

# Somerset Councillors May Report 2024

**Cllrs Adam Dance and Jo Roundell Greene**

**As we enjoy the lovely month of May with all the flowers and trees we have been reflecting on the last twelve months. It has been a difficult year with many financial and operational challenges as we brought five councils into one. Each District and the County had their own way of delivering services and a great deal of work has been done to bring the work streams together into one council.**

We have a hole in the **budget** of some £100m, which is an impossibly large sum to find, particularly with interest rates and inflation so high. The budget for 2024/25 is balanced but the situation going forward is precarious. Should the Finance Officer need to issue a section 114 notice, the Council will effectively be bankrupt. We are working hard to prevent this happening and large savings have already been made across the organisation but we are not out of the woods yet.

The Council is going through the process of **reorganisation** and will become a much smaller council, with fewer staff and smaller estate. More than 240 staff have applied for Voluntary Redundancy and there is a whole programme of workforce and service redesign. There is also a programme of asset disposal to make sure we are making the best use of all our buildings and property.

Work has started on one **Local Plan** for Somerset. This is a huge piece of work that will bring together the four plans from South Somerset, Sedgmoor, Mendip and Taunton and West Somerset. Until this is complete the existing Local Plans are being applied to planning applications in the old district areas. Our area is Planning South.

We are very pleased that the project for the restoration of the **Octagon Theatre** in Yeovil has been reinstated in the capital programme. We will keep you up to date with the progress of this project as the application for funding from the government is resubmitted. It will be great to have this wonderful theatre up and running again.

Adam has been working hard in his role as Lead Member for **Public Health**. He led the Know Your Numbers campaign to raise awareness of high blood pressure, which has been a great success. Across the county people have been having their blood pressure taken, making them understand how high blood pressure can lead to many health problems if not treated. He has also been working with our health colleagues to try and get more doctors and dentists in our town and villages.

Jo is the Associate Lead Member for **Children's Services** with a focus on schools. In Somerset we have an increasing number of children with Special Educational Needs (SEND). She has been talking to heads of special schools and working with officers to better understand the needs of the children and young people and how we can deliver the best and most appropriate education to all our children.

There are many different projects and services being delivered across our area. We are in negotiation with **Suez** regarding the waste contract. Increases in overheads and difficulty in recruiting drivers have substantially increased the price of collecting our waste and recycling. The council is confident that we can reach an agreement with Suez without disruption to the waste service, but it will cost us more.

A new contract for **highways** with Kier Transportation Ltd started on 1st April 2024. The aim is to increase efficiency and cost effectiveness whilst being more resilient to climate change and reducing carbon output.

**This is a small snapshot of what is happening at Somerset Council. If you would like more information or help with anything please get in touch with us. You can also visit the website [www.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.somerset.gov.uk).**

Best wishes

**Adam and Jo**

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