

## Somerset Council Report to Croscombe Parish Council meeting Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> July 2024

A short report for the Croscombe meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> July. My apologies that I am not able to join you.

### Overview

The current work of Somerset Council has to focus on measures to address the Council's declared financial emergency. Council members receive regular updates on budget position and forecasts. The overspends continue to be in Adult and Children, Families & Education Services. In Adult Services the variances from budget are due to higher fee levels than anticipated for care home placements, increased delivery of home care and market sustainability within supported living. In Children, Families & Education Services the overspend predominantly relates to increased demand resulting in more external placements and Social Care fieldwork (support for children at home), Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND), above average inflationary increases in transport. Programmes are in place to address these overspends but it all takes time.

Hand in hand with this is the Council's Improvement & Transformation Programme aimed at creating a leaner Council equipped to deal with the current challenges.

We all wait to see what changes the National Government elected on 4<sup>th</sup> July is likely to bring. The tangible change is that the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has become the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government (MHCLG). How that will impact on methods of financing the work of local government through taxation, planning and the phosphate issue which is preventing the building of many new houses in Somerset remains to be seen!

### My involvement in the work of the Council

I sit on two Scrutiny committees Children, Families & Education Services and Corporate and Resources. Scrutiny looks at and comments on the Council's proposed decisions before the Executive puts them into effect. It is a very important role.

In connection with the first of these, I was privileged last week to be able to visit in Chard the 6<sup>th</sup> house to be commissioned as part of the Homes and Horizons scheme. This has the objective of bringing children looked after "in house" and in county and thereby reducing the number of Somerset Children Looked After being housed in very expensive unregistered placements, very often out of area.

I also sit on the Planning East committee and the Licensing committee. If I appear cagey about planning applications it is because I need to make sure that anything that I say about an application before it gets to committee cannot be deemed to be pre-determination! My other committee is Constitution and Governance which proposes changes to the Council's structure. I am always there to follow up residents' concerns about any matter.

Martin Lovell

25/07/2024