

Somerset Council Report to Croscombe Parish Council meeting Tuesday 10th September 2024

A short report for the Croscombe meeting on 10th September.

Devolution of services to city, town and parish councils

Action to address Somerset Council's declared financial emergency includes the prospect of conversations as to whether Somerset's city, town and parish councils wish to consider taking on services which have been deemed by Somerset Council to be discretionary, leaving the Council to concentrate resources on statutory services. In the case of some town councils there is impatience to proceed and take on these services. It is understandable that some parish councils, such as Croscombe, will be nervous about the prospect of taking on any services given their limited resources.

There are current devolution pilots in Bridgwater and Yeovil. Given the legal intricacies involved and the fact that Somerset Council's legal team are thinly stretched, these pilots will be the focus for the current financial year. Smaller town councils can expect their applications to be considered within years 2 to 3 of their current plans. It needs to be stressed however that this will start with a conversation. There is no expectation that parish councils will be able to consider taking on services beyond what they currently provide.

Local Government Boundary Commission boundary review

Somerset Council Elected Members have been briefed with updates about a current Local Government Boundary Commission boundary review to which the Council has submitted proposals to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE). Somerset Council currently has 110 elected members in two member wards. In comparison with peer unitary authorities this is a high number. The current proposal is to reduce these to between 90 and 100 and to move predominantly to single member wards. LGBCE aim to publish their final recommendation in Autumn 2025. This assumes that changes will be implemented at the earliest in time for the next local elections in 2027.

Martin Lovell 05/09/2024