

1. Joint Committee meeting signals first steps to single unitary council for Somerset

A new Local Government Reorganisation Joint Committee ((LGR Joint Committee) met on 5th November 2021 to steer the move to a single unitary council for Somerset.

The Committee consists of nine members from both District and County Councils, including the five Somerset Council Leaders, plus four Somerset County Councillors. Cllr David Fothergill, Leader of Somerset County Council, chaired the meeting and Cllr Val Keitch, Leader of South Somerset District Council, was unanimously elected Vice-Chair.

They discussed terms of reference, programme governance, budget, future meetings and agreed a work programme. The Committee also agreed that the name of the new unitary authority, as proposed by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), would be 'Somerset Council' as of 1st April 2023 (vesting day).

Some matters regarding the draft Structural Changes Order (SCO) - the basic operating and governance principles for transition from five existing Councils to the new unitary council - were deferred to allow for further consultation within individual councils. They included the date of the next elections (**either May 2022 or May 2023**), plus the proposal that Somerset County Council will be the "continuing authority" for the new Council.

Papers for the inaugural meeting of the Joint Committee can be viewed online now. The meeting was recorded on Microsoft Teams and this recording will be available shortly. You can find full details [here](#).

LGR Joint Committee

The LGR Joint Committee will oversee the implementation plan and development of the new unitary council's constitution and budget, along with providing collaborative decision-making in areas which could impact on the position of the new unitary council. It is proposed the LGR Joint Committee meetings will be open to the public to attend in venues around the county.

The Structural Changes Order (SCO)

The SCO will be finalised and laid before Parliament around the turn of the year and come into force by the end of March.

Current Council Services

Existing council services will continue to be run by the current five councils until 1 April 2023. In district councils they will remain under the oversight of current members until that date. Services and teams will start working together more closely in the run-up to 1 April 2023.

2. Talk Money Week

Mendip District Council is encouraging residents who are struggling financially to come forward and talk. The Council can provide the following support:

- Offer eligible residents Council Tax Support www.mendip.gov.uk/counciltaxsupport
- Assist people through Hardship Funding www.mendip.gov.uk/cthp
- Issue Discretionary Housing Payments www.mendip.gov.uk/dhp
- Help struggling businesses with rates relief www.mendip.gov.uk/businessrates

Talk Money Week 8-12 November, is part of a national five-day campaign to get people to share their concerns. It's organised by the Money and Pension Service and aims to build financial confidence and resilience in people, by encouraging conversation.

Citizens Advice Mendip www.citizensadvicemendip.org.uk and Government organisations such as Money Helper www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en support the campaign. They offer free advice and guidance on benefits, work, housing, debts, scams and more. If you feel more comfortable approaching them with your financial concerns they'd welcome your enquiries.

Follow MDC on Facebook and Twitter at @MendipCouncil during the campaign for advice, information and links on how the Council and its partner organisations can support residents in difficulty.

Learn more about Talk Money Week here: <https://maps.org.uk/talk-money-week/>.

3. Invitation to CPRE 'Rewilding Somerset' event

CPRE Somerset, the countryside charity, are holding a "Rewilding Somerset" event on Friday 19th November at 12.45PM, Edgar Hall, Somerton, exploring the potential to make Somerset a greener, wilder place where wildlife and communities can thrive.

The afternoon will be introduced by CPRE Somerset President, Mariella Frostrup and there will be a great line up of topics and speakers. Rewilding success stories that will be shared include examples of projects in Somerset.

NB: The rewilding event will end at 3.00pm and, after a short break, will be followed by the CPRE Somerset AGM which should run until 4.00pm. Non CPRE members are welcome to stay for the AGM.

The event is free for CPRE members. We are inviting donations from non-members, which can be given when booking or on the day at the in-person event.

You are invited to attend in person for this exciting event or you can sign up to view the live stream on YouTube. **BOOKING IS ESSENTIAL.**

Book your place to attend in person here:

<https://www.tickettailor.com/events/cpresomerset/591985>

Click here to watch the event live streamed on YouTube:

<https://www.tickettailor.com/events/cpresomerset/587847> If you have any queries, please contact admin@cpresomerset.org.uk

4. Free festive parking this Christmas in Mendip

Free car parking will be available in all Mendip-owned pay and display car parks for one week, from Saturday 18th December until Friday 24th December 2021.

Additionally, the Council is providing free parking all-day on Saturday 1st January. This is to support drivers who park vehicles in car parks on New Year's Eve, to use alternative and safe methods of transport to get home.