

Full Council Meeting – 7 February 2023

Portfolio Holder Report for Local Government Reorganisation and Community Governance Review - Cllr Sarah Wakefield.

As previously, and since my last report in December, I have continued to attend meetings of the LGR Implementation Board, the LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee, the Shadow Taunton Town Council and meetings with various officers of SWT on a regular basis.

Local Government Reorganisation:

I am pleased to report that in general transition for Vesting Day (1st April 2023) is going well and according to plan as follows:

1. Technology – a successful cutover of our IT services took place over the weekend of the 20-23 January with many staff working into the small hours over that period to provide solutions as the data transfer took place to ensure as smooth a resumption as possible the following week. For Councillors and staff this means that we are all now on one system and are ready to use our new Somerset Council email addresses.
2. Staff – recruitment for the Senior leadership team is on track. Tier 2 is now complete and Tier 3 recruitment will be complete by Vesting Day. Recruitment of Tier 4 and finalising of teams structure and shape will follow Vesting Day.
3. TUPE - the transfer of all staff to become employees of Somerset Council is also on track to happen on Vesting Day. Staff will be continuously employed on their existing terms and conditions, sometimes enhanced if terms for Somerset Council are more beneficial. If and where redundancies are indicated this will happen after Vesting Day and on local government agreed terms.
4. Payroll - SWT payroll has been successfully set up on the SCC system and staff paid have been paid under this and on time. Councillors should have noticed the changeover in payment of their allowances too.
5. Services - each service continue to work through their readiness checklists which are tracked by the LGR workstream programme fortnightly.
6. Branding - has now been agreed for the Somerset Council and it is now being deployed ready for day one so that templates,

letters and key information is correctly branded to operate lawfully from Vesting Day.

7. ID Badges - these are being changed to the new council. They are in the process of being set up and will be distributed to staff and members in March.

Many of our SWT staff have worked closely and in co-operation with other districts and county staff in their LGR workstreams. The success of the programme to date is testament to all their hard work. Our staff have, of course, not only been involved directly in the LGR programme but are also fully employed in ensuring our services for our residents remain stable and delivered. This achievement is truly monumental in view of the tight timescale set by the LGR programme. A peer review of the LGR programme has also recently been carried out which has reported positively on its success and readiness for Vesting Day.

Community Governance Review - the setting up of (what will surely be known as) Taunton Town Council.

1. This matter is generally progressing well and according to plan. Any legal challenge is now being dealt with by SCC and its legal team and not by SWT.
2. Key milestones needed as soon as practicable have been achieved. An office on the ground floor of Deane House has been secured (under a one year lease at first) for use by the Clerk and any staff. The intention is to use the JMR Council Chamber for meetings of the new Council.
3. Appointment of the Town Clerk. After a competitive process a very well qualified Town Clerk has been recruited and will be starting in post from 30th January. I am sure you will all look forward to welcoming her to her post, getting to know her and working together over the next few months. This appointment will enable shadow town council meetings to be arranged and minuted and the process of engaging further staff and managing the provision of services - some of which may be shared with Somerset Council - to be set in motion. As the asset transfer referred to in the motion passed by Full Council will also take

place on Vesting Day arrangements need to be in place to review, manage and repair them.

4. Briefings for the Shadow Town Council have taken place on the emerging Assets and Services Devolution thinking for the new unitary council too.
5. The procedure for the election of councillors to the new council is also under preparation although the elections themselves will be managed by Somerset Council.

I am grateful to the SWT governance officers in particular who have and are facilitating this process.