

SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

BRIEFING SHEET FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

FEBRUARY 2022

Coronavirus infection rates: As of 28th January the number of confirmed Covid cases in Somerset was 106,569 (27% up from 83,300 on 30th December) and the number of Covid-attributed deaths 977. The rate per 100,000 stands at 964.2 (766.6) for Somerset with Mendip at 766.5 (892.0), Sedgemoor at 1143.1 (756.6), South Somerset 921.3 (684.3) and SW&T at 1016.0 (770.4). The number of total deaths across the County is currently below the 5-year average and the latest R-value for Somerset is between 0.8 and 1.1

Infection rates in Somerset continue to be extremely high. With the new Omicron variant it is still advisable, even for those who have had both jabs and the relaxation in Government guidelines to continue to observe Social Distancing and to always ventilate indoor areas.

Somerset Coronavirus Support Helpline: A single phone number continues to be available for anyone in Somerset who needs Coronavirus-related support. **0300 790 6275**, is open seven days a week from 8am to 6pm.

Vaccination programmes roll-out: Somerset continues to have one of the highest vaccination rates in the country with the latest figures showing over 96.2% of the 18+ population having had one dose of vaccine and 93.8% having had both doses. In total 63.7% of the adult population have also received their booster.

Local Government Reorganisation: Following the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) decision to support the move to a single Unitary Council across Somerset the Structural Changes Order was laid before Parliament on 24th January. The agreed vesting date remains 1st April 2023. The first elections to the new authority together with Somerset Town and Parish elections will be held on 5th May 2022.

County Council Revenue Budget: Somerset County Council has published its last draft proposed budget ahead of the creation of a new unitary Somerset Council in April 2023. The council is proposing major increases in investment in care services, with an increase for Adult Social Care of £18m (13%), and over £12m (also 13%) for Children's Services. The increase in funding for Adult Social Care in part reflects the council's recent decision to support an increase in carers pay and to provide a retention bonus for care staff in Somerset. This is intended to support the recruitment and retention of staff in a challenging job market for care services.

County Council Capital Budget: SCC is proposing to allocate £48 million for capital spending in the coming year. This includes substantial investment in measures to tackle climate change, building on the council's successful Climate Emergency Community Fund. The council has allocated £1 million in new match funding to support the "decarbonisation" of schools – on top of the existing £7.8 million investment in decarbonising the council's buildings, including libraries. A further £1 million has been allocated for electric fleet vehicles and charging infrastructure. A new investment of £1 million has been allocated to local transport schemes.

Proposed Council Tax: Council Tax for SCC is proposed to rise by two per cent with a further one per cent rise for the social care precept. This compares to UK inflation in December running at over four per cent and will mean that Somerset County Council continues to set one of the lowest County Tax rates in the UK.

Somerset libraries: Since libraries reopened their doors last April, Somerset Libraries have had over half a million visits and have welcomed over 16,000 new members. To encourage even more people to reconnect with library services and support communities as they start to recover from the impact of the pandemic Somerset Libraries is running two initiatives from 21st January until the 31st March. Children and young people aged 17 and under will not be charged for using any library services. This includes requesting books from other libraries, borrowing DVDs and no charges for the late return of items! The service will also be happy to clear outstanding charges, for all customers, incurred before 21st January 2022, no questions asked. To take advantage of this 'welcome back' offer, visit your local library before the 31st March and speak to a member of staff.

Climate change action 1: Somerset County Council has been ranked as the top county council in the UK when it comes to taking a lead on climate change. Climate Emergency UK has ranked all 409 local authorities, scoring them against nine categories, including how well councils' plans would mitigate the impact of climate change locally, whether the climate and ecological emergency was integrated into existing policies, community engagement, climate education, scale of emissions targets, and commitments to tackle the ecological emergency. Somerset County Council was named as the top county council, meanwhile Somerset West & Taunton Council was ranked as the top district council

Climate change action 2: A grant available to help Somerset people benefit from energy efficient installations worth up to £10,000 has been extended until June 2022. The Green Homes Grant Scheme allows eligible homeowners to apply for vouchers to install climate-friendly energy saving measures such as insulation, air source heat pumps, or double glazing. The work can be worth up to £10,000, with nothing for homeowners to pay towards the cost of the works. To be eligible for the grants, the residents of the property must have a low income and the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) for the property must be rated D, E, F or G. visit www.heatsomerset.co.uk for more information.