

# Somerset West and Taunton

## Newsletter to SWT Councillors and Parish Councils.

### Issue 1. Week ending 28/03/20

**#StayAtHome**

**#SaveTheNHS**

**#SaveLives**

Up to date information on the Council's response can be found on the SWT website:

<https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-and-information/>

### **SWT Council priorities**

Somerset West and Taunton Council's priorities during the Coronavirus outbreak are to:

- Preserve critical services;
- Safeguard the public; and
- Ensure our most vulnerable residents are supported.

The situation is being reviewed on a daily basis to ensure that the Council follows the [latest advice from Public Health England](#).

Whilst the Council is still open, the Council Offices are now closed and the message has gone to all office based staff to work at home. CEO James Hassett, has been sending daily bulletins to staff, whilst conference calls and video messaging has become the new 'norm'.

Earlier this week James Hassett said:

*"As the rest of the country prepares for life indoors, our focus this week remains firmly on our external customers as we support our vulnerable by deploying people and skills to cover those critical services. Our Housing directorate is currently working hard to identify rough sleepers with symptoms or at risk, identify appropriate accommodation and support to allow successful self-isolation, and maintain homelessness and housing advice service to the general public.*

*We know the most searched for subjects on our website are Business Rates and Council Tax. Teams in Internal Operations are creating the processes to manage what central Government are saying will happen - so things like a Council Tax and Business Rates support scheme and how we deploy that money. They are also working hard to ensure they turn those queries around as quickly as possible. If you are interested in the essential services information that members of the public need to know, all those messages are posted across our social media on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), as well as the SWT [website](#)"*

## Key messages for this week

1. The Emergency Response Team (ERT), Deane Helpline and ICT are working hard to ensure that business continuity is maintained during the current crisis. The latter is providing back up to infrastructure to enable nearly 400 staff to work from home and continue to deliver services.
2. SWT is working with partners to deliver the Government objectives to manage homelessness and rough sleepers in the community. The streetwise team and front line services are working with partners to find accommodation and additional support to get them off the streets before the weekend. SWT's Streetwise team is calling on volunteers to help ensure our most vulnerable members of society are supported during the Coronavirus emergency.
3. The following work is being maintained by Council operatives:
  - Visiting all communal flats making sure our residents are safe with fire inspections and general compliance issues
  - Case Management Leads and One Team Coordinators are contacting all vulnerable tenants residing within SWT housing stock to determine their needs.
4. Council operatives have been supplied with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and are now on standby to deliver essential supplies to identified vulnerable people in need as part of the Community Hub network, and as a service to vulnerable tenants. Our community hubs work is well underway, and we are looking at hubs to provide provisions and services to people that are classed by the NHS as needing to be shielded for at least 12 weeks. We are working with the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) to make this happen alongside key public services and the volunteer network.
5. A package of measures has been put into place to help businesses and more information can be found below and on the SWT website (see the link at the top).
6. There will be immediate payments to suppliers rather than the normal 30 day period to help them with their cash flow.

7. SWT play areas are temporarily closed in line with Government guidance. However, our parks and open spaces remain open. The key message is to ensure that people respect everyone's space and adhere to the 2m social distancing advice.
8. Health Protection regulations have come into force requiring the closure of crematoria to the general public except for those mourners attending pre-arranged services. The Taunton Crematorium remains open for pre-arranged services and is staffed but we ask that contact with the office is made by phone or email not face to face. We continue to conduct services and are asking for reduced attendances with a maximum of 25 people. Our other Cemeteries remain open at this time and we ask visitors to observe the appropriate social distancing. For information visit <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/bereavement-services/useful-contacts/>
9. Continuation of SWP recycling, clinical and household waste collection, despite restrictions and staff shortages. Services for Garden Waste Collection, bulky collections and new bin provision have been temporarily suspended. Somerset's 16 Recycling Centres operated by Viridor were closed on Monday until further notice, following the latest Government advice on avoiding non-essential contact and travel, and the challenges of ensuring public and staff safety at the busy sites where physical distancing is difficult. Please check [www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/coronavirus) for the latest information about service disruptions and guidance about disposing of any personal waste.
10. All Councillors and Parish and Town Councils have been written to this week, asking for information about the provision of local help and support within their various communities. These data sheets will be invaluable once the Government Community Hubs have been established at identifying the most vulnerable, and assisting with the distribution of food and medicines.
11. Any outstanding councillor/town and parish matters are now on hold, whilst the Council concentrates its resources on essential services. We trust you will understand and bear with us. These matters will not be forgotten and will be picked up as soon as possible. During the COVID19 Pandemic, Sam Murrell and Claire Thackray are taking all Councillors, Parish and Town Council enquiries and they will be your future contact point for matters needing attention. Please continue to address your concerns to the [governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk) email address.
12. All SWT public WCs across the district have closed except for Paul Street, Taunton. This will be the only WC to remain open from 7:30am – 5pm every day and will serve customers picking up prescriptions from Boots, Superdrug and the homeless.

Other Town Council operated WCs have closed or are operating a reduced service until Government guidelines dictate otherwise. Blue Anchor Seafront WCs remain open to serve key workers.

13. To support our key workers across SWT, we are no longer enforcing parking charges in any of our car parks.
14. Council Meetings are postponed currently and the Council will be holding virtual meetings once the Government guidance on Local Authority meetings has been received and our kit has been tested. Once we have the detail this will be disseminated to all Councillors as well as Town and Parish Councils.
15. Regular press releases on the SWT Council website and social media to ensure that the public have access to most recent up to date communication and relieve pressure on customer services,
16. The Hinkley Point C free Community bus service operation will temporarily cease after its last return trip on Friday 27th March due to the risks posed by the Coronavirus pandemic. This is purely a temporary measure taken in the interests of public health and safety and will restart as soon as the current situation improves and it is safe to resume
17. The Government have asked Councils to focus on the Planning, Licensing and Economic Development so that the impact on the economy is reduced and we can get into the recovery phase as quickly as possible

## **Business Support - What help is out there?**

Businesses are advised to keep updated on the latest information and advice to inform their responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19). We are also making sure we continue to get information out to businesses as fast as we can, ensuring that they have answers to their questions where possible as we continue to interpret Government guidance. The latest information is on the SWT website

[Guidance to employers and businesses about COVID-19](#)

[Support for those affected by COVID-19](#)

[Supporting Business Loans Enterprise Finance Guarantee](#)

[Remote Working Advice Toolkit](#)

**From the Cabinet Office:**

Government's COVID-19 business support website

[www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support/](http://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support/)

An online toolkit has now been published: <https://bit.ly/2UISFHJ> -includes key messages and digital content you may wish to use.

The [businesssupport.gov.uk](https://businesssupport.gov.uk) pages are engaging and useful to have a Q&A albeit it is limited in detail at present.

## Community Support – What help is out there?

The Spark Somerset website has lots of useful information on the informal/formal support groups which are popping up across Somerset and the Corona Helpers database which you can use to register your group and recruit volunteers.

Visit [www.sparksomerset.org.uk/covid-19](http://www.sparksomerset.org.uk/covid-19).

Spark is available to support our communities. If you need any help, please give us a call on 01460 202970 or email [support@sparksomerset.org.uk](mailto:support@sparksomerset.org.uk).

## FAQS

### Community

- Q. I need help. I am self-isolating or have other needs that make accessing support difficult. Who can help me during this time?**
- A.** Community Council for Somerset are happy to take calls from vulnerable/ self-isolating individuals, the number to call is **01823 331222**. People can also ask for a call back if they need help via their website. They just need name, number, postcode and outline of need and they triage getting help out to them via village agents and volunteers. They cover the whole district. Professionals can also refer via this service.
- Q. Why is my local play area/outdoor Gym/ MUGA closed? My children need to exercise and run around.**
- A.** Our play areas are temporarily closed in line with Government guidance. Our parks and open spaces remain open. Please ensure you respect everyone's space and adhere to the 2m social distancing advice.

### Health and Welfare

- Q. What if I need a dentist?**
- A.** NHS premises are exempt from closure and will still be operating but only for emergency cases.
- Q. I have a hospital appointment, can I still go?**
- A.** The NHS are stopping face to face appointments and instead are making telephone appointments.

Hospitals should only be visited to:

1. See patients receiving end of life care
2. Patients on children's ward and neo-natal units
3. Patients with specific conditions such as dementia or a learning disability

**Q. I am separated from my child's parent - can the child (under 18) still visit us both?**

**A.** In principle "Yes" but will need to be reviewed if either parent displays symptoms of COVID19. Please refer to the following available guidance.

**Public Health England**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>

[Help to protect yourself and your community - Public Health England](#)

**NHS – Help and Advice**

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - NHS website](#)

[Advice about staying at home - NHS website](#)

## **Crime / Fraud / Safeguarding**

**Q. What if I don't follow the advice and stay at home?**

**A.** You can only go outside for food, health reasons or work (if you cannot work from home). The one hour exercise as recommended by the Government should be taken within one mile of your home. Dogs should not be taken on a car journey prior to walking, and local beauty spots on the Quantocks and Exmoor are being patrolled to deter motorists. Leaflets are being distributed and financial penalties starting from £30 will be imposed. **The clear message is #StayHome**

**Q. I have received a text/email or message from the Government/HMRC asking for bank details in order to pay me grant or benefit I am entitled to as a result of COVID19. What should I do?**

**A.** Do not send bank details or other financial information in response to messages of this kind. There are a number of scams and frauds that are being perpetrated, targeted at the vulnerable. For more information please visit

<https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/news/2020/03/beware-fraud-and-scams-during-covid-19-pandemic-stay-at-home-stay-safe-on-line/>

### **FRAUD ALERT FROM South West Audit Partnership**

A scam is operating which is targeting parents in schools.

We have been alerted by the Department of Further Education that some parents have received an email stating:

**'As schools will be closing, if you're entitled to free school meals, please send your bank details and we'll make sure you're supported'.**

**This is a scam email - do not respond, and delete immediately.**

If you have concerns about frauds or scams, please visit the Avon and Somerset Police website.

[www.avonandsomerset.police.uk](http://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk)

[www.actionfraud.org.uk](http://www.actionfraud.org.uk)

## Finally

It is important to keep up to date with the latest [information and advice from the government](#).

For quick up to date information regarding SWT services please follow us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/SWTCouncil/](http://www.facebook.com/SWTCouncil/) or Twitter [@swtcouncil](https://twitter.com/swtcouncil)

Please see our dedicated [webpage](#) for updates.

If you have concerns about your own health and coronavirus please visit the [NHS](#) website.

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