

# Somerset West and Taunton

## Newsletter to SWT Councillors and Parish Councils.

### Issue 3. Week ending 13/04/20

**#StayAtHome    #ProtectTheNHS    #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 continuing 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](#).

As we come to the end of our third week in lock-down and the onset of Easter, it seems a good time to pause and reflect on what we have achieved so far. Most of the Council's services are now given over to supporting the coronavirus crisis, and serving the above priorities. First and foremost, our main aim is to protect life and ensure that we support the most vulnerable people in our communities.

It is vitally important that we adhere to the government's message on social distancing and take every possible step to stop or slow the virus. Unfortunately the consequence of this is that we don't get to see and turn to the people who we would normally lean on for emotional as well as practical support.

In recognition of this, the Somerset Corona Support Helpline has been launched, as a single point of contact for residents who need support, or who are concerned about a friend or relative. Please share this widely amongst your contacts and networks as we reinforce the government key messages of **#StayAtHome #ProtecttheNHS #SaveLives**.

## Key Messages this week

### 1. Somerset Coronavirus Support Helpline launched

A single phone number is now available for anyone in Somerset who needs Coronavirus-related support from their councils. The Somerset Coronavirus Support Helpline number, [0300 790 6275](tel:03007906275), is now live and will make it easier for people to access any local authority help they may need, including emotional support, in the current crisis.

The new number won't cover medical advice, for which people will need to continue to use the 111 NHS online service and only ring 111 if they cannot get help online.

Anyone who can't find help within their own local networks and volunteers, can use the new number to get help and advice around:

- Personal care and support including food and delivery of prescriptions
- Support for the homeless
- Emotional support if you're feeling worried or anxious
- Transport to medical appointments
- Waste collection and disposal
- Financial support

Callers will be asked to describe the support they require and will be connected with others for resolution.

The [0300 790 6275](tel:03007906275) number is being staffed by the five councils in Somerset and will be available seven days per week 8am – 6pm.

### 2. New Engagement Leads Strategy

Before the coronavirus outbreak, our Engagement Leads would work to support the wider communities of a particular geographical region of the district; however, in light of needing to respond to the virus, this original set up has now changed and the Engagement Leads have been reassigned to work and support the following areas within the Council:

- Member Engagement – Claire Thackray / Sam Murrell
- Voluntary Sector – Helen Phillips, Pippa Hughes, Colleen Blake
- Most deprived wards / One Team – Peter Joint, Richard Shadrack & Angela Bolitho
- Business Engagement – Hattie Winter & Beccy Brown

This situation will continue to be monitored / reviewed and you will all be updated on any further changes.

### 3. Parish Data Sheets and Community Led Action

SWT is using the data sheets from the Parish Councils to identify how the vulnerable are being supported within their communities. We have had a good response from the parishes but some data sheets have yet to be returned.

**Can all parish councils who are yet to submit their forms please do this as soon as possible and email to [governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk).**

SWT are using them to share knowledge, prevent duplication of services and identify where there are gaps in provision. We are working alongside the other public sector organisations, including village agents, charities and community groups to provide help and advice. This information is an invaluable tool now that the helpline is operational.

#### **4. Supporting the vulnerable**

There are 30 SWT staff that have been redeployed from various services across the Council, who are now working to pick up the thousands of potentially vulnerable, whilst we try to narrow down the list of those who most likely need the support. These members of staff are working in shift patterns each day and are making contact by phone to as many tenants as possible. Feedback so far is that 95% of those called have support in place or do not need any additional assistance. For the other 5% we are categorising by need and priority and identifying the best source of help.

#### **5. Council Meetings**

The Government have now produced the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels Regulations 2020 and these came into effect from Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2020. Councils can now legally hold virtual meetings to transact any items of business.

For more information on the Regulations at:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/392/contents/made>

Town and Parish Councils – NALC have produced guidance on the new meeting Regulations so check this out on the SALC or NALC website.

In terms of SWT meetings the first meeting will be Full Council on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020 and then the meetings will be:

- Annual Council Meeting – 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020 - CANCELLED
- Scrutiny Committee – 13<sup>th</sup> May 2020
- Planning Committee – 14<sup>th</sup> May 2020
- Executive – 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020
- Annual Council Meeting – TBC week commencing 25<sup>th</sup> May 2020

#### **6. Business as Usual – Where we can**

We are taking measures to safeguard the public and ensure our most vulnerable residents are supported while continuing to provide critical services.

**Customers can help us through this unprecedented time by using our online services and not communicating via paper post as far as possible**

### **Planning**

This is particularly important for the planning service where we would encourage you to use the [Planning Portal](#) to submit applications or email [planning@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:planning@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk) for advice.

### **Housing Benefit / Revenues Services**

The majority of the benefits team are working as normal from home, processing claims which have increased in the last three weeks. The revenues team meanwhile are working flat out to process the online business grants and are making payments daily. (For further information, please refer to the Council's website or email:

[Benefits@somersetwestandtaunton.co.uk](mailto:Benefits@somersetwestandtaunton.co.uk)

[Revenues@somersetwestandtaunton.co.uk](mailto:Revenues@somersetwestandtaunton.co.uk)

Telephone: 0300 304 8000

### **Parks and Open Spaces Services**

The Council will continue to cut the grass in our parks and open spaces; however, at times, you may see an interruption to service being provided due to the need of redeploying our operatives to another area of the business such as Deane Helpline and the Crematorium.

We will also continue to maintain some highway verges for Somerset County Council to ensure visibility is not impeded for motorists and drivers of emergency vehicles.

### **Right To Buy Applications**

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, Somerset West and Taunton Council is reviewing all current Right to Buy applications. As a landlord, our main priority is to protect the wellbeing of our tenants and this means reducing the risk of spreading the virus. Government advice, at this time, is that there should not be any home visits; consequently we are unable to undertake the necessary valuation surveys. Without a property valuation the Council is unable to progress these applications any further at this stage. We have written a letter to these applicants to explain that we will be placing these cases on hold until the Council returns to normal working practices and any additional discount accumulated during this time will be factored in.

For those applicants whose properties have already been valued and have been issued a Section 125 offer letter from the Council, there will be no need to pull out of transactions.

All new applications received will automatically be logged and placed into a held status with a letter going to the customer to advise them as such.

For more advice about home moves or property purchase during the COVID19 outbreak please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/government-advice-on-home-moving-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

## **7. SWP – All change for Easter and May Bank Holidays**

Easter will bring waste day changes for every household in Somerset.

Pick-ups of recycling, rubbish and clinical waste due on Good Friday 10 April will take place on Saturday 11 April.

No collections on Easter Monday 13 April mean all the week's kerbside services are one day later, including Friday pick-ups on Saturday 18 April.

All recycling sites remain closed due to the health situation, while garden waste and bulky waste services are suspended.

Collections on the next 2020 bank holiday – VE Day on Friday 8 May – will see pick-ups one day later on Saturday 9 May.

Residents are being reminded that disruption due to COVID-19, including dozens of staff forced to self-isolate, means changes to waste services:

- All weekly recycling collections as usual but there are no returns for missed pick-ups. Boxes and food waste bins should be put out the following week, when those collections will be a priority.
- Rubbish and clinical waste pick-ups as usual. If either are missed, report via the My Waste Services menu at [www.somersetwaste.gov.uk](http://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk) or through council customer services at [www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/contact-us](http://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/contact-us)
- Garden waste collections are suspended but 2020-21 subscribers will get a one year extension from the date when collections restart
- Bulky waste collections are suspended.
- No new container requests can be accepted.
- All recycling sites remain closed. Materials should be stored and not added to rubbish, especially those that could be a fire risk, such as batteries, gas canisters and electrical items.

## **8. Business Support – Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grant**

SWT processed the first 246 Small business and retail, hospitality and leisure businesses grants requests in the first two days amounting to £3.04m. These payments were made into the bank accounts of the businesses concerned on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> April; to provide much needed support in these difficult times.

SWT are processing grant requests in the order in which they are received and will be making further payments each working day until all eligible businesses, that have provided the necessary information, have been paid. An email is then sent to each business once their claim has been passed for payment so they know the money is on its way.

For eligible businesses that have not yet provided the necessary information to obtain a grant you can find out more and upload your details on the SWT [Business Grants](#) webpage.

### **9. Launch of Help for Business Newsletter**

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) Advice and Information page of our [website](#) also contains the latest links to wider advice, support and guidance for businesses.

For more information and to sign up for the newsletter, please visit [www.visitsomerset.co.uk/business](http://www.visitsomerset.co.uk/business)

### **10. Support available for Council Tax Payers**

SWT is inviting anyone struggling to pay their Council Tax due to the pressures of Coronavirus to get in contact. The Council has a range of measures in place to help people having difficulty with payments. It can work with residents who have permanently, or temporarily, lost their job; stopped their self-employment or had their pay cut, to help find a solution.

Further information on the support available can be found on our website <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-and-information/>

In addition SWT has suspended bailiff action and won't send any reminders until the end of June. It will be reviewing this as the crisis evolves.

## **Partner Engagement – Key messages from other Public Service Areas**

### **Highways England, M5 Junction 25 Improvements**

The works continue with a reduced workforce on site. This is in line with current Government policy, which is that construction activity can continue as long as Public Health England guidance on social distancing is maintained.

### **Toneway Creech Castle Junction Improvements**

Toneway Creech Castle junction improvements – planned to start on 14 April, this will now be paused until at least July in light of uncertainty over materials, sub-contractors and key utilities work. It will also allow contractor Alun Griffiths to focus its resources on the M5 Junction 25 project.

### **SCC – Highways**

All planned highway maintenance works in Somerset are now suspended to comply with Government instructions and to allow SCC to focus resources on safety repairs and emergency works. The Government has classified a number of roles within the transport industry as key to delivering essential services. This includes highways workers playing a critical role in maintaining roads to ensure safe passage for emergency services, key

workers and deliveries of supplies. SCC have received reports of some crews being approached by the public, potentially putting themselves and road workers at risk. Please give them space to continue keeping roads safe for those who need to use them.

## **Advice from Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service**

As you're spending more time at home, take the following steps to make your home safer from the risk of fire

- Test smoke alarms and carbon monoxide monitors once a month
- Don't wedge open fire doors to avoid people touching them. They are there to stop the spread of smoke and fire. Use good handwashing and hygiene routines instead.
- Take extra care when cooking – over half of fires in the home start in the kitchen.
- If you're working from home, think carefully about use of extension leads and charging devices and always use the charger that came with your device. Extension leads should be fully extended and you should check the maximum electrical load they are designed for.

If you're a business owner, you can read more about [protecting your business from fire during coronavirus](#).

We will always be available for home safety advice over the phone – please call 0800 05 02 999. You can also view our [home fire safety advice](#) booklet.

<https://www.dsfire.gov.uk>

## **NEWS FROM EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK**

**Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2020**

### **'THANK YOU FOR RESPECTING OUR PLACE OF WORK' SAY EXMOOR FARMERS**

The Exmoor National Park Authority along with the Exmoor Hill Farming Network is reminding people to stay close to home during the coronavirus pandemic and to take extra care when exercising on public rights of way that pass near farms or homes.

Dave Knight, Chairman of the Exmoor Hill Farming Network, said: "Spring is always a busy time on the farm with lambing and calving. Farmers are literally working around the clock to help feed the nation and it's understandable they don't want the extra worry of contamination to gates and property. Ultimately this is our place of work so I'm pleased that most people are being respectful of that by using alternative routes where possible and sticking to government guidelines."

Some farmers and residents have voiced concerns about increased use of public rights of way by local people following the lockdown restrictions. In response the National Park has

produced an easily downloadable poster on their website that can be displayed to remind people of the **Coronavirus Countryside Code**:

1. **Use open spaces near where you live.**
2. **Stay least 2 metres away from other people.**
3. **Avoid touching shared surfaces and clean hands regularly.**
4. **Leave gates as you find them.**
5. **Keep dogs under close control (at heel or on a lead).**

Defra advice is that risk of the coronavirus being passed on to others from people using public rights of way is very low if they follow these simple steps.

Exmoor National Park Authority Chairman, Robin Milton, farms sheep and cattle with his son near Dulverton. He said: "We ask local people to remember that many of the rights of way, paths, gates and stiles they might encounter on Exmoor are on farmers' land and near their homes, where they are carrying out essential work.

"Whilst exercising is essential for physical and mental wellbeing, I ask everyone to respect the ban on non-essential travel and wherever possible to seek routes away from rural homes and farms when using local paths.

"By taking these simple steps, we are all doing our bit to protect our brave NHS workers and save lives."

The law in England does not allow the National Park Authority to close any part of the public rights of way network for COVID-19 reasons. But anyone with concerns about public access can contact the National Park's Ranger team for advice at [info@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk](mailto:info@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk) or 01398 323665.

For further information about safe rights of way use or to download the poster see: [www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/enjoying/out-and-about-essentials](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/enjoying/out-and-about-essentials)

## **Community Support – What help is out there?**

SWT is working with partner organisations across the county to identify and support the network of volunteers offering help to the elderly, people self-isolating, and those identified as at risk across our communities. The Council would like to thank all those that have come forward with offers of help and would remind everyone to only make essential outings and follow [advice on social distancing](#) to reduce the risk of transmission. Information on local community groups [you can volunteer with or get help from](#).

## **Somerset Coronavirus Appeal**

The Somerset Coronavirus Appeal, launched by Somerset Community Foundation (SCF) to fund local charities and community organisations supporting those in most urgent need during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, now stands at £385,000 [*amount correct as at 07/04/2020*].

Grants worth £136,000 have already been awarded to 60 local good causes across the county, including those supporting food projects, older people and mental health, with more funding going out every day to local charities and organisations reaching the most vulnerable people in our communities

The incredible sum has come from donations from local individuals, charitable trusts and businesses, and was boosted by funding from a national appeal, run by The National Emergencies Trust (NET) in partnership with the British Red Cross. An additional £107,000 was added to the pot from existing funds managed by SCF on behalf of donors across the county.

Any groups wishing to apply should visit the SCF website, where they can complete a short, simple application form for grants up to £10,000: [www.somersetcf.org.uk/coronavirus](http://www.somersetcf.org.uk/coronavirus)

SCF is passionate about doing as much as possible to support our communities, and is encouraging local people, businesses, charitable trusts and organisations who feel able to **donate to the Somerset Coronavirus Appeal by clicking [here](#)**.

To support the national appeal, please visit:

[www.nationalemergenciestrust.org.uk/coronavirus](http://www.nationalemergenciestrust.org.uk/coronavirus)

To visit the Somerset Community Foundation website, please visit:

<https://www.somersetcf.org.uk/>

## **Health and Welfare**

**GP surgeries across Somerset will be staying open over the Easter break to support patients during the coronavirus outbreak.**

Practices, which usually close over the Bank Holiday weekend, will now be open on Friday (April 10) and Monday (April 13) between 8am and 6.30pm.

Services may be provided by individual practices or as part of collaborative efforts by groups of practices working together.

If you have received a letter from the NHS telling you that you're clinically extremely vulnerable, you can register on the gov.uk website to [get support as a clinically extremely vulnerable person](#).

Please refer to the websites below for the latest advice, help and 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

Avon and Somerset Police are reporting that the demand for their services has remained manageable with the vast majority of people abiding by the restrictions. ***In fact there has been a significant reduction in many crime types, some of which have fallen by as much as 40%.***

The public can be confident that it will notice a very visible Police presence when they are out and about with 59 new PCs and 32 PCSOs graduating several weeks early from their respective training course to join their colleagues in response and neighbourhood teams.

All officers and staff who had been seconded to other roles have also returned to force, while many members of the Special Constabulary have given up even more of their time than normal to provide reassurance to our communities

Support continues to be available for Somerset residents affected by domestic abuse via the One Teams working closely with partners to make sure services continue during the current health emergency. It is vital that people stay at home or self-isolate to help tackle the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic but that can put strains on relationships. Please refer to the website link below for more information.

<https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/report/domestic-abuse/>

If there is a danger to life then Avon and Somerset Police will still respond to critical emergencies and you should dial **999**.

Crimestoppers is joining in the campaign to raise awareness of **Domestic Abuse** reporting and would ask that these messages are shared far and wide with your contacts family/friends/professional.

Crimestoppers are working on a radio advert which will be ready very soon and are keen to follow up any other opportunities to reach out to our communities.

Please do follow and share on social media :

**Twitter:** Help look out for others. Learn the signs to spot or speak up for those that feel they can't. Tell the charity @CrimestoppersUK what you know 100% anonymously - 0800 555 111 or online: <https://bit.ly/2ykQ3bo>

**Facebook:** Help look out for others. Learn the signs to spot or speak up for those that feel they can't. Tell the charity @Crimestoppers what you know 100% anonymously - 0800 555 111 or online: <https://bit.ly/2ykQ3bo>

[www.facebook.com/CrimestoppersintheWestCountry](http://www.facebook.com/CrimestoppersintheWestCountry)

## 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.

**#StayAtHome      #ProtectTheNHS    #SaveLives**