

Somerset West and Taunton

Newsletter to SWT Councillors and Parish Councils.

Issue 6. Week ending 03/05/20

#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](#).

Key Messages this week

1. Virtual Council Meeting

SWT held its first virtual Council meeting on Monday 27 April. The Governance team put a lot of time into preparing for this and learning from the things that did not go quite so well for other Councils.

The preparation paid off, the meeting was a success and went without a hitch! Councillors and Officers dialled into the meeting using Zoom and we live-streamed it so that members of the public could watch. Fifty-five of our 59 Councillors took part, 52 people watched the live stream and a further 26 watched the recording after the meeting.

The Regulations put in place by the Government mean we can carry on with our normal schedule of meetings, ensuring that Council business can continue as usual.

2. Town and Parish Council information

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) has published a new legal briefing note that outlines new legislation concerning Neighbourhood Plans and local council elections (see attached PDF docs).

Neighbourhood Plan referenda

If you were planning to hold a referendum in the coming months, this cannot now take place until 6 May 2021, following the recent Covid-19 legislation for parish and town councils.

Police and Crime Commissioner Elections May 2020 elections

The Police and Crime Commissioner Elections have been postponed until 6 May 2021.

Casual vacancies and by-elections

For councils that had elections in May 2019, the legislation also applies in that if you have a casual vacancy and 10 electors request a poll, this cannot take place until 6 May 2021 at the earliest.

If a casual vacancy arises you should advertise it in the normal way and advise the District Council. If 10 electors request a poll, the earliest that this can take place is 6 May 2021. If there is no request for a poll, you can co-opt in the normal way.

For more information and to notify, please email elections@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

Need help with your first 'remote' council meeting?

The Regulations only came into effect from the 4 April so if any virtual or remote meetings were held prior to this date (without the public having access to them) then they are likely to be unlawful and any decisions resolved would not be valid. If you find yourself in this position then please ensure that you take further advice.

The NALC website signposts Town and Parish Councils to Northamptonshire County Association of Local Councils as they have created a video to demonstrate what a virtual meeting of (the fictional) Great Pipping Parish Council would look like in Zoom. Click [here](#) to watch a training videodesigned to show how a chairman would deal with councillors joining by computer and phone, declarations of interest, public participation and confidential items where members of the public and press are excluded.

Meetings and Annual Meetings

On 2 April, the Government published The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (COVID 19) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020. These regulations came into force on 4 April.

NALC produced two documents which were circulated to all members, including a legal briefing note on their interpretation of the regulations and practical guidance for local councils on how to hold effective remote council meetings.

NALC recommend you keep the number of meetings down to a minimum and when you do hold them keep the agenda as short as possible and for essentials only.

Top priority is to ensure all that needs to be delegated to the clerk is done so as a matter of urgency – this can be time limited – it will minimise the need for meetings virtual or otherwise.

Financial year-end and Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR)

Following NALC's engagement with the Government around local council audit timeframes, final regulations are due to be made this week which will extend the statutory audit deadlines for 2019/20.

It is proposed that:

- The publication date for final, audited, accounts for local councils will move from 30 September to 30 November 2020.
- To give local councils more flexibility, the requirement for the public inspection period to include the first 10 working days of July has been removed. Instead, local councils must commence the public inspection period on or before the first working day of September 2020
- This means that draft accounts must be approved by 31 August 2020 at the latest or maybe approved earlier where possible.

Authorities must publish the dates of their public inspection period this year, and the Government recommends that they provide public notice on their websites when the public inspection period would usually commence, explaining why they are departing from normal practise for 2020.

3. The Somerset Coronavirus Support Helpline

A single phone number is available for anyone in Somerset who needs Coronavirus-related support from their councils. The 0300 790 6275 number is available seven days per week 8am – 6pm.

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

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

4. Commemoration of VE Day

SWT plans to mark the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day (VE Day) despite Coronavirus restrictions, and wants as many people as possible to join in the virtual commemorations by sharing stories, photos and videos on its social media platforms.

The Council had been hoping to help communities run a host of activities on VE Day, Friday 8 May 2020, to remember the sacrifice so many made in the fight for our freedom. However, these were cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak so SWT is hoping that people can still get involved and show their support while following social distancing advice.

SWT wants to encourage everyone to hold their own celebrations at home, create their own decorations and make their own memories then share stories, photos and videos with SWT on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram tagging @SWTCouncil #VEDay75.

To find out more on how you can participate, please visit our [website](#).

5. Disruption to Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) services

The bank holiday for VE Day on Friday 8 May will see no waste collections so those recycling and rubbish pick-ups will be on Saturday 9 May from 7am. Collection crews are asking all residents to ensure their containers are out on time, with contents sorted, plastic bottles squashed, cardboard flattened, and - if safe - cans crushed.

Other updates:

- **Recycling Centres** remain closed, due primarily to restrictions on non-essential travel. SWP are planning ahead so they can reopen them as soon as possible once it is safe to do so/government guidance on essential travel changes. It is likely that they will reopen in a phased way with some initial restrictions. At this stage, very few authorities nationally have open sites - national data shows that over 90% of sites are closed.
- **New container** deliveries were reinstated this week, and SWP is now taking requests via its website <https://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/>.
- **Bulky item collections** are due to resume next week, and there are plans for the reintroduction of garden waste collections. This will involve securing additional vehicles and inducting more staff, as garden waste staff are currently providing crucial support to the recycling and rubbish collection services.
- SWP are finalising plans to provide a subsidy for up to **1,000 home composting kits** to make them a more attractive option for managing garden waste. It is hoped that composting, as well as significantly increased levels of recycling, will become positive habits that continue long after we have emerged from the Covid-19 crisis.
- SWP will be **temporarily suspending kerbside collections of textiles and shoes** from Monday 27 April. With charity shops closed and international trade in textiles severely affected, they cannot be sure that these will be recycled or reused. They will look at all options to restart this service, but do not want to undermine their commitment that everything that is collected for recycling is recycled properly.

6. Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grant

SWT is keen to ensure that as many organisations as possible apply for the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant and is aware that there are still eligible premises who have yet to apply. We have received 3221 request for business grants at close of business on Thursday and have so far paid £31.3m to 2,621 ratepayers.

You are eligible for the grant if your business is in the retail, hospitality and/or leisure sector, and your business would have qualified for the retail discount on 11 March 2020.

Properties that will benefit from the relief will be occupied hereditaments that are wholly or mainly being used:

- as shops, restaurants, cafes, drinking establishments, cinemas and live music venues
- for assembly and leisure e.g. sports grounds, gyms, museums
- as hotels, guest and boarding premises and self-catering accommodation
- for providing services to visiting members of the public e.g. travel agents, estate agents, hairdressers, funeral directors

Government has badged these as business grants whereas there are plenty of ratepayers that are not businesses (like amateur clubs and halls) who are entitled but who may wrongly assume the grants aren't for them. Community Facilities which don't consider themselves "businesses" may also qualify, even if they are nil rated. SWT Councillors have been trying to contact these premises to advise the rate-payer of their eligibility, following up on emails and letters where SWT hold the relevant details.

If ratepayers have queries they should call the main council telephone number 0300 304 8000 or email brgrants@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

For more information or to submit a grant request, please click [here](#).

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

7. Urban Tree Challenge Fund Round 2

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has announced that round two of the Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCF), aimed at smaller, community-led tree planting schemes, has opened to applications until 31 May 2020.

This will fund whips (small trees) only, since the large tree fund is now fully allocated. It will be suitable for local authority sites and/or applications from registered charities, community groups, public bodies, non-government organisations, private companies and individuals in England who wish to support the planting and establishment of trees.

Please encourage any groups you may know of to apply and get some bids in for planting in the Garden Town and across the district.

The deadline for applications is currently set at Sunday 31 May 2020. However, given the current situation concerning the coronavirus outbreak, the [Forestry Commission](#) will keep this under review.

Those wishing to apply should submit an Expression of Interest and return to UTCF@forestrycommission.gov.uk Further information, including [guidance notes](#) and details about how to apply, are available on the [GOV.UK website](#).

Partner Engagement – Key messages from other Public Service Areas

Somerset County Council Events on the Highway

As the Highway Authority for most of the public road network in the county, SCC is involved in a wide variety of tasks, some of which may not be immediately apparent to the public.

As well as high profile highway maintenance and improvements, SCC also works with event organisers where there may be a need for additional traffic management arrangements in order to make things run smoothly.

The “Big One” is, of course, Glastonbury Festival which has an extensive traffic management plan, requiring months of planning, and is actually in operation for more than a week. There are also a host of smaller events across the county, with carnivals and major sporting fixtures in between.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had, as you would imagine, a major impact on public events. **The latest news we have is that all events have been cancelled up to the middle/end of May and a fair number beyond that.** SCC is working with some organisers to assist them in alternative dates for their events later on in the year.

#NoClosedDoors2020

Domestic abuse continues to be a priority for all councils in Somerset due to its long lasting impact on the lives of survivors and their families. During the pandemic, a Somerset Domestic Abuse Task Group meets weekly, to assess the prevalence of domestic abuse in Somerset and manage the response. Communication with the public is ramping up to promote services and ways to get support. The important message for professionals and the public is that Somerset Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (SIDAS) continues to operate, supporting survivors, families, perpetrators and offering emergency accommodation for those who need to leave their homes as part of a national refuge network. All details of the service can be found at the dedicated website <http://www.somersetsurvivors.org.uk/>.

SCC is looking to reach as many people as possible with their Domestic Abuse support and awareness campaign [#nocloseddoors2020#staysafeinsomerset](#) With 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men being affected by domestic abuse in their lifetime, the chances are we all know

someone who is suffering behind closed doors. The impact of coronavirus and social distancing makes this a difficult and worrying time for everyone, especially for adults and children living with domestic abuse.

Whilst channels are in place to send messages via parents, schools and professionals – SCC is looking for other ways to share this with young people directly.

We all know about the fantastic work communities are doing to keep in touch and support some of our vulnerable residents during coronavirus. Please could you use any of your communication or media channels that young people access to help share the [#nocloseddoors2020](#) message. SCC is particularly interested in any forms of social media such as Instagram, Twitter or TikTok that may reach a wider youth audience.

Libraries

The number of people joining the library service has rocketed during lockdown. Anyone in Somerset can download FREE books, audiobooks and even magazines via the library website. It's really easy to get started and anyone who needs help can either email librariesmail@somerset.gov.uk, phone **0300 123 2224** or they can visit www.somerset.gov.uk/libraries for step-by-guides on the application process and how to download literature.

Advice from Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service

Are you using your electricals safely?

If you've set up a temporary office area in your house, you may have more electrical items around than usual. Remember that extension leads generate heat - especially when high powered appliances are used, for example - heaters, kettles and hair straighteners etc.

- A lot of people use 4-way adapters to increase the number of appliances plugged into a single socket, but this can risk overloading the socket.
- If you use a coiled or wind-up extension lead you must fully unwind it when you use it. If it's wound up it can generate heat and cause fire.
- Never join extension leads together in a daisy chain to increase capacity or distance. This just increases the electrical load at the original wall socket.

How to work out what you can plug into an extension lead

- As a rule of thumb, the extension lead itself has a 13 amp fuse, therefore only one appliance with a 13 amp fuse, such as a heater, can be in used on the lead at any one time.
- If you use smaller appliances that have 3 or 5 amp fuses (but may only use 0.5 amps of electricity), such as a laptop charger or printer, then you may be able to use an extension lead for multiple appliances up to a total of 13 amps.
- Never overload an extension lead by plugging in appliances that will exceed the maximum current rating. This could cause the plug or lead to overheat.

Community Support – What help is out there?

Voluntary and Community Sector Support

SWT is publishing an e-newsletter to support the phenomenal positive response and work of the voluntary and community sector across our district.

If you know of a group in your ward who may benefit or have something to contribute then please send them our dedicated email; VCSNewsletter@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

Health and Welfare

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](#)

FAQS

Q. Am I eligible for the business rate grant if I have a nil business rating? I am a Trustee of my local community centre which is closed due to the coronavirus and we are unable to fundraise. We don't actually pay rates as we are nil rated, so what help is available to us please?

A. As long as a business or organisation has a rate account (even if it was £zero) at 11 March 2020 and is entitled to one of the qualifying rate reductions, the ratepayer can apply for a grant. This applies equally to profit making and non-profit making businesses and/or organisations. The one exception is if the ratepayer is a precept authority such as a Town or Parish Council, SCC or SWT itself.

Therefore, I would advise the Trustees to submit a request for a grant via the Council's website as soon as possible. SWT aim to make payment to eligible ratepayers within 7 working days of receiving the required information via the website.

Q. I am in need of PPE – can the Council help me with this?

A. Unfortunately the answer is 'No'. The Council does not have any responsibility to supply PPE. We are receiving supplies through a SCC route in conjunction with the Local Resilience Forum but we can only order PPE for SWT use.

Q. Who is responsible for providing me with PPE?

A. Employers will make the decision, based on a risk assessment, as to if/what Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) may be required. Where a risk assessment shows a

need for PPE, the equipment you will get depends on what you do, with whom and where you are working.

For many staff, this will consist of items such as gloves and aprons. Those more at risk may require masks and face/eye protection. PPE issued in relation to COVID-19 should only be issued when the risk assessment shows it is necessary.

PPE will largely be concentrated on those caring for patients with symptoms or cleaning premises contaminated by droplets/body fluids that may contain the virus. This will allow PPE to be concentrated on those that require it. It is important that the wearer is trained in its use.

For further information on Personal Protective Equipment & coronavirus, please visit [UNISON webpage](#) and the [Government website](#).

Crime / Fraud / Safeguarding

Beware fraud and scams during Covid-19 pandemic

Our increased online presence as a result of lockdown means criminals have jumped at the opportunity to target people through scams, phishing emails text messages and online shopping. Criminals are experts at impersonating people, organisations and the Police. To help you stay safe and ensure that you do not become a victim of these criminals, think about the following:

Stop: Take a moment to stop and think before parting with your money or before sharing information that could keep you or your business safe

Challenge: Could it be fake? It's ok to reject, refuse or ignore any requests. Only criminals will try to rush or panic you.

Protect: Contact your bank immediately if you think you've fallen for a scam and report it to Action Fraud

Examples of online Fraud

Action Fraud have confirmed that the number of reports have significantly increased in March and April. Coronavirus themed phishing emails containing links and attachments attempting to trick people into divulging personal information including banking details, email logins, passwords, etc.

Some of the tactics being used in phishing emails seen nationally and locally include:

- HMRC - emails purporting to be from HMRC offering a tax refund and directing victims to a fake website to harvest their personal and financial details. The emails often display the HMRC logo making it look reasonably genuine and convincing
- ASDA/Tesco - 'we can offer ASDA/Tesco sterile delivery plus gift card if you click here to register your credit card'

- 'The sneeze of death/Pandemic survival' - An unpleasant phishing email detailing unpleasantities about Coronavirus. It plays on people's fears and hopes, people who are searching for answers and information, encouraging them to click on dangerous links

Example of Fraudulent Text Messages

The Police are also seeing an increase in fraudulent text messages, one in particular purporting to be from GOV.UK Any text message containing a link should be treated with the upmost caution. The best way to find information from GOV.UK, or any other agency is to visit the particular website directly and not via an email link.

Protect Yourself

1. Watch out for scam messages - don't click on the links or attachments in suspicious emails, and never respond to unsolicited messages and calls that ask for your personal or financial details
2. Shopping online - if you're making a purchase from a company or person that you don't know or trust, carry out some research first. Always type the web address directly into your internet browser rather than going via a search engine to make sure you visit the genuine website. If you decide to go ahead with the purchase, use a credit card if you have one, as most major credit card providers insure online purchases
3. Protect your devices from the latest threats - always install the latest software and app updates

Report Cybercrime and Fraud to 'Action Fraud' using their online reporting portal:
[Action Fraud](#)

Chief Constable and PCC: There's no safe space for criminals during lockdown

PCC Sue Mountstevens and Chief Constable Andy Marsh answered questions about policing and Covid-19 during a Facebook Live session broadcast on Tuesday 28 April. This can be accessed here: [Avon & Somerset Police & Crime Commissioner](#)

Chief Constable Andy Marsh said: "While all our minds are focussed on the national health emergency which continues to dominate our way of life, I want to reassure our communities that we're more determined than ever not to let criminals use this unprecedented situation to their advantage.

At the Downing Street press briefing on Saturday, Lynne Owens, the Director General of the National Crime Agency, outlined how criminals are adapting to the lockdown measures, but she reassured the public that law enforcement is adapting too.

This is very much the case in Avon and Somerset and throughout the lockdown period we've continued to proactively target criminals involved in corrosive and harmful offending, including county lines activity, drug-dealing, burglaries and robberies.

I want to thank all our officers and staff who are working round-the-clock to protect the public and make sure criminals have no space safe to operate in. Their painstaking and

tireless work is disrupting and thwarting criminals on a daily basis and we're making arrests and wherever possible, putting cases before the courts."

An example of proactive policing since the lockdown began:

Two people have been charged with possession with intent to supply crack cocaine and heroin after officers carried out an intelligence-led stop of a vehicle on the **A39 at Kilve**. A number of arrests were made at the scene and at a property in Minehead. A large quantity of heroin was recovered from a footwell in the car and a further quantity of cocaine was seized, along with cash, phones and paperwork.

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/ 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