

Somerset West and Taunton

Newsletter to SWT Councillors and Parish Councils

Issue 90 Week ending 16/01/2022

SWT Council's priority strategic themes and outcomes

Somerset West and Taunton Council's four strategic themes are as follows:

- Our Environment and Economy
- A Transparent and Customer Focused Council
- Homes and Communities
- An Enterprising Council

[Click here](#) to view SWT's expected outcomes.

Key Messages this week

1. Confirmatory PCR tests to be suspended temporarily

From 11 January in England, people who received positive lateral flow device (LFD) test results for COVID-19 are required to self-isolate immediately and are not required to take a confirmatory PCR test.

This is a temporary measure while COVID-19 rates remain high across the UK. Whilst levels of COVID-19 are high, the vast majority of people with positive LFD results can be confident that they have COVID-19.

Lateral flow tests are taken by people who do not have COVID-19 symptoms. Anyone who develops 1 of the 3 main COVID-19 symptoms should stay at home and self-isolate and take a PCR test. They must self-isolate if they get a positive test result, even if they have had a recent negative lateral flow test – these rules have not changed.

Please [click here](#) to read the full press release about the recent changes.

2. Democracy and Governance

Committee Meetings

You can search by Committee or by the monthly calendar for details of all [Committee meetings](#). Here you can find the agendas and minutes of all meetings, as well as which Councillors sit on each Committee.

A number of Committee meetings are scheduled to take place over the next couple of weeks, which are as follows:

- **Wednesday 19 January** – SWT Executive Committee at 6.15pm in the JMR. (The agenda and report packs for this meeting can be viewed on the [website](#)).
- **Thursday 20 January** – Taunton Charter Trustees at 6pm in the JMR. (The agenda and report packs for this meeting can be viewed on the [website](#)).
- **Monday 24 January** – SWT Tenants Strategic Group at 6pm in the JMR. (The agenda and report packs for this meeting can be viewed on the [website](#)).
- **Wednesday 26 January** – SWT Special Corporate Scrutiny Committee at 6.15pm in the JMR, to consider the General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Estimates 2022/23.
- **Thursday 27 January** – SWT Community Scrutiny Committee at 6.15pm in the JMR.

These meetings will take place in the Chamber at Deane House following the Government COVID-19 safety guidelines. As we are very limited to the number of people we can safely get into the Chamber, we are asking people to register if they wish to attend in person.

Information on speaking at public meetings is available on the SWT website. This also gives alternatives to participating without attending in person.

The meetings will still all be live streamed so that members of the public can watch at home. To watch the live stream when the meeting commences, please visit the SWT website by [clicking here](#). If you are not able to watch the meeting live, you can also watch it after the meeting.

Contact the Governance Team governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk.

Please see the dates listed above re deadlines for submitting questions or statements.

3. Notice of Vacancy – Alcombe ward

A notice of vacancy has been published for the Alcombe ward at SWT. An election to fill the seat will be held if the Returning Officer receives a request in writing from two electors from within the district.

If the election is contested the poll will take place on **Thursday 10 February 2022**.

Please [click here](#) to view the election notices.

4. SWT grant scheme for hospitality businesses

The Government announced on 21 December 2021 that additional support will be made available for leisure and hospitality businesses, that are within the business rates system, and who have been impacted by the Omicron variant.

Businesses with a business rates account which derive the majority of their income from serving food and/or drink in-house may apply to the scheme. The scheme is open and the expected closing date for applications is mid-day on **20 January**.

Full details of the scheme are available on the Council's [website](#).

5. Council-funded loans help homeowners towards net zero

With the current climate emergency, homeowners may be wondering what they can do to support a reduction in carbon emissions. The rising costs of energy also means many are wondering how to cut their utility bills.

Many homes in the UK struggle to retain heat because of their age and poor energy efficiency, as well as how they are heated. Whether looking to invest in renewable technologies such as solar or heat pumps, or to install energy-saving measures, homeowners may be eligible for an energy efficiency loan to help fund the upfront cost.

Working in partnership with Social Enterprise lender, [Lendology](#), SWT provides accessible finance in the form of low interest loans to homeowners wishing to increase their energy efficiency.

Please [click here](#) to read the full press release.

6. SWT partnership keeping construction sites safe

SWT and construction contractor ENGIE are delivering Health and Safety talks at local primary schools in Taunton to discuss the dangers on building sites.

Many children are injured, and several die each year because of accidents on building sites.

The Safe Play at all Times (SPLAAT) talks allow children to think about safer places to play than a building site as well as raising awareness of the dangers on construction sites amongst teachers, pupils and the wider community.

They are being delivered in partnership with ENGIE who are currently on site at the North Taunton Woolaway Project completing the new homes in Phase A.

Please [click here](#) to read the full press release.

7. Recycling-on-the-go poster competition extended

SWT Council's 'Recycling-on-the-go' poster competition has been extended until 31 January to allow more opportunity for schools to compete.

The competition was launched last month to help promote the introduction of 130 new public litter bins, which are currently being installed across the district and scheduled to complete later this year.

In addition to litter, dog waste and cigarette butts, the configuration of the new bins enables plastic bottles and aluminium or tin cans to be deposited separately, making recycling on-the-go easier in rural and urban public spaces.

The competition is being supported by Somerset County Council's [Support Services for Education \(SSE\)](#) and is open to pupils aged 11 to 16 attending schools within the SWT area.

Please [click here](#) to read the full press release.

8. SWT to consider new litter enforcement scheme

SWT is set to approve a twelve-month trial enforcement scheme as part of its ongoing commitment to help keep its streets and public spaces free of litter. The trial scheme forms part of a new Litter Strategy aimed at reducing litter through targeted communications campaigns and strategically sited bins which are emptied according to usage.

Not only is littering illegal and antisocial, but it also consumes considerable council resources. Keeping the district clean and free of litter costs the Council circa £1m a year.

The environmental impact from discarded litter often leads to clogged stormwater drains resulting in flooding after heavy rain, or it can enter rivers, canals and the sea, threatening aquatic ecosystems.

Please [click here](#) to read the full press release.

9. Country Park lease agreed

SWT has agreed a 125-year lease with Cheddon Fitzpaine and West Monkton parish councils to manage Monkton Country Park, known locally as Maidenbrook Country Park.

The Council's Executive Committee approved the joint lease agreement for the site at Yallands Hill between Taunton and Monkton Heathfield.

Monkton Country Park was acquired by the former Taunton Deane Borough Council from the Crown Estate in October 2018. The freehold asset will remain with SWT so the country park remains in public ownership.

The agreement to lease the land jointly to Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council and West Monkton Parish Council for a 125-year period at £1 per annum rent

will enable them to manage the park on behalf of SWT with clear delineation of responsibilities.

Please [click here](#) to read the full press release.

10. Somerset West Lottery Winter 2022 bolt-on prize

Following on from the success of previous national initiatives, the Somerset West Lottery is taking part in the Winter 2022 bolt-on prize draw.

Everyone who signs up to purchase one or more tickets between 4 January and 26 February 2022 will be in with the chance to win a £1,000 gift card to spend in store at Sainsbury's, courtesy of external lottery management company Gatherwell.

All tickets bought during this timeframe will automatically be entered into the bonus prize draw as well as being in with a chance to win up to £25,000 in the weekly lottery run by SWT council.

Please [click here](#) to read the full press release.

11. Reminder - SWT helping customers out of debt

SWT Council has set up a dedicated project team to help customers out of Council Tax and Business Rate debt.

The project will look at improving general housekeeping, building business intelligence on customers in debt and internal procedures for case resolution. It will also look to identify and engage with customers with large debts or multiple unpaid debts and those with vulnerabilities. Any additional income collected will be used to pay for essential services.

If you have outstanding Council Tax or Business Rate debts you can contact recovery@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk.

Please [click here](#) to read the full press release.

12. Somerset Waste Partnership Services (SWP)

Recycle More on its way to West Somerset and Sedgemoor

Sedgemoor and West Somerset can get ready to Recycle More as the fourth and final stage of the new service roll-out approaches.

The Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) expanded collections are set to be launched to more than 70,000 homes across West Somerset and Sedgemoor at the end of February.

They are already working well in Mendip, South Somerset, and Taunton Deane, collecting hundreds of extra tonnes of recycling each week – protecting the environment and helping tackle climate change. The new service also costs less and contributes savings for all members of the partnership.

Where possible, Recycle More will improve recycling for homes with shared or communal collections, for example blocks of flats and homes of multiple occupancy. This will happen later in the year at a date to be confirmed.

All residents will be written to twice before anything changes, with the first leaflet due to arrive by the end of next week.

If you live in Sedgemoor and West Somerset, please help spread the word and encourage people to prepare for this important change that means everyone doing things a little differently.

There's lots of information on the SWP [website](#), stakeholders are receiving regular updates and the first Recycle More [Facebook Q&A](#) took place on Monday.

Three more Q&A Days, running 7am-7pm, will be hosted in the coming weeks.

- Wednesday 26 January
- Friday 18 February
- Wednesday 16 March

A quick reminder of the Recycle More basics:

- The following are added to weekly recycling collections: Plastic pots, tubs and trays; food and drink cartons; small batteries; small electrical items.
- Extra weekly recycling means far less rubbish, so rubbish is collected every three weeks instead of every two.
- Collection days change for around two-thirds of households.

All residents with kerbside collections have a new recycling container – a 'Bright Blue Bag' - delivered before the new service starts.

Recycle More works best if you are making full use of the weekly recycling collections. Making sure you have all the containers you need is a great way to prepare.

Everyone can have a green and a black recycling box, plus a food waste bin. New, replacement or extra containers can be ordered free from the SWP website somersetwaste.gov.uk using the My Waste Service feature or by calling SWT.

New Council for Somerset

On 1 April 2023, Somerset will become a unitary authority, replacing the current County Council and four District Councils with a single council governing the whole area. Find out more [here](#).

The website <https://newsomersetcouncil.org.uk> contains a link to the One Somerset Business Case, recent press releases and details of Local Government Reorganisation Governance meetings. It will also signpost queries from the public to the mailbox at newsomerset@somerset.gov.uk.

Highlights from the Advisory Board Meeting on 16 December

A new Somerset Council will be a local council, with residents and communities playing a front and centre role. That was the key message from the fourth Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Advisory Board Meeting in December.

Held virtually, via Microsoft Teams, the event was attended by 95 people from across the county, all keen to contribute to discussions on building a new Council for Somerset.

Local Community Networks

A standing item on the agenda are the Local Community Networks (LCNs), with a particular focus on their boundaries and budgets.

It's envisaged up to 20 LCNs will be established on 1 April 2023, when the new Somerset Council officially begins. Consisting of residents, councillors, town and parish councils, community groups and partners such as the NHS, education, and the Police and Fire Service, LCNs will have decision-making powers to shape policy and take action to improve their local area.

Please [click here](#) to read the full press release.

The next meeting will be held virtually on **Thursday 3 February**, 15.30-17.00. Nearer the time, you will find a live link [here](#).

Survey on the role of the new Councillors

People attending the meeting on 16 December, took part in an exercise to explore the role of the new unitary councillors. Example role descriptions from other councils across the country were provided to help guide the discussion. A survey has been produced which aims to gather the key points raised and will feed back into the development of the new Somerset Councillor role description. This survey will close on **26 January 2022**. Please [click here](#) to take part in the survey.

Partner Engagement – Key messages from other Public Service Areas

Somerset County Council (SCC)

SCC Highway Maintenance Update

Welcome back after the Christmas and New Year break. The weather has been a mixed bag, somewhat, with a couple of wet spells, some frosty mornings requiring road salting and even a spell of daytime snow for which we had to carry out some actions on Exmoor and the Brendon Hills.

The **B3358 Challacombe Road, Simonsbath** is closed for repairs to the edge of the road until 17 January. Starting on 17 January are two other road closures, at **Sandrocks lane, Withycombe** and **Buckland Farm Road, West Buckland**, both for drainage work. Footway resurfacing will also commence at **Broomfield Close, Taunton**.

The 17 January also see the second week of carriageway repairs on the **C182 Hinkley Point Main Road**. The work is between Combwich and the power station and the **road will be closed from 6pm until 7am each night until 22 January**.

Urgent work to remove diseased trees from county roadsides

SCC's Highways team is continuing important work to remove diseased and dangerous ash trees along key routes.

Clearance work on the **B3227 through Norton Fitzwarren** requires a road closure. Work started on Monday 10 January, between 9am and 3.30pm each day, and is scheduled to finish no later than Friday 21 January. The road is reopened to traffic outside these times, on weekends and a signed diversion is in place.

The operation will see several dead or diseased trees affected by ash dieback removed. The fungus, otherwise known as *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, is a national problem expected to kill or seriously damage over 95 per cent of the nation's ash trees.

Please [click here](#) to read the full press release.

For more information on highway maintenance works and to stay up to date visit www.travelsomerset.co.uk or follow [@TravelSomerset](https://twitter.com/TravelSomerset) on Twitter.

Reporting a problem on the road

Alerting SCC to potholes or a host of other problems on the road is now easier and quicker – and you can track its progress after you've reported it.

Gone is the need to make phone calls or send emails - thanks to a new upgraded online system with an improved interactive map, members of the public can report a problem 24/7 and the Highways team will get on the case. From potholes, blocked drains and broken manhole covers, to overgrown vegetation, damaged pavements or cycle paths, faulty traffic lights or missing markings - they can all be reported in just minutes from a smartphone, tablet or computer.

The full range and how to report is available here www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-problem-on-the-road/.

The new development means that if you're reporting a fault, you can now track its progress. If it's safe to pull over, all you need to do is take a quick picture of the fault, then visit the Report It site on your phone, answer a few simple questions and upload your picture. You'll be sent a link which enables you to track its progress.

Please [click here](#) to read the full press release.

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans

SCC has unveiled plans for major new safe cycling and walking routes in the county to help create greener, healthier and more active streets.

The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) for Yeovil and Taunton are the first to be published – they'll be followed by plans for Bridgwater and Frome and funding has been netted to draw up plans for three other towns soon. These are focused, 10-year plans for developing a cycle and walking network within each local area. The aim is to secure funding over the next decade for significant new safe routes for cyclists and pedestrians across all Somerset's towns.

You can access and comment on the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans for Yeovil and Taunton here: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/roads-and-transport-local-cycling-and-walking-infrastructure-plans-lcwips/>.

These are evolving plans which will continue to develop over time, with the views and suggestions from the public central to the process.

SCC has now launched a Commonplace website where the public can comment on plans for sustainable transport in the county – you can also find the Local Cycling and Walking Plans here: [Have Your Say Today – Somerset Sustainable Transport – Commonplace](#)

Somerset Household Support Fund

£3.8m to help support Somerset households with food and bills this winter

SCC has been allocated £3.8m from the Government's Household Support Fund which will be used to ensure there is a wide range of support available to those who need it between now and the end of March 2022.

The Somerset Household Support Fund is funded by the Department for Work and Pensions and administered by Somerset County Council. The fund is designed to provide short-term financial support to vulnerable households which are struggling to afford household essentials this winter.

These households will need help with the cost of food, energy, water bills and other essentials. The fund is being distributed by the Citizens Advice organisations in Somerset which are assisting Somerset County Council

Please [click here](#) to read the full press release.

To find out more about how to apply and check eligibility criteria, please [click here](#).

Department of Education

Training and more testing to help people become HGV drivers

Free courses for adults to train to be HGV drivers are under way across the country – as part of a package of measures to ease driver shortages and support supply chains this Christmas and beyond.

Skills Bootcamps in HGV driving are free, flexible, intensive courses designed to train drivers to be road ready and gain their licence, offering people the chance to launch well-paid careers in the logistics sector. People that successfully complete the HGV courses are guaranteed a job interview with an employer, and the first drivers are expected to be on the road from March 2022.

The courses are available [now in locations across the country](#) and will also support existing drivers to refresh or upgrade their skills so they can get back on the road. The Department for Education has announced it has boosted capacity for even more people to just over 11,000 places – backed by £34 million. Courses are in high demand with more than 2,000 people having already expressed an interest in signing up with the [National Career Service](#) and hundreds more through Jobcentre and the DfE helpline.

More information about the range of opportunities on offer in the transport and logistics sector is available on the [JobHelp site](#).

Please [click here](#) to read the full press release.

Magna Housing Association Shared Equity Housing at Orchard Brooks, Williton

A brand new development of shared equity two bedroom properties are now available for sale at Orchard Brooks, Williton.

Shared ownership is another way to buy your own home if you cannot afford to do so on the open market. You purchase a percentage of the home and pay rent on the rest. Magna Housing owns part of it but you live there, decorate it and decide when to sell,

Buying a percentage means a smaller deposit and smaller mortgage. In most cases, you can buy further shares until you own 100%.

Please [click here](#) to visit the website and find out more.

Somerset Activity Sports Partnership (SASP) Get outside in Somerset – Beat the Blues

Let's #BeatTheBlues! Are you feeling a little deflated after the excitement of the Christmas period? It's totally normal to feel unmotivated at this time of year, but it's also important to remember to take care of ourselves.

Get Outside in Somerset is here to help you lift your spirits on Blue Monday! January can be a tough month for everyone, which is why it's more important than ever to partake in some well needed selfcare. This can be anything, from a walk to visiting your favourite coffee spot to catching up with a loved one, whatever works for you, there is no right or wrong way to take part.

Check out the Somerset self-care checklist for some inspiration and upload a photo with the hashtag #BeatTheBlues! Visit the [#GetOutsideinSomerset](#) website for even more inspiration, activities and challenges.

Exmoor National Park (ENP)

Bye Wood Project

Bye Wood is part of the biggest woodland creation project to have taken place in the National Park in the past 15 years and forms part of ENP commitment to increase tree cover on Exmoor from around 13.5% to at least 17% by 2050 - the amount recommended by the UK government's independent Climate Change Committee.

At Bye Wood, the vision is to create a unique and sustainable woodland in 2021/2 using only the best environmentally friendly practices. Whether new trees are planted from seedlings, or natural colonisation (NC) is used – the natural spread of trees into an area from the seed of local trees – is an important choice.

Help with Tree Planting at Bye Wood and Volunteering

Members of public are invited to volunteer and join ENP planting trees at Bye Wood from **10am to 3pm on 15 January 2022**. More details can be found [here](#) or email Patrick Watts-Mabbott on pwatts-mabbott@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk.

You can also join the team of volunteers helping collect and grow tree seeds on Exmoor or get involved with the new Tree Nursery. Sign up to the ENP [woodlands newsletter](#) for details.

Please [click here](#) to find out more information on the Bye Wood project.

Farming in Protected Landscapes Fund

To support farmers and land managers protecting the special and unique places that are our National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Defra have launched the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme. The programme will provide funding to farmers and land managers for projects that support nature recovery, mitigate the impacts of climate change, provide opportunities for people to engage with the landscape and cultural heritage and support nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses.

The programme will run from 1 July 2021 and close on 31 March 2024 and applications can be for single year or across more than one year as long as all works will be completed by 31 March 2024. This funding is open to all farmers and land managers within the Exmoor National Park and projects outside the boundary if they can be shown to bring benefit to the area.

Please [click here](#) for more information, full application guidance and links to the application forms.

Quantock Hill AONB

Kilve Court Landscape Management Course

Aimed at participants 16-18yrs not in education, employment or training

There are many different jobs in the land-based industries from gardeners, rangers, foresters and woodland managers. This free two-week course starting on **Monday 31 January** at Kilve Court (TA5 1EA) will provide the opportunity for young people to develop a range of both employability and practical land management skills as well as the chance to find out more about the wide range of opportunities within Land

Management. Participants will have the opportunity to meet local employers, identify and plan their next steps into work and/ or further training and also gain the skills and qualifications employers want.

Qualifications on offer include First Aid and a LANTRA Brushcutter qualification. This course can provide transport and will provide all equipment and PPE.

To find out more or to book a place on the course, please contact Richard Lucas on 07823537358 or email somersetworks@somerset.gov.uk.

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (DSFRS) Fire Services to continue supporting ambulance crews

Firefighters from across the five south west fire and rescue services are to continue to provide vital life-saving support alongside the ambulance service.

Since the early stages of the pandemic, firefighters have been working with ambulance crews from South Western Ambulance Service (SWASFT) to assist during medical emergencies.

The partnership has led to countless lives being saved and received praise from government and royalty.

The shared crews have so far attended in excess of 30,000 calls, more than half of which are within the highest two priority calls, which are to people in life threatening or serious conditions.

With the current winter pressures on the NHS and surge in Omicron cases, this arrangement has been extended and will now continue until April 2022.

Under the agreement, fire officers will continue to work alongside ambulance staff by driving vehicles and assisting clinicians to provide patient-focused care.

Please [click here](#) to read the full press release.

HM Coastguard Watchet New Year's Eve Coastal Rescue

On New Year's Eve, HM Coastguard Watchet was tasked to [Blue Anchor Beach](#) following the receipt of a 999 call reporting 2 adults, a child and a pet dog having become cut off by the flooding tide.

Having tried to wade out of danger towards the slipway on the eastern end of the seafront the group retreated back to the shingle beach. Onlookers from the shore and fishermen reassured the group whilst the team made their way to scene and the two lifeboats from [Minehead RNLI Lifeboat Station](#) were launched.

The Coastguard was soon on scene and wearing water rescue equipment made their way around to the stranded group. They were then able to confirm a safe route back to the shore.

Having arrived back on the roadside and given an assessment by the casualty carers, the group were soon making their way home to get into dry clothes.

Both Lifeboats were stood down and were able to return to station.

HM Coastguard continue to remind anyone who visits the coastline to check the tide times and ask locals if unsure if the beaches are covered by the rising tide.

Luckily on this particular day the conditions were not so rough. The group were being watched from the shore allowing a call for help to be made.

Remember in a coastal emergency to dial 999 and ask for the Coastguard.

Community Support – What help is out there? Voluntary and Community Sector Support

Spark Somerset

New Velocity Digital Transformation Programme

Introducing Velocity, an exciting new programme offering free digital training, support and investment to Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations in Somerset.

Spark are delivering Velocity in partnership with leading IT specialists, Cosmic, with support from the Community Renewal Fund. Their aim is to empower participants to make the most of digital technology, to increase their capacity and resilience and become better connected and more sustainable.

Velocity is open to charities, social enterprises, CICs, voluntary groups and community organisations in Somerset. Please follow [this link](#) to find out more and register your interest in the programme.

Somerset Community Foundation (SCF) Search launched for new Chair of Trustees Board

An exciting opportunity has arisen at Somerset Community Foundation (SCF) to join and lead their board of trustees. This unique local philanthropic charity is seeking an ambitious person to provide inspiring leadership as their new Chair and help steer the Foundation into the future.

SCF is a charity that helps passionate people in Somerset change the world on their doorstep by funding local charities and inspiring local giving and philanthropy. They aim to build stronger communities in Somerset where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. They provide rewarding and impactful ways for donors to give through them, to the causes and places they care about most. Together, they fund amazing organisations and the passionate people that change lives every day.

The deadline to apply is 5pm, Wednesday 26 January, 2022. For more information, or to apply, visit: www.somersetcf.org.uk/vacancies.

Surviving Winter Appeal

The annual appeal encourages pensioners to donate some or all their Winter Fuel Payment if they don't need it themselves. These donations provide funding and support to our older neighbours across Somerset who are struggling to heat their homes.

To donate some or all of your Winter Fuel Payment, or to make a donation of any size to the Surviving Winter appeal, please visit: www.somersetcf.org.uk/winter.

Please [click here](#) to read the full press release.

Community Council for Somerset (CCS)

Celebrating a huge milestone in Food Resilience in Somerset

The Somerset Food Resilience Taskforce was set up at the start of the pandemic in 2020, funded by SCC and Public Health, and supplied by many generous organisations, including Fareshare, HIS Church, local supermarkets such as Tesco & Morrisons, Branstons Potatoes, Charlie Bighams and lots more! These have enabled the CCS Village Agents and many community groups to create Veg boxes, Carers Respite Meal packs and Christmas Meal packs for so many people!

In December an AMAZING milestone was hit – over 1 MILLION items of food have been distributed to people in Somerset over the past 18 months! To put in context, that's food for a just under 500 people a day EVERY DAY, or around 200,000 days of food!

CCS Village & Community Agents are the beating heart behind the Food Resilience Taskforce and have a warehouse where they manage food deliveries, gather donated food items, precooked meals and more (such as heaters, blankets and other household items) and co-ordinate community groups to collect and distribute across Somerset, as well as delivering directly to their own clients.

This Christmas alone, they distributed over 1500 Christmas dinners to people who may have gone without, or who needed a little bit of TLC, and since April 2020 have funded and stocked 13 community freezers in Somerset.

On average 15-20 community groups meet at the warehouse, collecting and delivering around 10-30 thousand units, along with 100 - 600 frozen meals each week

It is a **PHENOMENAL** effort, and CCS Village Agents would like to express their deepest thanks to the amazing people who run food groups voluntarily to make sure people in their communities are looked after, and the funders SCC, Public Health and FareShare for enabling the movement.

If you think you could help, OR if you need a helping hand, please call the CCS on 01823 331 222, or visit: <https://somersetagents.org/help-with-food/>

Life Cycle UK

Get Somerset Cycling

National Charity, [Life Cycle UK](#), has recently launched a new campaign to get people in Somerset cycling.

Through the [Get Somerset Cycling Campaign](#), free tuition and bike vouchers are available to eligible people in Somerset and voluntary sector organisations can apply for up to four bicycle parking stands for their premises free of charge, including delivery and installation.

You can find out more and apply [here](#).

Help and support for businesses affected by COVID-19

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has made available webinars and videos about the support available to businesses to help them deal with the economic impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak.

HMRC cover the following government schemes:

- Coronavirus (COVID-19) Job Retention Scheme
- Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)
- Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) Rebate Scheme

Please [click here](#) for further information.

Health and Welfare

COVID-19

With case rates in Somerset now well over 1000 per 100,000 population, and the much-increased transmissibility of Omicron, the risk of contracting COVID19 is now the highest it has ever been. Fortunately, in people of working age who have been vaccinated and boosted the risk of serious illness appears very low. The greatest risk for employers over the next few weeks is staff absence due to COVID-19 and the impact on business continuity. In addition to direct employees being affected, there is a risk that other public and business services you rely on will also be unable to operate normally for the same reasons. Services such as buses and trains, refuse collection, schools and health services are all under pressure with high absence rates at present.

Somerset COVID Cases

COVID-19 case numbers in Somerset continue to increase and are currently at 1,162.9 per 100k. The expectation is for Somerset cases to continue to rise. Omicron is now the dominant strain of COVID-19 in the South-West. We are behind the peak of cases seen in London and the South-East and we anticipate South-West cases will peak in the next week or two and so this case rate will continue to rise.

In the week up to 2 January approximately 120,487 tests were carried out across the county with 6,538 new confirmed cases. The rates have increased in the last reporting week to 1,162.9 per 100,000. This is below the South-West average and the national average.

Hospitalisation data for Somerset is now around 35 COVID-19 in patients in Somerset hospitals.

Have you had your jabs? Update on COVID-19 Booster Programme

After a healthy flurry of bookings for boosters/vaccinations pre-Christmas, there has been a noticeable drop off after the festive period. There is lots of walk-in availability at a number of vaccination sites across Somerset in January. These slots are available for first, second and booster vaccinations for everyone aged 18 and for first and second vaccinations for those aged 12–15 and 16-17. Visit the [Grab a Jab](#) site for information about any walk-in clinics being held near you.

The boosters are very important as they significantly reduce the likelihood of serious illness or hospitalisation should you catch COVID-19 so, if offered, please make a booking without delay.

Once you have received the national invitation you will be able to go on the **National Booking site**: nhs.uk/CovidVaccination or call 119. Vaccination centres across Somerset remain busy, but with slots becoming available all the time, please remember to check the National Booking Service regularly.

In total, the provisional data shows over 1.3 million vaccinations have been given in Somerset, including just under 340,000 booster jabs. This means that approximately 80% of eligible people have received their booster jab meeting, the end of the year national target. However, there is still an estimated 90,000 eligible people in Somerset that have not yet received their booster jab (of these about 6,000 have only had their second dose in the last couple of weeks, so won't yet be eligible yet for their boosters).

Stay safe and help prevent the spread of COVID-19

Coronavirus remains a serious health risk. You should stay cautious to help protect yourself and others.

- Meet outside, or open windows and doors for indoor visitors
- If you think you have symptoms stay at home and [take a PCR test](#)
- Wear face coverings in crowded places and on public transport
- Check in to venues when you go out
- Wash your hands with soap regularly, and for at least 20 seconds
- [Get vaccinated](#).

New rules on Testing

- The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has announced that confirmatory PCR tests will be temporarily suspended for positive lateral flow test results.
- From 11 January in England, anyone who receives a positive LFD test result should [report their result on GOV.UK](#) and must self-isolate immediately but will not need to take a follow-up PCR test. This is a temporary measure while coronavirus (COVID-19) rates remain high across the UK. Whilst levels of

COVID-19 are high, the vast majority of people with positive LFD results can be confident that they have COVID-19.

- Anyone who develops 1 of the 3 main COVID-19 symptoms should stay at home and self-isolate and take a PCR test. They must self-isolate if they get a positive test result, even if they have had a recent negative lateral flow test – these rules have not changed.
- In line with the reduced self-isolation approach announced on 22 December, anyone who tests positive will be able to leave self-isolation 7 days after the date of their initial positive test if they receive 2 negative LFD results, 24 hours apart, on days 6 and 7.

If you would like to know more, a video which shows you how to use the Lateral Flow kit can be viewed [here](#). By testing yourself regularly you are helping to reduce the spread of the infection.

COVID-19 – latest advice

Please refer to the links below for the latest Coronavirus-related advice, help and guidance, should you need any help in the future.

- [Order your lateral flow tests online](#)
- [How to do a COVID-19 lateral flow test](#)
- [Log your lateral flow results here](#)
- [Book or request a PCR test online](#)
- [List of local pharmacies offering lateral flow testing](#)
- <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
- [NHS – Help and Advice](#)

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

[Click here](#) to read up to date information on how SWT continues to respond to Coronavirus.

The Somerset Coronavirus Support Helpline

This 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 this 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 including vaccinations
- Waste collection and disposal
- Financial support

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

If you would like to find out more about the Corona helpers, offer assistance, or need support please visit www.corona-helpers.co.uk.

Need to seek help?

If you, or someone you know are feeling like things are too much, please know that you / they don't have to be alone. Here are some numbers of organisations that can help:

- Samaritans - 116 123
- CALM - 0800 58 58 58
- ChildLine - 0800 1111
- Anxiety UK - 03444 775 774
- Mind - 0300 123 3393
- Somerset Domestic Abuse helpline - 0800 69 49 999

FAQ

Q Should you wait on getting a booster until there's an Omicron specific shot?

A No. Get your booster as soon as you're eligible, regardless of any omicron developments.

Even partial protection is better than no protection, and the longer you wait, the more you risk getting infected by another Covid variant — including Delta, which remains dangerous.

Plus, if the current COVID-19 vaccines prove effective against the new variant, Omicron-specific shots [may never be deemed necessary](#).

Q How is Omicron different from any other version of the virus that's been in our lives for nearly two years?

A Perhaps the biggest difference with Omicron is how easily transmissible this variant is. When Delta became the dominant strain of Covid in the summer, it was said to be far more contagious than previous versions, and Omicron is far more transmissible than Delta.

Omicron also appears to be more adept at producing breakthrough infections among those who are fully vaccinated, and even those who have received booster shots. However, the risk of serious illness or death is dramatically lower for those who are vaccinated and boosted.

On the positive side, there is some data that suggests – albeit not conclusively – that Omicron is a milder strain than Delta. Even if that proves

true, because it's so highly transmissible, it will still lead to a lot of illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths in the weeks ahead.

Crime / Safeguarding

Action Fraud

Cryptocurrency Fraud

Criminals will try to lure you in with adverts or via social media offering easy money quickly. Stop and think. It could protect you and your money.

Be suspicious if you are contacted out the blue about an investment opportunity. Consider getting independent professional advice before making a significant financial decision.

Certain cryptocurrencies are not regulated in the UK meaning you are unlikely to have access to the Financial Ombudsman Service or the Financial Services Compensation Scheme if something goes wrong.

Please [click here](#) to find out more about cryptocurrency fraud.

Avon and Somerset Police Crime Commissioner (PCC)

Police Tax survey

It's that time of year again where Police and Crime Commissioners up and down the country will need to decide whether to increase the precept – the policing part of the council tax - and the impact this will have on local people.

Before making this decision, Avon and Somerset PCC Mark Shelford wants to hear the view from communities about this potential increase. He has launched a survey asking if residents would be willing to pay an increase in the policing part of the council tax.

As a local resident you are invited to complete the short survey, which will be running until **21 January 2022**. You could also share the survey with your colleagues, friends and family and encourage them to complete it.

To access the survey please use this [link](#) .

Avon and Somerset Police (ASP)

Domestic Abuse

One year ago, Chief Inspector Sharon Baker recorded a heartfelt video in which she bravely talked about her experience of living in an abusive and controlling relationship. The aim of the video was to empower more victims to break the silence around their abuse and to come forwards and report to the police.

Chief Inspector Baker has now written a poignant blog for [mumsnet.com](#) in which she explains what coercive and controlling behaviour is, how she overcame her own abuse and how the mumsnet platform became a safe haven for her throughout her experience.

You can read the blog [here](#). If you have any questions about domestic abuse, Sharon will be coming back onto the thread to answer questions.

For further Neighbourhood Policing Updates...

For regular updates on events/campaigns and what is happening in your area, please keep an eye on the relevant policing Facebook pages detailed below:

- [Minehead and West Somerset Neighbourhood Policing](#)
- [Wellington Neighbourhood Policing](#)
- [Taunton Neighbourhood Policing](#)
- [Sedgemoor and Hinkley Point Neighbourhood Policing](#)

Finally

The below link may be useful to you, should there be a requirement to convert files to jpg format: <https://www.adobe.com/uk/acrobat/online/pdf-to-jpg.html>

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).

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