

Somerset West and Taunton

Newsletter to SWT Councillors and Parish Councils

Issue 101 Week ending 03/04/2022

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. Elections May 2022

The deadline for candidates' nominations for the Somerset County Council and Town and Parish Council Elections close at **4pm on Tuesday 5 April 2022**.

Useful information and the nomination packs can be found on the Somerset West and Taunton Council website:

[Elections 2022 \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

The statement of persons nominated will be published on Wednesday 6 April 2022.

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 6 April – SWT Corporate Scrutiny Committee – Cancelled**

- **Thursday 7 April** – SWT Planning Committee at 1.00pm in the JMR. The agenda and report packs can be viewed on the [website](#). Deadline for public questions is 4pm on Tuesday 5 April.
- **Wednesday 20 April** – SWT Executive – **Cancelled**
- **Thursday 21 April** – SWT Phosphates Planning Sub-Committee at 1.00pm in the JMR. Deadline for public questions is 4.00pm on Tuesday 19 April.

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.

Please see the dates listed above re deadlines for submitting questions or statements. Information on speaking at public meetings is available on the SWT [website](#).

3. Poll Cards are arriving

Polling cards for the election for the new Somerset Council, town and parish councils on Thursday 5 May are arriving on doormats across the county.

Somerset residents are being advised to check their poll card to make sure that they know which polling station they need to use on 5 May as some locations have changed. You can also check where your polling station is online at wheredoivote.co.uk.

If you don't receive a poll card, make sure you are registered to vote. This is important if you have recently moved house. This needs to be done by Thursday 14 April to make sure that you can have your say at the ballot box. The easiest way to register is by visiting www.gov.uk/register-to-vote. There's no need to re-register if you already are on the electoral roll.

There are several ways to have your say in the elections in May - you can vote in a polling station, by post, or by appointing someone you trust to vote on your behalf, which is known as a proxy vote, and it is never too early to apply for a postal or proxy vote.

Residents can still vote if they are away on the May 5 polling day. If you're thinking about voting by post, you can apply now, the deadline for postal applications is 5pm on 19 April. The deadline for proxy votes is 5pm on 26 April. If you want to apply for a postal or proxy vote, please visit our elections page [Elections 2022 \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](http://Elections2022.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk) or contact elections@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk.

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

4. Purdah – Pre-Election Period

During local government elections, there is a period described as a 'period of heightened sensitivity' (formerly referred to as purdah). For the forthcoming elections, this is from Monday, 21 March 2022 until Thursday, 5 May 2022. During this time, the focus is on the publicity that certain actions or decisions may create. It certainly does not mean that all council activity grinds to a halt, that committee decisions cannot be made, nor non-contentious consultations launched.

Elected Members, who are currently members and seeking election to Somerset Council can continue to express their own views to the press and are at liberty to organise any proactive publicity themselves, **but not** utilising any resources of the council; the auspices of the press offices, photographs that the authorities have paid for or taken.

The important detail is that no publicity from any Council at this particularly sensitive time should appear to support a particular candidate or even to support a single specific viewpoint as advocated by a particular candidate.

Any publicity should not be perceived as seeking to influence public opinion or promote the public image of a particular candidate or group of candidates.

The main point to bear in mind is that a local authority shall not publish any material that, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect support for a candidate or political party.

If in doubt, please contact:

Amy Tregellas, Monitoring Officer
A.Tregellas@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

Kevin Williams, Deputy Monitoring Officer
K.Williams@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

5. How to access support if you're sponsoring a Ukrainian refugee

A new webpage has been set up to provide information and support for Somerset households who have volunteered to sponsor Ukrainian refugees.

Somerset County Council is working with Mendip, Sedgemoor, Somerset West and Taunton and South Somerset District Councils, the Somerset NHS Clinical Commissioning Group, Avon and Somerset Police, and local charities and community groups to help both sponsors and refugees.

Those arriving from Ukraine are likely to need access to a range of services – from health and transport to schools and nursery places. It's a fast-moving situation and the initial priority is to identify local sponsors, carry out checks and help Ukrainian people settle safely in Somerset.

The new webpage can be found at www.somerset.gov.uk/Ukraine. This includes a digital form which should be completed by sponsors who are matched with

refugees. This will help local services to carry out the checks sponsors need to safely welcome their guests.

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

6. Local Pantry celebrates its first anniversary

Volunteers at [Rowbarton Local Pantry \(RLP\)](#), based at Rowbarton Methodist Church in Taunton, celebrated their first year of operation last Wednesday, 23 March 2022.

Representing one of four in a growing network of district pantry schemes, RLP was the first of its kind to be piloted by SWT with the aim of mitigating food insecurity, whilst reducing food waste and associated CO2 emissions. Operating as a membership scheme, the 'Pantry Model' seeks to prevent huge volumes of excess food from going to waste by redistributing it at an affordable price to local families.

The model has been successfully adopted in other areas of the UK and is proven to be a sustainable and long-term solution, particularly helping lower income households struggling to put meals on the table.

RLP is run by community volunteers and over the past 12 months, it has successfully saved and redistributed over 6,000 kg worth of food, initially to 23 families in the north Taunton area, which has now grown to 40 households.

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

7. Rural Innovation – At the heart of the community

Do you work in agriculture or the food and drink sector?

If so, don't miss the Rural Innovation Event **on Tue, 5 April between 9am and 1:30pm at Somerset County Cricket Club, Taunton**, showcasing the latest technologies and [#AgriFood](#) support network to help your business grow.

The theme for this event focuses on how collaborative the support network and structure is for UK Agri-Food start-ups, and those in other industries with technological advancements that can help transform the sector.

Please [click here](#) to find out more and register for this event.

8. Museum of the Moon was a grand success

Over 21,000 visitors came through the doors of Taunton Minster to see the Museum of the Moon art installation by Luke Jerram.

Thank you to all that came and shared their experience.

Plus, a really big thank you to all those who gave up their time to welcome, guide and inform the 21,000 visitors who travelled far and wide to see this

incredible exhibition. Without the support and commitment from volunteers, this exhibition in the heart of the town, would have not been possible.

9. Reminder - SWT Housing Newsletter – Spring 2022

SWT Housing has produced the latest tenants' newsletter which is due to hit doormats soon. Approximately 6000 publications have been printed and will be distributed to all SWT tenants and leaseholders signposting readers to help and support.

There has been a particular emphasis on post pandemic recovery such as debt management, housing maintenance and how tenants can access available services.

Please [click here](#) to view the Spring Newsletter online.

10. Somerset Waste Partnership Services (SWP)

All change – Summer hours at recycling sites from 1 April

All of Somerset's 16 recycling sites switch to their summer timetables from Friday 1 April.

When open weekdays, they will continue to start at 9am but close an hour later, at 6pm. Year-round Saturday and Sunday hours remain 9am-4pm at all 16 sites.

Latest site details including opening days can be found at on the Somerset Waste Partnership website somersetwaste.gov.uk/recycling/centres

With a number of sites achieving a recycling rate of 77%, Somerset's recycle site network is open every day of the year except Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day to take dozens of materials.

Nine of the county's recycling sites have online [queue cameras](#) so you can check before you leave if you want to make sure you avoid waiting at busy times: Bridgwater (Saltlands), Chard, Highbridge, Minehead, Street, Taunton (Priorswood), Wellington (Poole), Wells (Dulcote) and Yeovil.

#RepeatTheCycle

You can recycle plastic bags and other thin-soft-stretchy-crinkly plastics, plus plastic-foil pouches, at many supermarkets. Find your nearest location at:

www.recyclenow.com/repeatthecycle

That can include:

- Baby, pet food, coffee and cleaning product plastic-foil pouches
- Bags for bread, pasta, rice and salad, plus cereal liners
- Bags/wrapping for biscuits, confectionery, crisps and snacks
- Ready meal and yoghurt film lids
- Wrapping from cheese, fish, meat and flowers
- Multi-pack wrapping, toilet roll wrapping, bottle sleeves
- Plastic carrier bags, delivery bags, frozen food bags

For more on what you can do with plastics in Somerset, from supermarkets to the commercially-sponsored schemes of TerraCycle, from freezer packaging and multipack wrap to pet food pouches, see: somersetwaste.gov.uk/act-on-plastics/

Meanwhile, take your plastic bags and wrapping back to store

Thin film plastics taken by supermarkets are NOT accepted for recycling in kerbside collections or at recycle sites. Do not add these to your Bright Blue Bag. Add to your rubbish bin or, at recycle sites, put in the energy-from-waste skip.

Thin film plastics are a wide range and shifting mix of different low-quality high-contamination materials that are hard to collect, difficult to sort, and offer few practical options for reprocessing into anything of value.

SWP is carefully exploring whether recycling some thin plastics is possible, if can be done efficiently and sustainably, with all the collected material recycled, all materials processed in the UK into something of even low value, and if it would be a good use of your council tax.

Collection day information is also available online using the “My Collection Day” feature on the somersetwaste.gov.uk website. Calendars can be downloaded for printing or directly into your laptop or mobile device’s calendar - creating helpful automatic reminders.

You can find lots more information about Recycle More online at somersetwaste.gov.uk/recycle-more. Extra guidance and support can be requested using a form on this page, 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](#).

Exmoor Pilot Milestones met

Highlights from the March meeting of the Exmoor Area Panel, held at The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe

To ensure communities have ability to influence decisions in their areas under the unitary authority, up to 20 Local Community Networks (LCNs) will be set up, covering every corner of the county. They’ll act as ‘committees’ of the new Council, and they’ll have a devolved budget.

Three pilot LCNs are currently testing this new approach: in the Frome area, in the Wincanton, Bruton and Castle Cary area, and one across Exmoor. The Exmoor LCN pilot is focusing on Highways’ service provision.

At a recent meeting of the Exmoor Area Panel, key announcements were delivered which will significantly shift the way the Council engages with residents.

They confirmed the following:

- a Highways Steward with van and equipment will be in post by the spring,
- a proportion of the Highways maintenance budget will be passed to parishes,
- funding for a new 'broker' role has been secured.

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

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.

Partner Engagement – Key messages from other Public Service Areas

Somerset County Council (SCC) SCC Highway Maintenance Update

For 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.

Somerset Growth Accelerator Fund Grant Scheme

Grants are being made available to Somerset SME businesses (Small and Medium Size Businesses of up to 250 employees) to support the growth of eligible

organisations to help drive economic recovery post COVID-19 and support Somerset's ambition to become net zero by 2030.

Applicants can apply for:

- Grants of between £25,000 and £50,000 with the applicant expected to match fund 25% of the project costs
- A few grants will be made available in the region of £100,000 for exceptional cases where the applicant can demonstrate the activity will be transformative and act as catalyst for growth, with the applicant expected to match fund 50% of the project.

SCC are expecting projects to have been completed by March 2023 but demonstrating sustainable impact into future years.

The call for Expression of Interests (online form) opened on Tuesday 15 March 2022 until **Monday 11 April**, after which point the applications will be assessed and successful applicants invited to submit a Full Application within 6 weeks.

The number of grants available under this scheme is limited, so the grant assessment process is competitive. A second funding window will be considered if necessary.

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

The Queen's Platinum Jubilee 2022

Lord Lieutenant takes on 70-mile Somerset Jubilee Jaunt

The Lord Lieutenant of Somerset Annie Maw is about to embark on an ambitious 70-mile wheelchair marathon – to celebrate seven decades of the Queen's reign.

Annie broke her back in a horse-riding accident 20 years ago resulting in paraplegia. But she won't be letting life in a wheelchair get in the way of what she is describing as her 'Jubilee Jaunt'.

On April 3 she will begin seven days of journeys – each ten miles long – across Somerset, each planned and escorted by young people taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

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

Network Rail

Wellington and Cullompton stations one step closer

Network Rail will spearhead the next stage of this project with the development of detailed designs and a full business case following receipt of £5m from the Department for Transport.

Network Rail will lead on taking this project forward and continue to work closely with partners Mid Devon District Council, Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT),

Cullompton Town Council, Wellington Town Council, Devon County Council, Somerset County Council, the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership and Great Western Railway.

The funding will be used to now develop a detailed design for the stations and a full business case, to be submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT). It is anticipated that this next stage will be completed by no later than the end of December 2023.

Subject to the approval of the business case and the receipt of the necessary funding to build the stations, construction could start as early as 2024 with the aspiration for both stations to be in operation by 2025.

Once complete, Wellington and Cullompton will provide two additional stations that will serve the Great Western Mainline from London Paddington to Penzance and sit either side of Tiverton Parkway station. Both stations closed in 1964 and both towns have grown in population since then and are the largest settlements unserved by a rail station between Exeter and Taunton.

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

Western Power Distribution Community Matters Fund

Western Power Distribution (WPD) is pledging to support its most vulnerable customers with grants from its Community Matters Fund ahead of this year's Mental Health Week. The upcoming awareness week (9-15 May) aims to tackle loneliness - particularly in the wake of the pandemic, which has left many people reporting feelings of isolation.

To provide much needed support for the local organisations tackling these vital issues, WPD is calling on charities, councils and community groups in the South West, the Midlands and South Wales to apply for grants of up to £10,000.

This is the latest round of grants from WPD's annual £1 million Community Matters Fund, which has already seen the energy distributor support more than 100 grassroots organisations with crucial fuel poverty grants.

The application window for funding is open until **Sunday 24 April**. To help guide applications, examples of projects the fund will consider supporting are:

- Digital skills and inclusion projects
- Social inclusion and connectedness projects
- Mental health interventions
- Employability skills
- Projects increasing community access to outside space
- Inter-generational support projects
- Befriending services
- Innovative solutions to combating loneliness.

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

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy **Are you eligible for the Boiler Upgrade Scheme from April 2022?**

On 23 May 2022 a new grant scheme for homeowners upgrading from gas boilers to either an Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) or a biomass boiler may be eligible for a grant of £5,000, or £6,000 if upgrading to a Ground Source Heat Pump (GSHP).

The government will provide grants to encourage property owners to install low carbon heating systems such as heat pumps, through the Boiler Upgrade Scheme (BUS). These grants will help property owners overcome the upfront cost of low carbon heating technologies.

The scheme will be open to domestic and small non-domestic properties in England and Wales. It will run from 2022 to 2025.

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

Exmoor National Park **Lambing Season**

Spring is in the air and all over Exmoor new life is emerging.

It's also lambing season, which is a very important and busy time for our farmers.

Please [click here](#) to meet Ranger Tim and faithful friend Patch, reminding you why dogs need to be on a lead around livestock, especially at this important time of year.

Quantock Hills AONB **Spring is here**

The first foals of the year are up on the hills and will be followed soon by the lambs. Please remember not to feed them and keep dogs on leads.

The latest Spring Newsletter is available now, and can be viewed [here](#).

Falcon Rural Housing Ltd **Meadowlands, Washford Development**

Meadowlands is a new housing scheme situated on the old allotment site in Washford. It has been developed by local Social Housing provider, Falcon Rural Housing, in response to housing needs in the area. It will provide five social rented properties, comprising two 2-bedroom and three 3-bedroom homes, located just a short walk from the school and local amenities. The target completion date is the end of May 2022.

Falcon Rural Housing is looking for local people who are in housing need and may be interested in applying for one of these homes. For more information regarding the development and an application form for housing, please contact Falcon Rural Housing Ltd. on **01823 667343** or via email info@falconhousing.co.uk.

The properties will also be advertised on Homefinder Somerset, a choice-based lettings scheme that allows people to apply for social and affordable housing in Somerset. If you are registered, please apply online at www.homefindersomerset.co.uk. If you are not already registered online, please contact Falcon Rural Housing direct.

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (DSFRS)

Wildfire on Exmoor

On Saturday 26 March during the afternoon, crews from Lynton, Combe Martin, on-call from Barnstaple, and whole-time duty fire fighters were called to a large rapidly growing fire on Exmoor just outside Lynton. Porlock Fire Station was also requested soon after the initial crews had arrived.

The Fire Service was receiving multiple calls from members of the public and householders as the fire spread towards houses and cars parked by walkers. The type of vegetation on fire and the strong gusty winds caused the fire to spread rapidly and erratically in all directions with several separate fire fronts.

Crews worked hard on challenging terrain to bring the fire under control. It was finally put out by early evening, 6 hours after the initial callout. The perimeter of the fire measured just over 6.4 kilometres with approximately 350 acres of moorland damaged by fire.

This type of fire carries significant risk due to spreading at running speed in gusting winds whilst the thick smoke stays close to the ground. It means that people can be quickly overcome by smoke and heat if they are in proximity.

This fire appeared to have been lit deliberately, and as a result is being classed as arson by the Police. This is usual practice for fires of this type. The National Park may undertake carefully controlled burning (swaling), and this was permitted until the end of March, with people and equipment on site to control the fire.

DSFRS back fill gaps created by events like this, by moving resources around the service which allowed them to respond to other significant fires occurring at the same time in Devon and Somerset.

All types of uncontrolled fires are potentially dangerous so please consider wind direction and your way out of danger if you find yourself near a wildfire as they can spread very quickly.

Please [click here](#) for more information about wildfire safety.

Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Mark and identify your Water Sports Equipment

Reminder to water users: Please remember to put waterproof/permanent sticky labels with your contact details on all your equipment before heading to the water this year.

Over the last few years, HM Coastguard has launched countless searches after water sports equipment is found washed up on the shore with no obvious owner. Equipment such as: windsurf boards, kites, kiteboards, and most recently, windsurf sails and foil boards.

The Coastguard don't know if there is someone in need of their help, so they often go looking [#AlwaysOnCall](#).

By simply writing a mobile number with permanent ink, or placing a waterproof sticker somewhere on each part of your equipment, all it could take is one phone call to confirm that everyone is safe and well.

Water sports equipment is expensive, save yourself money by labelling your kit and making it more likely that you will see it again.

Help the emergency services to quickly check that you are safe and well and avoid a needless search where volunteers are put into potentially hazardous situations.

Ensure that we are free to respond to other emergencies.

And remember, if you ever find yourself in trouble at our coasts, call 999 and ask for the Coastguard.

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

Somerset Activity Sports Partnership (SASP)

Win a virtual Q&A with Emma Raducanu MBE

Win a Virtual Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) Youth Schools Q&A for your class with US Open Champion and BBC Sports Personality of the Year – Emma Raducanu MBE.

Courtesy of the LTA and its flagship Youth programme, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity is being offered to teachers that could see teenage sensation, Emma Raducanu MBE, appear virtually in your very own classroom for a Question and Answer (Q&A) session.

[LTA Youth Schools](#) is available for free to both Primary and Secondary schools nationwide. This innovative junior programme has been created by the LTA - the National Governing body for tennis in Britain - to help more children enjoy the benefits of playing and staying in tennis, whatever their age, gender, ability, disability, or background. Based on world leading expertise, research, and science, and drawing on insight from parents and players – the curriculum aligned tennis resources are perfect to build into lesson planning covering topics such as PSHE and Physical Education.

To be entered into the prize draw to win a virtual Q&A for your school with the US Open champion and BBC Sports Personality of the Year, teachers need to simply register for a free, [online teacher training course](#) and complete training before **13**

May 2022. On completion of the course, schools will also receive a £250 voucher to spend on ten hours of team-teaching support from an LTA accredited Coach or on equipment. Win-win!

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

Happy Healthy Holidays Programme

If your kids qualify for benefits-related free school meals, you can book a place on a free holiday club this Easter.

Fun activities, a free meal and plenty of new friends.

Grab a free code from your school to book, and browse the range of activities [here](#).

Spark Somerset

Could you offer a team building activity with a difference?

Due to an increase in interest from local businesses, Spark are looking for organisations who could offer fun and rewarding team volunteering activities.

Often, Spark are asked to help find practical projects such as tidying a garden, helping at an animal shelter or taking part in a beach clean. So, if you have a one-off task or activity that would be suitable for a group of willing volunteers, they would love to hear from you!

You can read about how Employee Supported Volunteering benefits those who take part, [here](#).

If you would like to offer a group volunteering activity or find out how Spark can support you to accommodate a group of volunteers, email volunteer@sparksomerset.org.uk.

Community Council for Somerset (CCS)

Another chance to apply for the Somerset Food Resilience Grant

A new Food Resilience grant fund is being provided to help Somerset communities that support or directly work to develop food resilience. Any community group, charity, organisation, and agency in Somerset can apply for a maximum of £2,000. The deadline for applications has been extended to the **31 May 2022** - or when the fund runs out. The grant is funded by Somerset County Council and provided by Smart Communities Ltd.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, food security became a huge focus for communities across the nation. Communities in Somerset came together to help support individuals, families, homeless people and anyone isolated to make sure that everyone in need had access to food through deliveries, collection points, and storage solutions. Often these needs have always in our communities but were unseen by the wider community. Now those groups are being offered additional funding to help continue to tackle those needs and continue the wonderful work undertaken over the last two years.

Please [click here](#) to find out more and make an application

Community Employment Hubs

Way to Work

Way to Work is a new partnership between government and employers to get 500,000 jobseekers into work by the end of June 2022.

This partnership will help fill record numbers of vacancies, supporting job-ready people into the labour market and helping them progress into a career.

Whether you're a jobseeker finding your way back into work, or an employer who's looking for a way to get the right person to help their business, Jobcentre Plus and Way to Work can help.

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

Health and Welfare

Age 40-74? Get your free NHS Health Check

The [NHS Health Check](#) is available for anyone between the age of 40 and 74 years, every five years, who does not have a pre-existing long-term condition.

The [NHS Health Check](#) is an important step for many people towards improving their health and becoming more aware of what they can do to lead a healthier life. It can help lower people's risk of developing heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, type 2 diabetes, and some types of dementia.

Attending a free NHS Health Check helps people be better prepared for their future. It identifies risks early on, giving people the opportunity to take steps to reduce them and improving their chance of staying healthy as they age.

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

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Since 24 February, the legal requirement to self-isolate has been removed in England and replaced with [guidance for living safely with the virus](#).

Case numbers have remained very high over recent weeks so we should all continue to do all we can to help prevent the transmission of COVID-19, especially to the most vulnerable in our communities.

Very soon we will be at stage in the pandemic when there are no legal restrictions so it will be up to us all to make the right decisions to keep ourselves and those around us safe. The SCC Public Health team still advise basic infection control measures should be followed, as these will help slow the transmission of many seasonal illnesses and have a positive impact on reducing sickness levels and improving business continuity. These include regularly washing your hands, maintaining appropriate cleaning regimes and keeping occupied spaces well ventilated.

Somerset COVID Cases

In the week ending 20 March, approximately 111,533 tests were carried out across the county. There were 7,608 new confirmed cases identified by these tests. The rates of COVID-19 remain very high and have almost doubled in the last reporting week to 1,353.28 per 100,000. This is above both the South-West average and the national average.

Hospitalisation data for Somerset has **increased by a significant amount** over the last week to around 180 COVID-19 in patients in Somerset hospitals. Most of these patients are not ill with COVID-19 but have been detected through routine screening. Hospitalisation for severe COVID-19 illness remains highest in older age groups and the unvaccinated.

Please note the Public Dashboard is being reviewed following changes to the national policy. In the week to the 13 March, the Office for National Statistics shows that around one in every 20 people have coronavirus, and in Somerset, we know our case rates are higher than this.

Symptoms of COVID-19 or a Positive Test

With case rates rising rapidly Public Health are concerned to see some national employers are requesting staff who have tested COVID-19 positive to go into workplaces, contrary to guidance. While it is no longer a legal requirement to isolate if you have COVID-19, there is a risk to worker health and business continuity, and for customer-facing businesses to customer health and safety, from the spread of COVID-19 from infected persons.

The general duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act continue to apply, it being a legal requirement to ensure the health, safety and welfare of employees and others, such as customers, as far as is reasonably practicable.

COVID-19 Testing

Free testing came to an end on 31 March, and most people must now pay for PCR and lateral flow tests.

Physical test sites for symptomatic COVID-19 testing in Somerset also closed on 30 March – this included mobile testing units (MTUs), walk-through local testing sites (LTS) and drive-through regional testing sites (RTS).

SCC Public Health are still awaiting national guidance regarding testing for those who work in high-risk settings and others who are vulnerable and may be eligible for free testing, and they will communicate this once the information is available. The Local Authority have no LFD test kits to provide to the general population.

Clintons COVID Catch Up

In this [Catch-up film](#) Clinton discusses some top tips for staying healthy this Spring – not just protection against COVID-19, but other diseases too.

Spring Booster Jabs

The NHS have begun inviting eligible people aged 75 and over and those who are immunosuppressed to come forward to book their [Spring booster jabs](#). More than nine in 10 people aged 75 came forward for their first booster and recent research from the [UK Health Security Agency](#) has shown that the NHS booster programme has helped prevent around 157,000 hospitalisations since mid-December.

Those eligible should arrange a jab through the national booking service when invited. Booking can be accessed online at nhs.uk/covidvaccine or by calling 119.

The Spring boosters will top up the protection of the elderly and the most vulnerable in our community against severe illness from COVID-19, please do all you can to encourage uptake.

There are plenty of walk-in appointments available across the county. Please check the local NHS website: [COVID-19 vaccinations in Somerset](#) to find clinics in your area or use the national portal to find a clinic: www.nhs.uk/grab-a-jab.

You can also pre-book an appointment. To do this, visit www.nhs.uk/Covid-Vaccination or call 119 for an appointment. The helpline has over 200 languages available if you or someone you know requires an interpreter.

NHS staff are ready to welcome you whether it's for your first, second, or third dose.

Coping with anxiety following the lifting of restrictions

There may be many people who are feeling anxious about the forthcoming lifting of all legal restrictions and the NHS are here to help. They very kindly have provided information and advice which can be found using this link:

[11 tips to cope with anxiety about getting "back to normal"](#).

Coronavirus Helpline Update

In line with the lifting of Government restrictions the Coronavirus Support Helpline closed on Thursday 31 March. The line took have 18,000 calls from Somerset residents who needed help during the pandemic.

If you require support, please now contact Somerset West and Taunton Council on 0300 304 8000 or Somerset County Council on 0300 123 22242.

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

Crime / Safeguarding

Action Fraud

Cadbury UK

If you receive a message claiming to be from Cadbury UK offering you a free Easter basket, don't click it. You can report suspicious text messages by forwarding them to 7726 (it's free of charge).

Cadbury UK have been made aware of circulating posts on social media, claiming to offer consumers a free Easter Chocolate basket. They have confirmed that this has not been generated by Cadbury UK and would urge consumers not to interact or share personal information through the post. Customer security is a top priority and Cadbury are working with the relevant organisations to ensure this is resolved.

Avon and Somerset Police (ASP)

Home Security

British Summer Time began at 1am on Sunday 27 March and the clocks went forward by one hour. This means it will initially be darker in the mornings and lighter in the evenings.

As you're able to enjoy lengthening days it is important that you remain mindful of your home security. With the weather improving, more people leave windows open, and doors unlocked whilst they are out in their gardens, putting them at a higher risk of being burgled.

Although tempting to have windows open on warmer days, please make sure your home is securely locked before leaving it.

Expensive garden equipment should always be locked away in a safe and secure location when not in use, the same goes for bikes which prove to be a tempting target if left unattended and unsecured.

There are several simple steps that cost nothing, you can take to minimise the risk to your home:

- Lock your doors while working in the garden.
- Close your windows that in areas that are accessible to a thief, such as from a flat roof or from standing on garden furniture.
- Close ground floor windows and doors whenever leaving your home,
- Keep an eye on neighbours' homes. If you have a trusted neighbour consider asking them to open and close curtains, pick up parcels, post etc when you go away on holiday, and offer to do the same for them.

Please [click here](#) for more information on how to ensure your property is secure.

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](#)
- [Rural Affairs Unit – Avon and Somerset Police.](#)

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.