

SOMERSET COUNCIL

CONSERVATIVE GROUP BRIEFING SHEET FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS JANUARY 2024

Council's Financial Position: As part of the Local Government Finance Settlement, the Government announced a 6.1% increase in Core Spending Power for Somerset Council. The provisional settlement is less than being forecast mainly due to reductions in Service Grant and New Homes Bonus but partially offset by a higher than forecast increase in Social Care Grant. In November, Somerset Council's Executive declared a financial emergency with a projected budget gap of £100m for 2024/25. The Council is currently inviting the public to have their say on finances and council services. The consultation is open to everyone and can be found at www.somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/comms/budget-consultation-2024-2025/ or can be completed in libraries across Somerset. The consultation closes on 22 January.

End of Charges for DIY Waste: Following a recent change of Government legislation current charges for disposing of construction and demolition materials including: asbestos, plasterboard, hardcore and rubble from household DIY projects have been removed. Each calendar month every household will be able to take up to eight, 50 litre sacks (or equivalent 2m sheets of asbestos or plasterboard) free of charge to a recycling site over a maximum of four visits in a month. Households will need to pre-book trips to dispose of this DIY waste, telling the council the amount of material they are disposing (up to 8x50 litre sacks per month) and the number of times they will need to visit (up to four visits per month). Disposal of asbestos, plasterboard or hardcore/rubble in excess of the free allowance can be paid for online.

Changes to waste collection days: Somerset Council recycling and rubbish collection days change for more than 120,000 households in western parts of the county in February. New collection routes are being introduced for homes in the former Sedgemoor and Somerset West and Taunton areas, as well as a small part of South Somerset. This means many homes in these areas will have a change in collection days from the week beginning Monday 12 February 2024. Changes will be made for the rest of the county later in the year. If a household's collection days are changing, they will receive a letter in early January making this clear. This will be followed by a service guide – including a collection day calendar – arriving near the end of January.

Phosphate Mitigation: The Government has awarded Somerset Council £9.6m of funding to deliver phosphate mitigation measures which will unlock the delivery of new homes across the area and provide for long term nature recovery. The funding will be used to expand the Council's existing phosphate credit scheme and deliver both interim and long-term phosphate mitigation measures including the use of new energy efficient water processing technology trialled at the Fivehead Wastewater Treatment Works near Taunton earlier this year.

Health Research Grant: The National Institute for Health and Care Research has awarded Somerset £5m over five years to form a Health Determinants Research Collaboration – a new research partnership to improve health and reduce health inequalities across the county. Somerset's HDRC, which is expected to launch in January 2024, will focus on the building blocks of good health such as housing, education and the physical environment to tackle the root causes of health inequalities and wider deprivation. Through the programme, the council will involve communities in applying evidence about the building blocks of health to local decisions, and in doing new research where there is not enough evidence.

The Range: A Taunton superstore has been fined £960,000, reduced to £640,000 for an early guilty plea, for food hygiene offences following a successful prosecution by Somerset Council. Guilty pleas were entered by CDS (Superstores International) Ltd, operating as The Range Home and Leisure at Hankridge, Taunton, for seven food hygiene offences in September 2023. An Emergency Hygiene Prohibition Notice was served in August 2022 to prohibit the business selling food for human consumption. During monitoring visits made to the premises, it was found that food was being sold in contravention to the Order which could have caused an imminent risk to health.

School Appeals Panel Members: Somerset Council is looking for new volunteers to become Independent Panel Members for School Appeals. Independent Panels hear and decide on admission, exclusion and transport issues for maintained schools and Academy schools in Somerset. A panel meets when a parent or school lodges an appeal against a decision related to a child's education. These panels are independent of Somerset Council and the governing bodies of the school. The Panels meet online so there is no need to travel, and applications are welcome from across Somerset. No qualifications are needed and full training is provided. For more information, and to apply, please visit www.assemblevolunteers.somerset.gov.uk/opportunities/50638-independent-school-appeals-panels-member-2023-07-17 or email neil.milne@somerset.gov.uk