

# SOMERSET COUNCIL

## BRIEFING SHEET FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS SEPTEMBER 2023

**Council Finances:** Somerset Council has warned that it will have to draw on reserves for the second successive year to meet its budget for 2023/24. A recent Executive report describes the council's financial position as "stark and challenging". The latest budget gap for the current year is £28.6m. The papers reveal that the Council has already drawn £18 million from reserves to fund spending beyond the 2022/23 budgets. These figures are despite an £18.5m annual bonus created by moving to a Unitary Council and which were planned to be fully realised by next year.

**Bus Services:** Four bus services in the county are to be subsidised to safeguard their future until spring. The following services all require additional financial support, which the Council can provide as part of the Government's Bus Service support funding, which has so far been worth over £12 million for the County. The routes are:

54 Yeovil to Taunton  
58/58a Yeovil to Wincanton  
25 Taunton to Dulverton  
28 Taunton to Minehead

First South has signalled it will review the routes later in the year, taking into account new data on passenger uptake.

**Covid autumn booster programme:** As the result of a newly identified variant the Covid-19 vaccine is being brought forward by one month and offered to those at high risk of serious disease and who are therefore most likely to benefit from the vaccination. Specifically, JCVI advises the following groups to be offered a Covid-19 booster vaccine this autumn:

- residents in a care home for older adults
- all adults aged 65 years and over.
- persons aged 6 months to 64 years in a clinical risk group.
- frontline health and social care workers
- persons aged 12 to 64 years who are household contacts of people with immunosuppression.
- persons aged 16 to 64 years who are carers and staff working in care homes for older adults.

Booster vaccinations are now planned to start on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

**Flu vaccinations:** NHS England has confirmed it will start by prioritising flu vaccinations for children from September, to prevent children from getting seriously ill and to break the chain of transmission to the wider population. School aged children will be able to get the flu vaccine at school or at community clinics, Children aged two and three years will be able to get an appointment with their GP practice. This year, based on the latest scientific evidence, the JCVI has recommended adults over the age of 65 and those with underlying health conditions will be eligible for a flu with the offer starting from early October, to maximise protection for patients right across the winter months. The flu season typically peaks in January when more people gather indoors.

**Suspected Arson Attack:** Police are investigating a suspected arson attack on a Somerset Council compound in Taunton which destroyed seven minibuses. The incident happened early on Thursday, 24 August in a secure compound at the Silk Mills Park and Ride site. The compound was locked and is monitored by CCTV. There were no injuries, and no other vehicles were damaged.

**Roundabout sponsorship:** Local businesses are being invited to take advantage of roundabout sponsorship to advertise socially responsible goods and services. The space is available for advertising a wide range of goods and services. The new ethical advertising policy means that the Council will not sanction certain adverts such as those promoting junk food, fossil fuels, gambling or consumption of alcoholic drinks. The money generated by the initiative will go back into the Council's highways maintenance budget although not specifically earmarked for roundabout maintenance.

**Gambling Policy Consultation:** Under the Gambling Act 2005 Somerset Council must review its Gambling Policy every three years. Comments are invited on the draft revised Gambling Policy from all interested parties including residents and those running businesses in the County, the consultation documents can be found at <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/licensing/gambling-policy-consultation> .The consultation closes on 22nd September 2023

**Single use plastics ban:** Trading Standards are reminding businesses, such as takeaways, sandwich bars, care homes and retailers who supply certain single use plastic items, that a ban comes into force October 1st. The ban includes all single use plastic cutlery, trays, plates, bowls, and balloon sticks, as well as banning the use of certain types of polystyrene cups and food containers used to supply food which is ready to consume.

**Soft plastics recycling:** More than four tonnes of plastic bags and wrapping such as bread bags and confectionary packets, have been collected for recycling as part of the Council's role in a national project to expand recycling collections. The small-scale pilot involving 3,600 homes across two locations in Frome started at the end of May.