**County Councillor Report – Long Load PC – 20/9/2022 – John Bailey and Emily Pearlstone**

#### **Feedback on County Issues**

**-1.1 -Specialists appointed to take Somerset arts and culture strategy forward**

Specialist partners have been appointed to help develop a five-year cultural strategy for the new Somerset Council that comes into being in April 2023.

Arts Council England, in partnership with Somerset’s five councils – Mendip, Sedgemoor, Somerset West and Taunton, and South Somerset district councils, plus Somerset County Council – have committed to invest in developing the strategy and have procured the services of cultural consultants, The Fifth Sector.

The project will be led by the Arts & Entertainment Service of South Somerset District Council based at The Octagon Theatre and Westlands Entertainment Venue, after the area was designated a ‘Priority Place’ by Arts Council England and included within the government’s Levelling Up for Culture places.

The process will begin with an intensive review of existing arrangements followed by analysis and, in mid-September, with opportunities for people to have their say on relevant issues and topics. In October, a direct consultation will be launched focusing on issues people have highlighted as important.

**-1.2-** [**Nominations open for Somerset’s Community Resilience Award**](https://oursomerset.wordpress.com/2022/08/17/nominations-open-for-somersets-community-resilience-award/)

Do you know someone who has helped their community be prepared for emergencies?

A new award has been launched to celebrate people or groups that have made their communities more resilient. The winner will be announced at the 2022 Somerset Community Resilience Day on Thursday 13 October, at West Monkton Village Hall.

Nominations are invited from Somerset residents, for groups or individuals that have made a difference in helping their community: for example, local flood groups, parish or town councillors who can be counted on to think ahead, or someone who has helped to make sure vulnerable people can get help in an emergency.

The event will run from 10am – 4pm, with presentations in the morning and workshops in the afternoon. Participants can come for the whole or part of the day, with registration on Eventbrite at [www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/somerset-prepared-community-resilience-day-tickets-365901058917](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/somerset-prepared-community-resilience-day-tickets-365901058917).

To find out more or nominate someone for the Somerset Community Resilience Award, see the Somerset Prepared website [www.somersetprepared.org.uk](http://www.somersetprepared.org.uk/) or email [info@somersetprepared.org.uk](mailto:info@somersetprepared.org.uk).

**-1.3 -Bus it! New campaign to boost bus passenger numbers**

Passenger levels on Somerset’s bus services are only about 70 per cent of pre-Covid numbers due to combination of changing working habits and older bus pass users staying away. This autumn the Government will be ending Covid subsidies for operators – First Bus South West has already announced a number of cuts and changes it plans to introduce from 9 October because of inadequate usage and the drop in funding. Action is needed to try to safeguard some of these routes before cuts are implemented, but also to protect other routes. In the current climate rising energy costs will make buses more relevant – we need to protect and build on capacity at a time of rising household budgets. What are we doing? Somerset County Council, backed by the Somerset Bus Partnership, is launching the Bus It campaign to encourage people back on buses or to think about using them. Ultimately the Council will step in to protect some key routes but promoting bus use is vital to help ensure long term bus service improvement.

Key campaign messages • The price of fuel is soaring – you could be saving money using the bus • How much is it costing to run the car? • Compare the costs with using the bus Providing support for County Councillors Sheet Number: 2022-27/08 • Help cut congestion and CO2 - support climate change • We need to use it or lose it! • The best things in life are free – are you using your bus pass

**-1.4 - Customer Panel launch**

This week we are launching a new Customer Panel and encouraging members of the public to join in and help shape the future of council services in Somerset. The Customer Panel is being established as part of the Local Government Reorganisation programme to ensure residents are at the heart of services run by the new Somerset Council. Panel members will have the chance to share their views by taking part in online surveys, one-to-one interviews, usability tests and discussion groups. No special skills are required, all they need is a willingness to take part in three research topics each year and provide honest and constructive feedback. The initiative is based on the successful Customer Panel currently run by Sedgemoor District Council. We are aiming to recruit panel members from across all parts of Somerset. Please encourage people in your divisions to take part. They can find out more and sign up online via our website. Alternatively, customers can request support with signing up by completing our Contact Us form or by calling 0300 123 2224.

# - 1.5 – Know your numbers week

Our Public Health team is encouraging Somerset’s residents to get their blood pressure checked for [‘Know Your Numbers’ week](https://www.bloodpressureuk.org/know-your-numbers/). The national campaign, from Blood Pressure UK, aims to raise awareness of high blood pressure (hypertension), encouraging all UK adults to get a blood pressure check.

Public Health is working with the Library Service in Somerset to put in place a convenient, easy and free to access service – providing blood pressure monitoring kits that can be loaned from libraries across the county. The kits can be loaned for a fortnight allowing people to check their blood pressure, ‘at rest’, in their own home.

Anyone who then discovers that they do have high blood pressure can take their results to their GP or other appropriate health professional, who can advise on the best intervention. The dangers of high blood pressure can be easily mitigated with the right medications and lifestyle changes.

About three in 10 adults in Somerset have high blood pressure but one in 10 do not know it as it often presents with no symptoms. It is a major risk factor for Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) and significantly increases the risk of having a heart attack or stroke, with one in two strokes and heart attacks happening as the result of hypertension – but early detection and treatment can help people live longer, healthier lives.

For anyone who is not a library member it is really easy to join, either call into your local branch or go online at [lwc.ent.sirsidynix.net.uk/custom/web/registration](https://lwc.ent.sirsidynix.net.uk/custom/web/registration).

Submitted by Michael Wallis

**- 1.6 - Tax Free childcare**

If you’re a working parent or carer, you can get up to £500 every three months (up to £2,000 a year per child) to help with the costs of childcare. If your child has a disability, you can get up to £1,000 every three months (up to £4,000 a year per child).

You can use it to pay for childcare including;

* childminders, nurseries and nannies
* playschemes, before and after school clubs, and holiday clubs

Check with your provider to see if they’re signed up.

#### How it works

You set up an online childcare account for your child. For every £8 you pay into this account, the government will pay in £2, up to a maximum of £2,000 a year (or £4,000 if your child has a disability). You can then use the money to pay your childcare provider.

You need to reconfirm your eligibility for Tax-Free Childcare every three months. You’ll get a text reminder and it’s easy to do through your online childcare account.

#### Am I eligible?

To get Tax-Free Childcare, you need to be working at least 16 hours a week, earning at least the National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage. This includes being;

* self-employed
* on maternity or parental leave
* on sick leave or annual leave. Your child is eligible until the September after their 11th birthday, or until their 17th birthday if they have a disability

Each parent or carer can earn up to £100,000 per year and still be eligible for Tax-Free Childcare. Your eligibility doesn’t depend on how much tax you pay, so it won’t affect your income tax liability or any other tax, like VAT.

You can’t claim Tax-Free Childcare at the same time as Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit or Universal Credit.

To find out how much you could get towards your childcare costs and check whether you’re eligible, visit [www.childcarechoices.gov.uk](http://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/).

**- 1.7 – Local Community Networks Consultation**

-Opens on 5/9/22 to 17/10/22

**2 Local Issues**

**-** 2.1 - Long Load Sign-Martock Side

Emily dealing with this.

Regards John Bailey and Emily Pearlstone