**SOMERSET COUNCIL REPORT**

**LONG LOAD 17th October 2023**

**1.0 – Somerset News**

**1.1 - Smokers stub the habit to improve their mental health this Stoptober**

October marks the start of Stoptober, an annual national campaign to help smokers kick the habit.  The campaign runs throughout the month, because people are five times more likely to quit for good if they can make it to at least 28 days smoke free.

This year, the campaign focuses on the mental health benefits of quitting. Many people believe that smoking helps reduce anxiety and depression, but studies show that once people have got past the short-term withdrawal stage of quitting, they have reduced anxiety, depression and stress and increased positive mood compared with people who continue to smoke.

Somerset Council’s Public Health team is encouraging Somerset smokers to seek free support from [Smokefree Somerset](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.healthysomerset.co.uk%2Fsmokefree%2F&data=05%7C01%7Cemily.pearlstone%40somerset.gov.uk%7C94b32e2145e347a5712108dbc32dfeae%7Cb524f606f77a4aa28da2fe70343b0cce%7C0%7C0%7C638318374655256040%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=2HLvXhkYIv7n8jSzUh828YQ%2Be5tDcMFJMxmARm4t0Ro%3D&reserved=0) - their stop smoking service.

**1.2 - Climate Lead’s letter follows frustration at green policy changes**

In a letter to the Minister for Net Zero, Somerset Council’s Lead Member for Climate and Environment has voiced her “frustration” at recent changes to green policy.

Writing to the Rt Hon Graham Stuart MP, Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero, Councillor Dixie Darch said she fears the changes announced last week will “seriously jeopardise Somerset’s and the UK’s ability to reach Net Zero.”

Cllr Darch, today advised Full Council that the letter had been sent. In it she said Somerset was at the “sharp end” of the effects of climate change and urged a rethink to the changes which included a delay to the ban of new non-electric vehicles and a removal of the need for landlords to make properties energy efficient.

“This is an issue that must transcend party politics - it is too important and too urgent,” said Cllr Darch. “The shift in policy undermines our work in Somerset, in practical terms and in the message it sends to the public about the commitment of elected members of all political parties to address the climate emergency.

“Rather than stepping back from policies, action needs to be stepped up – not just in reducing carbon emissions, but in investing in adapting to the effects of climate change.”

All of Somerset’s local authorities declared Climate Emergencies before becoming the unitary Somerset Council in April. The new council has formally declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency and is working to deliver on a [Climate Strategy](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/environment-and-food-safety/climate-and-ecological-emergency/our-strategies/) that covers energy, transport, waste and the natural environment.

Recent successes include the launch of a ten year tree strategy, a rapid expansion of the county’s EV charging network and a successful bid to fund work to assist the uptake of energy efficient home improvements.

**1.3 - Spare room to re-purpose? Hosting could be for you**

Since the Homes for Ukraine scheme was launched in March 2022, Somerset has welcomed over 1,500 Ukrainians to date, with host families playing a pivotal role in creating a safe environment for guests to re-settle and rebuild their lives in some way, supporting and helping them navigate a new life in the UK.

Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture at Somerset Council, comments: “The idea of becoming a host or sponsor to a displaced family or individual may seem daunting at first, however, there is a huge amount of support available; from information about how hosts and guests are matched, training and support for both parties, checks and visits that form part of the arrangements, thank you payments to hosts, as well as what to do if the relationship breaks down.”

More than half of the 1,500 Ukrainian guests in the county have moved out of sponsors’ homes, some into private accommodation, and others out of the county for work or back to the Ukraine. Around 700 Ukrainians are still living with hosts in the area.

Now 18 months into the Homes for Ukraine programme, a number of Ukrainian guests are seeking new hosts for ‘re-matching’ as original hosts approach the end of their commitment. As such, guests who are already living the in the UK and awaiting new hosts, will generally need less support; many will have found work, settled their children into local schools and be more established.

To find out more about the Homes for Ukraine scheme, visit [Homes for Ukraine.](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/housing-support/homes-for-ukraine/) For more information about becoming a host or to register your interest, please email homesforukraine@somerset.gov.uk

There are a number of ways to support refugees and asylum seekers in Somerset, in addition to hosting. If you are able to offer your time, skills or resources to supporting guests, get in touch at resettlement@somerset.gov.uk

**1.4 - Don’t lose your vote**

Somerset residents are being urged to check their electoral registration details or risk losing their chance to vote on decisions that affect them.

The annual canvass allows Somerset Council to keep the electoral register up to date, to identify who risks losing their voice at elections, and to encourage them to register before it is too late.

The Council is legally required to undertake this annual canvass of all of the residential properties in the area, to make sure that the information on the electoral register for every address is accurate and up to date.

Letters are now going out to an initial 83,000 households across the County. All other households will be written to later this month, so residents do not need worry if they do not receive a letter in the coming weeks. The correspondence will be addressed to the occupier and includes full details of what steps to take.

If residents tell the Council there are new people eligible to be registered at their address, they will receive an ‘invitation to register form’ either through the post (or via email, if this contact method has been provided). They can also go online to register to vote at Register to vote - [Register to vote - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gov.uk%2Fregister-to-vote&data=05%7C01%7Cemily.pearlstone%40somerset.gov.uk%7Cd6df78c228f74ba294eb08dbb82d32ab%7Cb524f606f77a4aa28da2fe70343b0cce%7C0%7C0%7C638306276499668337%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=Nl46D7Rs%2FOfQx09NS5VsP3HwnLLn1PQEHZqii%2FFfhEQ%3D&reserved=0)

Recent home movers are urged to check their details. Electoral Commission research has found that recent home movers are less likely to be registered than those who have lived at the same address for a long time. In Great Britain, 92% of those who have lived in their home for 16 years will be registered, compared with 36% of people who have lived at an address for less than a year.

More information on registering to vote is available on the [Electoral Commission](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.electoralcommission.org.uk%2Fi-am-a%2Fvoter&data=05%7C01%7Cemily.pearlstone%40somerset.gov.uk%7Cd6df78c228f74ba294eb08dbb82d32ab%7Cb524f606f77a4aa28da2fe70343b0cce%7C0%7C0%7C638306276499668337%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=MG3pccdERJuAua%2BdeeCTNul3u%2BY8kQpZT6tgtQT29OY%3D&reserved=0) website.

**1.5 - Creating Places for People**

Residents and businesses in Somerset are being urged to help shape the future of their county and have their say on how best to create places that put people at the heart of their design.

Somerset Council is launching a public consultation to seek opinions on a set of outline “principles” that are designed to steer new development in Somerset. These should guide developers towards creating attractive and high-quality environments, but also inclusive and accessible places for all, regardless of age, gender, mobility, or background, where people enjoy living.

The principles should offer substantial benefit to people in Somerset by improving air quality; reducing carbon footprints; creating safe and easy access to schools; and places that are more resilient to the impacts of climate change while protecting and enhancing nature and wildlife.

Creating connected, safe and healthy places will also help to improve quality of life and wellbeing. The Council is proposing to prioritise active travel – cycling, walking and wheeling - along with public transport to reduce reliance on using private cars.

Places should be designed to allow easy access to shops, services and facilities that meet residents’ needs, with streets linking to existing communities and services. Most new development comes forward in or on the edge of our towns, and for those there would be more emphasis on enabling active travel - bike and e-scooter hire, car clubs and public transport - with less on parking provision.

While Somerset is a largely rural county, at present rural roads are the most hazardous for users, per mile travelled, so the principles would aim to provide safer streets and lanes for rural communities and the opportunity for sustainable travel.

The principles are intended to make it easier for those able to walk, wheel, cycle or take public transport to do so, leaving space for those less able to make active travel trips or journeys by public transport, to continue to drive.

The consultation launches on 4 September and will run for six weeks until 16 October. People can take part via Citizen Space <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/planning/creating-places-for-people>

Paper copies containing further information and the online survey questions will also be available to the public at the following locations:

Bridgwater House, Bridgwater, TA6 3AR (Monday – Friday 8.45am to 5.00pm)

Council Offices, Cannard’s Grave Road, Shepton Mallet, BA4 5BT (Monday – Friday 8.30am to 5.00pm

Petters Way Council Offices, Yeovil, BA20 1AS (Monday – Tuesday and Thursday – Friday 9.00am to 4.00pm, first Wednesday of the month 11.00am to 4.00pm and every other Wednesday 9.00am to 4.00pm)

Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton, TA1 1HE (Monday – Friday 8.30am to 5.00pm)

West Somerset House, 20 Fore Street, Williton, TA4 4QA (Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5.00pm)

County Hall, Taunton, TA1 4DY (Monday – Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 09:00am to 4.00pm)

Libraries including: Taunton, Minehead, Frome, Bridgwater, Yeovil and Glastonbury

Responses can be emailed to localplanningpolicy@somerset.gov.uk, or posted to Planning Policy, Somerset Council, County Hall, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4DY. The principles agreed post-consultation will be considered as a material planning consideration subject to consultation and taking feedback into account.

The Council is keen to hear from as many people as possible – individuals, community and voluntary groups, businesses, transport providers, landowners, and city, town and parish councils as well as developers and their agents. This will help the Council to understand whether it is on the right track.

**1.6 - Current level of Care spending could put council viability at risk within two years warns Somerset Council**

Somerset Council is warning that it will have to draw on reserves for the second successive year to fund the rising cost of both Adult and Children’s social care.

The Council drew £18 million from reserves last year to fund spending beyond the 2022/23 budgets in Adult and Children’s care services. The Council has a legal obligation to fund these services, which have seen an unprecedented rise in both overall demand and complexity of need since the Covid-19 pandemic.

These two social care services are currently projected to overspend by £21 million again in the current financial year. This is despite significant increases in budgets in the two previous years.

Other challenges faced by the new unitary Council include the rising cost of processing an increasing amount of household waste and the cost of refinancing loans taken out by five predecessor councils.

Cllr Liz Leyshon, Lead Member for Resources and Performance and Deputy Leader of Somerset Council said: “Obviously repeatedly using the Council’s reserves to fund day to day care services cannot continue without putting the financial viability of the council at risk. The national problems we warned about last year have not improved, if anything they are worse. The demand on social care continues to grow and inflation and interest rates have continued to rise. We now have a clear picture of the financial legacies of the five predecessor Councils, although there is much work still to be completed by the external auditors. The current and next two years will be particularly challenging until the benefits of transformation of services at the new Council can be realised. After a decade of neglect, the Government has to address the future of council funding and how pressures, particularly on councils with social care responsibilities, are pushing many well-run Councils towards to a Section 114 notice. Having already taken savings from the move from five councils to one council, we now have a transformation programme that will start to produce saving in two to three years. We are working well with the local NHS on integrating our care services. Somerset looks poised to become Britain’s green energy powerhouse with Hinkley Point C coming on stream and the proposed new gigafactory, but the next two years will be very, very difficult. The Council’s challenge will be to make sure we are in a the right place to make the most of these opportunities, while taking care of those most in need.”

Cllr Leyshon added: “We know that we will have to reduce some of our services to a statutory level and no more, yet we know that when residents pay their council tax, they rightly expect their Council to support such services as sport and leisure, arts, parks, and open spaces. We also need to maximise opportunities in economic development and look after our town centres. We will review our whole capital programme to ensure that we create a Somerset Council that is sustainable in the longer term. This is a difficult task but one that we are committed to for the people of Somerset.”

**2.0 Local Issues**

**2.1 - Drainage issues**

Church Lane drainage was completed in early Sept. Please let us know if there are any further concerns.

**2.2 - Martock Surgery**

As promised an open afternoon is planned at the Martock surgery on 1st November for residents queries and for feedback for the surgery. Full details later.

Access to South Petherton and the Surgery has been improved by the extending of the Slinky bus service.

**2.3 - SIS Fence on the footpath**

Verbal update due to impending meeting.

**2.4 - 54 Bus to Yeovil**

This route is currently on the highly at risk list as the passenger numbers along the whole route haven’t increased to maintain it’s viability. An online zoom meeting is happening on the evening of this PC for parish councillors, bus groups and other stakeholders.

**2.5 - LCN Levels and Moors**

A successful and well attended LCN took place on 20th September where a presentation of demographic data for the LCN area was viewed and discussed and two working groups were agreed upon. One for Active Travel and one for Health and Wellbeing. Please email Kate Hellard, LCN@Somerset.gov.uk if you are interested in joining one of these working groups. Dates for the next two meetings are - Monday 13th November 2023 at The Edgar Hall, Somerton and Monday 15th January 2024 location to be announced.

Regards John and Emily