

SOMERSET COUNCIL

Adam Dance and Jo Roundell Greene

MAY 2023 Report

Spring has arrived and after the long winter it is a joy to hear the birds singing and see our beautiful countryside bursting with life.

We still have many families and individuals who are struggling with the cost of living and must continue to offer support. If you are aware of anyone in need of help please let us know.

Somerset Council is preparing for the Local Community Networks (LCN) to come into being in June. These local committees will set out their work programme of what they plan to do in the coming months. Every parish council will have a representative on the committee, to ensure that voices are heard across Somerset. More information will be available once the LCNs are up and running.

If you have any queries or problems please get in touch with us. We will always do our best to help or direct you to someone who can.

Best wishes

Jo and Adam

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Deadline approaches for two Alternative Fuel Energy payments

Householders in Somerset could be due for government payments to help towards the costs of heating their homes, under two separate schemes.

The first scheme is for those who heat their homes with an alternative fuel such as wood pellets, LPG or oil, as many do in rural and some urban areas. Those householders could be due a £200 one-off payment from the government, but they must apply by 31 May.

The payment is aimed at people who do not use electricity or mains gas for domestic heating and who have not received a payment from their electricity supplier. The payment isn't means tested. Householders must supply an invoice or receipts to show that they have purchased at least £200 of alternative fuels since June 2022.

The second scheme is for households that have not received a £400 discount on their energy bills from an electricity supplier (in six instalments from Oct 2022 to March 2023). They may be entitled to a £400 one-off payment from the government.

The scheme is aimed at those who don't pay directly to an electricity company for the energy they use in their home, for example residents of care homes, park home sites and people living above commercial property that does not have a separate meter for the domestic part. The payment isn't means tested.

To find out more about both schemes and to make an application, search 'Apply for energy bill support if you do not get it automatically' into the GOV.UK webpage search bar.

For anyone who may qualify for this support but does not have access to the internet, they can make an application to the government by telephone on 0808 175 3287, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.

All applications must be made to the government and not to the council. There is more information here: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/benefits-and-payments/alternative-energy-bills-support-scheme/>

Somerset primary school admission figures announced for 2023

Nearly 99% of Somerset's youngest children were offered a primary school place at one of their top three choices, Somerset Council's latest school admission figures show. Overall, 98.94% of the 5,182 applicants were offered a place at one of their top three choices, with 94.54% receiving their first choice.

Of the 5,182 primary school applications received this year:

1st preferences met – 94.54 % (4,899 offers)

2nd preferences met – 3.88% (201 offers)

3rd preferences met – 0.52% (27 offers)

Last year 5,296 applications for primary school places were received. Of those, 98.62% of applicants received one of their top three preferences, with 93.4% receiving their first primary school preference.

Bus use on rise as operator is praised for making timely improvements

Figures show more people in Somerset are choosing to 'Bus It' following the introduction of lower fares and evening buses as part of Somerset Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).

Since the introduction of a £1 fare for a single journey in Taunton, along with evening bus services on some routes, both funded by BSIP money, as well as a sustained 'Bus It' campaign by Somerset Council and the Somerset Bus Partnership, passenger numbers have increased by nearly 25 per cent on First Bus/Buses of Somerset services in Taunton area.

Similarly, following the introduction of the £2 fare for a single journey in Somerset, funded by the Government's Help for Homes scheme, passenger numbers have increased by around 14 per cent across the county. The Government has also officially announced its intention to continue the £2 fare across the country until 30 June.

Somerset Council and the Somerset Bus Partnership launched the 'Bus It' campaign last summer to try and encourage more people to 'Bus It'. You can find out more about it here, along with the various initiatives: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/bus-it-you-know-it-makes-sense/>

Somerset recycling goes top 30

Somerset's green-minded residents have helped the county climb into the top 30 councils for recycling.

In Defra's recently published league tables, Somerset's 2021-2022 recycling rate of 56.2% ranks it 28 out of 228 local authorities – putting it in the top 15%.

In 2020-21 Somerset ranked 59 out of 228, with a recycling rate of 52.4%.

And, with the full impact of Recycle More's expanded collections yet to be felt, Somerset Council is confident that the 2022-23 figures will see it climb even further.

The Council is committed to a greener, more sustainable county working hard to help homeowners recycle more and waste less.

In 2021-22, almost 150,000 tonnes of waste was recycled or reused, saving around 133,000 tonnes of carbon – the equivalent of taking more than 51,000 cars off the road for a year.

Of that, 97.2% was recycled into new products and package in the UK. Of the 5,771 tonnes of plastics collected, 99.4% were reprocessed in the UK.

Somerset's hard-working crews make more than 350,000 collections a week. For more information about what happens to the recycling they collect, check the Somerset Recycling Tracker on the Somerset Council website somerset.gov.uk/waste.

Sign-up for the latest climate news

Somerset Council is asking residents to sign-up for its new climate newsletter.

The new Somerset Council cross-county monthly newsletter was launched near the end of April, and you can sign-up to receive it on the Somerset Council website: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/environment-and-food-safety/climate-and-ecological-emergency/newsletter-sign-up/>. Sent on the last Friday of every month, it will be full of news, project updates, and inspirational ideas about the work going on in the county in response to the Climate Emergency, along with information and tips to help us all live better, waste less and reduce our environmental impact. If we all do our bit and love where we live, we can keep Somerset clean, green and attractive.

Making Somerset a greener, more sustainable place is one of the Council's top priorities, working with the Somerset Climate Network and other organisations, networks and individuals keen to make a difference.

£250 "Golden Hello" for new childminders in Somerset

Somerset Council is offering a "Golden Hello" grant worth £250 to those who would like to be a childminder. The £250 can be used to help with training and set up costs. Childminding is a rewarding occupation for anyone who likes working with children.

The post is ideal for new parents who wish to spend more time fitting work around their own children. It can also be a useful first step into other childcare and education roles, and may also suit people leaving teaching or other education support roles, but who still want to work with children. Deciding your own working hours and charges means the role can be flexible.

The Council offers guidance and training to newly registered childminders and supports them through Ofsted registration and beyond.

If you are looking for a change, would like to work from home and have a passion for supporting children to learn and grow through exciting play opportunities, why not consider childminding?

To find out more about becoming a childminder, and for an information pack please call 0300 123 2224 or visit www.somerset.gov.uk/register

How a small Somerset town grew its care and volunteer workforce and brought in a cool £1m in unclaimed benefits

A small Somerset town has brought in more than £1.4m in unclaimed benefits and seen its community care workforce expand from just 3 to 35 since its homegrown care scheme was established in 2018.

Wiveliscombe responded to the crisis in care by creating a 'connector' scheme signposting people who need help to self-employed carers.

These carers known as 'Micro-providers', help local residents with a range of activities, from personal care such as help with staying clean, ensuring meals are provided and medication is taken, as well as providing company and conversation.

Wivey Cares is the brainchild of David Patterson, a retired social worker who founded the scheme as a way of providing a very local solution to the crisis in care.

Mr Patterson said: "Wivey is a rural town, and the conventional model of care at home just doesn't work here for this reason. We believed that there must be people who lived locally who could meet the need for care, which would support the work of government agencies, reducing the cost of services provided and helping people live independently in their homes for longer.

"As a result, we now have more than 35 carers who can access meaningful self-employment, live locally, and offer really personalised support. To date we have managed and helped more than 300 people fill in forms and claim their Attendance Allowance. This is financial support the government offers, which can help people with extra costs if they have a disability, where they need someone to help look after them. At any one time we believe we are supporting between 120 and 140 clients to stay in their own homes, keeping them close to friends and family.

"This has resulted in nearly £1.4m of previously unclaimed benefits being received by Wivey residents, creating jobs, and stimulating our local economy."

People who are interested in setting up their own local care scheme can contact communityenterprise@somerset.gov.uk for more information.

Soft plastic recycling collections piloted in parts of Frome

A small-scale pilot of the collection of plastic bags and wrapping for recycling will soon be starting in Somerset – for invitees only. Following the success of expanded Recycle More collections, Somerset Council successfully bid to be part of a national 'FlexCollect' trial of kerbside collection of these soft plastics. The trial collections will be available to around 3,600 homes across two locations in Frome, starting near the end of May.

The pilot collections will pick-up a wide range of plastic bags and wrapping, including carrier bags, bread bags, confectionary wrappers, crisp packets, food wrapping and cling film. They will be part of the usual weekly recycling collections, to be put out for collection in plastic sacks provided to participating households.

The costs of the pilot collections are funded nationally. Depending on how the trials progress, it is expected that they will be expanded to more Somerset homes next year. For more information and news about Somerset Council's Waste Services visit somerset.gov.uk/waste and follow @somersetwaste on Facebook and Twitter.

Somerset Youth Parliament urges schools to promote new mental health app for students

A new mental health app for young people has been launched in Somerset. The free Tellmi app is now available for all local 11-18 year olds, and gives young people the tools to manage their own mental health and support others.

Commissioned by NHS Somerset, Tellmi is the only fully pre-moderated, dedicated, peer support app which is considered safe for children aged 11+. Posts are approved by human moderators within an average of 30 minutes, and in-house counsellors intervene to support when needed. Local young people who download the app will have 365-day access to support, where they can anonymously discuss their feelings in a safe environment.

Data is showing the app to be improving mental health outcomes for young people across the county already, with 83% of users reporting feeling less isolated, 45% who self-harm saying they had stopped or reduced self-harming, and 1 in 3 young people who felt suicidal experiencing fewer suicidal thoughts as a result of using the app.

Working with the Youth Parliament, Young Somerset, Somerset Council and CAMHS (Children & Adolescent Mental Health Services), the project aims to support young people on waiting lists, but also anyone who might benefit from further support.

So far, Tellmi has been promoted in eight schools and colleges across Somerset, but members of Somerset Youth Parliament are calling for more schools to sign up, as 75% of children and young people with mental health issues don't get the treatment they need.

The app can be downloaded at Google Play or the App Store. To find out more about Tellmi, visit www.tellmi.help

GET INVOLVED

Help make Somerset more accessible: your views needed

A year-long project to make Somerset more accessible for disabled people was launched on 1 April 2023.

'Accessible Somerset' is an ambitious project which will ask disabled people how their life could be improved in various areas. The project is seeking volunteers to share their views and is asking for individuals and organisations to get involved by contacting Disability.Inc@wecil.org.uk.

'Accessible Somerset' will begin by working with local disabled people and organisations to help map the areas of need across Somerset. This will help to identify the key areas of focus for the project.

To deliver this project, Somerset Council has teamed up with WECIL Ltd - a Disabled People's Organisation who offer a range of services which support independent living. WECIL have been working with both public and private sector organisations since 2016, supporting senior management teams, HR professionals and Equality Diversity and Inclusion officers to create accessible, inclusive environments.

If you would like to be involved in the project, please contact Kinny Chinangwa or Alison Browning at Disability.Inc@wecil.org.uk.