

## Somerset Council Report April 2024

On 1<sup>st</sup> April we saw the first anniversary of Somerset Council. It has been a very busy and demanding twelve months but there have been many successes along the way in spite of the financial challenges.

With the lighter evenings and hopefully some brighter and warmer weather we hope that things will become easier for those struggling with heating bills. Many people are still reliant on food banks and larders. Please give generously if you can to help the most needy in our villages.

If you would like more information or there is some way that we can help you, please do get in touch with us.

Best wishes

*Adam and Jo*

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### Somerset Council renews support for unpaid carers

Somerset has renewed its commitment to carers with a refreshed strategy, launched at an event in Taunton.

On Tuesday 19 March, Somerset Council joined forces with NHS Somerset and community organisations to launch the strategy explaining their ongoing commitment to supporting unpaid carers in Somerset.

The event, which was held at Deane House in Taunton, consisted of presentations from professionals and carers about the ongoing work that health and care services are doing to acknowledge and support unpaid carers in Somerset.

To create the strategy, the Council worked with Evolving Communities, an independent community interest company who help health and care service users have a voice to shape the services they use. The strategy was developed with unpaid carers and acknowledges the invaluable contribution and challenges they face. It is informed by conversations with unpaid carers, workshop events, sixty-five visits to carers groups, twenty-five case studies and hundreds of survey responses by unpaid carers in Somerset.

Somerset's Commitment to Carers aims to enhance the quality of life for carers and those they care for. It will enable, support and empower unpaid carers to easily access information, education, training and health and care services to support them while they carry out their vital caring roles.

The strategy, which was launched on 19 March, can be read on Somerset Council's website here: <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/carers>.

### **Council proposes new 20mph speed limits following requests from communities**

Somerset Council is proposing 15 new speed limits in the county at the request of local communities.

The changes would be funded by the communities as part of an initiative run by the Council.

Last year there were a number of requests from across Somerset for either 20mph or 30mph limits following concerns about safety. In response the Council invited all communities to apply for a 20mph speed limit if they were willing to fund the design and implementation and they are in line with Department for Transport criteria.

These proposals are now moving forward and the Traffic Regulation Orders are currently being advertised. During the 21-day consultation period, which closes week commencing the 8 April, people will have the chance to comment on the new proposals.

Anyone wishing to discuss the speed limit within their community should contact their Town or Parish Clerk.

The 15 proposed new 20 mph limits are in the following communities:

- Cannington
- Castle Cary and Ansford
- Chard
- Chewton Mendip
- Crowcombe
- Ditcheat and Alhampton
- Ilchester
- Monksilver
- North Petherton
- Othery
- Otterford
- Pilton
- Ruishton
- Trudoxhill
- Wincanton

Follow @TravelSomerset on Twitter and Facebook for live travel updates, roadworks and other highways news.

If you spot a problem on the road you can report it quickly and easily here [www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/report-a-problem-on-the-road/](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/report-a-problem-on-the-road/)

### **Somerset to get 25 new electric buses for the county's network in major £14.7m investment**

New electric buses will serve communities in the county thanks to a joint funding bid by Somerset Council and First Bus South and huge investment from the operator.

The 25 new double-decker and single decker buses will be funded by a £2.2 million grant from the Department for Transport's (DfT) Zero Emission Bus Regional Area scheme, along with a £12.5 in investment from First Bus South which operates Buses of Somerset, so are coming to Somerset at no extra cost to the Council.

The buses will operate from First Bus South's Hamilton Road depot in Taunton which is being upgraded to include charging infrastructure.

First South have extensive experience of delivering electrification projects across five of their other UK depots, including First South's depot in Hoeford, Fareham, as part of the first round of ZEBRA funding.

The electric buses will replace part of Buses of Somerset's current diesel fleet and overall, it is expected that each electric bus will save up to 60 tonnes of tailpipe emissions per year.

A project of this scale in Somerset, would be a fantastic opportunity and deliver much wider decarbonisation benefits. The transport sector generates the largest proportion of carbon emissions by sector in Somerset (44 per cent in 2019) significantly higher than the total UK emissions (27 per cent).

The proposed routes for operation of the electric vehicles are:

- 28 – Taunton to Minehead
- 21 – Taunton to Bridgwater
- 22 – Taunton to Wellington
- 1 – Taunton Town Service
- 2 – Taunton Town Service.

### **Road Safety Team launches campaign following 'disturbing' rise in road deaths**

Dangerous driving behaviours are the focus of a new Somerset Council campaign aimed at reducing fatal collisions on the county's roads.

The Fatal Five campaign, backed by Avon and Somerset Police and led by Somerset Council's Road Safety Team, highlights the key behaviours which can contribute to serious or fatal collisions.

Tragically, 30 people died while travelling on Somerset's roads in 2023 - this is nearly 43 per cent up on the figure for 2022 and the highest number of fatalities in 10 years. In four of the incidents more than one person died.

There is no particular cause or issue thought to be responsible for the increase, and

according to Avon and Somerset Police 76 per cent of the collisions involve one or more of the following five behaviours:

- Intoxicated driving, (drink or drugs)
- Careless or inconsiderate driving
- Excessive Speed
- Mobile phone use or distraction, or
- Failing to wear a seatbelt.

A further concerning factor is that nearly half of the fatal collisions were caused by a vehicle crossing into the path of another one.

Of the 30 fatal casualties, 11 were car drivers, 12 motorcyclists, four were car passengers, and three were pedestrians.

Fourteen of last year's fatalities happened on the county's A roads, five were on trunk roads, five were on B roads and six were on unclassified roads.

The figures for the past five years:

- 2019: 22 collisions / 22 fatalities
- 2020: 12 collisions / 12 fatalities

- 2021: 24 collisions / 25 fatalities
- 2022: 20 collisions / 21 fatalities
- 2023: 26 collisions / 30 fatalities

The figures for 2023 are the highest since 2014 when 33 deaths occurred.

Somerset Road Safety's delivery team delivered face-to-face training for 41,000 people in 2023. This included talks in primary schools for 12,619 pupils, as well as presentations to 8,579 secondary school pupils. The team gave talks and training to 2,509 motorcyclists and gave 1,182 older drivers advice and guidance on how to stay safe on Somerset's roads.

### **Somerset swimming pools awarded funding for energy efficiency upgrades**

Somerset Council has been awarded £316,700 of grant funding from Phase 2 of the government's Swimming Pool Support Fund (SPSF).

The ringfenced money from Sport England and the National Lottery will be used to install new energy efficiency measures in four Somerset leisure centres.

Frome Leisure Centre and Wells Leisure Centre run by Fusion Lifestyle will get new swimming pool covers and Photovoltaic (PV) Panels installed on the roofs.

Chard Leisure Centre and Goldenstones Leisure Centre in Yeovil ran by Freedom Leisure will have destratification fans installed.

De-stratification fans circulate warm air which has built up near the ceiling back down to ground level. They will help to improve energy efficiency by reducing the need for additional heating of the pool halls.

Somerset Council has previously been awarded £211,208 in 2023 as part of SPSF Phase 1 funding which supported five Somerset swimming pools with the increase in pool chemical and utilities costs. Learn more here: [www.somerset.gov.uk/news/swimmingpoolsupportfund](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/news/swimmingpoolsupportfund).

### **Somerset Libraries to launch Neurodiversity book collection**

Somerset Libraries will be launching its new Neurodiversity book collection to coincide with the start of Autism Acceptance Week. A special author event will be taking place at Yeovil Library on 20 April where local neurodivergent writer, Hannah Walker will speak about her latest book 'Mess is Progress'.

The new book collection replaces the pioneering Somerset Autism Collection, which was created in 2015. In the last nine years, research and writing about autism has grown and the new collection will showcase the best of this. The list of books is available on Somerset Libraries website.

It will also cover a wider range of conditions associated with neurodiversity, including ADHD, demand avoidance, dyslexia, and dyspraxia.

The collection includes 50 books and aims to provide 'something for everyone' including books for children, young people, adults, parents, women and those without an official diagnosis but who experience neurodivergent traits.

The collection will be shelved at 20 libraries across Somerset, in varying collection size, but will be available to request for free from any Somerset Library. Books will have a longer six-week loan period and there will be no late fees payable on them.

Autism Acceptance Week ran from 2-8 April to support people with autism and their families to cope with some of the challenges they face.

Tickets for the author event on the 20<sup>th</sup> April are free but need to be booked via [yeolib@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:yeolib@somerset.gov.uk).

Further information is available here: <https://www.autism.org.uk/get-involved/raise-money/world-autism-acceptance-week-2024>

### **Further support and grants available to help businesses ‘Go Green’**

Somerset Council is continuing to help businesses to reduce their carbon emissions and, in turn, save money on their energy costs through the extension of two pioneering schemes.

Launched in October, the ‘Go Green Scheme’ and the ‘Somerset Green Business Grant Scheme’ were introduced to offer businesses practical help and financial support to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions. The schemes have been funded from the Government’s UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Local Growth Fund.

The schemes are already making a tangible difference with the Go Green Scheme identifying potential energy and carbon savings of 35% while the Green Business Grants have funded businesses to take forward a wide range of measures – from e-forklifts to smart controls.

Harris Bros & Collard Ltd in Bridgwater was one of the first 50 businesses to benefit from the scheme when it was launched in October. Company Director Tom Travis explains how the scheme is going to benefit his business, “We were delighted to have been successful with our Go Green Scheme and Somerset Green Business Grant application submitted in late 2023.

“The application process was clear and with the advice and support of Balanced Energy, we were able to ensure all required documentation was in place by the submission deadline. We’re very much looking forward to seeing our green dream come to life over the coming months.”

Further information on the Go Green Scheme ‘empowering Somerset businesses to go green’ is available at [www.gogreenscheme.org.uk](http://www.gogreenscheme.org.uk)

Businesses interested in finding out more about Green Business Grants should visit <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/business-economy-and-licences/funding-and-grants-for-business/> or email [greenbusinesssupport@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:greenbusinesssupport@somerset.gov.uk)

### **‘Feed your family, not the bin’ say Somerset Council and SUEZ**

In support of Food Waste Action Week, Somerset Council and SUEZ are helping the county’s Local Pantry members go the extra mile to reduce food waste.

Fridges set to the correct temperature can help food stay fresh for up to three days longer. Somerset Council and SUEZ recycling and recovery – the Council’s collections contractor – are providing a fridge thermometer to every food pantry member, helping families to keep their food at a cool 0°c to 5°c.

It’s not just keeping your fridge cool that can help prevent food waste, the nationwide ‘Love Food Hate Waste’ campaign shares simple tips that can help everyone make the most of their food:

- Create a weekly meal plan

- Check your portions to avoid uneaten leftovers
- Don't put hot food straight in the fridge, let it cool first so it doesn't increase the temperature
- Keep fruit and vegetables in the fridge – it makes them last longer
- Create an 'eat me first' space in the fridge – so you can keep tabs on food that needs using up

Some food waste is unavoidable, it's always best to use up what you can, but if it must go then recycling food waste is the next best thing. Households in Somerset can recycle their food at the kerbside, with their weekly recycling collection. Last year 23,000 tonnes of food waste was recycled – but the waste in the general rubbish bins were filled with 21% food waste.

Food waste in Somerset is recycled in the county, via anaerobic digestion – it's turned into fertiliser for farms and electricity that goes into the national grid.

According to 'Love Food, Hate Waste', a staggering 60% of the UK's food waste come from our homes – that's eight meals a week!

Food pantries in Somerset are thriving, with nine up and running across the county. The nine Local Pantries do a brilliant job of diverting surplus food from shops and local allotments, saving food which would have otherwise been thrown out.

### **Purple chairs provide 'beacon of safety' for women and girls**

Purple chairs are being installed in libraries across Somerset to provide a clear beacon of safety for women and girls.

The 'Purple Chair Scheme' provides a safe space for women and girls to get information about health and wellbeing, as well as support and resources available to them in whatever circumstances they find themselves in, including:

- Antenatal and postnatal care,
- physical activity during pregnancy and after birth,
- breast cancer support,
- health visiting service,
- domestic abuse support,
- gambling,
- cervical screening,
- go smoke free,
- anti-social behaviour and harassment.

Library staff have also put together a carefully chosen selection of books on Women's Wellness, displayed in the health and wellbeing section.

Purple chairs and information packs can be found in the following libraries across Somerset: Bridgwater, Chard, Frome, Glastonbury, Taunton, Williton, and Yeovil.

The Purple Chair Scheme has been funded as part of a Home Office Safer Streets programme aimed at improving feelings of safety for women and girls in public spaces. This project also highlights the Safer Somerset Partnership commitment to support women and girls to live free from violence and harassment.

The information packs accompanying the purple chairs offer valuable information for everyone, irrespective of gender or identity. Somerset libraries warmly welcome everyone to access information, signposting, and support. Applications can be completed online, and applicants have to

reapply every three years. Full details on how to apply can be found here:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/apply-vote-post>

### **Check out Somerset's Bus Passenger Charter**

Bus users in Somerset are being signposted to an important document aimed at protecting the quality and performance of bus services.

Drawn up by Somerset Council, bus user groups and operators, the Bus Passenger Charter for Somerset establishes a consistent standard for bus services to meet and aims to improve the way passengers can hold the Council and operators to account.

The charter, which is a condition of Somerset's Bus Service Improvement Plan, sets out the standard of service the passenger can reasonably expect when they travel on any route operating within the County, and also what the Council and operator can reasonably expect in terms of passenger behaviour.

Included in the Charter are key pledges such as:

- Clear information to help plan a journey and about any possible disruptions
- Recognisable bus stops with up-to-date information
- Buses departing and travelling as advertised
- Comfortable, clean and accessible vehicles
- A clear complaints procedure

In return, passengers are asked to respect drivers and fellow passengers, as well as helping to keep the bus clean by taking litter home.

You can view and download the Charter here: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/somerset-bus-passenger-charter/#Purpose%20of%20this%20charter>

If you can't access the internet please call our customer service team to request a copy on 0300 123 2224.

### **Brand new Firepool Centre for Digital Innovation set to open in May**

This is an exciting time for innovative businesses in the digital economy as the brand new purpose-built Firepool Centre for Digital Innovation (FCDI) is set to officially open its doors in Taunton.

Owned and operated by Somerset Council, FCDI has already successfully held a number of events where lucky delegates were able to get a preview of the impressive facilities.

FCDI has been made possible after successfully securing more than £7.3m of external ring-fenced funding including European Union's European Regional Development Fund (£1.69 million) in addition to HM Government's Getting Building Funding (£5.45 million) and Growth Deal funding (£235k). This is in addition to a £3.6m investment from Somerset Council which was secured ahead of the creation of the unitary council. The modern and inspiring innovation centre will offer grade A office suites, co-working, collaboration and event space over four floors

### **Rob Beckley QPM: Chief Police Officer, assumes role of High Sheriff of Somerset**

Rob Beckley, a highly respected figure in law enforcement with a distinguished policing career spanning 38 years, is retiring from the police service and stepping into the role of High Sheriff of

Somerset. His appointment was formally declared in Wells Cathedral at the annual Somerset Legal Service on 17 March 2024.

With a wealth of experience and a longstanding connection to Somerset, Rob's appointment builds on an enduring commitment to community engagement and voluntary service. Rob's theme during his year as High Sheriff, is to promote greater community participation in community and voluntary services across Somerset. He is deeply concerned about the fall in voluntary participation in recent years and will be working hard to promote greater awareness of what the sector does for our communities.

The role of High Sheriff is one deeply rooted in history and tradition, with the first Somerset High Sheriff being appointed in 1061. While their exact duties have evolved over time, the High Sheriff remains an important figure within the county, appointed for a year and acting as the King's representative in matters of law and order. Beyond ceremonial duties, the High Sheriff has a vital role in supporting the judiciary, law enforcement, and voluntary and charitable community organisations in Somerset.