

## SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

### CONSERVATIVE GROUP BRIEFING SHEET FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

DECEMBER 2022

**Somerset County Council Finances:** The latest budget monitoring figures for Somerset County Council show a projected overspend of £22.5m including a £12.7m overspend in Adults and £16.8m in Children's. Some savings have been made in ECI (Highways etc). Next year's revenue budget currently shows a gap of £44.5m.

**Local Government Reorganisation:** Following the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) decision to support the move to a single Unitary Council across Somerset, vesting day for the new Unitary Council remains as 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

**Council Tax:** A new, unified Council Tax Reduction Scheme targeting help at people on low incomes, care leavers, and foster carers has been agreed for Somerset from 1 April 2023 when the new Somerset Council comes into being. A single person with an income below £95 a week, or a couple with two children on a weekly income below £260, will be entitled to the full 100% council tax reduction. However, some families with an income below £500 a week could also be eligible for some support. Care leavers up to the age of 25 will continue to be exempt from Council Tax and an entirely new measure, not currently offered by any of the district councils, will give Somerset Council registered foster carers and qualifying Special Guardians a 50% reduction. Certain benefits for people with disabilities, war pensioners, families in receipt of child benefit/maintenance and carers will not be considered when income is assessed. The scheme for pension age applicants is set by Government and will continue unchanged.

**Single NHS Trust:** The board of directors at Somerset NHS Foundation Trust and Yeovil District Hospital NHS Foundation Trust have approved the business case to support the planned merger between the two NHS trusts. The new NHS trust will provide acute care and treatment from Yeovil District Hospital and Musgrove Park Hospital, community-based services, including the county's 13 community hospitals, and mental health and learning disabilities across Somerset. In addition, it will run 16 GP practices through the Symphony Healthcare Services subsidiary. If the business case is given the go-ahead by NHS England, then it's intended that the two trusts will merge, subject to feedback, on 1 April 2023. The new organisation will be called 'Somerset NHS Foundation Trust'.

**Ukraine refugees in Somerset update:** An appeal for private landlords to come forward with vacant, or soon-to-be vacant, properties for rent, has been launched. Accommodation is now needed as part of a planned pathway across all Councils for moving guests out of sponsor accommodation and into private accommodation. Somerset Councils are offering a one-off cash incentive of £1,000 per bedroom, with up to a maximum of £4,000 for homes with four bedrooms and above. Landlords will be asked to sign up Ukrainian tenants for a minimum 12-month term on a self-contained assured shorthold tenancy basis. They must also agree to a rent that sits within Local Housing Allowance rates. Full details of the incentive scheme, alongside terms and conditions, are available on [www.Somerset.gov.uk/Ukraine](http://www.Somerset.gov.uk/Ukraine)

**Domestic Abuse:** To coincide with the national campaign, 'Sixteen Days of Action' against domestic abuse, (25 November – 10 December), Somerset County Council has launched a new toolkit for employers. The campaign encourages employers to play their part in tackling domestic abuse and learn how to spot signs that an employee may be in an abusive relationship. The Council is encouraging all employers to check out the online resource at <https://somensetsurvivors.org.uk/domestic-abuse-employers-toolkit/> aimed at guiding them in how to support staff who may be affected by domestic abuse. The toolkit helps organisations do more to aid their employees through training on the signs to spot, how to help and protect staff and where to go for support.

**Annual Flu Vaccinations:** Residents are being reminded to protect their health and the health of people around them by getting their flu and Covid-19 vaccinations. If you're 50 and over, a frontline health or social care worker, pregnant, have a long-term health condition, or are a paid or unpaid carer, you are eligible for the free flu vaccine, and you can likely get the Covid-19 seasonal booster. Children aged 2-15 years old are also eligible for free flu vaccination, which is delivered through either their GP for pre-school and school for school age children – parents need to sign a consent form. If you are eligible, you can book your seasonal Covid-19 vaccine using <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/> or by calling 119

**Somerset Business Survey:** Now in its third year, the Somerset business survey has been developed with the Somerset Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses. It will give useful insight into current business challenges, such as inflationary pressures, supply chain issues, higher borrowing costs, ongoing recruitment and skills concerns, and the journey to net zero carbon emissions. The survey is anonymous, and no personal data will be shared with anyone outside of Somerset's Local Authorities.

<https://someset.inconsult.uk/AnnualBusinessSurvey2022/answerQuestionnaire?qid=8297763>