

## SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

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

#### MARCH 2023

**Somerset County Council Finances:** Somerset County Council continues to show a significant projected overspend of £24.3 as at Month 9, with the main areas of Social Care causing the greatest overspends. The Revenue and Capital budgets for the new Somerset Council were proposed and debated at a Full Council meeting on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023. There are significant challenges in delivering this budget given the current trend in overspend and the risk to some savings which are planned.

**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. The last District and County Council meetings are currently being held with a civic service to mark the move to Unitary in Wells Cathedral on March 12<sup>th</sup>.

**Debate not hate:** Somerset County Council's last Full Council meeting saw members from all political parties voting to support a motion signing up the new Council -elected to the Local Government Association's Debate Not Hate campaign. The most recent Local Government Association (LGA) Councillor Census revealed seven in ten councillors reported experiencing abuse and intimidation within the last 12 months while one in 10 experienced abuse frequently. At the meeting, councillors agreed to work together on a cross-party basis to set an example of healthy debate and denounced abusive or threatening behaviour from anyone within the community on social media and in-person.

**School Term dates 2024/5 and 2025/6:** SCC has published two separate consultations: one for the 2024/5 and one for the 2025/26 academic years. Both consultations are particularly relevant to parents and carers with responsibility for school age children. The consultations run until the 17<sup>th</sup> March, with results being published in April this year. To complete the consultation visit either

<https://somerset.inconsult.uk/Termdates2425/consultationHome> or  
<https://somerset.inconsult.uk/Termdates2526/consultationHome>

**Independent Living Centres:** The Somerset Independent Living Centres are filled with useful technology and equipment designed to make daily living at home easier for anyone who may need support living independently, such as older people, or people of any age with disabilities, sensory impairments, or health conditions. There are two such centres in Somerset, one in Wellington and the other in Shepton Mallet. Members of the public can book a free appointment to visit the centre by calling 0300 123 2224 or email [adults@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:adults@somerset.gov.uk)

**Step Up to Social Work:** Somerset's 'Step Up to Social Work' programme offers an opportunity to train for a career in social work and receive a tax-free bursary of almost

£20,000. Successful completion of the 14-month training programme leads to a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work, enabling students to apply to register as a Social Worker. Recruitment for the programme is open now, with assessments scheduled for June and July 2023, with a January 2024 study start date. The programme runs once every two years, dependent on Government funding. Applications can be made via [www.susw.eu-careers.pocketrecruiter.com](http://www.susw.eu-careers.pocketrecruiter.com)

**Domestic Abuse:** Somerset Integrated Domestic Abuse Service helpline took 301 calls from people between the age of 16 – 20-year-olds since April last year, compared to 128 in 2021/22 – a nearly three times increase. Proportionately young people experience the highest rates of domestic abuse of any age group. It is estimated that 1 in 5 children are exposed to domestic abuse. Young people can find support by calling on 0800 69 49 999 or at [www.somerset survivors.org.uk](http://www.somerset survivors.org.uk).

**Secondary School Places:** Figures show that 4,785 secondary school applications were received this year compared to 4,866 in 2022. In total, **92.8% (down from 94.8% last year)** of children received a place at their first preference school, with **98.12% (down from 98.35% last year)** offered one of their top three choices.

**Somerset Community Awards:** Community heroes from across Somerset were recognised at the latest Somerset County Council Chair's Award for Service to the Community. The awards-giving has been an annual event for many years and this year's ceremony at Taunton Rugby Club was attended by 140 people, including 43 nominees from across Somerset. The award recipients were nominated by their parish and town councils for recognition of their outstanding contribution to their communities.

**Route 1 Advocacy:** Somerset County Council's Route1 Advocacy service is seeking Advocates and Independent Visitors to spend quality time with young people and help transform their lives. The independent visitor role involves taking a long-term interest in the life of a young person in care – something which many of them have never experienced. Trained volunteers are matched with a child in care and provide an invaluable service, one which is potentially life-changing for the young person involved, and even for the volunteer themselves. Advocacy is a short-term commitment, in which new advocates attend an additional 2 days of training before being added to a 'bank' of volunteer advocates, to be contacted when needed. Full training is provided by Route 1 Advocacy. To find out more about the roles and apply, please visit: <https://volunteering.somerset.gov.uk/route1>

**Highways 1:** The B3191 at Cleeve Hill near Watchet is set to remain closed indefinitely for safety reasons. Detailed inspections have revealed further cliff movement is inevitable and it will be impossible to safely reopen the road without major intervention which will require significant funding, currently unavailable to the Council.

**Highways 2:** Somerset County Council has announced that its bid for funding the Ashcott/Walton bypass has been unsuccessful despite the narrow route and volume of passing traffic, including a large numbers of HGVs. Alternative funding is currently not available.