

# **SOMERSET COUNCIL**

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

**APRIL 2023**

**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, the new Council came into being on 1st April 2023. Somerset Council replaces the four District Councils and County Council providing a range of over 500 services. Both a single point of telephone or website contacts are available on 0300 123 2224 or [www.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.somerset.gov.uk)

**Somerset County Council Finances:** Somerset County Council continues to show a significant projected overspend of £24.3 as at Month 9 (the latest figures available), with the main areas of Social Care causing the greatest overspends. There remain significant challenges in delivering the new Somerset Council budget given the current trend in overspend and the risk to some savings which are planned.

**Covid-19 Spring Booster:** As COVID-19 continues to infect thousands of people every week, over-75s and those with weakened immune systems will be offered a further dose of the vaccine this spring. The vaccine offers the best protection against the virus but immunity wanes over time. The NHS plan will offer spring boosters to eligible members of the public from between 17 April and 30 June 2023.

**Younger drivers:** Somerset Council is backing a major new campaign aimed at younger drivers to raise awareness of the dangers of excessive speed on rural roads. A quarter of incidents involving fatalities or serious injuries on Somerset's rural roads involve younger drivers. The Department for Transport launched its Think! campaign earlier this month on video and radio. The adverts underline key messages around taking care, reducing speed, and respecting the road layout, particularly on rural roads. Visit [www.somersetroadsafety.org](http://www.somersetroadsafety.org) to find out more about initiatives and courses.

**Online Support for Carers:** Somerset Council has recently launched a three-month pilot project with Mobilise, an online business created by carers to help unpaid carers get the support they are entitled to. Mobilise will work directly with the existing commissioned Carers Service, including the Community Council for Somerset Agents, to ensure that targeted information will be given to carers and their families. This will include a range of online support including individual support calls – seven days a week. The Mobilise service is free for residents of Somerset and can be accessed via <https://support.mobilise.co.uk/somerset>

**Housing Support Scheme:** A new scheme to support people leaving hospital and returning to their own homes is demonstrating the advantage of bringing services together in the new unitary Somerset Council. The headline benefit of the scheme, is the provision of stairlifts on loan, cutting through the processing of the Disabled Facilities Grant. The loan gets Somerset residents back into their own homes while the grant is processed. The policy, includes support for insulation, help for essential repairs for residents on means-tested benefits and support to make homes dementia friendly. The new Council services will be accessible through [www.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.somerset.gov.uk)

**Lettings Agents:** Trading Standards is reminding letting agents of their legal obligation to protect money they are holding on behalf of a client after a tribunal upheld an £8,000 fine imposed on a firm. Somerset Trading Standards imposed the fine on a Frome letting agent, after they had repeatedly ignored advice to obtain Client Money Protection that protects landlords' and tenants' money held by a letting agent. The Client Money Protection Schemes protect the money of both the landlord and tenant in the event of the insolvency of the agent.

**New Free School:** Somerset Council has been successful in its application to the Department for Education (DfE) to open a new free school, one of 33 new free special schools nationally. The school in Wells is expected to open in three to four years and will provide 64 places for children aged 9 to 16 years. Free schools are funded by the Government and run independently of the Council. The school will be easily accessible to students from Street, Glastonbury, Shepton Mallet, Frome and Cheddar.