

SOMERSET COUNCIL
BRIEFING SHEET
FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

MAY 2023

Recycling statistics: DEFRA's recently published league tables shows Somerset's 2021-2022 recycling rate of 56.2% ranking it 28 out of 228 local authorities – putting it in the top 15%. Previously this was 59 out of 228, with a recycling rate of 52.4%. In 2021-22, almost 150,000 tonnes of waste was recycled or reused, saving around 133,000 tonnes of carbon. 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 recycling crews make more than 350,000 collections a week across the County.

Soft Plastic recycling pilot: Following the success of Recycle More collections, Somerset Council successfully bid to be part of a national 'FlexCollect' trial of kerbside collection of soft plastics. As a result a small-scale pilot of the collection of plastic bags and wrapping for recycling will be starting in around 3,600 homes across two locations in Frome. 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. Depending on how the trials progress, it is expected that they will be expanded to more Somerset homes next year.

Primary School places: 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% (98.62% last year) of the 5,182 applicants were offered a place at one of their top three choices, with 94.54% (93.4% last year) receiving their first choice.

Mental Awareness Week: Somerset residents are being asked to share photos of their favourite 'Happy Place' in advance of Mental Health Awareness week (15 – 21 May). The theme of the 2023 campaign is anxiety, and those taking part can share photos of places they go in Somerset to help them to feel calmer and happier, using the hashtags **#SomersetMyHappyPlace**. The images that are shared before 15th May can be seen at www.healthysomerset.co.uk/mental-health-awareness-week/.

Alternative Energy payments: Householders in Somerset could still 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 urban areas. Those householders could be due a £200 one-off payment from the government, but they must apply by 31 May and the payment isn't means tested. The second scheme is for households that have not received a £400 discount on their energy bills from an electricity supplier. They may still be entitled to a £400 one-off payment from the government.

Making Somerset Accessible: A year-long project to make Somerset more accessible for Disabled people was launched in April 2023. To deliver the project, Somerset Council has teamed up with WECIL Ltd – a Disabled People's Organisation who offer a range of services supporting independent living. The project is now seeking volunteers to share their views and is asking for individuals and organisations to get involved by contacting disability.in@wecil.org.uk

Highway contravention fines: Nearly £15k of fines have been handed to BT for roadworks offences in Frome. The telecommunications firm was found guilty of two offences which included failing to ensure the safety of pedestrians by failing to install traffic management and for carrying out works without a valid permit.

Covid booster vaccination: The NHS in Somerset began the next phase of Covid-19 vaccinations on the 17th April with its Spring programme, geared up to protect the most vulnerable residents. More than 80 thousand people across Somerset are eligible which includes those aged 75 and above, those with a weakened immune system, and older adult care home residents. Invitations are being sent out via letter, text messages or the NHS app and appointments can be made online through the National Booking Service.

New childminders: 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. The Council offers guidance and training to newly registered childminders and supports them through Ofsted registration and beyond. To find out more about becoming a childminder, and for an information pack please call 0300 123 2224 or visit www.somerset.gov.uk/children-families-and-education/early-years-and-childcare/starting-a-childcare-business/