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SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL
Report for Mendip South
December 2022

Parish Council Budget Planning Advice

A parish council in Mendip South has asked us a question about setting parish council budgets in the next financial year. We felt that it would be beneficial for all parish councils in Mendip South to see our response, which has been put together following a conversation with senior leaders at Somerset Council.

Q: "We're going to be looking at our budget for next year, do we need to make any addition provision for county services, or do you believe it will be business as normal under the new council?"

A: Somerset Council does have to make savings in the next financial year, due to the current economic climate we find ourselves in. If a parish had been thinking of supporting more of the services currently delivered by district or county then parish cllrs may wish to consider precepting to cover the costs for future years.

That doesn't mean there will be cuts in the parish area.

We are simply highlighting the situation at this time as precepts are considered, and we realise that parishes will react differently.

Lowest income households to pay no Council Tax under new Somerset Council scheme. Fifty percent discount for foster carers.

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.

The Scheme was approved by Somerset County Council on November 23. The scheme will be simpler and fairer and means that the lowest income households will pay no Council Tax.

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 County 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.

The simpler scheme will, if approved by Council, replace four separate systems operated by Somerset's district councils with varying levels of council tax support. The changes will harmonise support for working-aged people on low incomes across the county.

While increasing support for the most vulnerable, the council also agreed fairer charges for second homes and empty properties aimed at bringing empty homes back into use. There will be no discounts for second homes or empty homes while long-term empty properties will attract premiums, for example 100% for properties empty for two years, rising to 300% after ten years.

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme went out to public consultation in July and by the time it closed in September had attracted almost 1,200 responses – the majority supporting the proposals.

The new scheme will be simpler, easier to understand and less complicated to administer than the existing four district-based schemes.

The council has also developed a new Business Rate Discretionary Relief scheme which aligns the different approaches currently in operation across the four districts into a single scheme. The new approach targets discretionary support at Somerset based charities and many not-for-profit organisations.

The single telephone number for the new Somerset Council has now been approved by Programme Board.

From 1 April 2023, members of the public will be able to call **0300 123 2224** for any enquiry about any unitary council service.

This is the current County Council number and keeping it makes sense for several reasons – it receives the most calls, it is widely known, there will be no change for social care services, and it's cost effective to keep an existing number.

The LGR team are currently working through the timing of when this number will be able to effectively re-direct callers if used prior to vesting day.

Hot desks available at offices across Somerset to support those impacted by cost-of-living crisis

Somerset's five councils recognise that many employees are finding the current cost-of-living crisis difficult. The high cost of heating and fuel may be making the choice between either working from home or commuting a long distance, challenging. Hot desks in district and county hubs across Somerset are being made available to all council staff – so people can use the office closest to them. These desks will be available from 5th December 2022.

Somerset Councils looking for suitable locations for potential renewable energy projects

Starting this month, the five Somerset Councils are commissioning a specialist consultant to carry out an extensive survey of the county for the new LAEP, in which suitable locations for potential renewable energy projects will be identified – and, whether the locations are compatible with connection to the National Grid.

For more information and tips about saving energy in Somerset, visit [Climate Emergency – Individuals and communities \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/climate-emergency-individuals-and-communities).

Volunteers needed for Independent Remuneration Panel

Somerset County Council needs volunteers to join an independent panel, which sets the allowances payable to its elected members.

The Independent Remuneration Panel, a legally required body, makes recommendations to the Council about the different financial allowances elected members can receive. Being a panel member will involve researching the amounts other authorities make available to their elected members and working towards producing the Scheme of Allowances for the new Somerset Council.

There are five places and applications are being accepted throughout December.

All panel members must be independent of the council. If you have an interest in local government, would like to know more about council processes or would like some satisfaction in using your existing skills to take part in this democratic process, this could be for you. Find out more and apply by visiting: [Independent Person for Remuneration Panel](#)

Somerset Councils launch countywide Business Survey 2022

Somerset's five Local Authorities are jointly undertaking a survey to better understand and support local businesses, now and in the future. The Somerset Business Survey 2022 is live and can be completed:

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

Know your Numbers – Heart Health Day

Following on from the successful 'Know Your Numbers' Week in September (5-11 September), Yeovil Library will be hosting encouraging residents to 'know their numbers' and will be running a Heart Health Day in their Wellbeing Zone.

The event, which will be held on Tuesday December 13 from 9.30am to 12.30pm, will encourage the public to check their blood pressure. There will be an automatic blood pressure monitor on-site, home blood pressure monitoring kit demonstration and the opportunity to borrow a kit from the library **for free** so that members can 'know their numbers' at home.

About 3 in 10 adults in Somerset have high blood pressure but 1 in 10 do not know it as it often presents with no symptoms. Early detection and treatment can help people live longer, healthier lives.

Once someone 'knows their numbers' by checking their blood pressure, they will know if they have high blood pressure -for anyone who has high blood pressure support to bring it under control and prevent these diseases is available from GP practices and health professionals.

There will also be an opportunity on the day to chat with local NHS Health Coaches about Heart Healthy living:

- Measure your blood pressure to see if it's under control.
- Modify your lifestyle if necessary.
- Manage your blood pressure and your health to beat 'the silent killer'.

No need to book, just drop in on the day. Visit www.bloodpressureuk.org/know-your-numbers/ for more information on the campaign. For more information on the event please email yeolib@somerset.gov.uk.

Holiday activities for Somerset's 'free school meal' pupils on offer again this winter

More free, fun activities are on offer this December for Somerset children eligible for free school meals.

The Happy Healthy Holidays Somerset (HHHS) project is once again being delivered by Somerset County Council and the Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership (SASP) as part of a Government initiative to help tackle inequalities in holiday hunger, physical inactivity and social isolation for children who are eligible for free school meals. The winter programme features football skills workshops, Christmas craft sessions, nerf games and much more, and every child receives healthy food and some nutrition advice.

This summer, children aged five to 16 took up more than 25,000 places at over 80 **Somerset** venues offering activities.

The HHHS winter activity programme runs from **19 – 23 December 2022**. Booking is **now open**, and children can be signed up to a maximum of four of the activity days via this link: [Somerset Activity & Sports Partnership – Happy Healthy Holidays Programme \(sasp.co.uk\)](https://www.sasp.co.uk/somerset-activity-sports-partnership-happy-healthy-holidays-programme), whilst one additional 'family ticket' day at venues like Farrington Golf Club and Brean Play can be booked via <https://www.hhhsomerset.co.uk>.

To book, parents need the code in the letter with booking instructions from their child's school. The sessions can be browsed using a 'distance from your town or postcode' calculator via the link above. Alternatively, you can explore [this map](#).

Somerset joins network to offer better support to county's most vulnerable residents

Somerset will be able to offer better support to its residents after joining forces with a national network that offers expertise in providing effective help to people to access our services.

Somerset is one of 10 new areas approved to join the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) network, joining the existing 32 locations already taking part.

MEAM offers guidance and training to help transform how services are delivered to vulnerable citizens and is a national initiative funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

The MEAM network is made up of several national charities that specialise in areas such as mental health (MIND), drug and alcohol treatment (Collective Voice), supporting the homeless (homeless link), and the criminal justice system (Clinks).

Over the next two years, Somerset will work with MEAM partners to build on work aligning public health, social care, and housing services when supporting those who most need our services.

For more information on the MEAM initiative visit: [Home – MEAM](#)

Cash incentives for landlords who help house Ukrainian refugees

An appeal for private landlords to come forward with vacant, or soon-to-be vacant, properties for rent, has been launched.

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** (LHA) rates.

This housing initiative is only available to households who arrived in the UK via the Homes 4 Ukraine scheme and supports access to the private rented sector for Ukrainian households who may find it difficult to access accommodation without employment references or a guarantor.

Government has provided additional money to Local Authorities to invest in homelessness prevention by engaging and incentivising landlords. Funds are limited and will be issued on a first-come-first-served basis.

If you can offer a suitable property in Sedgemoor, Somerset West and Taunton or South Somerset please contact srht@sedgemoor.gov.uk

For those with accommodation in the Mendip area we would ask you contact housing.admin@mendip.gov.uk. Call 0300 303 8588.

You'll find full details of the incentive scheme, alongside terms and conditions, on our dedicated website pages www.somerset.gov.uk/Ukraine. You can calculate your LHA rate [HERE](#).

Reminder: Have your say on Somerset's SEND strategy

Members of the public in Somerset are invited to have their say on a new draft strategy for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND).

The strategy was shaped by extensive engagement with children, young people and families and sets out how services will be delivered and led over the next three years (2023-26).

The consultation is open and will close on Friday 23 December. To read the strategy and provide feedback visit: [Somerset Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities \(SEND\) Strategy 2023/26 - Somerset County Council Consultations \(inconsult.uk\)](#)

After the consultation closes, the Somerset SEND Partnership will review all feedback and use this to update the strategy. The final strategy will be published in Spring 2023.

Useful links

Here is a reminder of the different areas of highways, where issues can be reported.

Problems on the Road e.g. Potholes, Overhanging Vegetation, Flooding, Blocked Drains and Gullies should all be reported online as you will receive a faster response as they are directly linked to our Highways Team

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/#problems-on-the-road>

Report a problem with a street light

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-problem-with-a-street-light/>

Road signs, bollards and road markings

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/road-signs-and-markings/>

Speed limits

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/speed-limits/>

Enquiries regarding the following issues have standard information to help guide your enquiry and exploration of the issue

Traffic lights

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-faulty-traffic-lights/>

Weight limits and abnormal loads

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/weight-limits-and-abnormal-loads/>

Live travel information

<https://www.travelsomerset.co.uk/>

On-street parking restrictions

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-badly-parked-vehicle/>

Disabled parking bays

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/disabled-parking-bays/>

Public and community transport

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/#public-and-community-transport>

Rights of way

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/#rights-of-way>

Report a problem with a public right of way

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-problem-with-a-public-right-of-way/>

Road works and road closures

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/#road-works-and-road-closures>

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