

SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

BRIEFING SHEET FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

OCTOBER 2021

Councillor Gemma Verdon – Chard South Division

Coronavirus infection rates: As of 30th September, the number of confirmed Covid cases in Somerset was 42,800 (26.6% up from 33,812 on 29th August) and the number of Covid-attributed deaths 839. The rate per 100,000 stands at 320.2 (459.1) for Somerset with Mendip at 379.8 (358.2), Sedgemoor at 292.3 (673.0), South Somerset 298.2 (410.5) and SW&T at 321.7 (417.1). The number of total deaths across the County is currently 15% below the 5-year average and the latest R-value for Somerset is between 0.7 and 0.9.

Infection rates in Somerset continue to be high. It is therefore important even for those who have had both jabs to remember to observe Social Distancing and to Ventilate indoor areas at all times.

Somerset Coronavirus Support Helpline: A single phone number continues to be available for anyone in Somerset who needs Coronavirus-related support. **0300 790 6275**, is open seven days a week from 8am to 6pm.

Vaccination programmes roll-out: Somerset continues to have one of the highest vaccination rates in the country with the latest figures showing over 95% of the adult population having had one dose of vaccine and 90.2% having had both doses. Work is now focusing on Children aged 12-15 years old via the school's immunization service and the third booster jab which is due 6 months after the second.

Local Government Reorganisation: Following the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) decision to support the move to a single Unitary Council across Somerset the transition programme, lead teams and governance structure have been agreed by the five current Councils. On 17th September the Councils responded to the Government's request to look at possible ward boundary changes with a maximum of 85 Unitary Councillors being elected. Whilst a number of options were presented it was almost universally felt that these gave sub-optimal outcomes at such an important stage. A cross-party and cross-authority request was therefore also submitted requesting more time, more flexibility in the warding parameters and involvement of the Local Govt Boundary Commission ahead of a Unitary election. It is still expected that statutory orders will be laid before Parliament in the late Autumn and a vesting date of the new authority as April 2023.

Somerset LGR Conference: The first Town, Parish and City conference focussing on Local Government Re-organisation in Somerset is due to take place on 7th October with over 100 different Councils already signed up to attend. The one-day conference will give Councils the opportunity to hear first-hand the transition programme and input their own thought on how the move to a Unitary structure could develop.

Somerset Youth Parliament: Somerset's Youth Parliament is seeking nominations from young people aged 11 to 18 wishing to become a Member of Youth Parliament (MYP). Nationally, over 300 elected representatives work with central and local government to make sure young people's voices are heard. Supported by Somerset County Council, Somerset MYPs campaign on a range of issues, advise, represent, give grants and are consulted by decision makers. 11- to 18-year-olds who live in or attend school or college in Somerset can put themselves forward to be the county's next MYPs. To do this, they should complete a short online form available here www.somerset.gov.uk/myp by Friday 5 November. Elections and voting will take place in December 2021 with newly elected MYPs taking up office on 1 March 2022 and serving a two-year term.

Young People's views on climate change: 11 to 18-year-olds in Somerset are invited to attend two virtual events in October to help shape Somerset County Council's Climate Emergency Strategy. Somerset Youth Parliament is running two free sessions via Zoom on Monday 11 and Monday 18 October, 6.15pm to 8pm, to learn more about the county's plans, listen to key speakers including Rebecca Pow MP (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) and have an opportunity to ask questions and contribute their own thoughts and ideas. To book a place at one of the virtual events email Kate Darlington at: kdarlington@somerset.gov.uk

Applications for school places 2022: For all children moving from primary to secondary school, or middle to upper school, in September 2022 applications for secondary school places opened on 13th September 2021 and must be submitted before Sunday 31 October 2021. All children starting school for the first time in September 2022, as well as those moving between infant and junior or first and middle school applications must be submitted between Monday 27 September 2021 and Saturday 15 January 2022. www.somerset.gov.uk/admissions

National Award (1): SCC has won a prestigious national award in recognition of its ground-breaking work in supporting the set-up microbusinesses. Leading local government publication the MJ awarded Somerset an achievement award in the Delivering Better Outcomes category, for its Community Micro-enterprise project. This supports Micro-providers who then provide help and support on the ground in local communities for people who need it.

National Award (2): Ann Adams, Service Manager at Somerset County Council's Support Services for Education (SSE), was a finalist in the outstanding lead governance professional category at the National Governance Association's (NGA) Outstanding Governance Awards 2021. The category recognises individuals leading and managing governance across several schools.