

## COUNTY COUNCIL CONSERVATIVE GROUP

### BRIEFING SHEET FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

#### DECEMBER 2019

**Winter Health:** Residents are asked to look out for those neighbours friends and family that may need help this winter including the vulnerable and elderly. Help can be in many forms but in particular making sure that heating does not drop below 18C, stocks of medication are up to date and giving some support with shopping and daily chores. NHS Choices provides information on Winter Health [www.nhs.uk/winterhealth](http://www.nhs.uk/winterhealth) but residents should call Somerset County Council Contact Centre if they are concerned about a person or child at risk on 0300 123 2224.

**Winter Health 2:** There's still time for a Flu jab ring your GP for further information.

**Mindline Health Support over Christmas:** Nobody should have to face a Mental Health problem alone, especially during Christmas. Mindline offers an emotional support helpline across Somerset and lines (01823 276 892) are open all year round including Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

**School Places:** For those applying for their first school place, the deadline for applications is 15th January - further details can be found at <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/education-and-families/apply-to-start-school/>

**Pop-up shop for December:** A highly successful retail project in Angel Place, Bridgwater is providing vital work experience for pupils at special schools across the county. Gaining proper work experience when you're close to leaving education is vital for any student, and especially so for young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities, and it is sometimes difficult to find. The shop's Christmas gift stock is created by pupils at Somerset's special schools, including ornaments, jams and up-cycled furniture, paintings, cards, sweets and plants. There's an opportunity to pick up some unique gifts and at the same time help the young people gain skills for life.

**Volunteering:** Volunteers are urgently needed to help support Somerset children and young people in care have fun, gain confidence, rebuild trust and speak up for them in key meetings. Age and background don't matter – but commitment and a willingness to connect with children and young people who need independent support are essential. Two distinct roles are available and training, support and out of pocket expenses are provided. 'Independent visitors' act as an adult friend to a child or young person in local authority care. They meet each other regularly – every two to four weeks. It's a long-term relationship so a commitment of two years is needed. 'Advocates' help a child or young person express their views and represent them at meetings about their wellbeing. Further information can be found by visiting [www.volunteering.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.volunteering.somerset.gov.uk)

**Domestic Violence:** Somerset County Council is backing a nationwide campaign to raise awareness of domestic violence in a bid to end it. Sixteen Days of action against domestic abuse runs until Monday 10 December. Working with partners SCC wants to raise awareness

of domestic abuse in its different forms and highlight local help available. As well as encouraging anyone experiencing domestic abuse to seek help, the campaign also encourages employers, friends and family to be vigilant and 'look, listen, ask ... ask again' if they have concerns about someone they fear may be in an abusive relationship. [www.somersetsurvivors.org.uk](http://www.somersetsurvivors.org.uk) has lots of useful information, advice and support. A confidential helpline is also available at **0800 69 49 999**.

**Connecting Devon and Somerset:** A public consultation has been launched by Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) ahead of undertaking a fresh procurement to find contractors to provide superfast broadband. CDS, which is responsible for rolling out broadband across the two counties, is establishing the remaining area where there are no current or credible future plans to deliver Next Generation Access (NGA) broadband infrastructure capable of download speeds of at least 30Mbps. Comments on their proposals need to be submitted by Tuesday 10 December to [enquiries@connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk)

**Working with the NHS:** A pioneering pilot scheme to help ease pressures on NHS resources this winter is being spearheaded by Somerset County Council and local NHS partners. The trial will see the authority base a social worker in the A&E departments at the county's two major hospitals – Musgrove Park in Taunton and Yeovil District. Some of the people who go to A&E don't need urgent medical care but go there because they are not sure where else to turn in a crisis. Some of these cases could be better dealt with by social care, and the Social Worker presence will help A&E staff get a better understanding of the support that social care may be able to offer. The Council is also looking to trial having a social worker based at the South Western Ambulance Service control centre to see if this too can relieve some of the winter pressures.

**Road Safety:** Newly released statistics show there were 971 injury collisions on Somerset's roads in 2018 – the lowest number ever reported in the county. The number of people killed or seriously injured remained at 154, the same as in 2017 – although the number of road deaths very sadly did increase to 26. In 2018 Somerset Road Safety provided training or advice to over 28,000 members of the public including meeting 5,130 people at public events, training 1,710 motorcyclists, reaching 910 senior drivers through Route 60+ workshops, and teaching over 10,000 school children at various education programmes.

**Winter gritting:** Somerset's highways teams are all set for winter – with 23 gritters on standby and 7,000 tonnes of salt ready to roll when temperatures drop. This winter Somerset County Council will be investing an extra £200,000 to grit over 900 miles of road this winter. You can check which roads are included at [www.travelsomerset.co.uk/gritting](http://www.travelsomerset.co.uk/gritting)

**Library e-Book Service:** Thousands of e-Books, e-Audio Books and e-Magazines can be accessed by Somerset residents on their electronic devices completely free of charge. With over 15,000 e-Books to choose from and new titles added regularly. Borrowers can check out as many as ten e-Books at a time, each of which can be borrowed for 21 days. All you need to do is become a member of Somerset Libraries – which is also free!

**Finally:** A reminder that Somerset County Council, in common with other local authorities remains in the 'Pre-election period' otherwise known as 'Purdah' until the 13<sup>th</sup> December and is limited in some of its public announcements and responses.