



**Somerset Liberal Democrats
Tatworth & Forton
December 2022**

Lowest income households set to pay no Council Tax under new Somerset Council proposals.

A new, unified Council Tax Reduction Scheme targeting help at people on low incomes, care leavers and foster carers is planned for Somerset from 1 April 2023 when the new Somerset Council comes into being. 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, would 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. The simpler scheme will replace four separate systems operated by Somerset's district councils with varying levels of council tax support. The changes will harmonise support for working-age people on low incomes across the county.

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.

Hundreds sign up to help shape council services

From April 2023, Somerset's five councils will be replaced by the new unitary Somerset Council which will deliver all council services to all communities – from waste collection and adult social care to housing, benefits and parks.

A new Customer Panel has been established to ensure residents are at the heart of those services. Since launching in August, more than 300 people have stepped forward – with members already providing valuable feedback on important work like the development of a new council brand.

No special skills are required to join the panel, all you need is a willingness to take part in three research topics each year and provide honest and constructive feedback. You can get involved in a number of different ways. Please find out more via our website (<https://playbook.somerset.gov.uk/our-customer-panel/>), or you can register by calling 0300 123 2224.

Somerset – make sure you get your winter vaccinations

With winter upon us, Somerset residents are being reminded to protect their health and the health of people around them by getting their flu and Covid-19 vaccinations. Covid and flu vaccinations are safe and effective ways to prevent serious illness.

If you're 50 and over, a frontline health or social care worker, pregnant, have a long-term health condition, or are a paid or unpaid carer, you are eligible for the free flu vaccine, and you can likely get the Covid-19 seasonal booster. Children aged 2-15 years old are also eligible for free flu vaccination, which is delivered through either their GP for pre-school and school for school age children – parents need to sign a consent form.

If you are eligible, you can book your seasonal Covid-19 vaccine using:

- the online booking service (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/>)
- by calling 119, or
- finding a local vaccination walk-in site (<https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-walk-in-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-site>)

If you have not yet had your earlier doses of the Covid-19 vaccine, it's not too late to come forward and you can get these at any time.

Getting both vaccines is important because more people are likely to get the flu this winter, and you're more likely to be seriously ill if you get the flu and COVID-19 at the same time.

A number of clinics across Somerset are also open for walk-ins. More details can be found at <https://nhssomerset.nhs.uk/covid-and-flu-vaccines/>

£300k boost for Somerset tree planting plans

Ambitious plans to plant thousands of new trees in Somerset have received a £300,000 funding boost. Planting significant numbers of new trees is a key part of Somerset's Climate Emergency Strategy to help the county achieve its ambition of becoming net zero by 2030.

However, this isn't as simple as just finding some spare land and putting saplings in the ground. You need to identify appropriate sites and species, develop planting and design proposals, and consult widely on the plans.

Therefore, Somerset County Council is pleased to announce it has been successful in a joint funding bid with the Exmoor National Park Authority to the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF) and has been awarded £300,000 - the maximum amount possible. The funding will be used to fund a new Tree Project Officer, a Community Empowerment Officer, and a Technical Officer over a three-year period.

They will help accelerate the delivery of tree planting in the winter seasons 2023/24 and 2024/25 and deliver on the actions set out in the Somerset Tree Strategy that is nearing completion.