



# Somerset Liberal Democrats Chard South April 2023

## Somerset Council is here – flags fly as new era dawns

Flags are flying as a new era dawns in Somerset with the official launch of Somerset Council. The new, single council's logo features on flags that are flying at council offices bringing services staff, and elected members under one umbrella. This will free up resources, including £18million every year, to protect jobs and services; grow Somerset's voice nationally; help to deliver the investment in business and infrastructure; and drive action to tackle climate change.



The change will make it easier for customers to access the services they need – there will be a single telephone number 0300 123 2224 and a single website [www.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.somerset.gov.uk). The number of Customer Access Points across Somerset is almost doubling from 12 to 19.

Somerset Council, with 110 councilors, will be one of the largest unitary councils in and its scale will enable innovative approaches to tackling the big challenges faced today.

Cllr Bill Revans, Leader of Somerset County Council, said: "This is the biggest shake up of local government in Somerset for 50 years. While people will see some immediate benefits, such as simpler ways to get in touch, there won't be a big difference right away.

"Creating a new council is a complex project that we've delivered on time and on budget. That is thanks to hardworking council staff working collaboratively for the good of our county. This exemplifies how in Somerset we get the job done."

## Council extends online support for carers with new digital service



Many Somerset residents who provide unpaid care do not access the support available to them. This could be because they do not see themselves as carers because they are simply supporting a relative, friend or neighbour who needs them to due to disability or illness.

Somerset Council has recently launched a three-month pilot project with Mobilise, an online business created by carers to help unpaid carers get the support they are entitled to. The new pilot will use social media and digital marketing to help find and identify 'unpaid carers' in Somerset and link them with the support that is available to them.

Mobilise will work directly with the existing commissioned Carers Service, including the Community Council for Somerset Agents, to ensure that targeted information will be given to carers and their families. This will include a range of online support, from website guides, regular contact through emails, guide to caring e-course to 'virtual cuppas' and even individual support calls - seven days a week. The Mobilise service is free for residents of Somerset and can be accessed via: <https://support.mobiliseonline.co.uk/somerset>

## 'Bus It' bonus as £2 single bus fare in Somerset is extended

Bus users in Somerset can now travel on most routes in the county and beyond for just £2 until July. The major fare cut is part of a national initiative funded by the Government aimed at boosting bus use while helping passengers to save money. It was introduced in January and was originally due to end on 31 March.



Now thanks to further funding it will continue for an extra three months, until 30 June. It's welcome news for people in Somerset as the cost of living crisis continues to bite, fuelled in part by high petrol and diesel prices. The £2 single fare is available from all participating operators, which includes Somerset Council. The initiative will apply to the majority of routes in Somerset until 30<sup>th</sup> June. You can check here <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/busit> to see which operators are involved in the scheme.

It's worth remembering that the initiative applies to cross-county services, which means for example you can travel from Street to Bristol for just £2.

Somerset Council and the Somerset Bus Partnership have launched the 'Bus It' campaign to encourage more people to use bus services at a time when some routes are under threat due to lack of use. It's hoped the new £2 fare will provide a major boost to patronage and support these aims.

## Organisations across Somerset unite against Child Exploitation



Organisations in Somerset are encouraging everyone to learn about the signs of child exploitation and help stop abuse in association with National Child Exploitation Awareness Day which took place on the 18th March 2023. The day aimed to highlight the issues surrounding child exploitation, encouraging people to think, spot, and speak out against abuse, and adopt a zero-tolerance attitude to adults developing inappropriate relationships with children, or children exploiting and abusing their peers.

Child exploitation is abuse that involves the manipulation and/or coercion of young people under the age of 18 into sexual activity, forced labour, money laundering, transporting drugs (known as county lines) or stealing.

People can help by recognising signs that a young person may be being exploited.

Signs can include:

- Children missing from home or education - not knowing where a child is or who they are with
- Discovering a child has been going to new places with no obvious connections
- Children spending more time online and distancing themselves from family, friends and usual activities
- Any child with unexplained bruises, cuts, burns, marks and a reluctance to seek medical attention
- Children who have increased alcohol use, drug use or self-harm
- Children with unexplained items in their possession, such as new clothing, money, phones or drugs
- Sudden changes in who a child spends time with
- Unusually secretive, fearful, withdrawn or aggressive behaviour
- Changes in clothing personal hygiene and vocabulary

Somerset Council has joined forces with its partners, Avon and Somerset Police and the NHS, to take part in community action days to raise awareness of the signs of exploitation with the public, community groups and local businesses.

If you suspect a child or young person is being abused, report it. In an emergency, always contact the police on 999. You can also contact the Police directly by dialling 101.

You can contact Children's Services on 0300 123 2224 and email at [childrens@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:childrens@somerset.gov.uk)

You can contact the NSPCC Helpline 7 days a week, via the website or by emailing [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk) or calling 0808 800 5000.

If you are on a train and notice something suspicious you can contact the British Transport Police on 61016.