

SOMERSET COUNCIL

BRIEFING SHEET

FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

JUNE 2023

Government support for Bus Services: Bus users across the County can now travel on most routes for just £2 until October 31. The major fare cut is part of the Government's initiative aimed at boosting bus use while helping passengers to save money and had been due to finish on 30 June. The Government have also announced that from 1 November fares for single journeys in the County will be capped at £2.50. The initiative also applies to cross-county services.

Road repair funding: The Government have awarded Somerset Council an additional £5.4m to carry out essential repair works across the county's road network. This year's extra funding from the Government recognises the challenges facing authorities after a year of extreme weather conditions. A blistering summer followed by a winter of sustained flooding and freezing temperatures which has led to an increase in defects on roads across the UK and with standing water getting under surfaces before freezing.

Gritting Season Ends: Somerset Council's gritting teams are standing down for the season after travelling the equivalent of twice around the world this winter. The fleet of 23 gritters were needed on 67 occasions (an increase of eight days over the previous winter season) when freezing temperatures were forecast, treating around 900 miles of road each time. The team covered 83,200 miles during the 2022/23 season, a significant increase over the previous winter season when they covered 45,000 miles. Recent winter seasons included 70,200 miles in 2020/21, 44,000 miles in 2019/20 and 32,800 miles in 2018/19. The lowest road temperature was recorded at -8.4 degrees on the A396 Exebridge on 16 December 2022. During the season, more than 9,850 tonnes of salt was utilised – almost double last year's quantity.

Repairs to Tarr Steps: Somerset Council has carried out repairs to the ancient Tarr Steps footbridge in Exmoor after some of its giant stones were washed away in floods. Known as a 'clapper bridge', Tarr Steps spans the River Barle and is a structure made up of slabs of grit stone arranged over stacks of stones without using mortar or cement. The footway is 150m long and is Grade 1 listed. It is believed to date back to the medieval period, but it's thought there could have been a structure on the spot as far back as the Bronze Age. Damage due to flooding is not unusual – this happened in 2012, 2016 and 2017.

Consultation on licensing policy: Residents and businesses are invited to comment on Somersets updated Licensing Policy which must reviewed every five years. The Policy document sets out an approach to the Council's licensing functions in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003. When the consultation has ended, the Council will consider responses and make any appropriate amendments to the Statement of Licensing Policy. The final draft will be considered and agreed at a Full Council meeting. The closing date for comments is 13 July 2023 and the consultation is available to view online <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/licensing/licensing-policy/> .

Recycling Centres: Cartons and Tetra Pak will no longer be taken at recycling sites from Monday 12th June as a result of the impact of increased kerbside collections. The move is down to the huge success of Recycle More expanded collections which mean cartons are collected from the kerb every week with the rest of the recycling. Last year Somerset recycled close to ten tonnes of cartons each month, with less than 500 kilograms having been collected across the recycling sites.

Volunteers (1): The beginning of June marks the start of the 39th year of Volunteers' Week when thousands of charities and voluntary organisations recognise the contribution volunteers make across the UK. Somerset Council has almost 1,600 volunteers with many supporting services that are so important to the county's residents of all ages from libraries and the environment to children, young people and the NHS. Volunteering opportunities are available on the Council's dedicated www.assemblevolunteers.somerset.gov.uk/opportunities .

Volunteers (2): Somerset libraries are looking for volunteers to help support this year's Summer Reading Challenge, 'Ready, Set, Read!'. The challenge, which runs across all Somerset libraries, aims to encourage children to read six books during the summer holidays, while also engaging in a host of fun events and activities, online or at their local library. In 2022, a total of 6,595 children participated in the challenge and now Somerset libraries are looking for volunteers, aged 14 and over, to help this year's challenge become another great success.

Cycle Routes: Somerset Council have produced an all-new leaflet and updated route section guidance for residents and visitors to enjoy a circular 80-mile cycle route across the south of the County. The route is fully waymarked and divided into eight sections which vary in length; with the shortest at 10.5km, Section 6 Ilminster to Merriott, and longest at 24km, Section 4 Somerton to South Petherton. The route provides detours including Cadbury Castle, Stembridge Tower Mill and Ham Hill Country Park.

Kind Regards

Cllr Tom Power & Cllr Lucy Trimnell