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**BRIEFING SHEET FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS**

**MARCH 2022**

**Coronavirus infection rates:** The Government published its Living with Covid-19 report on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2022. Under the plan

- people with Covid are not legally required to self-isolate
- however, guidance recommends that those who test positive stay at home and avoid contact with others for at least five full days
- self-isolation support payments of £500 for those on low incomes have stopped
- routine contact tracing has ended - people in contact with someone with Covid will no longer be advised to self-isolate or take daily tests
- workers are not required to tell their employer if they need to self-isolate
- face coverings are not mandatory but they are still "strongly encouraged"

From 1 April:

- PCR and lateral flow Covid tests will no longer be free for most people
- Covid passports will no longer be recommended, except for international travel
- employers will no longer have to consider Covid as a separate risk when working out how to keep employees safe

Over-75s and people with a weakened immune system are also being offered an extra Covid booster jab this spring, six months after their previous dose.

**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.

**Local Government Reorganisation:** Following the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) decision to support the move to a single Unitary Council across Somerset the Structural Changes Order were approved by the House of Commons Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> January and will now go before the Lords on or before 14<sup>th</sup> March. The first elections to the new authority together with Somerset Town and Parish elections will be held on 5th May 2022.

**County Council Revenue Budget:** Highlights of the 2022/23 Somerset budget include: An extra £18 million investment in Adults Social Care (13% increase), an extra £12 million invested in Children's Services (13% increase), an additional £8.4

million identified to invest in schools and £48 million in capital projects, including roads. Additionally there is a major investment in supporting the commitment to create a zero carbon Somerset by 2030 with £7.8 million allocated to reduce energy use in council buildings and £1 million invested in the electrifying the council fleet and building a charging infrastructure in the county. The County Council's share of Council Tax is proposed to rise by a two per cent with a further one per cent rise under the social care precept. For a home rated Band D for Council Tax this is equivalent to a rise of 78p a week.

**iAero:** A new £10m aerospace centre in Yeovil dedicated to innovation, collaboration and sustainable aviation has officially opened. The iAero project, led by Somerset County Council, is a hub for collaboration and innovation on new products. It stands next door to world-leading aerospace company Leonardo UK Ltd, a key partner in the project. The centre will be the gateway for the aerospace industry to access small and medium enterprises who are looking to collaborate and innovate on new products.

**Opportunity Boost Scheme:** A new grant has been launched to help people in Somerset overcome financial barriers when seeking employment and returning to work. The Opportunity Boost Scheme will provide grants worth up to £500 to help with the cost associated progressing into work, such as transport costs, childcare, work clothes, learning resources and training courses. The funding for the scheme has been provided through the Somerset Recovery Fund, and the initiative is being delivered in partnership between Somerset County Council and Citizens Advice Somerset. To qualify, applicants must be aged 16 or over, not be entitled to any other financial assistance for job seeking, and had a pre-Covid salary of less than £25,000. For More information visit [www.westsomersetadvice.org.uk/?p=1380](http://www.westsomersetadvice.org.uk/?p=1380)

**Half Term and Easter food support:** Somerset County Council is again working with schools to provide food vouchers to families eligible for Free School Meals to combat holiday hunger over the February half-term and Easter holidays. The Council has helped provide food vouchers to those children in need of support during the school holidays since October 2020, providing a much-needed boost to families who have felt the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. The allocation for February half-term and Easter provides vouchers worth £15 per pupil for the week and includes additional funding so that schools can also allocate vouchers to families who are in need of support but do not qualify for Free School Meals.

**Ukraine:** In addition to flying the Ukrainian flag and lighting County Hall in Yellow and Blue the County Council are offering extra support to Ukrainian members of staff and residents in Somerset. The Council stands by, ready to support the national humanitarian aid effort to relocate refugees displaced by Russian aggression.