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BRIEFING SHEET FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

APRIL 2022

Coronavirus: 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 now eligible for a Booster jab provided it is six months after their previous dose.

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 the Lords and passed into law on 17th March. The first elections to the new authority together with Somerset Town and Parish elections are being held on 5th May 2022.

Local Community Networks: The Local Government Association (LGA) has awarded a £50k funding boost to help develop Local Community Networks (LCNs) in Somerset. The grant is to develop LCNs and deliver new ways of working prior to Vesting Day, when the unitary authority officially begins. Some of the £50k will be used to facilitate three community-led LCN pilots bringing public services together with local people and other community organisations to explore opportunities around children and families; health and wellbeing; and local street scene and highways matters in the first instance.

Health Checks: NHS Health Check is a mandated SCC Public Health programme. The check is available for people aged 40 to 74 and assesses a person's 10-year risk of developing heart disease, stroke, diabetes, kidney disease or dementia. The check takes around 20-minute to complete and each person receives a comprehensive health report with their results, together with advice and support about how to maintain good health and make lifestyle changes that will help them to improve their health. The checks are available through a range of GPs, pharmacies and community locations in Somerset. More information about the Health Checks programme is available at <https://bit.ly/freehcheck>.

Road safety: Drivers are being warned by Somerset County Council's Road Safety Team of tough new legislation to punish mobile phone use at the wheel. As of Friday (25 March 2022), drivers caught using a phone while in charge of a vehicle can expect six points on their licence and a £200 fixed penalty notice. If you have only had your driving licence for less than two years, it will be revoked, and you will have to pass your test again. The Highway Code will also be changed to say that handheld phone use in traffic jams or when stationary is also illegal.

Saltlands Solar Park: A former landfill site near Bridgwater will be used to generate clean energy and save hundreds of tonnes of carbon a year. Somerset County Council's Cabinet has voted to start a procurement process to appoint a contractor to build a new solar park on the Saltlands landfill site, in the Chilton Trinity area of Bridgwater. Landfill operations at the site ceased in the 1980s and it is not suitable for most kinds of development. However, as a solar park it could generate 3,635,000 kilowatt hours of clean, renewable energy per year, save 805 tonnes of carbon per year, and play a key part in the Council's ambitions to achieve carbon neutrality in Somerset by 2030.

Ukrainian refugees: Somerset County Council has committed £250,000 to support refugees fleeing war-torn Ukraine as part of a county-wide response to the humanitarian crisis. Somerset has a proud record when it comes to welcoming refugees, with the County Council working with partners, charities and the community to help over 160 people safely resettle here since 2016. Support can include access to public services, education and health support, housing, travel, food and interpretation services. Sponsoring households may also require support. A further £50,000 was pledged for a new Somerset Ukrainian support fund. More details on actions around refugees can be found at www.somerset.gov.uk/ukraine/refugee-resettlement/