

# SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

## Report from Councillors for Curry Rivel & Langport Division 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022

### Somerset Children and Young People's Services celebrates 'Good' Ofsted rating

Somerset's Children and Young People's Services have been rated as "Good" across the board in a review of the service by national regulator Ofsted. Ofsted inspectors visited Somerset County Council in July 2022 and looked in detail at the work of the Council with those in care, care leavers and children and families with a social worker.

Ofsted found: "The Council is committed to driving up standards for Somerset's children and is rightly proud of the significant progress it has made since the last inspection in 2017."

Ofsted were particularly impressed with the Council's commitment to listening to children and families to improve services, reporting: "Leaders ensure that children are extensively engaged to help shape the future of children's services. They also consult widely and receive regular feedback, not only from children, but also from families and partner agencies. They use this to understand effectively the impact of services and to inform future service development."

For more information: <https://somersetnewsroom.com/2022/09/21/somerset-children-and-young-peoples-services-celebrates-good-ofsted-rating-rightly-proud-of-the-significant-progress-it-has-made/>

### Finance Update

The County Council budget is under very considerable pressure due to a number of factors:

- National picture of inflation affecting particularly energy costs, contract costs and pay awards. The County Council's energy bill, before increases, was £4.2million and is expected to increase by up to £5million per annum so to nearly £10 million.
- Lasting effects of the pandemic on adults and children who now need more support from Social Care, but Councils will not receive any further Covid grants from Government.
- A 'hot' labour market with difficulties of recruitment in key areas of Council statutory responsibilities including social care, legal and planning.
- Local Government Reorganisation – the move to a single Somerset Council – with considerable pressures on staff to reduce projected overspends at this time of additional work to prepare the structure of the new Council.

All the four District Councils and the County Council are working on their current year budgets to ensure the best possible outturn, which in turn will lead to a better position for the first year's budget of Somerset Council without exhausting all the reserves built up over many years.

### Innovation Zone proposal could put Somerset "at the heart of the Green energy revolution"

Councillor Bill Revans, Leader of Somerset County Council has welcomed the Chancellor's announcement that the Gravity site, just north of Bridgwater, could be part of one of the first of the Government's new Investment Zones.

Cllr Revans said: "We need to see the detail of how a new Investment Zone will work, but I am very pleased that Somerset looks like it could be a pioneer for the concept."

“With our plans for the Gravity site, our support for renewables and Hinkley Point C coming on stream later in the decade, we can put Somerset at the heart of the new Green Energy revolution. We have also identified significant growth opportunities in our other major towns. There is a prize here to be seized - and we have our eyes on that prize. “

The former Royal Ordnance Factory north of Bridgwater has been identified as a potential site for a Gigafactory. The 616-acre site has the potential for an onsite rail terminal and sits by J23 of the M5 motorway. The total project could deliver up to 7,500 skilled jobs in the County.

### **Insight and collaboration at Somerset Climate Business Summit 2022**

More than 60 local businesses joined the Somerset Business Climate Summit 2022 held at Queens College in Taunton on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> September.

The event opened with a surprise flash mob choir performance from Year 4 & 5 students from Queen’s College, who performed an inspiring and poignant rendition of Louis Armstrong’s ‘What a Wonderful World’

Over the course of the morning, delegates heard from other Somerset businesses how they have successfully reduced their carbon footprints while deriving other benefits and reduced costs in their business. The speakers provided insights on a wide range of topics relating to how businesses can reach carbon net-zero and take steps to be more sustainable and environmentally friendly.

Guest speakers from businesses of different sizes and industries, including Thatcher’s Cider, My Carbon Coach, The Field Works, South West Manufacturing Advisory Service, Trees for Good Causes, and New Leaf Design, a recently certified B Corp business, discussed topics including advice on the easiest ways for businesses to cut carbon, what Net Zero means, the journey to B Corp, and sustainable agriculture and manufacturing.

### **Somerset’s Public Health Nursing Team celebrate ‘Good’ inspection from CQC**

Somerset County Council’s Public Health Nursing (Health Visiting and School Nursing) team has been rated as ‘Good’ across all sections in a recent review of the service by inspectors at the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

The service provides community care, delivered by health visitors and school nurses across the county of Somerset and this inspection marks their first since its transfer from the NHS to Somerset County Council’s Public Health in 2019.

Inspectors observed staff demonstrating a caring and responsive approach with parents and young people and reported: “Staff treated children and young people with compassion and kindness, respected their privacy and dignity and took account of their individual needs. They provided emotional support to children and young people, families and carers. Parents told us staff were very attentive and would give them as much time as they needed. During observed interaction we saw they helped, comforted, supported and provided reassurance.”

The report also recognised the efforts of the workforce to maintain high quality care and safeguarding, commenting on their ability to understand how to protect children and young people from abuse.

### **‘Walk for a Life’ to highlight suicide prevention in Somerset**

Suicide can affect anybody: there isn’t a community in Somerset which hasn’t been touched. Somerset County Council, together with partners, including Somerset Foundation Trust, Open Mental Health and Stepladder, are helping to raise awareness of suicide at a Walk For A Life’ event taking place

on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> October. It will start at Stragglers Coffee House at Somerset County Cricket Ground at 11am.

### **Somerset's recyclers saved more than 130,000 tonnes of carbon last year**

The most recent figures chart continued progress, boosted by Somerset residents embracing the expanded Recycle More kerbside collections. Overall, Somerset recycled and reused 149,980 tonnes, pushing its recycling rate up from 52.4% to 56.2%, the highest it has ever been.

That equates to saving 133,000 tonnes of carbon saved – the same as taking 51,409 cars off the road for a year – and is up 10,000 tonnes on the previous year's figures. Tonnages of plastics have soared to 5,771, up from 4,359, thanks in large part to the inclusion of plastic pots, tubs and trays in Recycle More kerbside collections. An impressive 97.2% of material stayed in the UK to be turned into new products and packaging, including 99.4% of plastics.

These excellent figures are down to the excellent kerbside sorting by Somerset's residents. The more materials are correctly sorted into the right container, the less contaminated our recycling is and the easier it is to get recycled closer to home. The full Somerset Recycling Tracker can be found here: <https://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/recycling-tracker/>

## **HAVE YOUR SAY**

### **Local Community Networks**

A consultation regarding the development of the much-anticipated Local Community Networks (LCNs) is currently live. Somerset Council will cover a very large geographical area and so needs local committees of the council where voices can be heard, partners brought together, and decisions taken with the benefit of local knowledge and experience.

The consultation was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> September and run to 17<sup>th</sup> October, and will seek the views of parish, town & city councils, partner organisations and individuals on the function, form and name for LCNs. The responses will form an important part of the recommendations for the Somerset County Council Executive and Full Council.

For more information: <https://somerset.inconsult.uk/LCNs/consultationHome>

### **Somerset's economic future**

Residents, businesses and other groups are being asked to have their say on what the economic future holds for Somerset.

The Somerset Economic Futures project has been commissioned by Somerset County Council, Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset West and Taunton Council and South Somerset District Council.

From April 2023, the five councils will be replaced by the new unitary Somerset Council and this engagement is seen as a foundational piece of work to develop evidence and insight into our economic future in advance of preparing an economic strategy for the new organisation.

Some of the key questions being asked include:

- What roles does Somerset play within the economy of the wider region and how?
- How might our county's vulnerability to climate change affect its future economic development?

- How might its rural character affect how we promote social mobility?
- How might Somerset be impacted by social changes such as trends in homeworking?

For more information: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/business-and-economy/somerset-futures/>

### **An opportunity for Parent Carers to help shape the future of SEND in Somerset**

Somerset County Council, NHS Somerset and Somerset Parent Carer Forum are inviting families as well as school leads, education, and health professionals to join a webinar this October to help shape the future of Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) in Somerset.

The partnership is currently in the process of developing a Somerset SEND strategy for the next three years. This will outline the focus areas and action points that will inform us to develop our services.

The partnership has identified five 'working themes', each has been informed by feedback from families:

- Listening, hearing, and responding
- Working together and co-ordinating
- Getting help as early as possible
- Accessing the right support and provision
- Preparing for the future

For more information: <https://somersetnewsroom.com/2022/09/26/an-opportunity-for-parent-carers-to-help-shape-the-future-of-send-in-somerset/>

### **Help influence what Somerset's future landscapes will look like**

Opinions are being sought from experts and non-experts alike, from people who deal with trees in their work every day, to those who walk the dog in a woodland occasionally - and everyone else in between. The consultation will inform a long-term Tree Strategy for Somerset to ensure planting and woodland management is fit for the future and supports the area's ecology, landscape and its people.

The four District Councils (Somerset West and Taunton, Mendip, Sedgemoor, and South Somerset) and Somerset County Council, are working with consultants Evolving Forest, and stakeholders The Woodland Trust, Somerset Local Nature Partnership, the Environment Agency, The Forestry Commission, Quantock Hills AONB, Exmoor National Park and Somerset Wildlife Trust, to help develop the strategy.

Growing, protecting and restoring Somerset's trees and woodlands will be the focus, as these measures will help reduce carbon emissions, encourage biodiversity and nature recovery, grow our sustainable timber market, and improve people's health and wellbeing.

To complete the consultation visit: [A Strategy for Somerset's Trees \(google.com\)](#) by 21 October 2022

### **Restricted byway order given for Huish Drove, Frog Lane & Park Lane**

After walking this route, which has been blocked by a local landowner for many years, the council's Regulation Committee made an order for the route to be opened to walkers and riders of horses and bicycles. Cllr Mike Stanton walked the route and made representations at the committee meeting. The Landowner has the right to appeal against this decision

### **Somerset Rivers Authority**

The authority decided at its September board meeting to approve a new set of strategic objectives and to work further on a revised strategy for flood alleviation: see website:

<https://www.somersetiversauthority.org.uk/> CR&L Cllr Mike Stanton chairs the authority.

### **Independent Learning Centres**

These are now open at Wellington and Shepton Mallett: they offer all kinds of adaptations and gadgets to help people with disabilities, including ageing issues, to live confidently and well in their own homes.

### **Active Travel Group**

The Active Travel Steering Group met on 22<sup>nd</sup> of September attended by Mathew Prince (SCC Officer) and Matt McFeat (PJA Ltd). Progress on the current route has continued at pace. A new route from Langport to Huish Episcopi to be researched by PJA Ltd would also commence, with new links to Drayton to be discussed. Mathew Prince expressed that he will be using this project as model for rural Active travel. Cllr Richard Wilkins represented the community.