

## **SOMERSET COUNCILLORS REPORT - JUNE 2023**

### **Curry Rivel & Langport Division**

#### **Mike Stanton & Richard Wilkins**

#### **Another 'Bus It' bonus as £2 single bus fare in Somerset is extended to the autumn**

Bus users in Somerset can now travel on most routes in the county for just £2 until October 31.

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 due to finish on 30 June having been extended from the end of March.

Now thanks to further funding it will continue for another four months and from 1 November fares for single journeys in the county will be capped at £2.50. 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. The initiative will apply to the majority of routes in Somerset until 31 October.

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 extended £2 fare will provide a continuing boost to patronage and support these aims.

Since the introduction of the £2 fare cap along with other initiatives in Somerset there's been nearly a 15 per cent increase in bus usage across the county.

Visit the Somerset Council website to find out about ticket deals and calculate how much you could save: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/bus-it-you-know-it-makes-sense/>

#### **Somerset plugs into new era of EV charging**

Somerset Council is to be allocated nearly £4m of government funding to expand the county's electrical vehicle charging network.

A business case will be produced to unlock £3.7m from the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund which will be used fill in the gaps in Somerset's rapidly expanding EV charging network.

Data from Gov.uk indicates that there are now nearly 300 public accessible EV charging points within Somerset, which represents a 30% increase since the summer of 2022.

Of these, 117 have been provided by the five previous councils in Somerset and the LEVI funding could add another 200 or more.

Somerset Council's role is to work with the ChargePoint industry to improve the rollout of local charging infrastructure to ensure that there is good distribution and access for the 27% of Somerset homes that do not have off-street parking.

As part of the LEVI process, potential on street charging locations will be mapped, and as all locations are different, and there are a variety of charging solutions, the aim is to make sure the right charge points are available in the right locations.

The network will include car parks and on-street locations, as well as addressing the charging needs of our more rural communities, and tourist destinations.

Planning for this network is underway, and if approved the first charge points being funded in this way could start being installed from summer 2024.

### **Somerset Council explores ‘invest to save, invest to improve’ programme for Adult Services**

Somerset Council is considering undertaking a major transformation of how it delivers Adult Social Care in the county.

The proposals describe how, as part of a review procured in November 2022, major opportunities have been identified to provide care that focuses more on promoting people’s independence, improving outcomes for Somerset residents and driving savings in the costs of care services.

The review identified opportunities to focus more intensely on preventative services, community support and ‘reablement’ support for people leaving hospital. The proposals could lead to:

- 700 more people benefiting from reablement every year.
- 200,000+ fewer hours of homecare needing to be commissioned every year.
- 80 fewer residential placements needing to be commissioned every year.
- 100 adults with a learning disability moving out of a residential home and back into the community.

The ‘diagnostic review’ of care services, carried out by Newton Europe, identified opportunities to deliver recurring savings of £14.2m per year, stretching to a possible £17.2m. The majority of the savings would be delivered by more effective demand management. The council is now discussing commissioning Newton Europe to support a transformation programme at the cost of £3.5m a year for two years, but with guaranteed recurring savings of £10million per year. The current budget for Adult Social Care in Somerset is £186 million and accounts for 38% of the council’s revenue budget.

## **Road deaths decrease in Somerset**

Fatalities on Somerset's roads decreased from 25 to 21 over the 2022 calendar year.

Whilst the drop is welcome, Somerset Council's Lead Member for Transport and Digital Cllr Mike Rigby has stressed the need for all road users to think safety first.

The Council's road safety team receives police reports following injury collisions and carries out research to identify trends from them. They then look to improve safety across Somerset's network by analysing the data through the detailed annual Road Casualty Review.

Evidence shows that most collisions involve one or more of the "fatal five" behaviours of Intoxicated driving (drink or drugs), Careless/Inconsiderate driving, Excessive speed, Mobile Phone use and Failing to wear a seatbelt. In 2022, 15 (75%) of the fatal collisions had a link to one of these behaviours recorded by the Police.

Of rising concern across the whole Avon and Somerset Police Area is a notable increase in the number of fatal collisions recording at least one vehicle crossing a road into the path of another one. In 2022, 10 (50%) of the collisions recorded involved this type of manoeuvre.

In 2022, two deaths occurred on our Trunk Roads, 10 on A roads, three on B roads and five on our C class and Unclassified roads. Most of the collisions occurred on rural sections of the highway network.

Of the collisions, analysis shows that 10 (50%) incidents, occurred in Sedgemoor District, five in Mendip, four in South Somerset and one in Somerset West & Taunton.

## **Council secures extra £5.4m for road maintenance after a year of challenges**

Somerset Council has netted 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 unprecedented challenges facing authorities after a year of extreme weather conditions.

A blistering summer followed by a winter of sustained flooding and freezing temperatures has led to a huge increase in defects on roads across the UK with standing water getting under surfaces and then freezing.

By no means the worst hit, Somerset has a major programme of works to tackle. In January alone 4,347 safety defects (potholes, blocked gullies and other damage) were reported – nearly 50 per cent up on 2022. In total there were 27,671 safety defects for 2022/23, up 3,500 on the previous year. There has been the additional challenge of recent flash flooding.

If you spot a problem on the road you can report it quickly and easily using our online report it function:

<https://staging.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/report-a-problem-on-the-road/>

## **A recycling result to celebrate on Somerset Day**

New figures released on Somerset Day show that nine out of ten households in the county are now recycling.

Looking at a representative sample of more than 3,000 homes in March this year, 91% were found to be actively recycling and sorting items into their boxes and Bright Blue Bag.

That is up from the 85% when this analysis was last carried out five years ago.

And when it comes to food waste recycling the improvements are even better, with 72% of households recycling compared to 62% in the 2018 survey. Industry experts WRAP consider 55% to be a high participation rate for food waste for recycling.

Somerset Council is committed to a greener, more sustainable county and these latest 'participation analysis' results show that more residents than ever feel the same.

Sorting materials for collection produces high-quality recycling that is easier to get turned into new goods and packaging in the UK. Thanks to the efforts of residents, in 2021-22 an impressive 97.2% of the material collected from Somerset's kerbsides was recycled in the UK.

Sorting recycling also speeds up collections, making life easier for crews and reducing the chance of missed collections.

Since the 2018 research was carried out, Somerset has seen the successful Slim My Waste, Feed My Face campaign aimed at increasing food waste recycling.

Somerset has also successfully introduced its expanded Recycle More collections which have reduced refuse and driven up recycling.

For more information and news about Somerset Council's Waste Services visit [www.somerset.gov.uk/waste](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/waste) and follow @somersetwaste on Facebook and Twitter.

## **Somerset celebrates repair and reuse as the Fixy initiative turns one**

Somerset's Fixy initiative celebrated its first birthday last month, having started the repair and reuse conversation with nearly 3,000 people since its launch last May.

The celebrations coincide with this year's, 'The Big Fix', a month of repair and reuse activities that started in Devon and is spreading across the UK.

The Fixy project encourages Somerset residents to repair and reuse, focusing on giving new life to electricals but also bang the drum for wider repair and reuse.

The team has attended over 80 events during the last 12 months, speaking to more than 2,900 people about the benefits of breathing new life into old items.

Many of these have been alongside or promoting Somerset's thriving network of volunteer repair groups, highlighting their great work and encouraging more volunteers to get involved.

Fixy also runs a 'tech take back' service, accepting donations of unwanted or broken smart tech, such as laptops, tablets, smartphones. Donations are data-wiped and repaired as necessary by Somerset specialists DonateIT, and passed onto schools, community groups and families who need them. Since it launched in May 2022, over 1,500 items have been reused in this way.

## **British Empire Medals awarded in Somerset**

Three Somerset 'Community Champions' have been awarded British Empire Medals at a ceremony held in Taunton.

The Lord-Lieutenant of Somerset, Mohammed Saddiq, handed out the medals to Andrew Samuel from Taunton, David Scott from Williton, and William Mellersh from Stanton Drew.

The British Empire Medal (BEM) is awarded on behalf of the Monarch for "hands on" service to the local community over a period of time.

**Andrew Samuel** received his award for services to the community in Somerset, particularly during the COVID 19 pandemic. Mr Samuel was one of the founding members of the Coronavirus Community Support Group in Taunton. He galvanised a group of volunteers to deliver leaflets to 1,000 homes with contact numbers for essential services.

He developed software and training for volunteers enabling a support line to be operational 12 hours a day. He also identified the need for a safer, local shopping environment as people began to emerge from lockdown. So, with others, he set up a local, not-for-profit community shop close to a retirement village.

**David Scott** received his award for services to countryside conservation and heritage. Mr Scott has volunteered since 1976 when he began to work as a Cotswold Warden.

Following his retirement from teaching in 2017, he moved to Somerset where he became a Volunteer Ranger with the Quantock Hills AONB. He also works for the Minehead Woodland Group and volunteers on the West Somerset Railway. In total he has contributed more than 40 years of selfless service to his communities.

**William Mellersh** received his award for services to the sport of badminton in the Bristol area. In 2010 he successfully formed the Chew Valley Junior Badminton Club. His goal was to create a welcoming atmosphere where everyone could enjoy the sport, regardless of ability.

The club currently has around 150 members, many now playing at county or league level. Mr Mellersh remains the club's head coach. He has now expanded the remit of the club to offer opportunities to both men and women, enabling families to participate in the sport together.

## **Somerset's new coastal festival set to make waves this autumn**

A celebration of the county's coast is at the heart of the Somerset and Exmoor Coast Festival which launches this autumn.

The England Coast Path team at Somerset Council unveiled plans for the new event, which it's hoped will boost tourism numbers by shining a spotlight on one of the jewels in the county's crown.

The very first Somerset and Exmoor Coast Festival is centred around walks on the county's iconic coastal routes and is set to take place from Saturday 23 September to Sunday 1 October 2023. Eateries, B&Bs, galleries and other hospitality providers along the route will be encouraged to come aboard and support the festival in bid to cement its place as a permanent fixture on the county's calendar.

The event provides an excellent opportunity to walk the entire coast of Somerset, from Brean to Porlock Weir and celebrate its National Trail status. Visitors can also participate in guided walks that explore the coastal countryside from hubs along the route.

You can find out more by visiting [www.somersetcoastfestival.co.uk](http://www.somersetcoastfestival.co.uk) or follow the festival on Facebook @somersetcoastfestival

To get involved in the festival contact the England Coast Path team at Somerset Council on 01823 359795 or email [info@somersetcoastfestival.co.uk](mailto:info@somersetcoastfestival.co.uk)

## **Another busy season ends for Somerset's gritters**

Somerset Council's gritting teams are standing down for the season after travelling the equivalent of over two times 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 to help prevent ice forming with 2058 route actions in total.

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. Previous 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 – with additional salt ordered to maintain stock levels.

## Changes to Somerset Council Executive Leadership Team

Somerset Council has made key changes to the Executive Leadership Group of the Council.

The Executive, confirmed at the Annual Council Meeting on Wednesday 24 May, is:

- Cllr Bill Revans - Leader and Lead Member for Governance and Communications
- Cllr Liz Leyshon - Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance
- Cllr Tessa Munt - Lead Member for Children, Families and Education
- Cllr Dean Ruddle - Lead Member for Adult Social Care
- Cllr Mike Rigby - Lead Member for Transport and Digital
- Cllr Adam Dance – Lead Member for Public Health, Equalities and Diversity
- Cllr Theo Butt Philip - Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources
- Cllr Sarah Dyke - Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change
- Cllr Ros Wyke - Lead Member for Economy, Planning and Assets
- Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts – Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture

Members of the Executive will be supported by the following Associate Lead Members:

- Cllr Fran Smith – Associate Lead Member for Adults Social Care, and Housing
- Cllr Oliver Patrick - Associate Lead Member for Communications
- Cllr Jo Roundell Greene - Associate Lead Member for Education Strategy
- Cllr Val Keitch - Associate Lead Member for Localities (LCNs) and Public Health
- Cllr Tom Deakin - Associate Lead Member for Performance
- Cllr David Woan - Associate Lead Member for Business Partnerships
- Cllr Sarah Wakefield - Associate Lead Member for Commercial Investments and Risk
- Cllr Nicola Clark - Associate Lead Member for Leisure and Culture
- Cllr Dixie Darch - Associate Lead Member for Climate Change and Active Travel
- Cllr Heather Shearer – Associate Lead Member for Children's Social Care and Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

## GET INVOLVED

### Volunteer with Somerset Council

The Coronation of HM King Charles III gave volunteering the Royal seal of approval with the Big Help Out attracting thousands of people to give up their time to support others.

Now Somerset Council wants to build on that support by encouraging more people to come forward and lend a hand – and there is a wide range of opportunities on offer.

Some of those opportunities include:

**Volunteer Driver** – This role involves supporting adults and young people get to and from things like non-emergency medical appointments and school. This is ideal for anybody over 18 with a full UK driving licence and four-door car; particularly those who enjoy driving and meeting new people. Patients and passengers appreciate the opportunity to chat to their drivers too, since some live in remote or isolated situations.

**Route1 Advocacy** - Adults are needed across the county to give a helping hand to children and young people who may need a bit of extra support by becoming advocates or independent visitors. Advocates offer short-term one-to-one support to assist a child or young person have a voice at meetings concerning their wellbeing or care. Independent visitors befriend and spend time with a child or young person who is in the care of the Local Authority.

**Libraries** – There are loads of opportunities with local libraries across the county including, the Home Library Service which enables those who are not able to travel to their local library to still use its services. These roles include supporting events in libraries, supporting people to improve their digital skills and helping with this year's Summer Reading Challenge.

**Rights of Way** – Opportunities include helping keep your favourite local walk clear from vegetation as an Adopt-a-Path Volunteer to commenting on consultations and draft policy documents as part of the Somerset Local Access forum and others in between.

There are even more opportunities available on the Council's dedicated volunteering website where people can find the currently available and regularly updated opportunities. Keep checking back at <https://assemblevolunteers.somerset.gov.uk/opportunities>

To keep up to date with latest news around Volunteering with Somerset County Council, please like and follow us here [www.facebook.com/volunteeringatsomersetcouncil](http://www.facebook.com/volunteeringatsomersetcouncil).



## **Have your say on the Council's Licensing Policy**

Somerset Council is inviting residents and businesses to comment on its updated Licensing Policy.

A consultation is now open for six weeks until 13 July 2023, and you can have your say here:

<https://sومersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/licensing/licensing-policy/>

Somerset Council must review its Statement of Licensing Policy 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 here:

<https://sومersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/licensing/licensing-policy/>

Alternatively, you can request a printed copy by emailing [consultations@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:consultations@somerset.gov.uk) with your details.