

Somerset Council Report to Croscombe Parish Council meeting Tuesday 24th October 2023

First, my apologies that I am not able to attend the Croscombe Parish Council meeting this evening. I have a clash with a full council meeting of Shepton Mallet Town Council of which I am an elected member.

Leisure

You may be aware that Shepton Mallet Leisure Centre closed at the end of January this year. The Leisure Centre is part of the Whitstone School campus and is wholly owned by Whitstone Academy Trust. The decision to close the Leisure Centre was made by the Trustees of Whitstone Academy, claiming low footfall and hence viability as reason and that the school needed to re-purpose the building and site as a SEND facility. Many Shepton Mallet residents agree that this decision was all of peremptory, made without consultation with the local community and has left Shepton Mallet and the surrounding area short of leisure provision. There has been no transparency in the justifications for the decision. The school has brushed off any attempt to discuss the issue directly with them since.

I have not brought this issue to Croscombe Parish Council before now. The purpose here is to gauge whether Croscombe residents have been affected adversely by this decision and whether Croscombe Parish Council wishes to add to the clamour that the decision to close be reversed and the building be returned to its original purpose as a leisure centre.

I will welcome any contact and comments about this.

Planning

The cycle of monthly planning east committee meetings is now established. They are invariably the first Tuesday of each month in the Shape Council Chamber at 2 p.m.

If applications go for determination at committee it is because there is controversy involved, in particular where the opinion of the local parish council differs from the recommendation of the case planning officer. For that reason it is important that a member of the Parish Council attends the Planning East Committee to register to speak and present the Parish Council view on a relevant application.

A recent case in point is the meeting held on Tuesday 3rd October 2023. There was a Croscombe Parish application on the agenda for determination. Our Chair Councillor Hilary Shergold attended and presented the Parish Council position most eloquently. The meeting approved the application against case officer recommendation. Being there and speaking to it can make a difference!

Local Community Network (LCN)

By the time of this meeting LCN Area Shepton (Area 3) will have had its second meeting on Wednesday 31st July, at 7pm at Ashwick & Oakhill Village Hall. A hybrid format will be trialled. If successful it will no doubt be repeated at other venues in the LCN area. Chair Councillor Hilary Shergold has agreed to attend as your representative.

With this report I attach the minutes of the meeting which took place on Monday 31st July 2023.

Schools

For parents of children moving to secondary and upper schools:

The application website for parents and carers of children moving to Secondary and Upper Schools is now open and parents and carers can apply for places for their children from now until 31 October 2023. Please visit:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/children-families-and-education/applying-for-school/starting-at-a-secondary-or-upper-school-in-september/>

For parents and carers of children who are new starters at their first school:

The application website for parents and carers of children starting school for the first time opens on 25 September until 15 January 2024. Please visit: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/children-families-and-education/applying-for-school/apply-to-start-school-for-the-first-time>

Parents and carers of new starters are advised to read the Primary Admissions Guide before making an application. The guide can be accessed at <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/children-families-and-education/applying-for-school/primary-admissions-guide/>

In helping children get ready to start school, parents and carers can find advice on school readiness at www.cypsomersethealth.org

Parents and carers can also get help to access free early education at

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/children-families-and-education/early-years-and-childcare/finding-childcare/>

For parents and carers of children moving to junior and middle schools:

Junior and middle school applications can be made from 25 September until 15 January at <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/children-families-and-education/applying-for-school/starting-at-a-junior-or-middle-school/>

Any parent who does not have online access can telephone the Somerset Council customer contact number on 0300 123 2224.

Shortly before the deadlines, reminder emails and/or letters will be sent to parents and carers of new starters who have not yet applied. However, the responsibility for getting applications in on time lies with parents and carers.

Up to three preferences can be made. Parents are advised to use all three preferences and consider including their catchment school. Outcomes will be sent to parents and carers via email on 1 March 2024, National Offer Day.

The webpage www.somerset.gov.uk/admissions holds a wealth of related information including a directory of schools, catchment areas and admissions policies.

The start of work to build Somerset's first ever carbon net zero school was marked with a timber framing ceremony after land at the Orchard Grove housing development in Taunton was handed from the Orchard Grove Consortium to Somerset Council.

Orchard Grove Primary School is expected to welcome staff and students from September 2024. Sponsored by Castle Partnership Trust, the School will offer places to 420 pupils from Reception to year 6, as well as 52 nursery places and feature three sports pitches, a production kitchen and a library. It will serve the surrounding communities and the design allows for an extension to accommodate a further 210 children if these are needed in the future.

Funded by Somerset Council as part of their School Growth Programme, the £12.3million build will incorporate solar panel technology, air source heat pumps and electric vehicle charging points in line with the Council's commitment to decarbonisation.

Environment

In a letter to the Minister for Net Zero, Somerset Council's Lead Member for Climate and Environment has voiced her "frustration" at recent changes to green policy.

Writing to the Rt Hon Graham Stuart MP, Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero, Councillor Dixie Darch said she fears the changes announced last week will "seriously jeopardise Somerset's and the UK's ability to reach Net Zero."

Cllr Darch, advised September's Full Council meeting that the letter had been sent. In it she said Somerset was at the "sharp end" of the effects of climate change and urged a rethink to the changes which included a delay to the ban of new non-electric vehicles and a removal of the need for landlords to make properties energy efficient.

"This is an issue that must transcend party politics - it is too important and too urgent," said Cllr Darch. "The shift in policy undermines our work in Somerset, in practical terms and in the message it sends to the public about the commitment of elected members of all political parties to address the climate emergency.

"Rather than stepping back from policies, action needs to be stepped up – not just in reducing carbon emissions, but in investing in adapting to the effects of climate change."

All of Somerset's local authorities declared Climate Emergencies before becoming the unitary Somerset Council in April. The new council has formally declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency and is working to deliver on a Climate Strategy that covers energy, transport, waste and the natural environment.

Recent successes include the launch of a ten year tree strategy, a rapid expansion of the county's EV charging network and a successful bid to fund work to assist the uptake of energy efficient home improvements.

Every piece of plastic Somerset Council collected from households and via the recycling sites last year was recycled in the UK.

The 6,500 tonnes of plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays all went to UK companies to be turned into new products and packaging – everything from plastic wrapping and compost bins to fleece jackets.

The figure is up from 99.4% the previous year and features in Somerset Council's annual Recycling Tracker which will be released next week for Somerset Recycling Week.

The tracker shows what happens to every tonne of household waste - where it goes, the companies involved and the likely use, the latest tracker will be published online later in September, at: www.somerset.gov.uk/recycling-tracker

In Somerset, most types of plastic, including bottles, pots, tubs and trays can be recycled with kerbside collections using the Bright Blue Bag.

Somerset Council is one of a handful of authorities taking part in a national trial of the kerbside collection of plastic bags and wrapping. This is working well in the small sample of properties in Frome and the aim is to expand it in years to come.

With the high level of energy prices continuing Somerset Council is taking action to help businesses to reduce their carbon emissions and, in turn, save money.

The 'Go Green Scheme' and the 'Somerset Green Business Grant Scheme' are being introduced to offer businesses practical help and financial support to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions.

Launching this month the 'Go Green' Scheme is being delivered by the Net Zero specialist consultancy Balanced Energy and will help eligible Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) to understand their energy consumption and show how it can be reduced. The scheme offers free energy audits and support to develop individual, costed and prioritised sustainability plans.

For SMEs who already have sustainability plans in place, the Somerset Green Business Grant Scheme can provide financial assistance to take forward identified measures to reduce energy consumption and costs as well as carbon emissions. Grants can be capital and/or revenue and fund up to 50% of total eligible project costs, with the remainder funded by the applicant.

The grant scheme is now open for applications for activity and expenditure which must be completed by end of March 2024. The deadline for submission is 31st October.

The Go Green Scheme and Green Business Grant Schemes are receiving around £200,000 in 2023/24 from the UK Government from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Further information on the Go Green Scheme 'empowering Somerset businesses to go greener' is available at www.gogreenscheme.org.uk/go-green-scheme

Further information on the Somerset Green Business Grant Scheme is available at <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/business-economy-and-licences/funding-and-grants-for-business/>

For businesses who are not ready to make an application for funding this year Somerset Council expects further grant opportunities for similar project activity to be announced in early 2024.

More than four tonnes of plastic bags and wrapping have been collected for recycling as part of Somerset Council's role in a national project to expand recycling collections.

The small-scale pilot involving 3,600 homes across two locations in Frome started at the end of May and is already proving a success.

Residents in the trial areas are asked to put their flexible plastics, such as bread bags and confectionary packets, into a recyclable blue plastic bag for collection on their usual weekly recycling day.

Somerset Council put itself forward to be part of the £2.9m FlexCollect project which involves nine local authorities across England and is being managed in partnership with SUEZ Recycling and Recovery UK.

The trial aims to inform government and industry on how plastic bags and wrapping should be added to existing household collection services. The full cost of the pilot service is funded by the Flexible Plastic Fund and the government. The only costs to the council are time and resources.

Only those who were written to directly can take part. It is expected it will be expanded to more Somerset homes next year, following further monitoring of the trial.

Trading Standards is reminding businesses, such as takeaways, sandwich bars, care homes and retailers who supply certain single use plastic items, that a ban comes into force this October and they should start thinking now about alternatives and where to source them from.

The Government has announced a ban on a wide range of plastic items that is expected to come into effect from 1 October 2023.

It means that from October, businesses across England will not be able to supply certain single use plastic items to the end user.

The ban includes all single use plastic cutlery, trays, plates, bowls, and balloon sticks, as well as banning the use of certain types of polystyrene cups and food containers used to supply food which is ready to consume.

It is estimated that England uses 2.7 billion items of single use cutlery each year, and 721 million single use plates. Only 10% of these items are recycled

Transport

The medieval village of Dunster has become the latest location to benefit from the Council's rollout of electric vehicle charging points.

The 22kW fast charge point is located in Dunster Steep car park. It has become one of 305 publicly accessible charge points in Somerset, a figure that has increased 40.5% from 217 in June 2022.

Of these, 117 have been provided by the five previous councils in Somerset, achieved through public, private and grant funding, in particular the Government led 'On Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme' (ORCS).

The expansion of EV charging is part of Somerset Council's commitment to a greener and more sustainable travel strategy.

Earlier this year the Council submitted an expression of interest to secure £3.8m from the Government's 'Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure' (LEVI) fund and recently received confirmation that it cleared the initial stage.

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 late 2024.

Find a charge point location near you: <https://www.zap-map.com/live/>.

British Telecommunications (BT) has been fined for carrying out work on Somerset's highway network without adequate traffic management or a valid street works permit.

The works were carried out last March on Ilminster Road in Ruishton.

The utility firm was fined £12,000 and ordered to pay costs of £3,158, plus a £2,000 victim surcharge by Taunton Magistrates after it pleaded guilty to offences under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 and Traffic Management Permit Scheme (England). The total penalty was £17,154.

In passing sentence, the court gave full credit to BT for guilty pleas entered at the earliest opportunity and accepted the mitigation submitted by the firm. However, it found aggravating factors in that the works had no advance warning signage to warn the public of the site's presence and it was deficient in any pedestrian safety.

Due to the disregard for the NRSWA 1991 the court found that there was a high risk of danger to pedestrians and road users alike. The court also took into account that BT has previous convictions for similar offences committed both within Somerset and nationwide within the past 7 years.

Local businesses can now take advantage of some of the busiest spots on Somerset's road network to advertise socially responsible goods and services.

Somerset Council is one of the first local authorities in the UK to develop an ethical advertising policy in line with the county's climate emergency strategy and public health concerns.

The space is available for advertising a wide range of goods and services which do not need to be specifically promoting sustainability or wellbeing, but the ethical advertising policy means that the Council will not sanction certain adverts such as those promoting junk food, fossil fuels, gambling or consumption of alcoholic drinks.* A full list of the criteria is available here:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/advertising-on-roundabouts/>

The money generated by the initiative will go back into the Council's highways maintenance budget.

Signage and positioning on the roundabouts is subject to a strict safety audit and will at the same time help to prevent unofficial 'fly notices' which are put up without permission.

The plan has the potential to reach thousands of people every day, and businesses can visit here to find out more or book on the link above.

*Whilst producers of alcoholic products are not excluded, particularly local based industries, advertisements of the alcoholic products themselves will not be permitted.

Suicide Prevention

Somerset Council's 'Walk for a Life' event, aimed at raising awareness of suicide prevention, returned on Saturday 9 September.

Starting at the Castle House at the Museum of Somerset at 10:30am, crowds gathered to take the mile long walk through Taunton's Town Centre, passing through meaningful locations to commemorate those impacted by suicide within the County.

The walk paused in Vivary Park for a moment of reflection and to lay flowers at the 'Afterlife' bench donated by Netflix and CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably).

The event was attended by nearly 100 people and was organised by Somerset Council's Public Health team in partnership with various organisations across the county.

The event's key focus was on the theme of 'Creating Hope Through Action' to address the critical issue of suicide prevention and provide support to those affected.

Participants were given a free back sign from the Walk for a Life team, which they could personalise in remembrance of a loved one.

Following the walk, participants were invited back to Castle House at the Museum of Somerset where there were refreshments provided and local organisations on hand to chat about their services and provide support.

Leading up to the event, members of the public were invited to share their inspiring quotes, lyrics, or poems that have helped them during challenging times in their lives. These have been published in a 'Book of Hope' and can be read here: <https://walkforalife.org.uk/book-of-hope/>

Support for those dealing with mental health challenges or suicidal thoughts is readily available through organisations like Open Mental Health. To explore various support options, visit www.openmentalhealth.org.uk.

Cyber security

Cyber experts from across industry and government gathered together to discuss the increasing importance of cyber security at a sold out event on 26 September.

Alongside Baroness Nicky Morgan and the Avon & Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner, Mark Shelford, guest speakers included cyber experts from Microsoft, Leonardo, Quoram Cyber, C3iA Solutions, Cysiam, Securious, and the UK Hydrographic Office.

Organised by the South West Business Council the event also allowed guests the opportunity to get a sneak preview of Somerset Council's inspirational Firepool Centre for Digital Innovation in Taunton.

The centre is due to be launched early in 2024, and represents an £11 million public investment, with external funding from the European Union Regional Development Fund, the UK Government and the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.

The Cyber Resilience Centre for the South West is directly funded by the Home Office and regional policing to help businesses and charities in the region become more cyber resilient.

Young people

From this month, young people aged 11 – 17 who live in Somerset or go to school, college or a youth club here have the opportunity to influence change by nominating themselves to stand for election as a Member of the Youth Parliament (MYP).

Nominations are open, and the deadline closes on midnight Sunday 12th November. Somerset's MYPs represent 3 areas - Taunton Deane & Somerset West, Bridgwater & Sedgemoor, and South Somerset & Mendip. Those wishing to stand should visit: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/children-families-and-education/the-local-offer/having-your-voice-heard/democracy-and-young-people/>

Somerset's 3 elected Youth Parliamentarians and their deputies represent Somerset at the national UK Youth Parliament. The County's current MYPs will hand over to the newly elected MYPs from January to March next year, and their new term of office runs from March 2024 until February 2026.

MYPs are supported by an Advisory Group of self-selected young people aged 11 to 18 from all backgrounds. They bring a range of experiences, opinions and abilities, and Group members take part in consultations, decision making, planning and grant giving, as well as campaigning on their chosen manifestos.

MYPs are elected by local young people in the schools, colleges and youth clubs who've registered an interest. Young people can also ask how they can vote by emailing the Youth Parliament team at YouthParliament@somerset.gov.uk.

All local 11- 17 year olds can register to vote for 3 candidates in total, 1 from each area. Voting takes place from Monday 13th November to Friday 15th December. Candidates are notified of the results by Wednesday 20th December, followed by a public announcement in early January 2024.

Information sessions take place on Thursday 28th September and Wednesday 4th October from 5.30 to 7pm via Zoom. These give potential candidates, parents and carers, teachers, tutors and community youth workers the chance to meet current members of Youth Parliament and the Advisory Group, and to ask questions about what's involved. To book a space, visit: <https://forms.office.com/e/W5mrh49ngb>

All candidates need to attend an 'Election Information and Development Day' on Saturday 9th December at Donyatt Village Hall, Ilminster TA19 0RG. They'll take part in activities and workshops about understanding 'Youth Voice' and influence, representation, running a campaign and public speaking.

All candidates get a certificate and recognition of their participation and learning, and are invited to join the Advisory Group. They get the same support and development opportunities as successfully elected MYPs, and opportunities to run projects alongside the official campaigns.

Somerset celebrated half a century of music-making when the current members of the County Youth Orchestra and the Concert Band joined forces with former members to present a varied programme of music to mark the milestone anniversary.

More than 100 performers gathered at the Johnson Hall, Millfield School in Street to celebrate 50 years since the formation of both ensembles, proving that that music-making still flourishes in Somerset five decades on.

The large and enthusiastic audience was treated to a mix of popular and standard classical pieces. Both the Orchestra, conducted by Andrew Sherwood and the Concert Band, conducted by Paul Denegri, showed that the players were equally at home in the 'lighter' music as in the 'serious' pieces. Both conducted the mass ensemble pieces

Voting

Somerset residents are being urged to check their electoral registration details or risk losing their chance to vote on decisions that affect them.

The annual canvass allows Somerset Council to keep the electoral register up to date, to identify who risks losing their voice at elections, and to encourage them to register before it is too late.

The Council is legally required to undertake this annual canvass of all of the residential properties in the area, to make sure that the information on the electoral register for every address is accurate and up to date.

Letters are now going out to an initial 83,000 households across the County. All other households will be written to later this month, so residents do not need worry if they do not receive a letter in the coming weeks. The correspondence will be addressed to the occupier and includes full details of what steps to take.

If residents tell the Council there are new people eligible to be registered at their address, they will receive an 'invitation to register form' either through the post (or via email, if this contact method has been provided). They can also go online to register to vote: <https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>

Recent home movers are urged to check their details. Electoral Commission research has found that recent home movers are less likely to be registered than those who have lived at the same address for a long time. In Great Britain, 92% of those who have lived in their home for 16 years will be registered, compared with 36% of people who have lived at an address for less than a year.

More information on registering to vote is available on the Electoral Commission website: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter> .

Living in Somerset

Invest Somerset is looking for a wide range of people who are passionate about living and working in Somerset and willing to champion the county as a top business location.

Set up by Somerset Council and Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HotSW) Invest Somerset aims to increase economic growth in the county. It offers a one-stop shop approach to facilitate more jobs and investment and works closely with people at key organisations who can support relocation and expansion projects.

The role of an Ambassador is simple but important. Ambassadors will champion Somerset by sharing positive views and experiences of growing up, being educated, working or relocating businesses here. By using their own networks and endorsing and sharing news and campaigns Ambassadors will help to spread the positive message about the county.

If you are interested in becoming an Ambassador a range of support and materials are available on the website www.investsomerset.co.uk. For further information please email the Inward Investment Team at enquiries@investsomerset.co.uk

Residents and businesses in Somerset are being urged to help shape the future of their county and have their say on how best to create places that put people at the heart of their design.

Somerset Council is launching a public consultation to seek opinions on a set of outline “principles” that are designed to steer new development in Somerset. These should guide developers towards creating attractive and high-quality environments, but also inclusive and accessible places for all, regardless of age, gender, mobility, or background, where people enjoy living.

The principles should offer substantial benefit to people in Somerset by improving air quality; reducing carbon footprints; creating safe and easy access to schools; and places that are more resilient to the impacts of climate change while protecting and enhancing nature and wildlife.

Creating connected, safe and healthy places will also help to improve quality of life and wellbeing. The Council is proposing to prioritise active travel – cycling, walking and wheeling - along with public transport to reduce reliance on using private cars.

Places should be designed to allow easy access to shops, services and facilities that meet residents’ needs, with streets linking to existing communities and services. Most new development comes forward in or on the edge of our towns, and for those there would be more emphasis on enabling active travel - bike and e-scooter hire, car clubs and public transport - with less on parking provision.

While Somerset is a largely rural county, at present rural roads are the most hazardous for users, per mile travelled, so the principles would aim to provide safer streets and lanes for rural communities and the opportunity for sustainable travel. The principles are intended to make it easier for those able to walk, wheel, cycle or take public transport to do so, leaving space for those less able to make active travel trips or journeys by public transport, to continue to drive.

The consultation launches on 4 September and will run for six weeks until 16 October. People can take part via Citizen Space <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/planning/creating-places-for-people>

Paper copies containing further information and the online survey questions will also be available to the public at the following locations:

- Bridgwater House, Bridgwater, TA6 3AR (Monday – Friday 8.45am to 5.00pm)
- Council Offices, Cannard’s Grave Road, Shepton Mallet, BA4 5BT (Monday – Friday 8.30am to 5.00pm)
- Petters Way Council Offices, Yeovil, BA20 1AS (Monday – Tuesday and Thursday – Friday 9.00am to 4.00pm, first Wednesday of the month 11.00am to 4.00pm and every other Wednesday 9.00am to 4.00pm)
- Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton, TA1 1HE (Monday – Friday 8.30am to 5.00pm)
- West Somerset House, 20 Fore Street, Williton, TA4 4QA (Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5.00pm)
- County Hall, Taunton, TA1 4DY (Monday – Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 09:00am to 4.00pm)
- Libraries including: Taunton, Minehead, Frome, Bridgwater, Yeovil and Glastonbury

Responses can be emailed to localplanningpolicy@somerset.gov.uk, or posted to Planning Policy, Somerset Council, County Hall, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4DY. The principles agreed post-consultation will be considered as a material planning consideration subject to consultation and taking feedback into account.

The Council is keen to hear from as many people as possible – individuals, community and voluntary groups, businesses, transport providers, landowners, and city, town and parish councils as well as developers and their agents. This will help the Council to understand whether it is on the right track..

Care

Somerset Council is warning that it will have to draw on reserves for the second successive year to fund the rising cost of both Adult and Children’s social care.

Papers published ahead of a meeting of the Council’s Executive on 6th September describe the council’s financial position as “stark and challenging”. The warning comes as other councils in the UK are raising concerns that their budgets are unsustainable. The papers reveal that the Council drew £18 million from reserves last year to fund spending beyond the 2022/23 budgets in Adult and Children’s care services. The Council has a legal obligation to fund these services, which have seen an unprecedented rise in both overall demand and complexity of need since the Covid-19 pandemic.

These two social care services are currently projected to overspend by £21 million again in the current financial year. This is despite significant increases in budgets in the two previous years. Other challenges faced by the new unitary Council include the rising cost of processing an increasing amount of household waste and the cost of refinancing loans taken out by five predecessor councils. Cllr Liz Leyshon, Lead Member for Resources and Performance and Deputy Leader of Somerset Council said: “Obviously repeatedly using the Council’s reserves to fund day to day care services cannot continue without putting the financial viability of the council at risk.

“The national problems we warned about last year have not improved, if anything they are worse. The demand on social care continues to grow and inflation and interest rates have continued to rise.

We now have a clear picture of the financial legacies of the five predecessor Councils, although there is much work still to be completed by the external auditors.

“The current and next two years will be particularly challenging until the benefits of transformation of services at the new Council can be realised. After a decade of neglect, the Government has to address the future of council funding and how pressures, particularly on councils with social care responsibilities, are pushing many well-run Councils towards to a Section 114 notice.

“Having already taken savings from the move from five councils to one council, we now have a transformation programme that will start to produce saving in two to three years. We are working well with the local NHS on integrating our care services.

“Somerset looks poised to become Britain’s green energy powerhouse with Hinkley Point C coming on stream and the proposed new gigafactory, but the next two years will be very, very difficult. The Council’s challenge will be to make sure we are in the right place to make the most of these opportunities, while taking care of those most in need.”

Cllr Leyshon added: “We know that we will have to reduce some of our services to a statutory level and no more, yet we know that when residents pay their council tax, they rightly expect their Council to support such services as sport and leisure, arts, parks, and open spaces. We also need to maximise opportunities in economic development and look after our town centres. We will review our whole capital programme to ensure that we create a Somerset Council that is sustainable in the longer term.

“This is a difficult task but one that we are committed to for the people of Somerset.”

Health and Well-being

A new series of online relationship, health and wellbeing resources worth £100 per person have been launched in Somerset.

The learning resources are available to all Somerset residents, and span topics such as pregnancy, labour and birth, parenting, mental health and wellbeing, and relationships.

Residents can access the online learning by:

- Visiting bit.ly/LearnForLove or scanning a QR code with their phone
- Entering the code ‘dragon’

They can then choose the subjects they are most interested in learning about – there is no limit on the number of resources residents can access. An email address is needed for those signing up, but no other personal information is needed.

To find out more about Connect Somerset, contact ConnectSomerset@somerset.gov.uk .

Support

Somerset is committed to supporting displaced people in the county as they seek to resettle and navigate a new life in the UK; from learning a new language, integrating into the local community, becoming independent and settling into a new and often very different daily life to previously. More and more, mutual benefit is being experienced as refugees share their knowledge and talents within their communities, creating a richness of culture and diversity.

In partnership with local services, charities and the generosity and kindness of communities, many individuals and families have been able to resettle safely and happily, with Somerset's 'Welcome Hubs' playing a key role for many during the earliest days of resettlement.

Offering vital assistance in finding a home, accessing public services and healthcare, seeking childcare and education services, as well as in finding work, the hubs are a first – and increasingly ongoing – port of call for anyone seeking guidance, support and connection.

Somerset has a long history of supporting people in need, no matter the circumstances. There are a number of ways to support displaced people in Somerset and more information can be found at: [https://www.somerset.gov.uk/health-safety-and-wellbeing/refugee-resettlement-in-somerset/..](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/health-safety-and-wellbeing/refugee-resettlement-in-somerset/)

Public Health

Public Health leaders in Somerset are urging people who suffer from Diabetes to take part in a programme which could radically improve their quality of life.

The county is one of just twenty-one areas of the country offering a free NHS programme to support residents with the life-threatening condition to lose weight and potentially achieve remission. Type 2 diabetes affects more than 30,000 people in Somerset.

The NHS Type 2 Diabetes 'Path to Remission' programme began in Somerset in June last year and so far, 209 residents locally have signed up to take part. The 12-month programme of support from trained coaches aims to help people with the condition to achieve remission, reducing their risk of diabetes complications and the need for medication.

The initial phase involves 3 months of meal replacement with a range of soups, shakes and bars, all of which are provided free of charge to participants. This is followed by reintroduction of healthy meals. On average, participants in Somerset have lost 14% of their starting weight after six months on the programme.

To be eligible for the programme residents must be aged between 18 and 65, have been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes in the last 6 years, and have a raised body mass index (BMI).

If you think you might be eligible you should check the programme website and complete a self-assessment questionnaire. If you are still interested, contact your GP practice about a referral. Places are limited, so it is best to do this as soon as possible.

Licensing

Somerset Council has to review its Gambling Policy every three years. The Policy document sets out our approach to the Council's licensing functions in accordance with the Gambling Act 2005.

The policy will ensure:

- Activities are conducted fairly and openly
- Prevention of crime and disorder
- Children and vulnerable people are protected from harm or exploitation

Comments are invited on the draft revised Gambling Policy from all interested parties including residents and those running businesses in the County, the consultation documents can be found at: <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/licensing/gambling-policy-consultation/> The consultation will close on 22nd September 2023. and responses will be considered, and any appropriate amendments will be made.

Somerset Council report to Croscombe Parish Council

Martin Lovell

17/10/2023