

Somerset West and Taunton

Newsletter to SWT Councillors and Parish Councils.

Issue 5. Week ending 26/04/20

#StayAtHome #ProtectTheNHS #SaveLives

Up to date information on the Council's response can be found on the SWT website:

<https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-and-information/>

SWT Council priorities

Somerset West and Taunton Council's continuing priorities during the Coronavirus outbreak are to:

- Preserve critical services;
- Safeguard the public; and
- Ensure our most vulnerable residents are supported.

The situation is being reviewed on a daily basis to ensure that the Council follows the [latest advice from Public Health England](#).

Key Messages this week

1. Small Business and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grants

We have so far received **2,872** requests for grants and have paid out nearly **£26.9m** to around 2,281 small businesses. Although our offices are closed our staff are working from home to ensure we get payment out to eligible business as soon as possible. Generally cases are being passed for payment within seven working days from receipt of the required information.

We are continuing to use a variety of channels of communication (letters, phone calls, e-mails, text messages) to raise awareness of the business grants and as a result of this, our stats currently compare favourably with those of neighbouring authorities. However, there remains a significant number of organisations that we believe to be eligible for a grant who have not yet been in touch to register.

To be eligible for these schemes, businesses must be in the retail, hospitality and/or leisure sector. That means they must be ‘wholly or mainly being used’:

- as shops, restaurants, cafes, drinking establishments, cinemas and live music venues,
- for assembly and **leisure***; or
- as hotels, guest & boarding premises and self-catering accommodation.

****Sports stadiums, clubs, arenas, salons and spas fall into this category and may be eligible for the scheme.***

Please encourage remaining eligible business to register for the grant that they are entitled to, particularly for small independent businesses and organisations.

There may be those on the list that you have contacts with through your own personal or professional networks. Any time that you are able to spare in encouraging those within your ward and or parish area to apply would be appreciated. We are not asking you to go out and visit the business but to contact them via email or telephone if you have their contact details. This will help us in mitigating the financial impact of the COVID19 lockdown within our communities.

Premises occupied for "personal use" will not qualify. Beach huts, moorings and private stables are given as examples. Car parks and parking spaces do not qualify. Decisions about personal use will be taken by SWT.

The application process is straightforward. Businesses should be advised to go to the Council website following the links to Coronavirus (COVID-19) information and advice and Business Grants - COVID 19 response. The direct link to the relevant page is <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/business-rates/business-grants-covid-19-response/>

2. Parish Data Sheets and Community Led Action

Thank you to all of the parish councils and SWT councillors for returning your data sheets. This information has been pivotal in helping us to coordinate the Community Resilience Cells and support our local Voluntary Community Support groups.

Can all parish councils who are yet to submit their forms please do this as soon as possible and email to governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk. We attach a copy of the data sheet for your ease of reference to this email.

3. Somerset Coronavirus Support Helpline

The [Somerset Coronavirus Support helpline](#) is available between 8am and 6pm seven days a week including Bank Holidays.

The single helpline covers the whole of Somerset and will offer support with personal care, transport, housing, waste, financial and emotional well-being. The number is **0300 790 6275**.

This number will not cover medical advice, for which people will need to continue to use the 111 NHS online service and only ring 111 if they cannot get help online.

4. Update on Tenant Liaison via the Community Resilience Cell

We can confirm that **over 2,500** calls to our most vulnerable tenants have now been made by a team of around 30 staff across our Housing and other Directorates. Now the team are busy making calls to tenants in the age band of 60-69 years and so far we have established they require less support.

The focus is shifting on making calls to those in the wider communities who may be vulnerable and do not have an existing relationship or contact with another agency. SWT will try to ensure that we reach out to as many people as possible to ensure needs are being met.

This week approximately 72,000 letters will be sent out to those people living across the Somerset district that the Community Resilience Cell has not been able to contact over the phone. This letter will provide advice on how to contact the Corona Helpline and give further guidance relating to the support on offer and how to tap into it, should they feel it necessary.

5. Disruption to Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) services

All recycling sites remain closed due to the health situation, while garden waste and bulky waste services are suspended.

Collections on the next 2020 bank holiday - VE Day on Friday 8 May - will see pick-ups one day later on Saturday 9 May.

Residents are being reminded that disruption due to COVID-19, including dozens of staff forced to self-isolate, means changes to waste services:

- All weekly recycling collections as usual but there are no returns for missed pick-ups. Boxes and food waste bins should be put out the following week, when those collections will be a priority.
- Rubbish and clinical waste pick-ups as usual. If either are missed, report via the My Waste Services menu at www.somersetwaste.gov.uk or through council customer services at www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/contact-us
- Garden waste collections are suspended but 2020-21 subscribers will get a one year extension from the date when collections restart
- Bulky waste collections are suspended.
- No new container requests can be accepted.
- All recycling sites remain closed. Materials should be stored and not added to rubbish, especially those that could be a fire risk, such as batteries, gas canisters and electrical items. Members of the public are reminded that if they use lockdown time to have a clear out at home they need to be able to hold on to the items until the recycling centres reopen

For more information check how we can all fight fly-tipping section on Somerset Waste Partnership website. To report fly-tipping use our [report fly-tipping](#) online form or phone [0300 304 8000](tel:03003048000)

- make sure you give the exact spot
- if you don't know the address include a description of nearest landmark in your report
- take a photograph if you can and include it in your report. We will attend to reported fly-tipping incidents as soon as circumstances allow.

6. Trees in Vivary Park

Further to incorrect information published on the Somerset Gazette webpage earlier this week, the Council has dispelled fears that the iconic avenue of trees in Vivary Park had been felled. Click [here](#) to read the full article on the Council's website.

The Council is working in partnership with the Somerset Wildlife Trust to create a number of wildflower meadows across the district. Work is already under way at Taunton's Vivary Park where a new wildlife area is being created on the site of the old aviary. As part of this work one diseased Horse Chestnut tree and one damaged Conifer have been felled, along with five Poplar trees which were removed on health and safety grounds.

The Council will be replanting with more trees than have been removed and creating a family friendly wild flower area with a new small hedge.

7. Live in Somerset 2020 refunds

The Live in Somerset 2020 concerts at Vivary Park have been cancelled due to ongoing Coronavirus restrictions. SWT will be offering refunds for all Live in Somerset tickets purchased at the Taunton Visitor Centre as soon as possible. The Visitor Centre is currently closed in line with Government advice but the Council is monitoring the situation carefully and will reopen when it is safe to ensure the health and wellbeing of customers and staff. Refunds can only be processed in person at the Taunton Visitor Centre, upon receipt of the Live in Somerset tickets and the original receipt of purchase. Please keep an eye on our social media platform 'Visit Taunton' for updates.

If you have further enquiries regarding refunds for tickets purchased from the Taunton Visitor Centre please contact:

tauntonvisitorcentre@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

8. Temporary Provision for Gypsies and Travellers

The Council has obligations to gypsies and travellers in respect of assessing health and housing needs, therefore, we are currently looking to provide these communities with temporary accommodation on two designated sites in Taunton; more information about this will be provided in due course.

When dealing with unauthorised encampments on council land during the pandemic, the Council is taking a more lenient approach to the agreed procedure we typically would follow.

It is important to stress that an assessment will be taken of any unauthorised encampments and each will be dealt with on a case by case basis. Enforcement

action will only be taken if the encampment poses a risk to the gypsies and travellers and the wider community.

We continue to work actively with Avon and Somerset Police and other multi-agency partners to keep disruption to amenities and services to a minimum.

To report a concern about a new encampment, please visit our website and complete our online [general enquiry](#) form.

9. Voluntary and Community Sector Support

SWT is publishing an e-newsletter to support the phenomenal positive response and work of the voluntary and community sector across our district.

The aim will be to:

- Provide information and key messages from SWT for the VCS, especially smaller groups
- Updates on funding opportunities
- To provide key messages from partners such as Somerset County Council
- To pass on key messages or updates from any infrastructure groups such as Spark and the Community Council for Somerset
- Share information to and from groups
- Incorporate good news element

If you know of a group in your ward who may benefit or have something to contribute then please send them our dedicated email; VCSNewsletter@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk and link to the last edition with the option for them to subscribe: <https://mailchi.mp/909bf211ecf8/vcsnewsletterissue1>

10. Business Support

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) Advice and Information page of our [website](#) also contains the latest links to wider advice, support and guidance for businesses. For more information and to sign up for the newsletter, please visit www.visitsomerset.co.uk/business

Partner Engagement - Key messages from other Public Service Areas

Somerset County Council Highways

Keeping Somerset's roads safe

Highways maintenance teams across Somerset will be stepping up works to keep highways safe for the NHS, emergency services, delivery vehicles and other essential workers travelling across the county.

SCC like most local authorities, scaled back some routine highways maintenance, except emergency works, following the introduction of social distancing measures in response to the coronavirus emergency.

The Government has since released updated guidance for construction activity stating that it should continue where it fits with both the current Public Health England requirements and in accordance with industry safety guidance. Following this advice, SCC will now continue with most planned maintenance works.

Works being carried out include:

- Resurfacing - extensive works to remove and replace an old road surfaces.
- [Surface dressing](#) - a technique to restore roads which are structurally sound to reduce risk of potholes forming.
- [Grass cutting](#) - verge maintenance to preserve visibility for drivers (not grass cutting in parks or urban areas).
- Street lighting
- Other maintenance works, such as patching, line painting or sign repairs.
- Key safety works such as [repairing potholes](#) will continue as before.

Somerset County Student Bus Pass Ticket

SCC has made the decision to cancel all annual student bus pass direct debits from 1 April 2020. They also intend to issue pro-rata refunds to all those who paid in full. As all payments have been cancelled County Ticket passes will not scan on bus ticket machines. This decision has been taken as colleges and sixth forms are closed and SCC are aware of the financial hardship many are finding themselves in due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Daily Covid Bulletin launched by SCC

Members of the public can now sign up for regular email newsletters about Somerset's response to the coronavirus pandemic. Somerset County Council is providing daily email bulletins on all things coronavirus related. The updates include information on affected council services, details of help available for the public and businesses, latest national and local headlines, and tips to keep your mind and body healthy during the emergency. To sign up, simply visit www.somerset.gov.uk/coronavirus and enter your name and email address in the box provided.

Advice from Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service

Waste collection crews in Somerset are poised to distribute 'please park carefully' notes in solidarity with fire service colleagues this week.

Staff working for Somerset Waste Partnership's new contractor Suez will be putting the polite notices from the fire service on to the windscreens of the rising number of problem parkers.

The cars are often legally parked, but parked in a way that makes it difficult for recycling and rubbish collections trucks to negotiate narrower streets. They have meant collection crews haven't been able to make some recycling and rubbish collections - and this despite having smaller vehicles at their disposal as part of a new fleet.

If recycling crews can't get through, fire appliances won't be able to either. The fire service is becoming increasingly concerned that its crews could be seriously delayed getting to an emergency incident because of inconsiderate parking. These parking problems are being seen across the county, from small villages with narrow streets to new estates with many more people at home. For the emergency services it could be a matter of life and death.

Station Manager Dan Taylor said: "We have noticed that an increasing number of homeowners want to park their vehicles directly outside their properties without considering that access may be required for fire appliances in an emergency. Some of the streets are narrow even without parked cars. Obviously, the size of our vehicle being what it is, we need slightly more room to manoeuvre than a car."

The Service is asking people when parking their vehicle to:

- Park close to the kerb
- Leave enough space for a fire engine or an ambulance to pass
- Leave extra room near tight corners
- Fold in your wing mirror

Making a 999 during the Covid-19 Outbreak

If you need to call the Fire Service or any other 999 responder, please ensure you inform the call operator if there is anyone at the property that has COVID-19 symptoms or is in isolation. Emergency responders will still attend but need to be aware so they can protect themselves accordingly.

Community Support - What help is out there?

SWT is working with partner organisations across the county to identify and support the network of volunteers offering help to the elderly, people self-isolating, and those identified as at risk across our communities. The Council would like to thank all those that have come forward with offers of help and would remind everyone to only make essential outings and follow [advice on social distancing](#) to reduce the risk of transmission. Information on local community groups [you can volunteer with or get help from.](#)

Somerset Coronavirus Appeal

Just a reminder that grants of up to £10,000 are available for local charities, community organisations and volunteer groups helping those in most urgent need during the coronavirus outbreak, and Somerset Community Foundation (SCF) pledges to award funding within three working days. Any groups wishing to apply should visit the SCF website, where they can complete a short, simple [application form](#).

The Fund is open to local charities, community organisations, social enterprises and parish or town councils in Somerset.

Health and Welfare

Lockdown Rules Relaxed for People with Autism & Learning Difficulties

The Government has provided updated guidance that now permits people with autism and learning difficulties to exercise more than once a day. The new rules also clarify that those with autism or specific health conditions are allowed to travel further than their local area, and more than once a day; however this should be limited as much as possible and also 'ideally in line with an agreed care plan'.

The guidance upholds the social distancing rule that people should remain two metres apart from other individuals who are not part of the same household at all times in order to reduce the spread of virus; however, this does not apply to carers who can remain in close contact with their service user even if they live separately.

[Click here](#) to see the updated advice provided by Government.

Every Mind Matters

With many of us feeling worried, anxious or isolated during these challenging times, Every Mind Matters highlights that there are lots of things we can all do to look after our mental wellbeing and help others to prevent these concerns from becoming more serious.

Public Health England's Every Mind Matters platform has launched new advice, focussed on looking after people's mental wellbeing during the coronavirus pandemic. Please see below these helpful links.

- [Every Mind Matters](#) provides simple NHS-approved tips and advice to start taking better care of your mental health. If you are still struggling after several weeks and it is affecting your daily life, please contact [NHS 111 online](#).
- You can access free easy [ten minute work outs](#) from Public Health England or try other exercise videos at home on the [NHS Fitness Studio](#). Sport England also has tips for [keeping active at home](#).

- The [Every Mind Matters sleep page](#) provides practical advice on how to improve your sleep.
- Visit the [NHS mental health and wellbeing advice website](#) for self-assessment, audio guides and practical tools, if you are experiencing stress, feelings of anxiety or low mood.
- If you already have a mental health problem, you can access [comprehensive guidance provided by Mind](#).

Signpost to further advice, help and support

If you have received a letter from the NHS telling you that you're clinically extremely vulnerable, you can register on the gov.uk website to [get support as a clinically extremely vulnerable person](#).

Public Health England

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>

[Help to protect yourself and your community - Public Health England](#)

NHS - Help and Advice

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - NHS website](#)

[Advice about staying at home - NHS website](#)

Crime / Fraud / Safeguarding

Update from Avon and Somerset Constabulary

As of Thursday 15th April, Avon and Somerset Police (A&SP) received 10,767 reports of breaches of which 4,174 were via the online form. A total of 146 fixed penalty notices have been given out so far and nationally released data shows they are adopting a proportionate response to enforcement when compared with other forces. All enforcement activity is subject to close scrutiny in much the same way as reviews of the use of Stop and Search powers.

While overall crime has reduced in our force area by 37 per cent, it is known that some crimes take place behind closed doors and are often hidden and under-reported. Domestic abuse is a prime example of this and A&SP want to provide reassurance that they are doing everything they can to support victims in the area during a time when they may become even more vulnerable.

Supporting the Government's **#YouAreNotAlone** campaign, they have produced an awareness video featuring those within the police who work closely with domestic abuse victims, as well as from partner agencies who provide such a vital service, to amplify the message that help is still available and they are ready to respond should victims need them. This will be the first phase of a multi-channel campaign to bring this hidden crime firmly into the light.

A&SP are also aware of public concern over a potential spike in speeding offences as a result of a significant reduction in traffic on our road network. They are responding to these concerns and will robustly deal with people who are using the potential lure of empty roads to drive dangerously, putting lives needlessly at risk. The number of Roads Policing motorbike patrols have been increased, particularly in rural communities, with officers targeting enforcement at those committing offences at the more serious end of the scale.

Following the extended bank holiday weekend, A&SP wanted to highlight a couple of examples of how they took the opportunity to engage with the public slightly differently.

You may have seen their social media videos featuring officers and staff thanking communities for the sacrifices they're making to adhere to the restrictions. They are continuing to see significant levels of compliance across our cities, towns and villages so it's important we recognise this publically, whilst not becoming complacent. While we'd never choose to be in this situation, we can choose how we respond to it. A&SP officers and staff are firmly focussed on strengthening the bonds with all our communities during these troubled times through acts of kindness and unwavering dedication to protect and serve.

A key part of this approach relies on continuing to engage and explain the Government's measures to the public, encouraging them to comply and using enforcement as a last resort.

Further videos showed true partnership working in action with heroic local NHS staff recording messages of support for the police work in encouraging the public to stay home to save lives and reduce the pressure on our hospitals. By the same token, you may have seen in the media last week that A&SP honoured the bravery and courage of NHS workers by naming their newest police horse 'Hero'. This move breaks with the tradition of naming police horses after locations in the local force area and will act as a lasting tribute to all those who are working to care for those suffering with coronavirus

Online Beat Surgeries

On Friday 24th April at 1100hrs, [PCSO Katherine Williams](#) and [Linda Brooks](#) will be holding their first online Beat Surgery via Facebook Live. They are asking that questions are emailed to their profiles in advance so that they can have the answers ready to share.

[PCSO Sam Bushen](#) has pioneered this form of police engagement, and past Beat Surgeries can be viewed via his Facebook profile. SWT will try to publicise more of these sessions, when dates and times become available via this newsletter.

COVID-19 breach of restrictions: If you have concerns that an individual or business has breached Government restrictions you can [report it using our online form](#), ring us on 101 (for non-emergencies) or 999 (for emergencies).

Finally

It is important to keep up to date with the latest [information and advice from the government](#).

For quick up to date information regarding SWT services please follow us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SWTCouncil/ or Twitter @swtcouncil
Please see our dedicated [webpage](#) for updates.

If you have concerns about your own health and coronavirus please visit the [NHS](#) website.

#StayAtHome #ProtectTheNHS #SaveLives