

Somerset West and Taunton

Newsletter to SWT Councillors and Parish Councils.

Issue 12. Week ending 14/06/20

#StayAlert #Controlthevirus #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 updated priorities during the coronavirus outbreak are as follows:

- Preserve critical services;
- Safeguard the public;
- Ensure our most vulnerable residents are supported; and
- Planning economic resilience and recovery

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. SWT reflects on the past 12 weeks. Where are we now?

SWT has been supporting residents and businesses throughout the Covid-19 crisis. Although offices have been closed to protect our community and staff the Council has been delivering critical services and ensuring our most vulnerable residents are supported.

In many cases this has meant re-organising working arrangements, boosting resources in some areas and setting up completely new services. Key to this has been ensuring public involvement in decision making with virtual committee meetings.

Since measures were announced to prevent the spread of Covid-19, SWT has been involved in the following:

- Made calls to 3,500 tenants and 600 other potentially vulnerable residents to check if they need help
- Delivered over 110 food boxes to people who are shielded and those facing hardship
- Coordinated and supported a network of community and voluntary groups to ensure everyone has access to help in their community
- Provided Business Rate relief to 1,300 qualifying business rate accounts and removed their liability to pay rates for this year
- Supported local businesses via grants and advice
- Implemented the Council Tax Hardship Funding received from central Government and applied one-off £150 awards to 7,017 working age Council Tax Support claimants
- Reviewed and extended the awards for 285 Discretionary Housing Payment claims to provide ongoing help to people to pay their rent
- Recalculated 1,693 Housing Benefit claims providing additional support for people to help pay their rent.

Please [click here](#) to view the full SWT press release

2. DEMOCRATIC/GOVERNANCE

Councillors are reminded that if they do not wish to receive paper copies of agendas to please let the Governance Team know.

For the 2020/21 Municipal Year:

The Chair of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee is Cllr Lee Baker
The Vice Chair of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee is Cllr Derek Perry.

The next meeting of the Executive takes place on Wednesday 17 June at 6.15pm and items on the agenda are:

- A recommendation from the Scrutiny Committee regarding the Bus Station and First Bus
- Council Governance Arrangements
- Zero Carbon Affordable Homes pilot (with confidential appendices)
- Commercial Investment Portfolio Review (confidential)

Public Participation:

The meetings will all be live streamed so that members of the public can watch at home. To watch the live stream when the meeting commences please visit the SWT website

<https://democracy.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/mgCalendarMonthView.aspx>

If you are not able to watch the meeting live, you can also watch it after the meeting.

Members of the public are still able to participate in the meeting by submitting their questions or statement to the Governance Team via governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk and these will be read out by an officer at the meeting. Please see above for deadline dates

3. Reopening the High Streets Safely

SWT is working with shop-keepers, traders and business groups to prepare for the re-opening of High Streets and retail centres, following the Government announcement that non-essential shops can open from **Monday, 15 June**.

SWT officers have been putting plans in place in conjunction with town councils, Minehead BID, local business groups, and Chambers of Commerce across the district, engaging with business communities in the main centres of Taunton, Wellington and Minehead, and at Dunster, Porlock, Wiveliscombe, Williton and Watchet.

SWT is following Government guidance and using money from the European Regional Development Fund for Reopening High Streets Safely to implement a range of measures to keep shoppers and staff safe. This includes signage (hoping to be distributed on Friday, 12 June) messaging on posters, banners and social media reminding people about the importance of social distancing and hand washing. There will also be regular deep cleaning regimes.

Information and advice for business is freely available from SWT. You can contact the Economic Development team for help or advice at OpeningHighStreets@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

A Covid-19 Toolkit has been created and provides useful documents such as a risk assessment template and action plan, business checklists and useful guides to help organisations reopen safely. In addition to considerations suggested in this Toolkit, organisations **must** ensure they also keep up to date with current Government guidelines relevant to the control of COVID-19.

Please copy and paste this link into your webpage browser to see the **Covid-19 Toolkit**: <https://www.heartofswgrowthhub.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/BBFA-Covid-19-Toolkit-280520.pdf>

Or alternatively, please see the attached PDF document.

Please [click here](#) to read the full SWT article on reopening the High Streets Safely.

4. Update on Business Grants

The Small Business and Retail, Hospitality & Leisure grants are all still running with no end date yet announced. Applications are still coming in and over 80% of the available funding has been paid out, totalling over **£37.7m** to 3,165 eligible businesses. If you think your group may be eligible, please do check the criteria and if appropriate apply. [For more details read here.](#)

The Discretionary grant scheme, which opened on Monday 1 June, has had a good response and potentially up to 50% of the available funding is already committed, but charities and local groups are encouraged to watch for updates if they think they may be eligible. As stated at the launch, this funding will remain under review and the scheme closed, or criteria broadened, depending on the take up.

The discretionary grant is aimed at small businesses and other organisations who have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 crisis, particularly those that may not have benefitted from previous Covid-19 schemes (although you can still apply if you or your business has received furlough and/or self-employment support). The organisation must have fixed property-related costs of at least £200 per calendar month (this may include rent, license fees, mortgage, insurance, broadband, utilities). The business must have been trading on 11 March 2020 to be eligible for the scheme, and must have evidence of this.

You can find more [guidance about the scheme and the grant allocations here](#).

An analysis of the volume of claims received for the Discretionary Grant Scheme suggests that at the end of the two-week claim window in the current scheme, SWT is likely to have funds still available. Therefore, the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Member for Economic Development and Chair of Scrutiny Committee, has approved the adoption of an extended discretionary business grants scheme to widen the eligibility criteria for awarding the grants when the initial two-week claims window ends.

The revised criteria and application process will be accessible from the [SWT Covid-19 webpage](#). The aim is to update this page at 12 noon with the new criteria on Monday 15 June 2020.

5. SWT Planning Business As Usual

Maintaining momentum in planning has been an important part of SWT service provision. The Council has continued to accept pre-application advice applications, site visits are being undertaken where appropriate with social distancing rules, and phone and conference calls are being made.

Customers have been encouraged to use the [Planning Portal](#) to submit applications or to email planning@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk for advice.

Full information on the planning process during Covid-19 pandemic is available on the SWT [website](#), along with other essential service advice.

6. Emergency Repairs to Dulverton Leat

On the evening of Monday 25 May, Dulverton Leat ran dry.

The Dulverton Weir & Leat Conservation Trust said this was particularly disappointing given work had only recently been done with SWT on the structure, and there had even been recent excitement as otters were spotted swimming there.

The problem was due to the level of water in the river being too low to flow through the leat. Therefore, SWT officers met on site on 2 June and within 24 hours a team carried out remedial repairs to restart the flow of water through the leat pending more significant repairs.

Please [click here](#) to read the full article.

7. SWP Sites and Services

All SWP recycling sites are on their usual summer schedule but with restrictions to ensure social distancing for the safety of customers and staff. Reduced loading bays can mean long queues. The widening range of materials taken at all recycling sites now includes wood, paint, small electricals, and plastic pots, tubs and trays.

All 16 sites accept these materials:

- NEW: Plastic pots, tubs and trays (recycled in UK)
- NEW: Man-made wood - chipboard, MDF, etc. (recycled in UK)
- NEW: Natural wood - painted, treated and untreated timber etc. (recycled in UK)
- NEW: Small household electrical items (recycled in UK)
- NEW: Paint (water-based recycled in UK; other paint landfilled in Somerset)

Not yet taken: cardboard, Tetra Paks/beverage cartons, and more. These household recyclables should be put out weekly as part of the usual kerb side collection.

Queue cams at Bridgwater, Chard, Taunton and Yeovil can be viewed [here](#). Expect queues and delays. If queuing, turn off engine, maintain social distance with those waiting, and then unload on site swiftly to let others take your place.

Urge others to follow @Somersetwaste on Facebook and Twitter. Sign up [here](#) to subscribe to e-news.

Partner Engagement - Key messages from other Public Service Areas

Somerset County Council (SCC)

Highway Maintenance Update

After a busy week on the roads of Somerset West and Taunton, there will be another one this week. The drainage works just above Beasley Farm on the **Timberscombe to Heathpoult Cross Rd** (above Church Street Timberscombe) has now been successfully completed. The scheme was to repair and improve 270 metres of road edge drainage and cross drains as there have been many historic issues due to tree root ingress combined with low capacity pipework. These works required a full road closure due to restricted road widths for worker and public safety. The works initially started slowly as the team encountered various areas of hard dig due to shillet etc but, helped by extremely good weather thus far, the works have now caught up and are scheduled to be completed at the end of this week (weather permitting).

SCC is currently about half way through the resurfacing of **A358 Staplegrove Road** through the **Manor Road** traffic lights near Staplegrove Post Office, Progress so far has been good and they will once again be working there under a series of evening road closures from Monday 15 June to Friday 19 June. The new footway at **A358 Cross Keys, Norton Fitzwarren** (a Small Improvement Scheme, SIS) is approaching completion.

A major item of work is the surface dressing of the **A358 Minehead Road** at **West Bagborough**. In order to do this the **A358** will need to be closed to through traffic between **Crowcombe** and **Bishops Lydeard** for 3 hours (9:30am to 12:30pm on Monday 15 June and Tuesday 16 June. Heavy traffic will be diverted via Bridgwater along the A39/A38. Light traffic will be able to travel via **Raleghs Cross** on the **B3190/B3224** in order to avoid the closure.

Please see the attached document named SCC Road Closure for more information.

SCC will also be surface dressing **B3224 Willet Hill**, near **Elworthy**, **A39 Porlock Road**, near **Lucombe** and **Huish Champflower** village to **Sperry Cross**, **Upton** via **Winters Cross** and **Flint Cross**.

SCC would like to take the opportunity to thank the public for their help and tolerance whilst they try to carry out as many difficult and sensitive schemes as possible capitalising on the reduced impacts under Covid-19 restrictions. SCC appreciate the inconvenience this may cause due to the short notice but they are trying to achieve the least damaging effects overall to the general public and will continue to keep you all in the loop with any further works.

For more information on highway maintenance works and to stay up to date visit the SCC Highways' website www.travelsomerset.co.uk or follow @TravelSomerset on Twitter.

Toneway Creech Castle upgrade postponed to support economic recovery

The major road improvement scheme to upgrade the Toneway Creech Castle junction in Taunton is set to be postponed until next year to support the economy as it recovers from the coronavirus pandemic.

SCC originally planned to begin work in April 2020 but this was temporarily paused due to the start of lockdown and uncertainty over materials, sub-contractors and key utilities work.

Now, following discussions with the business community, it is proposed to postpone the scheme for another 12-18 months. This is to help support the local economy during the recovery by minimising any temporary disruption on a key route into Taunton.

The Creech Castle scheme was due to be delivered by Alun Griffiths Ltd, who are currently continuing to work on the nearby M5 Junction 25 improvement scheme. Postponing the Creech Castle works has allowed the contractor to press on at Junction 25 during the lockdown period and works remain on schedule, despite the coronavirus disruption.

The proposal to postpone the Creech Castle works will be considered by SCC's Cabinet at its meeting on 17 June 2020.

For further updates on Junction 25, and to sign up for email newsletters, please [click here](#).

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue have a new set of activities for children to help them learn more about safety at home and outside. There are videos on different topics including road safety, staying safe at home and how to stop, drop and roll. There are also fun activity sheets with word searches, puzzles and some firefighter themed maths questions too.

Please [click here](#) to find the resources on the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue website.

Community Support - What help is out there?

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.

Please share this with all your contacts and encourage people to [subscribe](#).

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

Citizens Advice, Somerset

The national network of Citizens Advice is made up of over 300 independent charities. In Somerset there are 5 member organisations working within their respective District Council boundaries.

Citizens Advice are known and trusted as a reliable source of advice and thousands of people a year turn to them for help when they face troubling circumstances. It was no surprise to their teams that at the onset of Covid-19 they saw a huge increase in demand for advice on benefits, employment, housing, relationships and money issues.

Thanks to the incredible staff and volunteers who were able to make a fast channel shift to deliver advice by phone and email as the face to face services closed due to lock-down. Through conversations with the public and voluntary sector partners it became apparent that some people who needed Citizens Advice help didn't know how to get in contact. The opportunity to bid to the Somerset Community Foundation for funding to set up a new, central, point of contact, couldn't have come at a better time.

The new Citizens Advice Somerset partnership offers anyone a quick way into advice either by Adviceline (**03444 88 9623**) or through the website.

Please [click here](#) for the full details.

The Tree Council Branching Out Fund Is Now Open

The aim of the [Tree Council Branching out Fund](#) is to assist schools and community groups in the UK with tree- and hedge-planting projects that actively involve children up to the age of 21. Grants between £300 and £1,500 for UK community organisations, parish/town councils and schools for tree planting projects, ideally during National Tree Week, Saturday 28 November to Sunday 6 December 2020.

There is no application deadline for the Branching Out Fund - applications may be made at any time. UK community groups, UK schools, parish and town councils, tree warden networks may apply (please note that this is not an exhaustive list and requests for funding may be considered by other types of organisation).

To apply, please [click here](#) to visit the Tree Council website, where further details about the scheme, how the funding can/cannot be used and an application form can be found.

Bike donations helping Somerset to get moving again

More than 40 bikes have been donated to help people get moving in West Somerset. Somerset charity CCS (The Community Council for Somerset) issued a plea for any unwanted bikes in a bid to help those without transport, which could help many get back into work, education, or simply save money and help the environment.

As part of the initiative, funded by the West Somerset Opportunity Area and Somerset County Council, expert mechanic Mark Gibbs, from Exmoor Bike Repair, refurbishes donated bikes - with the first bike already finding a new home.

Donations have helped those who are in urgent need of transport, but for whom buying a new bike is not an option financially.

The charity is still seeking donations of adult bikes in a good condition, meaning nearly ready to ride, with two wheels, pedals and handlebars.

Please [click here](#) to read the full article.

Health and Welfare

New drive-through Coronavirus Testing Centre at Taunton Racecourse

On 6 June a drive through coronavirus testing facility opened at the Taunton Racecourse, as part of the Government's UK-wide drive to increase testing. Anyone experiencing a new, continuous cough, a high temperature, or a loss of or change in their normal sense of smell or taste, should book a test at nhs.uk/coronavirus or by visiting [NHS 111 online coronavirus service](#) to find out if they currently have coronavirus.

Taunton Racecourse is one of several new testing sites being added to the existing network in the UK. Anyone testing positive for the virus will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace to help them track their contacts. This should help people to identify who they may have been in close contact with, protecting others from further transmission.

Staff from Boots in Taunton have already stepped forward to volunteer to run the Covid-19 testing station.

Please [click here](#) to read the full article.

The Somerset Coronavirus Support Helpline

A single phone number is available for anyone in Somerset who needs coronavirus-related support from their councils. The **0300 790 6275** number is available seven days per week 8am - 6pm.

Anyone who can't find help within their own local networks and volunteers, can use this number to get help and advice around:

- Personal care and support including food and delivery of prescriptions
- Support for the homeless
- Emotional support if you're feeling worried or anxious
- Transport to medical appointments
- Waste collection and disposal
- Financial support

This number won't cover medical advice, for which people will need to continue to use the 111 NHS phone number if they cannot get help online.

Please refer to the websites below for the latest advice, help and guidance:

Links to the most up to date Government guidance as of 29 May 2020 can be found here

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

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](#)

FAQS

Q. Some children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 classes returned to school on 1st June. When will all the other year groups return to school?

A. This week the Government has scrapped their plans for all pupils in England to return to primary school this term before the summer holidays. This announcement means that many primary school children, outside of Reception, Years 1 and 6, will not be back in schools in England until September. Apart from some lessons for Years 10 and 12 from 15 June, secondary schools will also not return until September 2020.

Q. What is the Council doing to help businesses reopen?

A. SWT is following Government guidance and using money from the European Regional Development Fund for Reopening High Streets Safely to implement a range of measures to keep shoppers and staff safe. This includes signage, messaging on posters, banners and social media reminding people about the importance of social distancing and hand washing. There will also be regular deep cleaning regimes. All signage is for public realm spaces only and not for the interior spaces. Adaptions to the interior of business premises should comply with Covid-19 regulations and responsibility falls on the business proprietor. To assist retailers with their reopening, SWT has produced a [Business Advice retail pack](#) which contains useful guidance and information.

For further advice on how to make your business Covid-19 compliant, please [click here](#).

Crime / Safeguarding

Avon and Somerset Police (A&SP)

National Neighbourhood Watch Week (8-15 June)

This week A&SP are marking National Neighbourhood Watch Week (8- 15 June). Nationally the key messages have been Be Kind, Connect, Support and Share. Since lockdown began, there has been a surge in community togetherness as people look out for the vulnerable and talk to neighbours more than ever before - a silver lining to what is an extremely challenging time for many people.

A&SP are encouraging community-spirited residents to continue helping their local area by signing up to Neighbourhood Watch. Being part of a scheme shows your community is looking out for each other, it keeps you up to date with what's going on in your area and can help prevent and tackle crime.

For more information about Neighbourhood Watch and how to join please [click here](#).

Five works vans broken into and expensive tools stolen in Taunton

A spate of thefts of expensive trade tools from works vans has been reported in Taunton this week. The vehicles targeted have been trade vans containing work tools whereby the offenders have damaged the vehicles to gain access and have stolen multiple expensive trade tools from within.

The Police are currently looking into this spate of incidents and advise people to remove as much from their vans as possible each night.

Please [click here](#) for the full article.

Domestic Violence

On 1 June, [PCSO Supervisor Sam Bushen](#) was joined in his Facebook Live Beat Surgery by Marilyn Selwood, an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor. Topics covered included; how to recognise domestic abuse; what forms it takes and how to get help. The question and answer session is still available to view on his Facebook page, with a useful link to the [THIS IS NOT AN EXCUSE](#) website.

Marilyn has advised that National Helplines are reporting a 40% increase in calls and websites of 160%, but worryingly lots of "known" high risk victims are not engaging with services or reporting incidents. There are lots of issues around child contact and breaches of child arrangement orders, whilst those who need to flee are experiencing problems in accessing Refuges/Safehouse spaces. Financial constraints are also a huge problem. Professional services have had to come up with creative ways to support clients, as the usual access points have been withdrawn due to coronavirus restrictions.

As well as the police, there are specialist organisations which offer support and practical advice. Their services are confidential, and in many cases, completely free. Useful numbers are available in the '[Links to other services](#)' section of the [Somerset Survivors website](#).

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, please always call the Police on 999.

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.

#StayAlert #Controlthevirus #SaveLives

Attachments:

BBFA-Covid-19-Toolkit-280520 document
SWT Business Advice Handbook
SCC Highways Road Closure A358