

## SOMERSET COUNCIL REPORT

### MARTOCK PARISH COUNCIL 22<sup>th</sup> MAY 2024

#### 1 – Somerset Council News

##### 1.1-Become a volunteer driver and turn miles into smiles

Somerset Council is working with the NHS on a campaign to recruit more volunteer drivers in the county who can get people without easy access to transport to crucial appointments.

Since Covid-19 the numbers of volunteer drivers in Somerset has reduced by about 67 per cent. These dedicated drivers play a pivotal role in the community, providing essential transportation services to residents so the Council are calling out for new volunteers.

Many residents who need the service live in rural areas with little or no access to public transport and are unable to drive. This can feel isolating and volunteer drivers are able to give a friendly helping hand to help residents access vital medical and social care services. This can be routine NHS appointments and school runs, or lifesaving cancer treatment.

If you are working part-time, a parent, retired or just have some spare time on your hands and you have a car and at least half a day to a day to offer then you can get involved and make a positive impact on people's lives. As a volunteer driver, you'll receive training and be reimbursed expenses at 45p per mile (or 50p per mile with passengers).

Criteria for becoming a volunteer driver:

- Own 5 door car
- DBS (at no cost to volunteer)
- Current full driving licence with no more than 6 points
- Basic IT skills such as email and online meetings
- Undertake induction and training
- Reliable and punctual
- Helpful and caring manner with a friendly disposition
- Good social skills

Register your interest and apply today at <https://volunteering.somerset.gov.uk/drive>

##### 1.2- Somerset primary school places announced for 2024/25 academic year

**Today (16th April), nearly 99% of Somerset children starting school for the first time were offered a primary school place at one of their top three choices.**

Overall, 98.86% of the 5136 applicants were offered a place at one of their top three choices, with 95.33% receiving their first choice.

Of the 5134 primary school applications received this year:

- 1st preference met – 95.33% (4,894 offers)
- 2nd preference met – 2.98% (153 offers)
- 3rd preference met – 0.55% (28 offers)

Anyone who applied for a place online will receive their offer by email today, Tuesday 16th April. Those who made an application by post will receive a letter with their offer this week.

Allocated schools will contact families to discuss the arrangements shortly. Last year, 5,182 applications for primary school places were received. Of those, 98.94% of applicants received one of their top three preferences, with 94.54% receiving their first primary school preference.

Parents and carers of children not offered one or more of their three primary school preferences have various options available to them. Information can be found at the Council's [refused a place at your preferred school webpage](#).

### **1.3-Somerset Duke of Edinburgh's Award Celebrates Record Numbers**

The Somerset Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) team is celebrating their highest ever number of enrolments across the county, with 2908 local young people signed up to an award between April 2023 and March 2024.

The DofE award is on offer in all secondary schools, colleges and most Special Educational Needs (SEN) providers in Somerset. Young people can start an award between the ages of 14-25 and those who are home educated can access the award directly through Somerset DofE.

Across the 66 Somerset DofE centres, 2908 young people signed up to take part in the award last year, an increase of nearly 300 from the previous year. Of the young people to take part last year, 1558 achieved an award.

Last year saw an increase in enrolment and completion of the award by those with additional needs. Somerset DofE works with over 25 SEN centres to ensure that the award can be achieved by all young people in the county. There is a Somerset bursary to enable any young person who is disadvantaged or facing financial barriers to access the award.

Holyrood Academy, Chard, is amongst the schools celebrating another year for high enrolment, with 246 pupils signed up to take part in the award across all three levels. Heather Shearer, Somerset Council Executive Lead Member for Children, Families and Education and Associate Lead Member, Jo Roundell

Greene, attended the Holyrood Academy annual award ceremony, which saw around 70 pupils receive their bronze and silver Duke of Edinburgh certificates.

Over the past year, Somerset DofE have held charity walks, bike rides and tree planting events, alongside organising residential and expeditions and supporting the 66 DofE centres across the county. Somerset DofE recently planted a tree with the Somerset Freemasons to recognise the commitment they have had to supporting disadvantaged young people across the county. Over the past four years, the Freemasons have donated £45000 to the bursary that supports individual young people and groups access the award. The team are keen to work with additional funding partners to expand the disadvantaged programmes that they offer, please get in touch if you can help.

To find out more about the award, how to become a DofE centre, access the bursary, or how you can support/donate, contact [DofE@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:DofE@somerset.gov.uk).

#### **1.4 - Voters advised to use Royal Mail for postal votes**

Somerset residents planning to cast their vote by post, rather than in person, need to be aware of changes to the system. From today (15 April) the way postal votes are received at Somerset Council offices will change.

New laws coming into force means that when someone hands in a postal vote at a reception point or at a polling station, a Postal Vote Return form must now also be completed. This could be time-consuming. So voters are being encouraged to use Royal Mail and post their vote in good time for it to be counted. Postal votes receive a speedy service from Royal Mail and are easily identified by the purple flashes marked on the envelopes. They are delivered up to 9.30pm on polling day which is why Royal Mail should be the preferred method of returning them.

Voters can check their nearest post box and collection times via [www.royalmail.com/services-near-you#/](http://www.royalmail.com/services-near-you#/)

Postal votes can still be handed in and the relevant forms completed during office hours only at these four locations in Somerset:

- Bridgwater House, Bridgwater
- Shape Office, Shepton Mallet
- West Somerset House, Williton
- Petters House, Petters Way, Yeovil

Voters need to know that any postal votes that are simply left at offices or put in office post boxes, will have to be rejected. The next scheduled elections take place on 2 May for the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner and in Somerset's Mendip South division following the resignation of one of the two

councillors elected to represent the area. Somerset residents planning to cast their vote by post, rather than in person, need to be aware of new laws, which came into force on Monday, 15 April. Anyone handing in a postal vote at a reception point or a polling station must now complete a Postal Vote Return form, which could be time-consuming.

### **1.5-Care homes in Chard and Frome saved from closure**

Critchill Court in Frome and Sunnymeade in Chard have been saved from closure thanks to a successful takeover bid by family-owned care provider, Agincare.

The homes were at risk of closure following a consultation launched by Somerset Care in February 2024. However, as part of the consultation, Somerset Council and Somerset Care worked together to identify a suitable alternative provider who could offer continuity of care and quality of service to the residents, their families and the staff.

### **1.6 - Berry's Coaches partners with 'Our Somerset' to promote blood pressure awareness**

Berry's Coaches, a family-run business with a rich history in passenger transport dating back to 1920, recently participated in the 'Take the Pressure Off' campaign, a joint initiative between NHS Somerset and Somerset Council. The campaign aims to raise awareness about high blood pressure and encourage early detection through free blood pressure checks within communities across Somerset.

## **2.0 - Local Issues**

**2.1 - Coat Grove Issues** These works are now underway and further timetables are as follows

Entrance works to site are due to commence April 22<sup>nd</sup> with a 4/5 week completion time. This has been delayed by Utilities issues

The work to Hills Lane will commence immediately after the entrance works are complete. A date of May 27<sup>th</sup> is expected. With the works again lasting around 4 weeks.

**2.2 - Stoke Road Industrial Estate pedestrian access** This will continue to be an ongoing aim, (linked with 2.5 below) given the expansion of businesses and need for a safe way for pedestrians to reach this site.

**2.3 - Martock Surgery** Ongoing communications on improvements and the use of Martock surgery to retain its viability. Continuing to produce information to the public and working with other groups in Martock.

### **2.4 - Ash/Long Load/Martock Traffic Strategy Group**

A Group has been formed with Long Load and Ash to look at the options to address the issues of speeding, traffic and access. The Group has held four meetings looking at speed indicator devices, and access and has

reported back to Planning and Highways Committee. It is hoped to develop an Active Travel Plan for Martock/Ash.

The last meeting with Sc and Police staff was 14/12/23. The meeting focused on rebuilding the SID network (finance, programme, usage) and using other data sources to underpin future plans. Road safety options and problem points were outlined. Next meeting 21/3/24. This has been delayed as the SID positions have yet to be agreed with SC. Once this is done then a Memorandum of Agreement will need to be signed between SC and the PC's. Verbal update will be given.

Meeting held on 1/5/24 with SC Officer and Action Plan and report by PH produced. Next meeting 8/8/24.

**2.5 - Stapleton Close** - Surface added to micro list, 24/25 programme

**2.6 - Eastfield** Poor condition of surface, inspection carried out and looking to add to works list 24/25. Will confirm when works list is finalised. Awaiting clarification of the timescale of work under new contract

**2.7 - Library Meeting** On Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> April a meeting was held with Darren Smart (SC Library Development), Joy Bailey (Martock Vice-Chair), Natalie Fortt (CEO / Clerk) and John Bailey (Somerset Councillor) A presentation was given by Darren. A brief verbal update will be given and intentions of future meetings in May.. Being postponed until PC meeting in June.

**Regards**

**John and Emily**