

SOMERSET UNITARY COUNCIL REPORT

CLLR SARAH DYKE & CLLR NICOLA CLARK

APRIL 2024

Speed limits, Planning queries and Potholes

It has been a busy couple of months for casework in our villages, and we've been pleased to assist with a variety of issues. Please do get in touch if we can help and do feel free to pass on our contact details to residents if they need help.

Somerset Council renews support for unpaid carers

On Tuesday 19 March, Somerset Council joined forces with NHS Somerset and community organisations to launch the strategy explaining their ongoing commitment to supporting unpaid carers in Somerset.

The event, which was held at Deane House in Taunton, consisted of presentations from professionals and carers about the ongoing work that health and care services are doing to acknowledge and support unpaid carers in Somerset.

Somerset's Commitment to Carers aims to enhance the quality of life for carers and those they care for. It will enable, support and empower unpaid carers to easily access information, education, training and health and care services to support them while they carry out their vital caring roles. The strategy, which was launched on 19 March, can be read on Somerset Council's website here: <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/carers>.

Councillor Sarah Wakefield, Lead Executive Member for Adults Services at Somerset Council said,

"There are approximately 50,000 unpaid carers in Somerset (and possibly more than that) who provide vital support to the people they care for. Many of these people don't think of themselves as carers, as they see what they do as a normal part of family life, or just being a good friend. Caring for someone, though very rewarding, can also be very isolating and demanding, so as a Local Authority, we have a duty to support them to look after the people they love.

The Community Council for Somerset (CCS) are asking carers and professionals to complete their survey regarding improving their digital offer for Carers. Answers will help them to develop and improve the support that they offer to unpaid Carers in Somerset who are able to access online services. [Click here to complete the survey](#).

Free support for carers can also be found here: [Free support & information for Carers just like you. - Somerset Carers](#).

The Carers advice freephone number is 0800 31 68 600.

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Somerset Council proposes new 20mph speed limits

Somerset Council is proposing 15 new speed limits in the county at the request of local communities.

The changes would be funded by the communities as part of an initiative run by the Council.

Last year there were a number of requests from across Somerset for either 20mph or 30mph limits following concerns about safety, as we have seen here in our communities across the Blackmoor Vale division.

In response the Council invited all communities to apply for a 20mph speed limit if they were willing to fund the design and implementation and they are in line with Department for Transport criteria.

Somerset Council's Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Councillor Richard Wilkins said: "We are always ready to support communities who wish to fund discretionary works such as the introduction of speed limits where appropriate.

"This initiative is very much driven by the communities themselves – this is not about imposing measures people don't want. In all cases the call for a 20 mph or 30mph limit has come from local people, for very valid safety reasons. We're really pleased to be able to support this."

The 15 proposed new 20 mph limits are in the following communities:

- ▶ Cannington
- ▶ Castle Cary and Ansford
- ▶ Chard
- ▶ Chewton Mendip
- ▶ Crowcombe
- ▶ Ditchet and Alhampton
- ▶ Ilchester
- ▶ Monksilver
- ▶ North Petherton
- ▶ Othery
- ▶ Otterford
- ▶ Pilton
- ▶ Ruishton
- ▶ Trudoxhill
- ▶ Wincanton

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APRIL 2024

If your village is interested in finding out more about how to work with Somerset Council to investigate implementing a revised speed limit, please do get in touch.

Somerset's Bus Passenger Charter

Whilst it is great news that the 58 service has been saved for the next year, it is vitally important that we encourage more users onto the buses. One of the things that is often a roadblock (excuse the pun) to this is the level of service and reliability for people who need to use bus services for work or time critical appointments.

Bus users in Somerset are being signposted to an important document aimed at protecting the quality and performance of bus services.

Drawn up by Somerset Council, bus user groups and operators, the Bus Passenger Charter for Somerset establishes a consistent standard for bus services to meet and aims to improve the way passengers can hold the Council and operators to account.

The charter, which is a condition of Somerset's Bus Service Improvement Plan, sets out the standard of service the passenger can reasonably expect when they travel on any route operating within the County, and also what the Council and operator can reasonably expect in terms of passenger behaviour.

Included in the Charter are key pledges such as:

- Clear information to help plan a journey and about any possible disruptions
- Recognisable bus stops with up-to-date information
- Buses departing and travelling as advertised
- Comfortable, clean and accessible vehicles
- A clear complaints procedure

In return, passengers are asked to respect drivers and fellow passengers, as well as helping to keep the bus clean by taking litter home.

Councillor Richard Wilkins, Somerset Council's Executive Lead Member for Transport and Digital said: "The Bus Passenger Charter is essential in holding both Somerset Council and the operator to account – it ensures passengers can expect the best possible service.

"Please do take a look, it's important passengers are in a position to challenge inadequate or poor services effectively, and this lays out what bus users should rightly expect."

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You can view and download the Charter here, [Somerset Bus Passenger Charter](#).

If your residents are unable to access the internet please ask them to call our customer service team to request a copy on 0300 123 2224.

Zero-emissions buses coming to Somerset

We're delighted to announce that Somerset is due to receive its first investment in rolling bus stock for 15 years, thanks to a major investment by First Bus South (£12.5 million) and the Department for Transport (£2.2m) who are investing in 25 new electric buses.

This is a major step towards a greener, more sustainable Somerset - one of our priorities as the administration at Somerset Council. After all, transport generates the largest proportion of carbon emissions by sector in Somerset (44 per cent in 2019). That figure is significantly higher than the total UK emissions (27 per cent). More information can be found here:

<https://news-ssandsw.firstbus.co.uk/news/somerset-to-get-25-new-electric-buses-for-the-countys-network-in-major-gbp-14-7m-investment>

An early note about changes to recycling and rubbish collection days

Recycling and rubbish collection days will be changing for many households in the former Mendip and South Somerset areas from the 17 June 2024.

Since March 2020, Somerset Council's kerbside waste collections have been delivered by Suez UK. It provides collections for more than 260,000 households, working closely with the Council's Waste Services team.

Suez inherited collection routes that had evolved as new homes were built. These were outdated and inefficient and Suez is in the process of changing the routes to reduce mileage. This 'rerouting' will make collections more efficient, less carbon-intensive, more cost-effective, and more manageable and reliable – benefitting residents, Somerset Council, and Suez.

The change to routes means changes to collection days for many residents.

The 'rerouting' has been split into two phases. Phase One is complete and Phase Two starts in June.

The costs associated with the reroute, including all postal communications, are being covered by Suez and come at no additional cost to the Council.

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Phase Two involves the former Mendip and South Somerset area. Around 80% of the 120,000 of the households will see a change to their collection day. The change in days will start in the week beginning Monday 17 June and apply to weekly recycling collections and three-weekly rubbish collections. Fortnightly Garden Waste collections, clinical and bulky waste collections will not change.

Interim refuse collections

As well as changes to weekly recycling collection days, many residents will also see a change to the week in which their three-weekly rubbish collection happens.

Some (but not all) of the households having a change to the rubbish collection will also have a one-off, interim collection. This is needed to make sure no one goes too long between rubbish collections when crews move to the new collection days.

The interim collections will take place on a Saturday and anyone having one will have this clearly highlighted in communications.

Communicating with residents.

The Council are replicating the successful approach used for the introduction of Recycle More, with households being written to twice if their collection day is changing. Writing twice increases the likelihood of everyone, including residents who are not online, getting the information they need and not missing a collection if their day changes.

- ▶ Warm up letter six weeks before new routes start: highlighting the change, asking householders to look out for a Service Guide/Collection Day Calendar, and flagging up an interim collection date where this applies.
- ▶ Service Guide/Collection Calendar three weeks before new routes start: an introduction to Somerset's waste collection services which includes a simple calendar showing collection days for the next 12 months, specific to the property. Interim collections will be included on the calendar where this applies.

Households whose collections days are not changing will not receive the warm-up letter but will receive the Service Guide and Calendar.

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APRIL 2024

Customer Service support

In Phase One the vast majority of residents understood the change and presented waste on the correct day. Our Customer Service Team will continue to work closely with Waste Services to manage any contact generated by the change.

Suez will also have extra staff on the ground to check the new collection day and the old collection day for non-presentation and wrong presentation respectively.

- ▶ Where recycling is presented on the wrong day, residents would be expected to hold on to it and present it the following week.
- ▶ Where rubbish is presented on the wrong day SUEZ will return it to the property and post a postcard with the correct collection day on.

If you have any questions or concerns please let us know and we can ask the team and come back to you with answers.

Cessation of old ex-district council telephone numbers

On the formation of Somerset Council on April 1, 2023, a single number for customers to contact the council by telephone was agreed and promoted as 0300 123 2224.

The previous main District Council numbers have remained in place since this date, with a message to provide the caller with the new Somerset Council number and asking them to make a note of it and re-dial.

The plan has been to keep these old District Council numbers 'live' with this message for up to twelve months (and within this time, monitor the usage).

Contact to these numbers has dropped from over 21,000 calls per month to under 5,000 per month.

There are several sources whereby people still use an 'old' number.

- ▶ From leaflets etc that residents keep
- ▶ Signposting from City, Town and Parish website
- ▶ Signposting from local newspapers and other stakeholder organisations
- ▶ From stored number in various electronic devices
- ▶ From livery on council vehicles which have yet to be re-branded
- ▶ From habit

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There is a cost to keeping these old numbers live with a message, as well as potential for confusion for customers.

Therefore, as from 1 April 2024, all old district numbers will be de-commissioned. If a customer phones these numbers after this date, they will just get the unattainable sound.

Communications and reminders will be sent to all parishes; partners/stakeholder organisations who signpost Somerset Council contact details. Social media and press releases will also be sent as reminders for the general public.

We strongly promote and encourage customers to self-serve online via Somerset Council website where possible.

If they cannot do this or the service/interaction requires support, then our Customer Services Team are happy to help on 0300 123 2224.

New highway contractor from 1st April

The good news is that we are now in a new financial year, which means that highway budgets are topped up for the year. In addition, our former highway contractor (Milestone) has demobilised as their contract came to an end - and we now have a new contractor (Kier) looking after all our highway maintenance.

This should mean that we will begin to see a return to longer-lasting highway jobs and repairs that had been delayed, or fixed on a temporary basis, getting underway very soon. Remember - if you spot a highway issue in your area please help us by taking a picture and reporting it to the Council on the link below:

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

Cllr Sarah Dyke sarah.dyke@somerset.gov.uk	Cllr Nicola Clark 07429 831737 / 01935 840667 nicola.clark@somerset.gov.uk
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