

SOMERSET COUNCILLORS' REPORT
FOR CURRY RIVEL & LANGPORT DIVISION
MAY 2023

Deadline approaches for two Alternative Fund Energy payments

Householders in Somerset could be due for government payments to help towards the costs of heating their homes, under two separate schemes.

The first scheme is for those who heat their homes with an alternative fuel such as wood pellets, LPG or oil, as many do in rural and some urban areas. Those householders can apply for a £200 one-off payment from the government, by 31 May.

It's aimed at people who don't use electricity or mains gas for domestic heating and who have not received a payment from their electricity supplier; it isn't means tested. Householders must supply an invoice or receipts to show that they have purchased at least £200 of alternative fuels since June 2022.

The second scheme is for households that have not received a £400 discount on their energy bills from an electricity supplier: these were paid in six instalments from Oct 2022 to March 2023: some may be entitled to a £400 one-off payment from the government. It's aimed at those who don't pay directly to an electricity company for their home energy, for example residents of care homes, park home sites and people living above commercial property that doesn't have a separate meter for the domestic part. The payment isn't means tested.

To find out more about both schemes and to make an application, search 'Apply for energy bill support if you do not get it automatically' into the GOV.UK webpage search bar. Anyone who may qualify for this support but doesn't have access to the internet can make an application to the government by telephone on 0808 175 3287, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.

All applications must be made to the government and not to the council. There is more information here: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/benefits-and-payments/alternative-energy-bills-support-scheme/>

Somerset primary school admission figures announced for 2023

Nearly 99% of Somerset's youngest children were offered a primary school place at one of their top three choices, Somerset Council's latest school admission figures show. Overall, 98.94% of the 5,182 applicants were offered a place at one of their top three choices, with 94.54% receiving their first choice.

Of the 5,182 primary school applications received this year:

1st preferences met – 94.54 % (4,899 offers)

2nd preferences met – 3.88% (201 offers)

3rd preferences met – 0.52% (27 offers)

Last year 5,296 applications for primary school places were received. Of those, 98.62% of applicants received one of their top three preferences, with 93.4% receiving their first primary school preference.

Bus use on rise as operator is praised for making timely improvements

Figures show more people in Somerset are choosing to 'Bus It' following the introduction of lower fares and evening buses as part of Somerset Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).

Since the introduction of a £1 fare for a single journey in Taunton, along with evening bus services on some routes, both funded by BSIP money, as well as a sustained 'Bus It' campaign by Somerset Council and the Somerset Bus Partnership, passenger numbers have increased by nearly 25 per cent on First Bus/Buses of Somerset services in Taunton area.

Following the introduction of a £2 fare for a single journey in Somerset, funded by the Government's Help for Homes scheme, passenger numbers have increased by around 14 per cent across the county. The Government has also announced its intention to continue the £2 fare across the country until 30 June.

Somerset Council and the Somerset Bus Partnership launched the 'Bus It' campaign last summer to try and encourage more people to 'Bus It'. You can find out more about it here, along with the various initiatives: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/bus-it-you-know-it-makes-sense/>

Somerset recycling goes Top 30

Somerset's green-minded residents have helped the county climb into the top 30 councils for recycling. Defra's recently published league tables gave Somerset's 2021-2022 recycling rate at 56.2%, which ranks us 28 out of 228 local authorities – in the top 15%. In 2020-21 Somerset ranked 59 out of 228, with a recycling rate of 52.4%.

And, with the full impact of Recycle More's expanded collections yet to be felt, Somerset Council is confident that the 2022-23 figures will be better still.

We are committed to a greener, more sustainable county, working hard to help homeowners recycle more and waste less. In 2021-22, almost 150,000 tonnes of waste was recycled or reused, saving around 133,000 tonnes of carbon – the equivalent of taking more than 51,000 cars off the road for a year. Of that, 97.2% was recycled into new products and package in the UK. Of the 5,771 tonnes of plastics collected, 99.4% were reprocessed in the UK.

Somerset's hard-working crews make more than 350,000 collections a week. For more information about what happens to the recycling they collect, check the Somerset Recycling Tracker on the Somerset Council website [somerset.gov.uk/waste](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/waste).

Sign-up for the latest climate news

Somerset Council is asking residents to sign-up for its new cross-county monthly climate newsletter launched near the end of April: you can sign-up to receive it on the Somerset Council website: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/environment-and-food-safety/climate-and-ecological-emergency/newsletter-sign-up/>.

Sent on the last Friday of every month, it will be full of news, project updates, and inspirational ideas about the work going on in the county in response to the Climate Emergency, along with information and tips to help us all live better, waste less and reduce our environmental impact. If we all do our bit and love where we live, we can keep Somerset clean, green and attractive.

Making Somerset a greener, more sustainable place is one of the Council's top priorities, working with the Somerset Climate Network and other organisations, networks and individuals keen to make a difference.

Greener homes project lands crucial grant funding

A ground-breaking project to help Somerset homes become more energy efficient has won crucial funding.

Somerset Climate Action Network (SomersetCAN) in collaboration with Somerset Council and Frome, Glastonbury, and Bruton Town Councils, have successfully bid for a £50,000 grant to set up a not-for-profit service promoting and supporting 'retrofitting' which means making changes to an existing home to help reduce energy bills and greenhouse gas emissions, making homes more comfortable to live in.

Backed by a grant from MCS Charitable Foundation, Retrofit Somerset aims to speed up retrofitting delivery across the county by:

- bringing together existing climate groups, Parish Councils, not-for-profit organisations, and others to develop a workable model for delivering retrofit across the county;
- enhancing Retrofit Somerset as a one-stop website that helps to inform and connect homeowners and community groups with local retrofit contractors;
- accelerating widespread adoption of low-carbon technologies like heat pumps and PV panels;
- helping groups of homeowners to work together to achieve practical solutions, including grouping together to get discounts on retrofit works.

Retrofit Somerset will have its own dedicated project manager, as well as local advocates in communities trained to raise local awareness of the benefits of retrofit for homeowners to start their retrofit journey.

In its first year, the project aims to create an investable business plan to attract further funding to help continue essential work to decarbonise Somerset homes.

For more information about Retrofit Somerset, including retrofit stories from Somerset residents and a directory of retrofitting suppliers and contractors, visit www.retrofitsomerset.info

£250 "Golden Hello" for new childminders in Somerset

Somerset Council is offering a "Golden Hello" grant worth £250 to those who would like to be a childminder. The £250 can be used to help with training and set up costs. Childminding is a rewarding occupation for anyone who likes working with children.

The post is ideal for new parents who wish to spend more time fitting work around their own children. It can also be a useful first step into other childcare and education roles, and may also suit people leaving teaching or other education support roles, but who still want to work with children. Deciding your own working hours and charges means the role can be flexible.

The Council offers guidance and training to newly registered childminders and supports them through Ofsted registration and beyond. If you are looking for a change, would like to work from home and have a passion for supporting children to learn and grow through exciting play opportunities, why not consider childminding?

To find out more about becoming a childminder, and for an information pack please call 0300 123 2224 or visit www.somerset.gov.uk/register

How a small Somerset town grew its care and volunteer workforce and brought in a cool £1m in unclaimed benefits

A small Somerset town has brought in more than £1.4m in unclaimed benefits and seen its community care workforce expand from just 3 to 35 since its homegrown care scheme was established in 2018.

Wiveliscombe - or 'Wivey' as it's known to locals - responded to the crisis in care by creating a 'connector' scheme signposting people who need help to self-employed carers.

These carers, known as 'Micro-providers', help local residents with a range of activities, from personal care like help with staying clean, ensuring meals are provided and medication is taken, as well as providing company and conversation. Wivey Cares is the brainchild of David Patterson, a retired social worker who founded the scheme as a way of providing a very local solution to the crisis in care.

Mr Patterson said: "Wivey is a rural town, and the conventional model of care at home just doesn't work here for this reason. We believed that there must be people who lived locally who could meet the need for care, which would support the work of government agencies, reducing the cost of services provided and helping people live independently in their homes for longer.

"As a result, we now have more than 35 carers who can access meaningful self-employment, live locally, and offer really personalised support. To date we have managed and helped more than 300 people fill in forms and claim their Attendance Allowance. This is financial support the government offers which can help people with extra costs if they have a disability where they need someone to help look after them. At any one time we believe we are supporting between 120 and 140 clients to stay in their own homes, keeping them close to friends and family.

"This has resulted in nearly £1.4m of previously unclaimed benefits being received by Wivey residents, creating jobs, and stimulating our local economy."

People who are interested in setting up their own local care scheme can contact communityenterprise@somerset.gov.uk for more information.

BT handed heavy fine for roadworks violations

Nearly £15k of fines were handed to BT for roadworks offences in Frome. The telecommunications firm was found guilty of two offences which included failing to ensure the safety of pedestrians. Because Somerset Council is responsible for managing the road network, we prosecuted BT earlier this year as part of our commitment to minimising disruption and keeping the public safe. The case, heard at Taunton Magistrates on Thursday 16 March, related to the following:

On Friday 21 October 2022, in contravention of S65 of NRSWA 1991 by failing to install traffic management to ensure the safety of pedestrians, particularly those with disabilities and the travelling public affected by the works, BT was fined £8,000.

BT carried out the works, at Butts Hill, Frome without a valid permit, contrary to Regulation 19, The Traffic Management Permit Scheme (England) Regulations 2007. BT was fined £500 for this offence. Fines against BT totalled £8,500, with costs of £4,319.86 and a surcharge of £2,000 awarded against them. A combined total of £14,819.86.

In passing the sentence, the court gave credit to BT for guilty pleas entered at the earliest opportunity and accepted in mitigation that BT had issued guidance for its sub-contractors to take

account of and to adhere to when conducting street works and that it has since increased its training of operatives.

For more information and news about Somerset Council's Waste Services visit somerset.gov.uk/waste and follow @somersetwaste on Facebook and Twitter.

Soft plastic recycling collections piloted in parts of Frome

A small-scale pilot of the collection of plastic bags and wrapping for recycling will soon be starting in Somerset. Following the success of expanded Recycle More collections, Somerset Council successfully bid to be part of a national 'FlexCollect' trial of kerbside collection of these soft plastics. The trial collections will be available to around 3,600 selected homes across two locations in Frome, starting near the end of May.

Those able to participate will receive information in the post shortly. No other householders, in Frome or elsewhere in the county, can participate or request to take part.

The pilot collections will pick-up a wide range of plastic bags and wrapping, including carrier bags, bread bags, confectionary wrappers, crisp packets, food wrapping and cling film. They will be part of the usual weekly recycling collections, collected in plastic sacks provided to participating households.

The costs of the pilot collections are funded nationally. The only costs to the council are time and resources. Depending on how the trials progress, it is expected that they will be expanded to more Somerset homes next year.

For more information and news about Somerset Council's Waste Services visit somerset.gov.uk/waste and follow @somersetwaste on Facebook and Twitter.

Somerset Youth Parliament urges schools to promote new mental health app for students

A new mental health app for has been launched in Somerset. The free Tellmi app now available for all local 11-18 year olds gives young people tools to manage their own mental health and support others.

Commissioned by NHS Somerset, Tellmi is the only fully pre-moderated, dedicated, peer support app which is safe for children aged 11+. Posts are approved by human moderators within an average of 30 minutes; in-house counsellors intervene to support when needed. Local young people who download the app will have 365-day access to support, where they can anonymously discuss their feelings in a safe environment.

Data shows the app to be improving mental health outcomes for young people across the county already, with 83% of users reporting feeling less isolated, 45% who self-harm saying they had stopped or reduced self-harming, and 1 in 3 young people experiencing fewer suicidal thoughts as a result of using the app.

Working with the Youth Parliament, Young Somerset, Somerset Council and CAMHS (Children & Adolescent Mental Health Services), the project aims to support young people on waiting lists, but also anyone who might benefit from further support.

So far, Tellmi has been promoted in eight schools and colleges across Somerset, but members of Somerset Youth Parliament are calling for more schools to sign up, as 75% of children and young people with mental health issues don't get the treatment they need.

The app can be downloaded at Google Play or the App Store. To find out more about Tellmi, visit www.tellmi.help

GET INVOLVED

Help make Somerset more accessible: your views needed

A year-long project to make Somerset more accessible for Disabled people was launched on 1 April 2023.

‘Accessible Somerset’ is an ambitious project which will ask Disabled people how their life could be improved in various areas. The project is seeking volunteers to share their views and is asking for individuals and organisations to get involved by contacting Disability.Inc@wecil.org.uk.

‘Accessible Somerset’ will begin by working with local Disabled people and organisations to help map the areas of need across Somerset. This will help to identify the key areas of focus for the project.

To deliver this project, Somerset Council has teamed up with WECIL Ltd - a Disabled People’s Organisation who offer a range of services which support independent living. WECIL have been working with both public and private sector organisations since 2016, supporting senior management teams, HR professionals and Equality Diversity and Inclusion officers to create accessible, inclusive environments.

If you would like to be involved in the project, please contact Kinny Chinangwa or Alison Browning at www.Disability.Inc@wecil.org.uk

City break escape is new bonus lottery prize

Everyone who signs up to buy one or more Somerset West lottery tickets from 2 - 27 May 2023 will be in with the chance to win a European city break in Barcelona, Florence or Paris, courtesy of the external lottery management company Gatherwell.

Somerset West Lottery gives 50p from every £1 ticket sold to local registered good causes with 10p from every ticket sale going into a community grant fund for which local good causes can apply.

If you know of a good cause wishing to raise funds or would like to buy a ticket contact the Somerset West Lottery on 0300 30 20 666; support@somersetwestlottery.co.uk or visit www.somersetwestlottery.co.uk

Potholes Repaired...

This winter has been particularly bad for potholes. Although it wasn’t particularly cold, the wet weather followed by cold followed by wet and cold again has had a detrimental effect on the quality of our roads. This is why extra funds have been made available for their repair.

CLlr Richard Wilkins reported over 40 potholes in April with many repaired within days. He says if we all reported issues in our areas, the council could act quickly and effectively to make our highways safe and reliable for everyone.

Anyone can report a problem on the roads in Somerset (including potholes and blocked gullies) just go to: <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/report-a-problem-on-the-road/>

Or Search: ‘Report a pothole Somerset’ on a search engine.

Richard Wilkins & Mike Stanton 9th May 2023