

# SOMERSET COUNCIL

## LIBERAL DEMOCRAT GROUP

**OCTOBER 2023**

### **Apply now for your child's 2024 school place**

#### **For parents of children moving to secondary and upper schools:**

The application website for parents and carers of children moving to Secondary and Upper Schools is now open and parents and carers can apply for places for their children from now until 31 October 2023. Please visit:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/children-families-and-education/applying-for-school/starting-at-a-secondary-or-upper-school-in-september/>

#### **For parents and carers of children who are new starters at their first school:**

The application website for parents and carers of children starting school for the first time opens on 25 September until 15 January 2024. Please visit: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/children-families-and-education/applying-for-school/apply-to-start-school-for-the-first-time>

Parents and carers of new starters are advised to read the Primary Admissions Guide before making an application. The guide can be accessed at <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/children-families-and-education/applying-for-school/primary-admissions-guide/>

In helping children get ready to start school, parents and carers can find advice on school readiness at [www.cypsomersethealth.org](http://www.cypsomersethealth.org)

Parents and carers can also get help to access free early education at <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/children-families-and-education/early-years-and-childcare/finding-childcare/>

#### **For parents and carers of children moving to junior and middle schools:**

Junior and middle school applications can be made from 25 September until 15 January at <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/children-families-and-education/applying-for-school/starting-at-a-junior-or-middle-school/>

Any parent who does not have online access can telephone the Somerset Council customer contact number on 0300 123 2224.

Shortly before the deadlines, reminder emails and/or letters will be sent to parents and carers of new starters who have not yet applied. However, the responsibility for getting applications in on time lies with parents and carers.

Up to three preferences can be made. Parents are advised to use all three preferences and consider including their catchment school. Outcomes will be sent to parents and carers via email on 1 March 2024, National Offer Day.

The webpage [www.somerset.gov.uk/admissions](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/admissions) holds a wealth of related information including a directory of schools, catchment areas and admissions policies.



## Climate Lead's letter follows frustration at green policy changes

In a letter to the Minister for Net Zero, Somerset Council's Lead Member for Climate and Environment has voiced her "frustration" at recent changes to green policy.

Writing to the Rt Hon Graham Stuart MP, Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero, Councillor Dixie Darch said she fears the changes announced last week will "seriously jeopardise Somerset's and the UK's ability to reach Net Zero."

Cllr Darch, advised September's Full Council meeting that the letter had been sent. In it she said Somerset was at the "sharp end" of the effects of climate change and urged a rethink to the changes which included a delay to the ban of new non-electric vehicles and a removal of the need for landlords to make properties energy efficient.

"This is an issue that must transcend party politics - it is too important and too urgent," said Cllr Darch. "The shift in policy undermines our work in Somerset, in practical terms and in the message it sends to the public about the commitment of elected members of all political parties to address the climate emergency.

"Rather than stepping back from policies, action needs to be stepped up – not just in reducing carbon emissions, but in investing in adapting to the effects of climate change."

All of Somerset's local authorities declared Climate Emergencies before becoming the unitary Somerset Council in April. The new council has formally declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency and is working to deliver on a Climate Strategy that covers energy, transport, waste and the natural environment.

Recent successes include the launch of a ten year tree strategy, a rapid expansion of the county's EV charging network and a successful bid to fund work to assist the uptake of energy efficient home improvements.

## 100% of plastic stayed in UK for recycling

Every piece of plastic Somerset Council collected from households and via the recycling sites last year was recycled in the UK.

The 6,500 tonnes of plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays all went to UK companies to be turned into new products and packaging – everything from plastic wrapping and compost bins to fleece jackets.

The figure is up from 99.4% the previous year and features in Somerset Council's annual Recycling Tracker which will be released next week for Somerset Recycling Week.

The tracker shows what happens to every tonne of household waste - where it goes, the companies involved and the likely use, the latest tracker will be published online later in September, at: [www.somerset.gov.uk/recycling-tracker](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/recycling-tracker)

In Somerset, most types of plastic, including bottles, pots, tubs and trays can be recycled with kerbside collections using the Bright Blue Bag.

Somerset Council is one of a handful of authorities taking part in a national trial of the kerbside collection of plastic bags and wrapping. This is working well in the small sample of properties in Frome and the aim is to expand it in years to come.

## **Somerset's 'Walk for a Life' event attracts crowds who walked to raise awareness of suicide prevention in Somerset**

Somerset Council's 'Walk for a Life' event, aimed at raising awareness of suicide prevention, returned on Saturday 9 September.

Starting at the Castle House at the Museum of Somerset at 10:30am, crowds gathered to take the mile long walk through Taunton's Town Centre, passing through meaningful locations to commemorate those impacted by suicide within the County.

The walk paused in Vivary Park for a moment of reflection and to lay flowers at the 'Afterlife' bench donated by Netflix and CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably).

The event was attended by nearly 100 people and was organised by Somerset Council's Public Health team in partnership with various organisations across the county.

The event's key focus was on the theme of 'Creating Hope Through Action' to address the critical issue of suicide prevention and provide support to those affected.

Participants were given a free back sign from the Walk for a Life team, which they could personalise in remembrance of a loved one.

Following the walk, participants were invited back to Castle House at the Museum of Somerset where there were refreshments provided and local organisations on hand to chat about their services and provide support.

Leading up to the event, members of the public were invited to share their inspiring quotes, lyrics, or poems that have helped them during challenging times in their lives. These have been published in a 'Book of Hope' and can be read here: <https://walkforalife.org.uk/book-of-hope/>

Support for those dealing with mental health challenges or suicidal thoughts is readily available through organisations like Open Mental Health. To explore various support options, visit [www.openmentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.openmentalhealth.org.uk)

## **Somerset's first Net Zero School build gets underway**

The start of work to build Somerset's first ever carbon net zero school was marked with a timber framing ceremony after land at the Orchard Grove housing development in Taunton was handed from the Orchard Grove Consortium to Somerset Council.

Orchard Grove Primary School is expected to welcome staff and students from September 2024. Sponsored by Castle Partnership Trust, the School will offer places to 420 pupils from Reception to year 6, as well as 52 nursery places and feature three sports pitches, a production kitchen and a library. It will serve the surrounding communities and the design allows for an extension to accommodate a further 210 children if these are needed in the future.

Funded by Somerset Council as part of their School Growth Programme, the £12.3million build will incorporate solar panel technology, air source heat pumps and electric vehicle charging points in line with the Council's commitment to decarbonisation.

## Somerset's EV Charging Network Continues to expand

The medieval village of Dunster has become the latest location to benefit from the Council's rollout of electric vehicle charging points.

The 22kW fast charge point is located in Dunster Steep car park. It has become one of 305 publicly accessible charge points in Somerset, a figure that has increased 40.5% from 217 in June 2022.

Of these, 117 have been provided by the five previous councils in Somerset, achieved through public, private and grant funding, in particular the Government led 'On Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme' (ORCS).

The expansion of EV charging is part of Somerset Council's commitment to a greener and more sustainable travel strategy.

Earlier this year the Council submitted an expression of interest to secure £3.8m from the Government's 'Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure' (LEVI) fund and recently received confirmation that it cleared the initial stage.

As part of the LEVI process, potential on street charging locations will be mapped, and as all locations are different, and there are a variety of charging solutions, the aim is to make sure the right charge points are available in the right locations.

The network will include car parks and on-street locations, as well as addressing the charging needs of our more rural communities, and tourist destinations.

Planning for this network is underway, and if approved the first charge points being funded in this way could start being installed from late 2024.

Find a charge point location near you: <https://www.zap-map.com/live/>

## BT prosecuted for carrying out street works without permission

British Telecommunications (BT) has been fined for carrying out work on Somerset's highway network without adequate traffic management or a valid street works permit.

The works were carried out last March on Ilminster Road in Ruishton.

The utility firm was fined £12,000 and ordered to pay costs of £3,158, plus a £2,000 victim surcharge by Taunton Magistrates after it pleaded guilty to offences under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 and Traffic Management Permit Scheme (England). The total penalty was £17,154.

In passing sentence, the court gave full credit to BT for guilty pleas entered at the earliest opportunity and accepted the mitigation submitted by the firm. However, it found aggravating factors in that the works had no advance warning signage to warn the public of the site's presence and it was deficient in any pedestrian safety.

Due to the disregard for the NRSWA 1991 the court found that there was a high risk of danger to pedestrians and road users alike. The court also took into account that BT has previous convictions for similar offences committed both within Somerset and nationwide within the past 7 years.

## Support and grants available to help Somerset businesses 'Go Green'

With the high level of energy prices continuing Somerset Council is taking action to help businesses to reduce their carbon emissions and, in turn, save money.

The 'Go Green Scheme' and the 'Somerset Green Business Grant Scheme' are being introduced to offer businesses practical help and financial support to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions.

Launching this month the 'Go Green' Scheme is being delivered by the Net Zero specialist consultancy Balanced Energy and will help eligible Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) to understand their energy consumption and show how it can be reduced. The scheme offers free energy audits and support to develop individual, costed and prioritised sustainability plans.

For SMEs who already have sustainability plans in place, the Somerset Green Business Grant Scheme can provide financial assistance to take forward identified measures to reduce energy consumption and costs as well as carbon emissions. Grants can be capital and/or revenue and fund up to 50% of total eligible project costs, with the remainder funded by the applicant.

The grant scheme is now open for applications for activity and expenditure which must be completed by end of March 2024. The deadline for submission is 31st October.

The Go Green Scheme and Green Business Grant Schemes are receiving around £200,000 in 2023/24 from the UK Government from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Further information on the Go Green Scheme 'empowering Somerset businesses to go greener' is available at [www.gogreenscheme.org.uk/go-green-scheme](http://www.gogreenscheme.org.uk/go-green-scheme)

Further information on the Somerset Green Business Grant Scheme is available at <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/business-economy-and-licences/funding-and-grants-for-business/>

For businesses who are not ready to make an application for funding this year Somerset Council expects further grant opportunities for similar project activity to be announced in early 2024.

## Somerset Council joins partners to help businesses stay cyber secure

Cyber experts from across industry and government gathered together to discuss the increasing importance of cyber security at a sold out event on 26 September.

Alongside Baroness Nicky Morgan and the Avon & Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner, Mark Shelford, guest speakers included cyber experts from Microsoft, Leonardo, Quoram Cyber, C3iA Solutions, Cysiam, Securious, and the UK Hydrographic Office.

Organised by the South West Business Council the event also allowed guests the opportunity to get a sneak preview of Somerset Council's inspirational Firepool Centre for Digital Innovation in Taunton.

The centre is due to be launched early in 2024, and represents an £11 million public investment, with external funding from the European Union Regional Development Fund, the UK Government and the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.

The Cyber Resilience Centre for the South West is directly funded by the Home Office and regional policing to help businesses and charities in the region become more cyber resilient.

## Young people can make a difference and be heard - stand for the Youth Parliament

From this month, young people aged 11 – 17 who live in Somerset or go to school, college or a youth club here have the opportunity to influence change by nominating themselves to stand for election as a Member of the Youth Parliament (MYP).

Nominations are open, and the deadline closes on midnight Sunday 12th November. Somerset's MYPs represent 3 areas - Taunton Deane & Somerset West, Bridgwater & Sedgemoor, and South Somerset & Mendip. Those wishing to stand should visit: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/children-families-and-education/the-local-offer/having-your-voice-heard/democracy-and-young-people/>

Somerset's 3 elected Youth Parliamentarians and their deputies represent Somerset at the national UK Youth Parliament. The County's current MYPs will hand over to the newly elected MYPs from January to March next year, and their new term of office runs from March 2024 until February 2026.

MYPs are supported by an Advisory Group of self-selected young people aged 11 to 18 from all backgrounds. They bring a range of experiences, opinions and abilities, and Group members take part in consultations, decision making, planning and grant giving, as well as campaigning on their chosen manifestos.

MYPs are elected by local young people in the schools, colleges and youth clubs who've registered an interest. Young people can also ask how they can vote by emailing the Youth Parliament team at [YouthParliament@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:YouthParliament@somerset.gov.uk).

All local 11- 17 year olds can register to vote for 3 candidates in total, 1 from each area. Voting takes place from Monday 13th November to Friday 15th December. Candidates are notified of the results by Wednesday 20th December, followed by a public announcement in early January 2024.

Information sessions take place on Thursday 28th September and Wednesday 4th October from 5.30 to 7pm via Zoom. These give potential candidates, parents and carers, teachers, tutors and community youth workers the chance to meet current members of Youth Parliament and the Advisory Group, and to ask questions about what's involved. To book a space, visit: <https://forms.office.com/e/W5mrh49ngb>

All candidates need to attend an 'Election Information and Development Day' on Saturday 9th December at Donyatt Village Hall, Ilminster TA19 0RG. They'll take part in activities and workshops about understanding 'Youth Voice' and influence, representation, running a campaign and public speaking.

All candidates get a certificate and recognition of their participation and learning, and are invited to join the Advisory Group. They get the same support and development opportunities as successfully elected MYPs, and opportunities to run projects alongside the official campaigns.

## Don't lose your vote

Somerset residents are being urged to check their electoral registration details or risk losing their chance to vote on decisions that affect them.

The annual canvass allows Somerset Council to keep the electoral register up to date, to identify who risks losing their voice at elections, and to encourage them to register before it is too late.

The Council is legally required to undertake this annual canvass of all of the residential properties in the area, to make sure that the information on the electoral register for every address is accurate and up to date.

Letters are now going out to an initial 83,000 households across the County. All other households will be written to later this month, so residents do not need worry if they do not receive a letter in the coming weeks. The correspondence will be addressed to the occupier and includes full details of what steps to take.

If residents tell the Council there are new people eligible to be registered at their address, they will receive an 'invitation to register form' either through the post (or via email, if this contact method has been provided). They can also go online to register to vote: <https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>

Recent home movers are urged to check their details. Electoral Commission research has found that recent home movers are less likely to be registered than those who have lived at the same address for a long time. In Great Britain, 92% of those who have lived in their home for 16 years will be registered, compared with 36% of people who have lived at an address for less than a year.

More information on registering to vote is available on the Electoral Commission website: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter>



## GET INVOLVED

### E-Newsletters – how to sign up

Somerset Council produces a number of e-newsletters covering many topics including business, the environment, waste and recycling, transport, news and events.

To receive these important updates directly into your email inbox and to choose which emails are most relevant to you, visit: <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKSC/subscriber/new>

### Become an Ambassador for Somerset

Invest Somerset is looking for a wide range of people who are passionate about living and working in Somerset and willing to champion the county as a top business location.

Set up by Somerset Council and Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HotSW) Invest Somerset aims to increase economic growth in the county. It offers a one-stop shop approach to facilitate more jobs and investment and works closely with people at key organisations who can support relocation and expansion projects.

The role of an Ambassador is simple but important. Ambassadors will champion Somerset by sharing positive views and experiences of growing up, being educated, working or relocating businesses here. By using their own networks and endorsing and sharing news and campaigns Ambassadors will help to spread the positive message about the county.

If you are interested in becoming an Ambassador a range of support and materials are available on the website [www.investsomerset.co.uk](http://www.investsomerset.co.uk). For further information please email the Inward Investment Team at [enquiries@investsomerset.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@investsomerset.co.uk)

### Creating Places for People

Residents and businesses in Somerset are being urged to help shape the future of their county and have their say on how best to create places that put people at the heart of their design.

Somerset Council is launching a public consultation to seek opinions on a set of outline “principles” that are designed to steer new development in Somerset. These should guide developers towards creating attractive and high-quality environments, but also inclusive and accessible places for all, regardless of age, gender, mobility, or background, where people enjoy living.

The principles should offer substantial benefit to people in Somerset by improving air quality; reducing carbon footprints; creating safe and easy access to schools; and places that are more resilient to the impacts of climate change while protecting and enhancing nature and wildlife.

Creating connected, safe and healthy places will also help to improve quality of life and wellbeing. The Council is proposing to prioritise active travel – cycling, walking and wheeling - along with public transport to reduce reliance on using private cars.

Places should be designed to allow easy access to shops, services and facilities that meet residents’ needs, with streets linking to existing communities and services. Most new development comes forward in or on the edge of our towns, and for those there would be more emphasis on enabling active travel - bike and e-scooter hire, car clubs and public transport - with less on parking provision.

While Somerset is a largely rural county, at present rural roads are the most hazardous for users, per mile travelled, so the principles would aim to provide safer streets and lanes for rural communities and the

opportunity for sustainable travel. The principles are intended to make it easier for those able to walk, wheel, cycle or take public transport to do so, leaving space for those less able to make active travel trips or journeys by public transport, to continue to drive.

The consultation launches on 4 September and will run for six weeks until 16 October. People can take part via Citizen Space <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/planning/creating-places-for-people>

Paper copies containing further information and the online survey questions will also be available to the public at the following locations:

- Bridgwater House, Bridgwater, TA6 3AR (Monday – Friday 8.45am to 5.00pm)
- Council Offices, Cannard’s Grave Road, Shepton Mallet, BA4 5BT (Monday – Friday 8.30am to 5.00pm)
- Petters Way Council Offices, Yeovil, BA20 1AS (Monday – Tuesday and Thursday – Friday 9.00am to 4.00pm, first Wednesday of the month 11.00am to 4.00pm and every other Wednesday 9.00am to 4.00pm)
- Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton, TA1 1HE (Monday – Friday 8.30am to 5.00pm)
- West Somerset House, 20 Fore Street, Williton, TA4 4QA (Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5.00pm)
- County Hall, Taunton, TA1 4DY (Monday – Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 09:00am to 4.00pm)
- Libraries including: Taunton, Minehead, Frome, Bridgwater, Yeovil and Glastonbury

Responses can be emailed to [localplanningpolicy@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:localplanningpolicy@somerset.gov.uk), or posted to Planning Policy, Somerset Council, County Hall, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4DY. The principles agreed post-consultation will be considered as a material planning consideration subject to consultation and taking feedback into account.

The Council is keen to hear from as many people as possible – individuals, community and voluntary groups, businesses, transport providers, landowners, and city, town and parish councils as well as developers and their agents. This will help the Council to understand whether it is on the right track.