

SOMERSET COUNCIL

March 2024

Council Tax

Council Tax bills for 2024/25 have now been issued. Please remember that help is available if you are struggling to pay your Council Tax through flagship policies "Our Council Tax Reduction Scheme" and a separate "Exceptional Hardship Scheme". More information on how to get help can be found at <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/benefits-and-payments/council-tax-reduction/>. Taunton Town Council have been sharing updates on their budget setting and for more information on the setting of their precept visit <https://ow.ly/WSTU5OQQqFL>.

Sector-Led Improvement Partner Status

Somerset Council has been appointed by the Department for Education (DfE) as a children's social care '**Sector-Led Improvement Partner**'.

Following the Ofsted judgement that we deliver a *Good* standard of support, we were eligible to apply to be part of a small group of local authorities who are asked to support other councils to improve.

The DfE said in their feedback:

"Your bid exceeded our expectations by demonstrating the significant improvements you have made in your own children's social care performance and setting out a strong approach to governance arrangements and partnership working."

"Your evidence of having won an innovation award clearly demonstrated that you are a strong and credible source of peer support, alongside your experience of successfully providing improvement support to peers."

The Knife Angel visits Somerset in April

A sculpture which aims to raise awareness of the negative effects of violence and aggression will be in Somerset next month as part of a nationwide tour. The Knife Angel stands at 27 ft tall, weighs 3.5 tonnes, and was designed by artist, Alfie Bradley at the British Ironwork Centre using 100,000 knives and blades retrieved from amnesty bins from across all 43 UK police forces.

Since its completion in 2018, the statue has been validated by The Home Office as the National Monument Against Violence and Aggression. The month-long placement outside the Market House in Taunton is being supported by Somerset anti-violence campaigner Adam Fouracre, who is the CEO of charity Stand Against Violence, and the Barnaby Webber Foundation.

A short civic ceremony will be held at the site on Wednesday 3 April at 1pm, when Emma Webber – mother of 19-year-old Barnaby, who tragically died after a knife attack in Nottingham – will speak to officially unveil the Knife Angel, together with local representatives and British Ironwork Centre Chairman, Clive Knowles. Somerset Council and Taunton Town Council are supporting and encouraging a 30-day campaign of anti-conflict awareness raising with schools, community groups and local businesses.

Adam Fouracre founded Stand Against Violence after his brother, Lloyd died due to a violent attack in Taunton in 2005. He said: "It is a terrific opportunity to be involved in supporting the Knife Angel project in Somerset where my brother lost his life to mindless violence. The Knife Angel doesn't just

represent the victims who have lost their lives to knife attacks but to all victims of violent acts. We still have a long way to go to see an end to violence in this country, but it begins with awareness and education – something that we hope the Knife Angel will bring and that we can absolutely support.”

Aldermen honoured

Stalwarts of Somerset’s former councils were reunited at a ceremony in Taunton to mark their years of service to the community. Chair of Somerset Council, Cllr Mike Best, presented the Aldermen with certificates and medals at a ceremonial afternoon tea. The title of Alderman is the highest award that can be made to a former Councillor in recognition of their exceptional service to their community.

Cllr Best said:

The combined years of service by our Aldermen is truly remarkable, as are the people who accepted the honour when it was bestowed by their respective councils.

Those councils may now be in the past but their achievements are very much still with us and provided the foundation for Somerset Council. I am delighted to be able to meet these remarkable people, pay tribute to them for their service and bring them all together into the Somerset Council organisation.

Somerset Health Determinants Research

In January 2024, the Somerset Council Public Health Team was successful in being awarded a five-year contract with the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) to establish a ‘Health Determinants Research Collaboration’ (HDRC). This is a £5m partnership between Somerset Council and two universities, the University of West of England and University College London, to increase the Council’s capacity to use evidence and do research where evidence is missing across all Council functions that influence the health of Somerset residents.

We know that the biggest factors influencing our chances of living a long and healthy life are the circumstances that we’re born into, grow up and live in. Our homes, early life experiences, education, income, employment, and stability in our lives all have major impacts on stress, physical and mental health, and whether we can lead a healthy lifestyle. Healthcare itself plays a comparatively small part in how long and how healthy our lives will be. The Council has significant influence over these building blocks, including our powers and duties to deliver transport, planning, housing, economic and community development, education and social care services, among others.

The new HDRC will improve how we use existing evidence and will also produce new evidence of what works to support the building blocks of health.

Help us get the people of Somerset involved in shaping Somerset's Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Somerset Council has been appointed and funded by Defra to lead the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Somerset. The LNRS is about creating a blueprint for the recovery of nature across the country. Working with partners we are developing Somerset's LNRS strategy, it will help focus the work for a full range of organisations and groups, involved and invested in nature recovery in the county. To help shape the strategy, we also want to gain local knowledge from those who live and work here.

We have launched a public survey which is open until 30 April.

People can take part by visiting www.somerset.gov.uk/lnrs or scanning the QR code on the attached poster.

[Watch this film about the Somerset LNRS](#)

Key stats and facts

The [Somerset State of Nature Report](#) demonstrates that we need to do much more to reverse the decline in nature and help Somerset's wildlife to thrive.

Key findings include:

- *Somerset has lost over 5% of its total grassland habitats over 25 years.*
- *Butterfly distribution has declined by over 330 square miles over 30 years*
- *Lapwing records have declined to worrying levels.*
- *The number of 'Good' quality rivers in Somerset has decreased.*
- *Non-native invasive species cover has increased by 260%.*
- *Somerset's 45-mile coastline, and the species that call it home, were found to be under threat.*

Other things we are doing as a council to support nature.

We are integrating the new government [Biodiversity Net Gain](#) rules that come into force this month into our planning process. This means planning applications for new developments must leave nature better off than before and create new habitats and green spaces, to compensate for any removed or affected as part of the build. This is a legal agreement to commit and monitor any habitat gains for over 30 years.

We launched the Somerset Tree Strategy funded by Defra. This is a ten-year plan to enhance and protect trees and woodland across the county and increase the county's tree cover from its current 8% to at least the national average of 13%.

Museum of Somerset

As part of the Museum of Somerset's popular Spotlight Loan programme, Tate will be lending the artist John Martin's extraordinary painting 'The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum' (1822) to the museum from 23 March to 2 June 2024.

The artwork is a vast and vividly colourful oil painting, depicting the disaster that famously beset Pompeii and Herculaneum when Mount Vesuvius erupted on 24 August AD 79.

It also has an important connection to Somerset through the forgotten friendship of John Martin and the poet and music master Edwin Atherstone, who lived in a house adjoining Taunton Castle.

Get tickets to an associated Talk and Tea on 10 May to learn about John Martin and the Art of Apocalypse: <https://swheritage.org.uk/events/john-martin-talk/>

Learn more about the loan and artwork here: <https://swheritage.org.uk/events/the-destruction-of-pompeii-and-herculaneum/>

Yeovil Town Football Club support community blood pressure testing

In an important step to improve community health across the county, NHS Somerset and Somerset Council have partnered with Yeovil Town Football Club as part of their 'Take the Pressure Off' campaign, raising awareness of the importance of testing your blood pressure. They attended the match between Yeovil Town FC and Welling United at Huish Park Stadium on Saturday (9th) to host free community blood pressure checks to more than 3,200 fans that attended the match, and some of Yeovil Town's management team including Club Owner and Chairman, Martin Hellier.

Over half of all strokes and heart attacks in Somerset are caused by high blood pressure. Many people will have no symptoms of the condition, often termed the 'silent killer', but it can lead to serious health issues like heart disease, stroke, and kidney problems if left unchecked. The "Take the Pressure Off" campaign is designed to encourage residents, particularly those aged 40+, to regularly check their blood pressure and take necessary steps towards managing their health.

Managing New Stowey Farm

The Quantock Hills National Landscape is now managing a farm near Nether Stowey on behalf of Somerset Council. New Stowey Farm is a 45-hectare holding which was previously tenanted, most recently for grazing, and will continue to operate as a working farm.

We will work with a range of stakeholders, including graziers, community groups and environmental experts, to demonstrate the potential of New Stowey Farm to deliver a range of agricultural, environmental, climate and community benefits, such as:

- creating farmland rich in nature through habitat creation and restoration,
- adopting practices that mitigate climate change,
- engaging communities to increase understanding of agriculture with opportunities for learning, training and volunteering.

Visitors to the site will notice some changes in the coming months. The barn will be rebuilt, grazing livestock will be reintroduced and the rights of way network across the farm will be improved. Our longer term aims include establishing a community orchard, planting in-field trees, improving woodland health, and assessing how modifications to the stream can restore natural hydrological processes.

To find out more about the Quantock Hills National Landscape, visit www.quantockhills.com