

SOMERSET COUNCIL

November 2024

Royal recognition for Somerset charities

3 Somerset charities are celebrating after winning the coveted King's Award for Voluntary Service (KAVS).

Equivalent to an MBE for individuals, **KAVS** is the highest award given annually to voluntary groups in the UK, celebrating outstanding work done by charities.

Only about a third of groups nominated nationally receive an award but in Somerset, for the second year running, all three charities nominated were successful.

Deputy Lieutenant Jane Sedgman, who oversees the nomination process in Somerset on behalf of the Lord-Lieutenant, said:

This has been another outstanding year for our Somerset nominees. To get a clean sweep 2 years in a row is a remarkable achievement.

The King's Award for Voluntary Service is prestigious and an encouragement for those who give so generously of their time and expertise. It can open the doors to funding streams which might otherwise prove very hard to access, so there are practical benefits in addition to the emotional rewards.

This year's local recipients include:

- [ARK at Egwood](#)
- [Exmoor Young Voices](#)
- [Somer Valley FM](#)

ARK at Egwood

ARK at Egwood is an intergenerational, therapeutic land-based day provision, supporting people of all ages and varying needs to improve their confidence, self-esteem and wellbeing.

ARK provides a safe outdoor space for people to connect with themselves and others, using animals, nature, horticulture, rural arts and crafts, cooking and more.

It supports all ages and all needs in the same environment and is run by a dedicated team of volunteers, many of whom started by using the services they now help to provide.

Each day on average, ARK has 30 people attending. It also provides one off activity days, group visits and courses/workshops in partnership with Somerset Skills and Learning and other partners.

Training is offered in skills which benefit both ARK and the individuals, helping them into employment and with better life style management.

Exmoor Young Voices

Exmoor Young Voices engages with young adults in the community, offering support with job opportunities, housing and other issues to help them stay working and living on Exmoor.

The majority of these young adults, aged 18 to 35, are still living at home although **EYV** is steadily improving the conditions for a number of them to be independent and is also gradually improving the prospects of owning their own sustainable homes through self-build initiatives.

EYV is a self-organising and self-directing all-volunteer group of empowered young adults, bringing their own persuasive, practical and innovative solutions to a raft of 59 authority policy makers and budget holders that prioritise housing, digital inclusion, rents, earnings, travel, and transport, to sustain a balanced population on Exmoor.

EYV strives for positive action that prioritises young people's needs. Their golden goal is to prevent young people from needing to leave Exmoor to start a life elsewhere.

Somer Valley FM

Somer Valley FM is an Ofcom licensed community radio station in Midsomer Norton and Radstock, broadcasting local content including news, entertainment, music, heritage, and sports.

SVFM develops creativity and talent in broadcasting with around 70 individuals at any one time, who live and work in the community. These volunteers make regular commitments as presenters, producers, or in **SVFM**'s administration or training initiatives.

A key characteristic of **SVFM** is the encouragement offered to all. In the last 15 years no person seeking training and inclusion has been turned away.

Organisations wanting to be considered for next year's **KAVS** can get all the information they need by visiting kavs.dcms.gov.uk.

Consultation on Local Validation Checklist for Somerset

Views are being sought on a new Local Validation Checklist covering the Somerset Council area.

Local Validation Checklists (LVCs) help inform applicants and agents about the type of documents and level of information required to be submitted in order for the Council to validate a planning application and/or other consents.

Each of the former councils which make up Somerset Council had an adopted LVC reflecting the Local Plans for their area.

Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) are required to maintain an up to date LVC and review it every 2 years.

This will be the first LVC for the Somerset Council area and where necessary it includes specific requirements from the former LPA's adopted Local Plans while a new Local Plan for Somerset is being prepared.

Cllr Mike Rigby, Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, said:

We are committed to providing a professional and efficient service for all potential applicants and agents.

The LVC will help them to prepare their submissions and ensure they can be validated and determined as swiftly as possible. I would urge all interested parties and members of the public to share their views with us.

The consultation runs for 6 weeks from **11 November to 23 December 2024** and can be found by visiting the Council's [Local validation checklist](#) consultation page.

The Council will consider all comments on the draft LVC which may be amended to take account of comments, observations and updates that assist with the content and clarity of the document.

The proposed final version will be considered before a decision is taken to adopt the new LVC in 2025.

UKHSA issues health advice following the half-term break

As children across the country return to their classrooms after the half term break, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is reminding parents of the simple steps they can take to reduce the spread of stomach bugs and winter illnesses to ensure they stay healthy this term and keep strong this winter.

We are now beginning to see cases of flu and norovirus increasing as we head into the winter months, with norovirus activity in the past two weeks more than double the 5-season average for the same 2-week period and flu steadily increasing over the past few weeks.

Teaching good hygiene habits

Parents are urged to encourage good hygiene habits in their families, such as handwashing and using a tissue to catch coughs and sneezes. Regularly washing your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds or using hand sanitiser when convenient, is one of the most effective ways to stop the spread of germs.

Knowing when to keep your child at home and when to send them to school

Children are encouraged to stay in school or nursery with symptoms such as a runny nose, sore throat or slight cough (if otherwise well and do not have a high temperature), but should stay home if they're displaying symptoms such as having a fever (they should stay home until the fever has passed and they are well enough to attend) or diarrhoea and vomiting (children should stay home for at least 48 hours after these symptoms clear up).

Stopping the spread of stomach bugs

Stomach bugs spread easily in schools and nurseries. If you or your child have diarrhoea and vomiting, washing your hands with soap and warm water and using bleach-based products to clean surfaces will help stop infections from spreading. Don't prepare food for others if you have such symptoms or for 48 hours after symptoms stop. If you are unwell, you should also avoid visiting people in hospitals and care homes to avoid passing on the infection to those more vulnerable. It's important that all children are given the opportunity to start the year in good health, which is why it's important not to return to school, nursery or work until 48 hours after symptoms have stopped.

Getting vaccinated

Infections such as flu, which see a seasonal increase in winter, are easily protected against with vaccination. All primary school age children, those aged 2 years (who have turned 2 years old before the 1 September 2024) and all 3 year olds (and secondary school children from Year 7 to Year 11) are eligible for the flu vaccine, which beyond protecting the children themselves and the school community, will also protect elderly relatives.

It's also important to ensure your children are up-to-date with their routine vaccinations, which protect against diseases such as measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria and polio. UKHSA is continuing to see cases of measles, which is easily prevented with vaccination. If parents are unsure of their child's vaccination status, they can check their child's red book or contact their local GP.

Dr Richard Pebody, Director, Clinical & Emerging Infections at UKHSA, said:

As children return to school after the half term holidays, it's important that they get off to the best start possible ahead of winter. Staying healthy and taking simple steps to reduce the spread of illness will ensure children and their families experience less disruption at this important time of year.

Each winter, we see an increase in acute respiratory and gastro-intestinal illnesses, however it only takes simple steps to reduce the spread of most of these infections. By following advice on good hygiene habits, knowing when to keep your child off school and taking up the opportunity to get vaccinated, parents are protecting their children and the wider school community.

UKHSA's [e-bug](#) resources for all ages can help you to explain and discuss hygiene habits and their importance, to your child or teenager.

NHS UK also provides easily accessible guidance for parents to [help manage winter illness at home](#)

Council issues muddy roads warning

Somerset Council urges farmers to keep roads clear of mud and debris to ensure public safety

Somerset Council is reminding farmers and other operators working on the land to make sure they keep roads clear of mud and debris.

As rural county where farming is a major activity and where farmers carry out a lot of important land and vegetation maintenance, it is a common occurrence for mud and debris to end up on the road. The Council's expectation is that operators ensure all mud and debris is removed immediately when this happens.

It is an offence to leave mud and other material on the road, and people who do so may be liable to prosecution and for the cost of cleaning it up.

Earlier this year a Somerset farmer was held responsible for landslip resulting from land management issues which had closed a major A road, causing significant disruption.

Somerset Council successfully recovered costs of £19,000 for the ensuing clear-up which involved a Council highways team over several hours.

Last month, the A3088 Cartgate link road near Yeovil had to be closed to enable a highways team to clear mud from the road which was posing a major hazard to motorists.

Lead member for Transport and Waste Services Councillor Richard Wilkins, said:

We are grateful for the vital work local farmers do throughout the year – trimming hedges and ensuring road safety during winter with snow ploughing.

But there is a minority who fail to clear up when run-off occurs or when mud is left by vehicles working on nearby fields.

This is highly dangerous for the road-using public – in some cases it has happened on fast, major routes and drivers may not spot it until it's too late.

We ask all local farmers to ensure any mud or debris is removed from the road – as we have demonstrated, we will come after those who fail to do so and use our powers to enforce the law.

If you spot mud or another problem on the road, you can report it quickly and easily via the Council's [Report a problem on the road](#) page.

For further safety information, visit the Council's [Mud on the road](#) page.

Make the most of Council's super Slinky service

Explore how Somerset's super slinky service is revolutionising local transport and enhancing community connectivity

People living in Somerset are being reminded they have access to a demand responsive transport service known as Slinky.

Demand responsive transport is a bookable, flexible service which residents can use if there is no public transport alternative.

All users need to do is [register online](#) to start using the Slinky bus to get to the shops, to visit friends and family, get to college or social clubs, or access medical appointments.

You can also call:

- [01749 880482](#) for Mendip area
- [01823 331266](#) for Sedgemoor, Taunton and Wellington area
- [01643 707090](#) for West Somerset area
- [01935 477399](#) for South Somerset area

The service is available to anyone in Somerset who does not have access to a regular bus service, which is especially helpful to those in more rural locations.

Previously having your own transport precluded you from using the service but from 1 September, that has changed – car owners can use Slinky.

Somerset Council's Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Councillor Richard Wilkins said:

Slinky is an incredibly useful option for people in Somerset. It is vital if you don't have transport, but now it also offers a flexible, affordable alternative for people who don't want to use the car, or for younger people who just want to get around more easily without having to rely on a parent.

Slinky services are available in all parts of Somerset, operating within the following areas (covering towns and the local communities in-between):

- Taunton/Wellington and surrounding areas
- Mendip area – including Frome, Wells, Glastonbury, Shepton Mallet, Street and surrounding areas
- South Somerset – including Yeovil, Martock, Crewkerne, Chard, Ilminster and South Petherton and surrounding areas
- West Somerset – including Minehead, Exford, Watchet, Washford, Wheddon Cross and Williton and surrounding areas

- Sedgemoor area – including Bridgwater, Highbridge, Burnham-on-Sea, Wedmore, Cheddar, Axbridge and surrounding areas

Please note: Slinky does not operate between areas, such as from Taunton to Yeovil or Wells to Bridgwater.

Whether you are 16 or 60, Slinky could be your flexible transport solution.

There is a 50% fare reduction for Concessionary Bus Pass holders, and for children aged 5-16, while under-5s go free.

Passengers need to register first, this can be done online, and then they can simply book their journey on a phone line. Planning ahead is advisable – the team needs 24 hours notice for you to book your journey.

Somerset Council is also running a trial Digital Slinky using its Bus Service Improvement Grant, operating 7am to 7pm in the Langport and Somerton areas. Digital Slinky is booked quickly via an app and aims to offer an affordable, flexible, easy-to-use service for all ages.

If successful it could be rolled out across the county. Users can still book by phone. More details are available via the Council's [Slinky Digital – Somerton](#) page.

Strawberry Line celebrates sweet success with grand opening

New sections of traffic-free pathway open, enhancing active travel and community connectivity in Somerset

Somerset Council has joined residents and volunteers to celebrate the opening of another 2 new sections of the Strawberry Line, a traffic free greenway through the county.

On 8 November, representatives from the Council joined volunteers for a ribbon-cutting ceremony, formally opening the Dulcote Extension and the West Shepton Link.

The Dulcote Extension is an 800m stretch from Dulcote Quarry to Churchill Batch Lane.

The West Shepton Link runs from Hitchin Lane to Ridge Road, a 1.3km stretch that includes a 15ft-long bridge that was craned into place last month and allows path users to safely cross the B3136.

The Strawberry Line is a traffic-free path reaching from the Mendips to the sea. The path is a unique and pioneering multi-partnership project between, charities, volunteers, contractors, community groups, councils, Historic Railways Estate and private landowners.

Somerset Council, and before, Mendip Council, has helped the project by providing guidance and investment where possible.

Construction was supervised by volunteer led charitable organisation [Greenways and Cyclerooutes](#) and work carried out by local contractors [MP and KM Golding](#).

The [Strawberry Line](#) volunteers together with volunteers from the neighbouring [Friends of Windsor Hill Tunnels](#) project have provided key support and helped with clearance and construction on the project through regular weekly volunteer sessions and at Greenways workcamps.

This has included supporting with all aspects of the path, from land access negotiations, vegetation clearing and preparatory works ahead of construction, to vegetation planting, creating local walking routes, managing the local ecology and maintaining the path itself.

Councillor Richard Wilkins, Lead Member for Transport and Waste, said:

The grand opening event really showcases the importance of the local community and volunteers. Thank you, your efforts have transformed the disused railway into a vibrant pathway for everyone to use.

This triumph gives more people the opportunity to leave their cars at home and get into active travel – which is great for health, wellbeing and the environment.

The converted railway line now provides a link for walkers, cyclists and horse riders through wonderful Somerset countryside.

The Strawberry Line project encourages people out of cars, reducing congestion and pollution, while promoting active travel and a healthy lifestyle. It also supports local businesses along the route too, helping to achieve a number of the Council's key priorities.

Work is also progressing on further sections of the Strawberry Line and Somerset Circle that will the traffic free network continue to grow in coming years.

For more information, visit Strawberry Line's [Discover the line](#) page.

Somerset Council seeks public opinion on the future of local pharmacy services

Somerset Council is conducting a Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) consultation for the public to share their thoughts and contribute to the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment statutory report produced by the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board.

The PNA is a comprehensive assessment of the current and future pharmaceutical needs of the local population and is used to review local community pharmaceutical services and evaluate whether they adequately meet the county's needs.

NHS commissioners use the results of the PNA to work out if any changes might be needed in local pharmacy services. Despite the name, the PNA does not review the quality of pharmaceutical provision, it helps to inform decisions.

The Council is encouraging the people of Somerset to share their thoughts and experiences by completing the online survey before **1 January 2025**.

To take part, visit: the Council's [Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment 2024](#) consultation page

Somerset Council's Lead Member for Public Health, Climate Change and Environment, Councillor Graham Oakes said:

I firmly believe that access to high-quality pharmaceutical services is essential for the health and well-being of our residents. A robust pharmaceutical service ensures that residents receive the medications and advice to manage their health effectively.

Pharmacies also play a critical role in preventative care, helping to reduce the burden on our healthcare system.

By participating in the consultation, we can work together to identify areas for improvement.

Pupils are the champions as they dream up names for Somerset gritters

Somerset Council's 2 new gritters have had their names chosen following a competition involving schools and the Somerset public.

The gritters, soon to join the Council's winter fleet are to be named Gritty Gritty Bang Bang and Spready Mercury.

Somerset Council is working with new highways contractor Kier to help make roads safer this winter and the gritter naming competition is a fantastic opportunity to involve the community and raise awareness about the importance of road safety during the winter months.

A long list of 30 was whittled down to a shortlist of 6 and the public voted on their favourite 2.

Gritty Gritty Bang Bang and Spready Mercury, named by Brymore Academy and West Pennard C of E School respectively were the winners.

The schools will receive a visit from the gritter and have the honour of seeing the name embellished on the vehicle.

Gritting is important during icy months as it helps keep roads safe and reduces weather-related disruptions, whether you're heading to school, work, or appointments.

This year, over 900km of gritting routes are set to be treated. The Council has stockpiled over 6,400 tonnes of salt, with over 800 grit bins filled across the region.

Road gritting involves spreading rock salt on roads to prevent ice and snow build up, giving car tyres better grip. With temperatures falling, gritting teams will soon be undergoing trial runs – and will grit the roads when the weather is set to fall below 0.5°C.

Councillor Richard Wilkins, Somerset Council's Lead Member for Transport and Waste, said:

Thank you to everyone who took part, the schools for their amazing and creative name suggestions and the public for helping chose the winning names. The names add flare and personality to our gritters.

We can't wait to see Gritty Gritty Bang Bang and Spready Mercury on the road this winter, keep an eye out for them on your travels.

If you see road gritters out, then be patient and be safe. You can get updates about when we are gritting roads on @TravelSomerset on [Facebook](#) and [X](#).

Follow @TravelSomerset on [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#) and [Facebook](#) for live travel updates, roadworks and other highways news.

Allan Rigby, general manager at Kier, added:

It has been wonderful that during the first year of Kier delivering on the contract that we have engaged with the community on this. We hope children across the county wave at our drivers as they undertake the important role of making the roads safer.

Our new road gritters will soon be embellished with their names and out on the road once surface temperatures reach freezing, keep an eye out for them.