

SOMERSET COUNCIL

BRIEFING SHEET May 2024

Suez waste collection contract: The Council's waste contractor, SUEZ, has disclosed figures showing significant annual losses on its £24m a year contract. It has made a number of contractual claims seeking adjustment to payment and while these are in dispute, without an increase in payments there is a risk that SUEZ may exit the contract, to limit its losses over the contract's remaining six years. A report to the Council's Executive Committee meeting recommends giving the Council's Chief Executive a mandate to negotiate with SUEZ to broker a deal which would stop SUEZ exiting the contract. The ongoing rerouting of collections is helping make rounds more efficient and as cost effective as possible, but even with this SUEZ considers the contract unviable.

Roadside grass-cutting: From May 2024, where safe to do so, mowing routines across managed highway verges, open spaces, country parks and council property grounds will be reduced although safety and visibility around verges and public spaces such as play areas will be cut more regularly. On wider verges, only a 1-meter swathe is mowed, leaving the rest untouched to maintain biodiversity. Further information on the cutting schedule can be found at <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/grass-cutting/>

Subsidised Bus Fares in Taunton: Somerset Council has announced revised bus fares for the Taunton Town Zone to keep services sustainable. From 1 June this will be £1.50 for any adult single fare and 80p for a child. The new fares will be reviewed at the end of this year. Across the rest of the county the cost for any single fare will stay at £2 until December 2024, part of the national Government-funded initiative. The fare for the Park and Ride service in Taunton remains £1 for a single fare.

Children and Young Peoples Plan : The new Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) for Somerset sets out the Council's aims for 2024-2030 including how services and communities are accountable for children and young people and how they will work together to ensure the ambitions of the plan are achieved. Members of Somerset Youth Forum have suggested that the most important priorities are:

- Having a better experience in education
- Leading healthier lives
- Help to improve your mental health
 - Living in safer communities
 - Building better relationships
 - Being prepared for adulthood

The Council wants to encourage all individuals under the age of 25 to share their thoughts on these priorities via the online survey: <https://forms.office.com/e/dNHR44HCfn>

Volunteer Drivers: Since Covid-19 the numbers of volunteer drivers in Somerset has reduced by about 67 per cent. These dedicated drivers play a pivotal role in the community, providing essential transportation services to residents so the Council are calling out for new volunteers. Many residents who need the service live in rural areas with little or no access to public transport and are unable to drive. If you are working part-time, a parent, retired or just have some spare time on your hands and you have a car and at least half a day to a day to offer then you can get involved and make a positive impact on people's lives. Volunteer drivers receive training and are reimbursed expenses at 45p per mile (or 50p per mile with passengers).