

# Coronavirus Briefing

Please find attached the latest Coronavirus Somerset briefing. I hope that you have been finding these regular updates useful, but we are now moving online, so that we can share this information more widely with residents and other partners.

Please take a look at the new site, available at

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/coronavirus/covid-19-latest-advice/>

We will still send you a regular round-up, but you can access the site anytime for the most up-to-date information as we get it.

It would be great if you could share this link and the information below with your communities, particularly links to where they can access help and support during these difficult times.

## Stay at home, safe lives

The current government advice is for everyone to stay at home and limit their contact with others. This means only going outside for food, health reasons or essential work. If you must go outside you should stay 2 metres away from other people and wash your hands in warm, soapy water as soon as you get home. These measures will help to stop the spread of infection and give our NHS the best chance to cope with the additional demand generated by Covid-19. There are lots of things you can do to stay happy, healthy and safe while at home and you will find some ideas on how to do that at the [Healthy Somerset webpages](#). It is completely normal for people to feel overwhelmed and vulnerable as we read the news about the Covid-19 outbreak and experience big changes to our day to day lives. Mindline are offering an emotional support telephone service for people who would find it helpful to talk. They are available Monday to Friday, from 9am to 11pm, and 8pm to 11pm at the weekend on 01823 276892.

## Shielding hubs update

Important work to identify and look after Somerset's most vulnerable people is well underway. In response to the government's announcement that 1.5m of the most at risk people will be asked to self-isolate for at least 12 weeks, Somerset County Council is working closely with Sedgemoor, Mendip, South Somerset and Somerset West and Taunton district councils to set up shielding hubs to ensure they are looked after. Details of exactly how these will work are now being finalised, but will include a single point of contact for all enquiries, a brokerage service to connect requests to food and supplies, and other support, including for homeless people. Watch this space for updates.

## **Prioritising the vulnerable**

Somerset County Council is changing the way it works in order to respond to the coronavirus pandemic. This means focusing our resources on communities and individuals that need our help, making sure that we can anticipate and respond to the demands that the virus is placing on us. As part of this, we have asked all staff whether they are willing to accept a temporary redeployment to other areas of work. The response has been fantastic and within 24-hours, 600 colleagues have put their hands up and told us what skills they have and which tasks they can do. These roles will include helping in domestic and community settings, driving, keeping schools open. We are linking this work to similar activities in our district councils, with neighbouring authorities and, of course, with the NHS.

## **Volunteering opportunities**

We recognise how critically important the work of volunteers and local charitable groups is at this time, and we thank them for all the support provided so far. More volunteers are needed and people can do so through the contacts below. Spark Somerset is working to bring all offers of support into one place, making it easier for people to get the help they need. Both people who need help and people who want to offer help are encouraged to register on <https://www.corona-helpers.co.uk/> which is a website specially set up to deal with helping our community through the Coronavirus. Help is also available through Somerset County Council's Village and Community Agents: <https://www.somersetagents.org/>

There are a number of community and voluntary groups that have already been set up by communities themselves that offer help to people in need. Further advice and guidance for community groups can be found here: <https://www.sparksomerset.org.uk/guidance-cov-19-groups>

People can sign up to help the NHS at <https://www.goodsamapp.org/NHS>

## **Business Support**

### **Heart of the South West Growth Hub**

Businesses across Somerset can find free support, advice and information on sources of finance, along with assistance on working from home through the Heart of the South West Growth Hub at: <https://www.heartofswgrowthhub.co.uk/covid-19-guidance-for-business/>

## **Small Business Grant Funding**

District Councils will be contacting small businesses eligible for the grants of £10,000 or £25,000 imminently to help them meet their ongoing business costs.

## **Self-employed**

A summary of financial assistance for the self-employed reported by the Chancellor yesterday will be online today at; <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/coronavirus/covid-19-help-for-business/>

## **Reception closures**

Following new government advice to reduce the spread of Covid-19, all County Council Receptions are now closed until further notice to ensure the wellbeing of the public and our employees. Support information and advice can be found on our website or for anything urgent, please phone 0300 123 2224.

## **Scams warning**

Devon, Somerset and Torbay Trading Standards are urging people to remain vigilant and to watch out for scams in their neighbourhood, which often target elderly and vulnerable people within the community. The outbreak of coronavirus has seen an increase in scams that include counterfeit medical kits that claim to prevent or cure the disease and fake online coronavirus resources which can contain damaging software. Devon, Somerset and Torby Trading Standards are urging people to be vigilant and look out for elderly and vulnerable neighbours. A full list of identified scams can be viewed on the [National Trading Standards website](#).

## **Somerset Waste Partnership**

SWP's new contract for kerbside collections starts this weekend, with SUEZ taking over from Kier, and we're conscious of this happening at a time of disruption. All parties have been working hard to make sure the transfer is smooth and the new fleet of vehicles should help us cope with these pressures. All 16 recycling centres remain closed, to ensure public and staff safety in light of Government advice around non-essential travel and physical distancing. Garden Waste services are suspended until further notice (subscriptions extended to take account of this) and the public is advised to leave the waste in their bins and consider home composting where practical. Bulky waste collections are suspended, and this who have booked collections are being contacted. Recycling and refuse collections are currently being maintained, but likely to come under increasing pressure in the coming days. Please note the government guidance around disposing of potentially contaminated personal waste (tissues and cleaning cloth etc). This and

regular service updates can be found here [www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/coronavirus) and by following @somersetwaste on Twitter and Facebook.

## **Registration Services**

Somerset Registration Services are currently only taking appointments for death registrations at their offices in Somerset and North Somerset. All ceremonies, notice of marriage appointments and birth registrations have been cancelled following the Prime Minister's announcement on March 23rd. No new bookings are currently being taken for these services, although provisional ceremony bookings are being taken for July 2020 onwards. Enquiries should be made via email as the Registration customer service team are operating a triage system to identify the most urgent issues. The Heritage Centre is now closed to the public. There is currently no facility to issue copy certificates, so any urgent enquiries should be made online to the General Register Office online.

## **Schools and education**

Schools in Somerset are continuing to cater for children of key workers and vulnerable children. There have been a number of enquiries to our Contact Centre so a useful set of FAQs has been put together. It includes details free school meals. You can access this here

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/coronavirus/coronavirus-guidance-for-key-workers/>

Staff may be redeployed to other educational sites to ensure adequate cover and Somerset County Council has also begun a major redeployment exercise which includes an appeal for those with teaching or classroom experience, as well as staff who have experience of supporting pupils with additional needs.

## **Any questions?**

If you are a Councillor, and any COVID-19 related questions, particularly around holding Council meetings, please email [democraticservices@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@somerset.gov.uk)

Latest Somerset County Council Coronavirus service updates can be found online at [www.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.somerset.gov.uk). And to keep up-to-date with all the latest COVID-19 information, visit the NHS site at [www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/)