

MDC Briefing

For Publication

Issue 11

14th September, 2020

Mendip news

Stronger Somerset

Overwhelming support from Councillors to back Stronger Somerset and a better future for all

Mendip District Council has backed an ambitious, innovative plan for local government reform.

In an historic vote that will impact future generations, elected Members supported the Stronger Somerset joint-proposal put forward by the county's district councils.

Stronger Somerset would see the creation of two new unitary councils – East and West - with a combined authority. Its focus is on job creation, improvements in care and public health, investing in young people, and opportunities for all.

The magnitude of the decision, after months of research and consulting with experts throughout the UK, was not lost on Leader of Mendip District Council, Cllr Ros Wyke, at a special meeting of Full Council on Thursday 10th September 2020.

Cllr Wyke said: "Today is an important moment for all of Somerset. Decisions taken in the next few weeks will impact on generations to come."

Read the full press release, and view the recorded vote, here:

<https://www.mendip.gov.uk/9448>

Watch the Leader of Mendip District Council, Cllr Ros Wyke, discuss the two unitary proposal on ITV West Country here:

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=335110317612415>

Pulling together: Community-led weeding pilots picked

Mendip District Council recently announced that Frome and Easton have been chosen to take part in their manual weed management trials. Volunteers in the Somerset town and village are being asked to step forward and sign up for the scheme.

You don't have to be a keen gardener, or have the kit. You don't need to be physically fit or agile either, to join in.

The aim of these two trials is to establish if the Council and community, by pulling together, can tackle weed control without the use of glyphosate - a weed killer linked to cancer and toxic to birds and insects.

Register now! www.mendip.gov.uk/communityweeding

Don't live in Frome or Easton? No problem. Mendip wants community weeding groups to spring up across the district, and they'll help facilitate these, even though they are not part of the official trials.

Want to see how quick, easy and fun community weeding can be? Check out Cllr Shane Collins' film here: <https://direc.to/eqov>

Council to provide roadside residents extra support in seeking housing solutions

Mendip District Council is to appoint a full-time, specialist housing advisor to work directly with roadside communities to support suitable accommodation solutions.

The aim of the government-funded role is to build relationships with roadside dwellers, enable honest conversations and explore realistic housing options.

In addition to the housing advisor post 'on the ground', a part-time officer will be employed to provide strategic input and support local partnership working. They will act as a single point of reference and report back to the District Council on progress, coordinating with wider district projects where needed.

The new appointments are in response to research observed by Smart Communities Limited (SCL) who engaged with residents living on the roadside in Glastonbury to gain more detailed information regarding the causes and their circumstances. Mendip commissioned this piece of work during late 2019/early 2020 when numbers in the town stood at 82. By August 2020 that figure had increased to 112.

Mendip's £57 million COVID-spend to support communities

Mendip District Council's COVID-spend topped £57 million - providing a lifeline to residents and local businesses during the crisis.

The money has been used to provide business grants, ensure business rates relief to nurseries and retail, to support working age Council Tax payers in receipt of Council Tax Support and for general additional costs incurred by the Council relating to COVID-19.

Despite prudent financial management, an all-but balanced budget last year, and some sound commercial investments, the Council faces a funding shortfall of between £2 million and £3.5 million in 2020/21, due to COVID. Its healthy £12.7 million reserves will help cushion the costs, however.

Press release in full here: <https://www.mendip.gov.uk/article/9446/Build-back-better-Mendip-District-Council-s-57-million-COVID-spend-supports-local-communities>

Mendip's safeguarding for taxi drivers scheme attracts nationwide interest

Mendip District Council is helping to protect communities through the delivery of specialist safeguarding training to all licenced taxi and private hire drivers. Taxi drivers can play an important role in the safeguarding process, sometimes witnessing issues relating to vulnerable children and adults. It is critical drivers are alert to these potential issues, and know what to do if they have concerns.

Due to COVID, the first sessions were delivered online and were well attended, with positive feedback from drivers. News of the safeguarding session success hit the headlines. This led to a senior licensing officer from Trafford Council contacting Mendip to request they attend our training, with a view to replicating delivery back in Greater Manchester.

Read the press release here: <https://www.mendip.gov.uk/article/9430/Online-safeguarding-sessions-prove-popular-with-Mendip-s-taxi-drivers>

Keeping homes safe, warm and ready for winter

Mendip District Council can help! We've pulled together checklists, guidance and the latest information locally and nationally, to help you make your home more comfortable as we approach the colder months...

Could your home be more energy efficient?

Is your loft insulated? Does your property have the potential to install renewable energy? The Council has a range of information, funding and advice to support you to improve the energy efficiency of your home – making it more comfortable and potentially saving you money too.

<https://www.mendip.gov.uk/energyefficiency>

Mendip District Council's Home Energy Checklist

Do you want to make your home more comfortable ahead of winter? Do you want to save money on your energy bills, but are unsure where to start?

Download our Home Energy Checklist to help you identify improvements you could make in your home. The checklist has links to guides produced by our partner – The Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE). Click on the link for further information on grants and loans available to help improve your home's energy efficiency.

<https://www.mendip.gov.uk/energyefficiencyfinance>

Installing renewable energy in the home

Have you ever considered installing solar panels or alternative heating? Installing renewable energy can make your home more comfortable all year round, save you money on your energy bills and help reduce your carbon footprint too!

Find key sources of information and advice on installing renewable energy in the home here: <https://www.mendip.gov.uk/article/8651/Energy>

Or check the Council's Planning and Renewables Guidance:

https://www.mendip.gov.uk/media/25830/Planning-and-Renewables-Guidance-Note/pdf/Planning_and_Renewables_Guidance_Note.pdf

The Government's Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) enables you to get money towards renewable heating costs in your home.

<https://www.mendip.gov.uk/renewableenergy>

Please share this information with your communities through your networks and on social media. Thank you.

Keeping homes safe, warm and ready for winter

Green Home Grants

The Government will launch its Green Homes Grant scheme this month. It means people living in Mendip can apply for vouchers of up to £5,000 to go towards 'green' home improvements.

For low-income families, the Government will fund 100% of the cost of the works for up to £10,000. For everyone else, the scheme will fund up to two-thirds of the costs. Homeowners and landlords can apply for the grant, which could help families save up to £600 per annum on their energy bills.

Local traders must register to carry out green grant works

Mendip District Council is encouraging local tradespeople to register for TrustMark or Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) accreditation, to be able to carry out works for the Government's Green Homes Grant scheme.

Only tradespeople who sign up to the TrustMark accreditation or MCS will be able to undertake the green home improvements. It's an opportunity for them to have access to more work in the Mendip area compared to those tradespeople not accredited, and also ensures quality and peace of mind to property owners that the works being carried out are to a high standard and offers consumer protection.

Register for Trust Mark Accreditation here www.trustmark.org.uk/

Register for the Microgeneration Certification Scheme here
<https://mcscertified.com/>

For more information about the grants, visit the Centre for Sustainable Energy
www.cse.org.uk/advice

Learn more about the Green Homes Grant scheme here
www.gov.uk/government/news/quality-assurance-at-heart-of-new-2-billion-green-homes-grants

Grants and loans

Loan scheme continues to improve homes across the district

With the Government announcement of the Green Homes Grant Scheme launch, a loan from Lendology CIC (formally Wessex Resolutions) could be used to top-up a grant where there is a shortfall in the cost, or for those homeowners who are not eligible for the Green Homes Grant. There are a variety of home repairs and improvements covered under the scheme. If you need to repair your home, it couldn't be simpler to apply for a home improvement loan.

Just contact the team at Lendology direct on 01823 461099 or visit their website www.lendology.org.uk

£1m Climate Emergency Community Fund launched

A pot of £1 million is available to help local communities become carbon neutral and mitigate the impacts of Climate Change in Somerset.

From 1st October, city, town and parish councils across Somerset are invited to bid for between £5,000 and £75,000 for innovative projects that can make a real difference in reducing carbon emissions and can contribute to making Somerset resilient to the effects of Climate Change.

All applications must be submitted by parish, town or city council or a local member if you are in an unparished area, so if you've got a great idea for what your local council might do, get in touch with them now.

For information visit: www.somerset.gov.uk/climate-emergency.

Grants available from The Somerset Fund

If you are a grassroots community group based in Somerset, grants are available up to the value of £2,500 from The Somerset Fund. Somerset Community Foundation (SCF) manages the Fund and is encouraging applications from smaller charities and community groups that run on less than £100,000 per year. The grants will be 'unrestricted', which means they can be used to pay for ongoing running costs, also known as 'core costs'.

Please ensure applications to the Fund are made through SCF's website www.somersetcf.org.uk/somersetfund or call 01749 344949

The deadline to apply is **Friday 16th October 2020**.

COVID NEWS – AN IMPOTRANT UPDATE

Rule of six comes into force

From today it will not be possible to meet with people from other households socially in groups of more than six. This will apply indoors and outdoors, including in private homes.

This doesn't include schools, workplaces, COVID-secure funerals or weddings or organised team sports.

Other COVID-secure venues, such as places of worship, restaurants and hospitality venues, can still host larger numbers in total but groups of up to six must not mix or form larger groups.

The police can fine anyone not following the rules.

There has been a significant rise in cases nationally. While the number of new infections in Somerset remains low, we need everyone's help to keep it that way. Following the guidance will keep you and your loved ones safer, and could help prevent a return to the tighter restrictions we've seen in other parts of the country.

Here are the things we can all do to reduce the spread of infection:

- Keep contact with people outside of your household or support bubble to a minimum.
- Wash your hands regularly with warm soapy water for a minimum of 20 seconds, and catch coughs in a tissue or your elbow.
- Wear a face covering in enclosed public spaces, such as public transport or shops.
- Maintain 2m (three steps) social distance from people outside your household.

What you can and can't do:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/>

Meeting with others safely:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing/>

COVID-secure guidelines for venues:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

'Hands. Face. Space' public information campaign

To coincide with the new measures being introduced nationally today the Government has launched the 'Hands. Face. Space' public information campaign.

This urges the public to continue to wash their hands, cover their face and make space to control infection rates and avoid a second peak.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-campaign-to-prevent-spread-of-coronavirus-indoors-this-winter>

Take a test – but only if you have symptoms

It's important that you only book a coronavirus test if you're showing one or more of the symptoms of coronavirus.

The symptoms are:

- a high temperature
- a new continuous cough
- a loss, or change, to your taste or smell

Data suggests that about 25% of people being tested at the moment don't have symptoms and this is making it more difficult for those that need a test to access one.

You shouldn't be booking a test using the NHS system if you need to be tested before travelling abroad - you should use a private test provider for this.

If you have symptoms and there aren't any tests available when you first try to book, keep trying as more slots are added throughout the day.

If you have any symptoms of coronavirus, you must stay at home and self-isolate until you receive your test results and, if positive, continue to isolate for 10 days from the start date of your symptoms.

COVID-19 national updates ... continued

Guidance for hostel services for people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping

The Government has updated the guidance on coronavirus for commissioners and providers of hostel services for people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-services-for-people-experiencing-rough-sleeping>

Extension of tenants' protection from eviction

The Government has written to councils to notify them of the extension of emergency measures regarding notice periods which came into force on 29th August 2020. The letter gives details on the change to the Coronavirus Act 2020 (Residential Tenancies: Protection from Eviction) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020, which requires residential landlords to give tenants 6 months' notice of their intention to seek possession, except in the most serious cases.

Letter: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-act-2020-residential-tenancies-protection-from- eviction-amendment-england-regulations-2020-letter-to-local-authorities>

Save up to £2,000 with Tax-Free Childcare

As schools return in Mendip, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is reminding working parents they could save up to £2,000 per child per year to pay towards after-school clubs and other childcare services. Around 100,000 families in region are eligible for Tax-Free Childcare, which can cut thousands of pounds off childcare bills.

You can find out more and apply through the Childcare Choices website www.childcarechoices.gov.uk. It includes a Childcare Calculator that compares all the Government's childcare offers to check what works best for individual families. www.gov.uk/childcare-calculator

Travel corridors

If you're going abroad it's important that you continue to follow the guidance on social distancing, handwashing and face coverings. Remember that there are extra precautions in place when travelling, for example at airports and on planes. If you're coming back from a country that isn't on the travel corridor list then you must self-isolate for 14 days on your return. These measures are in place to reduce the risk of spreading the virus, which would see us needing to return to tighter restrictions.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus>

COVID-19 business updates

Changes to the Job Retention scheme

From 1st September changes came into place for the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. HMRC now pay for 70% of usual wages for hours furloughed employees do not work, with employers needing to make up the additional 10% so staff still receive the same payments.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme/changes-to-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

Sign up for apprentice cash boost

As part of the [Government's Plan for Jobs](#), employers are being offered £2,000 for each new apprentice they hire aged under 25, and £1,500 for each newly recruited apprentice aged 25 and over. This includes taking on an apprentice who has been made redundant. The cash boost is designed to support employers to cover the cost of recruiting an apprentice such as providing facilities, uniforms, helping with travel costs or to help pay their salary.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/employers-encouraged-to-sign-up-for-apprentice-cash-boost?>

Domestic abuse advice line for businesses

The charity Hestia launched a new advice line for businesses supporting employees experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse. Funded by the Home Office, the [Everyone's Business Advice Line](#) will be a point of contact for businesses, supporting them on how to approach disclosures of domestic abuse by their employees, particularly in light of COVID-19. They will also receive advice so that they can signpost staff to specialist domestic abuse services.

<https://www.hestia.org/news/hestia-launches-free-domestic-abuse-advice-line-for-businesses>

Help and support if your business is affected by coronavirus

Watch videos and register for the free webinars to learn more about the support available to help you deal with the economic impacts of coronavirus.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/help-and-support-if-your-business-is-affected-by-coronavirus-covid-19>

Guidance for food businesses

You'll find guidance here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-food-businesses>

Coronavirus information for farmers, landowners and rural businesses

The latest information for farmers, landowners and rural businesses during the coronavirus outbreak.

Read this page for regular updates: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-farmers-landowners-and-rural-businesses>

Eat Out to Help Out: More than 6.7 million meals claimed for in South West

6,771 outlets in the South West signed up to use the Eat Out to Help Out Scheme as of 27th August 2020. This only relates to businesses that have fewer than 26 outlets. The actual figure (which includes larger restaurant chains in the region) is higher. So far, a total of 6,778,000 (6.7 million) meals have been claimed for across the South West region.

Total amount of discount claimed = £35,022,000 (£35 million)

Average discount per meal = £5.17

It is important to note that these figures are up to 27th August 2020, and businesses have until 30th September to **make a claim**

Across the UK more than 100 million meals have been claimed for so far (up to 31st August 2020).

The latest Eat Out to Help Out figures have been published on GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmrc-coronavirus-covid-19-statistics#eat-out-to-help-out-scheme>

Eat Out to Help Out Scheme - claims by parliamentary constituency

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eat-out-to-help-out-scheme-claims-by-parliamentary-constituency>

COVID-19 health focus

Car sharing

If your journey requires you to share a car with another household, please follow Government advice:

- try not to share a vehicle with those outside their household or support bubble
- if this is not possible, share the transport with the same people each time open the windows for ventilation
- wear a face covering for the duration of the journey
- consider seating arrangements to maximise distance between people in the vehicle – e.g. leave seats some free.
- clean their car between journeys including door handles and other areas that people may touch

This guidance is for personal family owned cars.

Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles have their own guidance and regulations:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-transport-guidance-for-operators>

Every Mind Matters

With children and young people now back at school or college, PHE's new campaign 'Better Health – Every Mind Matters' is designed to support children and young people's mental wellbeing. Aimed at parents, carers, teachers and young people themselves, the campaign provides NHS-endorsed tips and advice to help children and young people's mental wellbeing and equip parents and carers with the knowledge to support them. <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

Obesity means increased risk

People living with excess weight are being encouraged to embrace a healthier lifestyle and lose weight if they need to. A 12-week plan has been developed by the NHS to help you plan meals, be more active and set weight-loss goals. There are also discounts for Weight Watchers and Slimming World and free apps to support your journey. <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health>

Events and Campaigns

Suicide is everybody's business

'Suicide Let's Talk' is a 20 minute free bite size online course developed by the Zero Suicide Alliance and is for anyone in Somerset who has an interest in learning more about suicide and gaining lifesaving skills and knowledge.

The session includes facts surrounding suicide and provides useful advice and guidance on how to understand the signs that someone maybe at risk.

See the problem. Say the words. Signpost to support. You can join in and undertake the training here: <https://www.healthysomerset.co.uk/covid-19/happy/>

Call for food artisans to join virtual festival - 10th and 11th October 2020

Wells Food Festival with Charlie Bigham's, is a food festival giving artisan producers from the South of England the opportunity to reach a wider audience, via its virtual shopping experience – open for business now. Food and drink producers interested in exhibiting should email wellfoodfestival2020@gmail.com for details.

<https://wellsfoodfestival.bighams.com/>

Keep Britain Tidy: Be part of the pick 11th-27th September 2020

Visit the website, get involved (with up to five friends – following Government guidance) and show support for the Great British September Clean.

<https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/get-involved/support-our-campaigns/great-british-spring-clean>

Free allergen awareness webinars for businesses

Do you run a food or catering business? Learn how to control allergens in the food you serve at a free webinar with Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officers.

The webinar will cover:

- Practical advice on allergen awareness
- An update on new labelling legislation coming out in October 2021
- A Q&A session

All attendees will receive a certificate of attendance, which you can display to improve customer confidence.

Join the webinar on a date to suit you: **Mon 28th Sept at 10am; Tue 29th Sept at 2pm or Mon 5th Oct at 2pm.**

Find out more and sign up at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/environmental-health-amp-trading-standards-officers-31076240533>

Useful numbers, links and helplines

Mendip District Council: www.mendip.gov.uk/coronavirus

Stronger Somerset: <https://www.strongersomerset.co.uk/>

Government information on coronavirus: www.gov.uk/coronavirus

Coronavirus cases: <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/>

NHS information: www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/

LGBTQ+ services helpline and counselling service:

<https://www.intercomtrust.org.uk/item/214-we-are-here-for-you>

Mind in Somerset, available on 01823 276 892:

<https://www.mindinsomerset.org.uk/our-services/adult-one-to-one-support/mindline/>

Citizens Advice:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-we-provide-advice/advice-partnerships/money-advice-services/>

Keep connected

These briefings are produced by Mendip's Marketing and Media Team. We're doing everything we can to make sure we're directing you to the most up-to-date information and advice. A version of these, suitable for publication, is available as a pdf, a Word document, and a web link. The shareable version can always be found here: <https://www.mendip.gov.uk/mdcbriefings>

Mendip District Council's corporate Facebook page

www.facebook.com/mendipcouncil

We are also on Twitter twitter.com/MendipCouncil

And LinkedIn www.linkedin.com/company/mendip-district-council

Finally, here's our official website: www.mendip.gov.uk