

## County Councillor's Report – April 2021

Future Parish, Town and City Council meetings: The government announced on the 25th March that the Coronavirus regulations allowing for remote Parish, town and City Council meetings would not be extended beyond 6th May 2021. This effectively means that all Council meetings scheduled for the 7th May or later will have to be held in public, face-to-face. No provision is available for remote attendance including mixed hybrid (part attendance) meetings. A legal challenge has been launched by Hertfordshire County Council but this will not be heard until later in April and planning should now be made to either pull forward meetings before 7th May, postpone meetings or determine Covid secure meeting facilities for the Council and Members of the public.

At the same time the Government have launched a consultation on allowing remote or hybrid meetings on a permanent basis via their website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-authority-remote-meetings-call-for-evidence/local-authority-remote-meetings-call-for-evidence>

Road Map out of lockdown: From 29 March - Outdoor gatherings of either six people or two households were allowed including gatherings in private gardens. Outdoor sports facilities such as tennis or basketball courts reopened and organised adult and children's sport, such as grassroots football, returned. From 12th April: major parts of the economy are permitted to reopen including non-essential retail, hairdressers and some public buildings like libraries; Outdoor settings like beer gardens, zoos and theme parks; Indoor leisure like swimming pools and gyms; Self-contained holiday accommodation, such as self-catering lets and campsites. Wider social contact rules will continue to apply in all settings - meaning no indoor mixing between different households.

Coronavirus infection rates: As at 1st April the number of confirmed Covid cases in Somerset was 19,982 (up from 18,890 on 28th February) and the number of Covid-attributed deaths 787 (722). The rate per 100,000 stands at 41.8 for Somerset with Mendip at 26.8, Sedgemoor at 53.6, South Somerset 61.2 and SW&T at 22.6. The current number of total deaths across the County is currently 25% below the 5-year average and the latest R-value for Somerset is between 0.7 and 0.9.

It is vitally important to remember, even those who have had a jab, to observe Hands-Face-Space and to Ventilate indoor areas at all times.

Somerset Coronavirus Support Helpline: A single phone number continues to be available for anyone in Somerset who needs Coronavirus-related support. 0300 790 6275, is open seven days a week from 8am to 6pm.

Vaccination programme roll-out: Teams across the wider health and care system have worked round the clock at 13 GP-led community vaccination sites, two hospital hubs, two large vaccination centres (Taunton Racecourse and the Bath and West Showground) plus seven local pharmacy sites. As a result Somerset has one of the highest vaccination rates in the country with the latest figures showing 309,227 having received at least their first vaccination in the County or 66.7% of the 16+ population. In addition 33,765 have received their second dose. Take up rates across the County of the first dose remains very high: 80+ (98.7%), 75-79 (100%), 70-74 (99.3%), 65-69 (91.6%), 60-64 (96.5%), 55-59 (94.2%) and 50-54 (88.3%).

Somerset Medal: The Somerset Medal is designed to say a heartfelt thank-you to the best of the best that have really gone beyond the call of duty during the Coronavirus pandemic. So many people, from teachers and nurses, police and fire officers, carers, shop workers, volunteer drivers and waste collectors have all gone the extra mile to make sure that every effort was made to support communities. To nominate someone who has really made a difference to your community please submit an email with a maximum of 250 words, providing the nominee's name and location and describing why they deserve the medal to [DemocraticServices2@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:DemocraticServices2@somerset.gov.uk) and put 'Somerset Medal nomination' in the subject field. Nominations close on 23 April with the inaugural Somerset Medal award winners unveiled on Somerset Day, 11 May.

One Somerset: The government's public consultation into changing the way local councils work in Somerset ends on the 19th April. The County Council's proposal to replace the county's five existing councils with a simple, single unitary model to end confusion for residents, remove waste and duplication, and free up funding to invest in vital public services is a key part of the consultation. It would also offer more powers for local Town and Parish Councils and one strong voice to lobby for funding and support. For more information and to take part in the consultation visit: [www.onesomerset.org.uk](http://www.onesomerset.org.uk)

Investing in School (1): Plans are underway for a major £6.2m project to expand Holyrood Academy in Chard to increase student numbers and meet growing demand. The new building will incorporate a purpose-built student/dining area, six classrooms, new office spaces and meeting rooms and a single point of entry into the school. If approved, building is set to start late summer with the new building complete by September 2022. To have your say then email [FuturesInfo@Somerset.gov.uk](mailto:FuturesInfo@Somerset.gov.uk)

Investing in Schools (2): The new Somerton primary school will open after Easter following a £7.3m build programme by Somerset County Council. The new school can accommodate up to 420 pupils and 52 early years children, with 14 classrooms, a pre-school, a school hall, a production kitchen, sports pitches and a multi-use games area. The facilities used innovative construction techniques to

ensure the school has strong environmental credentials. Plans for the school to open in September 2020 were delayed due to archaeologists uncovering evidence of Roman and Iron Age settlements at the site ahead of construction.

**Highways Awards:** The multi-million pound project to upgrade Taunton's M5 Junction 25 has won a two prestigious awards at the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transport (CIHT) South West Awards 2021 ceremony. As well as winning the Project of the Year and Collaboration Awards for the £19.2m scheme SCC also picked up the Innovation Award for on traffic modelling for the Toneway scheme.