

Clare Paul

BRIEFING SHEET FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

OCTOBER 2019

Measels: Measles is a highly infectious viral illness that can be very unpleasant and sometimes lead to serious complications. Earlier this year the UK lost its measles free status due to the increased number of confirmed cases in the UK and evidence that transmissions of measles had been re-established. This increased number of cases is directly linked to the drop in the number of Children vaccinated, in particular the second dose of the MMR vaccination. Evidence has shown that cases of measles occur in communities where vaccine uptake is low. As measles is highly infectious, even small decline in uptake can have an impact, and anyone who has not received 2 doses of MMR vaccine is at risk. Those people who missed out on getting the vaccine are urged to make an appointment now to get vaccinated. For more information, visit www.nhs.uk/conditions/measles

School places: September saw the opening of applications for school places for 2020. The deadline for secondary school places is 31 October 2019 and for Primary school admissions the deadline is 15 January 2020. SCC encourage everyone to submit three preferences, including their local school as one of those preferences. In recent years, some applications have only included one preference for a non-local school and if demand is high for that single school, it can mean that students and parents have to wait longer for a confirmed placement at a different school, making the experience more stressful. www.somerset.gov.uk/education-and-families/apply-to-start-school

New school openings: September saw two new schools open their doors in Taunton, the £8.5m Hazelbrook campus at Selworthy Special School and the new £7.3m Nerrols Primary school, creating 500 new school places. The state-of-the-art new campus at Selworthy will offer 80-100 places for secondary age pupils with a wide range of Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities. The development will help to ensure pupils can be educated close to their homes and communities, without needing to take long journeys to a school, which can accommodate their needs.

Libraries: Over 7,000 children visited libraries across Somerset to take part in 'Space Chase' - this year's national Summer Reading Challenge inspired by the 50th anniversary of the first moon landing. Children signed up to read up to six books over the summer and received rewards for every book they read. During the holidays over 160,000 books were read in total and hundreds of children and families took part in free events held in their local libraries such as slime making, story times, 3D printing, Virtual reality, LEGO days, Nintendo Switch gaming events, and many more.

Costa Coffee Fostering Events: Over the next few weeks information events about Fostering opportunities are being held in Yeovil , Shepton Mallett and Bridgwater, kindly supported by Costa Coffee. More information can be found at www.fosteringinsomerset.gov.uk

Enterprise centres: Two business-boosting enterprise centres for Somerset have taken a leap forward with construction work now underway. Cathedral Park, Wells will offer two larger offices, ten smaller offices and two meeting rooms as well as five 50 square metre industrial units whilst the new, purpose-built Wiveliscombe centre will offer ten offices, two meeting rooms and seven industrial units. The aim is for both centres – which are each costing in the region of £2m – to be open next Spring, bringing the total number of centres in the Somerset network up to seven. All centres provide modern, accessible space for small and growing businesses – something that can be hard to find in rural areas. They offer flexible tenancies, superfast broadband, business networking, access to business support and competitive rents.

Gritting routes: As the County Council's financial position has now significantly improved SCC has confirmed it will make available an additional £200,000 for the highway winter service to fund additional routes and activities. The precautionary gritting network has been reviewed in line with the most up to date code of practice. This has resulted in an increase in the precautionary gritting network from approximately 720 miles to 900 miles of road which will be treated every time ice or snow is forecast. This is around 21 per cent of the total roads in Somerset – bringing it back to previous levels. SCC will be operating 23 gritting lorries, running out of five depots across the county.

Grit Bins: Parish council are being asked to check their grit bins and to let SCC know by 31st October if they need filling. This will assist with the continuing sustainability of this service by targeting visits by the road maintenance teams to only those locations in need. One tonne dumpy bags of salt are sometimes provided on steep slopes, especially on Exmoor and the Mendips, and this will continue to be the case. If Parish/Town Councils have any questions regarding the provision of roadside salt please contact the area highways office. The parish/town council salt bag collection day which has taken place for a number of years up until last winter was also reviewed. The conclusion was that on recent occasions the take up of this service was generally low and it did not provide good value for money.

Opposite Sex Civil Partnerships: Somerset's Registration Service is ready and waiting for couples wishing to tie the knot through a new 'opposite sex civil partnership' next year. The service would like to hear from couples interested in booking a ceremony in 2020 following the change of Government legislation which will make civil partnerships available to opposite as well as same sex couples. Somerset Registration Service has a large team of professional celebrants who will tailor ceremonies to suit each couple's preferences at over 120 licensed venues. Contact Somerset Registration Service via somersetregistrations@somerset.gov.uk