

## **SOMERSET COUNCIL**

### **BRIEFING SHEET SEPTEMBER 2023**

**Council Finances:** Somerset Council has warned that it will have to draw on reserves for the second successive year to meet its budget for 2023/24. A recent Executive report describes the council's financial position as "stark and challenging". The latest budget gap for the current year is £28.6m. The papers reveal that the Council has already drawn £18 million from reserves to fund spending beyond the 2022/23 budgets. These figures are despite an £18.5m annual bonus created by moving to a Unitary Council and which were planned to be fully realised by next year.

**Covid autumn booster programme:** As the result of a newly identified variant the Covid-19 vaccine is being brought forward by one month and offered to those at high risk of serious disease and who are therefore most likely to benefit from the vaccination. Specifically, JCVI advises the following groups to be offered a Covid-19 booster vaccine this autumn:

- residents in a care home for older adults
- all adults aged 65 years and over.
- persons aged 6 months to 64 years in a clinical risk group.
- frontline health and social care workers
- persons aged 12 to 64 years who are household contacts of people with immunosuppression.
- persons aged 16 to 64 years who are carers and staff working in care homes for older adults.

Booster vaccinations are now planned to start on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

**Flu vaccinations:** NHS England has confirmed it will start by prioritising flu vaccinations for children from September, to prevent children from getting seriously ill and to break the chain of transmission to the wider population. School aged children will be able to get the flu vaccine at school or at community clinics, Children aged two and three years will be able to get an appointment with their GP practice. This year, based on the latest scientific evidence, the JCVI has recommended adults over the age of 65 and those with underlying health conditions will be eligible for a flu with the offer starting from early October, to maximise protection for patients right across the winter months. The flu season typically peaks in January when more people gather indoors.

**Roundabout sponsorship:** Local businesses are being invited to take advantage of roundabout sponsorship to advertise socially responsible goods and services. The space is available for advertising a wide range of goods and services. The new ethical advertising policy means that the Council will not sanction certain adverts such as those promoting junk food, fossil fuels, gambling or consumption of alcoholic drinks. The money generated by the initiative will go back into the Council's highways maintenance budget although not specifically earmarked for roundabout maintenance.

**Soft plastics recycling:** More than four tonnes of plastic bags and wrapping such as bread bags and confectionary packets, have been collected for recycling as part of the Council's role in a national project to expand recycling collections. The small-scale pilot involving 3,600 homes across two locations in Frome started at the end of May.