

## **BRIEFING SHEET September 2024**

**Winter Fuel Payments:** The announcement by the new Labour Government to stop paying Winter Fuel Payments to those pensioners not receiving Pension Credits will impact over 110,000 residents in Somerset. This together with the rise in the fuel cap will have a significant impact upon a large proportion of them.

**Commercial Investments:** Somerset Council has completed the sale of another Commercial Investment - its property at Aztec West, Bristol. The building is one of many commercial assets that the Council is disposing of as part of its property rationalisation programme established in response to the financial emergency. Other commercial assets recently sold include the Steelite factory in Stoke-on-Trent and Howdens in Bromsgrove.

**Bridgwater Celebration Mile:** Work on Bridgwater's Celebration Mile has now commenced. The pedestrian and cycle route will connect the railway station and the Northgate Docks which are also in line for regeneration. Both are funded by money from the Government through the Bridgwater Town Deal. The closure of Eastover is expected to be in place until November when construction moves to the next phase. The scheme aims to re-energise the centre of Bridgwater by improving footfall and encouraging visitors to spend more time in the town centre. The route will include coordinated quality public realm materials, street furniture, shared surfaces, paving, lighting, street trees, interpretative material, public art, and improved wayfinding.

**Reducing carbon emissions:** Somerset Council is encouraging businesses to reduce their carbon emissions by registering for the Go Green Scheme. Part of the scheme will enable businesses to take advantage of a free carbon reduction plan, which will improve energy efficiency and is likely to reduce running costs. The Go Green Scheme is funded by the UK Government to support businesses transition to a cleaner, greener economy. A tailored report then sets out the current energy usage, the alterations and support needed to achieve the predicted energy reduction. To find out more about the Go Green Scheme and to register interest visit <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/business-economy-and-licences/net-zero-for-business/> and scroll down to the Sustainability Audit.

**Trading Standards:** Businesses across Somerset are being warned that they are putting their livelihoods at risk by not asking for identification when selling age-restricted goods such as vapes, tobacco and alcohol. This follows the prosecution of a shopkeeper from Bridgwater who has been ordered to pay more than £3,500 after being caught selling vapes to a 15-year-old girl. The girl was in fact a volunteer in a test purchasing exercise on behalf of the Trading Standards Service.

**Green Flag Awards:** Four of the Councils managed open spaces have been awarded the prestigious Green Flag Award for 2024 – Ham Hill, Yeovil Country Park, Wellington Park and Blenheim Gardens in Minehead. Somerset Council had taken the decision not to enter their parks into the Green Flag Award competition this year due to budget constraints but the four which retained their green flag status were entered by local voluntary groups and Minehead Town Council.

**On Your Bike:** A new initiative with SUEZ and charity, On Your Bike means that bikes collected via the council's bulky collection service will now be donated to On Your Bike. Bikes are often collected and although previously recycled as scrap metal, they will now go to new homes. On Your Bike is based in Bridgwater and Taunton with an aim to train and support those in the community who have suffered social exclusion, have physical disabilities or mental health issues. This includes ex-service personnel, refugees, ex-offenders, homeless and long term unemployed. Bikes that are donated to On Your Bike are then refurbished and sold in their Bridgwater and Taunton shops. All funds generated go back into local projects. During the first month On Your Bike received more than 25 bikes.

**Fostering:** With over 600 children in care and fewer than 200 in-house Foster homes more people are needed to come forward to train as foster carers. More information can be found at [www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk](http://www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk) or by calling 0800 587 9900.