The festive season is an exciting time, but it is also a challenge for everyone involved in keeping us healthy and independent.

Winter can be bad for your health, especially for older people. Visits to GPs and Accident and Emergency increase, and so do hospital admissions and requests for support from the Council’s social care teams.

We are working closer than ever with health colleagues to make sure people get the support they need and to help them get home as soon as possible if they do end up in hospital. The Home First initiative (see page 8) has really taken-off and our social workers in both of the county’s main hospitals start care planning as soon as possible, making links with community activities and groups wherever possible.

There are a few simple things that we can all do to help ourselves and loved ones stay well this winter and ease the pressure. Stay warm, eat well and get a flu jab is a great starting point. If you start to feel unwell with a cough or a cold, don’t wait for it to get worse - see your local pharmacist straight away. If you’re ill and not sure what to do, phone NHS 111 – it’s free and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Or, visit www.nhs.uk/staywell

The festive season can be difficult for anyone feeling lonely or a bit cut-off, but it’s also a good excuse to make new friends. Somerset’s Village Agents have put together a helpful directory of activities and events going on over Christmas and New Year for anyone who wants to make sure they’re not at a loose end (see page 7).

And, of course, many of us will be spending time on the road this winter. The Council’s highways team will be working hard to keep the traffic moving whatever the weather. We’ll be gritting 900 miles of road every time the temperature falls below 1°C, making sure priority routes between towns, villages and hospitals are as safe as they can be.
I think it’s important to first highlight our feature on Child Sexual Exploitation (pages 4 and 5). It may be an uncomfortable read, and you might be forgiven for thinking that this sort of thing isn’t relevant to you or doesn’t happen in Somerset.

But unfortunately, you’d be very wrong. So please take note and be aware of the signs of CSE - we all have a role to play in protecting and keeping our children safe.

As you will see from our main story, winter brings with it a number of challenges for us all. But rest assured that we are working hard with our health colleagues to support you to stay well, so that you can spend the festive season with your loved ones and not stuck in hospital. But we need you to take care of yourselves too so take a look at our feature on pages 6 and 7.

Christmas is a magical time children, but for the hundreds of children in care in Somerset it can be a really difficult time. We have many children looking for a permanent loving family, so if you’ve been thinking about adoption, take a look at our feature on page 15 to find out more. You never know, 2018 could be their year to find a forever home.

And finally, I’d like to say a personal thank you to all our staff who will be on call over the Christmas period. But all sites will be closed on Christmas, Boxing and New Year’s Day.

There will be changes to kerbside collections across both festive weeks. Pick-ups will be two days later in the first week. So, for example, collections due on Monday 25 will be on Wednesday 27 December, through to Friday 29 on Sunday 31 December.

In the second festive week, pick-ups will be one day later, so collections due on Monday 1 will be on Tuesday 2 January, through to Friday 5 on Saturday 6 January.

All services will be back to usual from Monday 8 January.

Celebrate Christmas with less waste

Simple planning can help you to cut Christmas waste and save money.

Top tips include using wish lists, creating compostable natural decorations and making tree baubles from recycled materials. These are just a few of the ideas you can find on Somerset Waste Partnership’s website to help you to waste less, recycle more and save money this Christmas.

To find out what to do with your Christmas tree after Christmas, visit www.somersetwaste.gov.uk

EDITOR’S INFO

To get in contact with Your Somerset or to advertise in this publication, contact Lauren Fellingham on (01823) 359176, email yoursomerset@somerset.gov.uk or write to us at Your Somerset, Somerset County Council, FREEPOST NAT 9109, County Hall, Taunton, TA1 4DY.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of organisations that advertise in Your Somerset, but Somerset County Council can accept no responsibility for the products or services advertised. We advise readers to make their own enquiries before purchasing products or services.

Pssst... Your Somerset costs 7p per copy to produce.
As our Library service reaches its 100th anniversary next year, we have lots of celebratory events planned to mark this momentous occasion.

Over the last century, our library service has witnessed lots of change; always reviewing and adapting to the needs and demands of our customers. Alongside the loan of books, we are proud to provide a full range of services, from ebooks, audiobooks and free internet, to a vibrant range of children and family activities.

None of this would have been possible without a growing number of people who have volunteered to support their local library. They have helped us to deliver things like the hugely successful annual Summer Reading Challenge and Home Library Service. We’re also fortunate to have a number of active Library Friends groups, which work closely with our library staff.

For more information about the celebratory events planned for our centenary year, visit www.somerset.gov.uk/libraries

As we move forward into another new and exciting century of library services, we continue to be fully committed to delivering a thriving, modern library service.

Over the last few months we have been meeting with community groups across Somerset to get their thoughts about the library service going forward. In January we will launch a public consultation to get your feedback on our proposed plans for the next three years – so please look out for it. Once live, you’ll be able to respond online, at your local library or join us at one of our events, which will be taking place across the county.

You really are Unstoppables!

In the last edition of Your Somerset, we featured the amazing work of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Engagement and Participation Team.

Well, we’re not the only ones who think they’re fab! Their Unstoppables Young People’s Forum, which they set-up to give children and young people in Somerset with SEND their own voice, was shortlisted by the British Youth Council for a ‘Celebrating Diversity Award’. Although they didn’t scoop the top award, it was great to see Somerset on the map and playing such a big part in this year’s ‘National Youth Voice Star Awards’.

Well done everyone!
CSE is a type of sexual abuse. It is when someone takes advantage of anyone under the age of 18 sexually, for their own or other people’s benefit or enjoyment. This frequently involves using threats, bribes, violence, humiliation or emotional blackmail.

It can be difficult to identify because those who have suffered don’t always consider themselves to be victims at first, and may believe that they’re in a ‘loving relationship’.

It’s easy to assume that Child Sexual Exploitation is something that happens elsewhere and to other people. The uncomfortable reality is that this form of child abuse, like all forms, happens in communities of all kinds, in just about every part of the country.

That includes Somerset.

Following a recent case of CSE in Somerset, a group of young people, aged between 12 and 14, including some who had been victims of CSE, were asked what they would say to other young people and parents. They had some powerful messages.

**Young person to young person**

- Think before you do anything. It may have a long-lasting effect.
- Once something is on the internet anyone can see it - a future employer may even search for you online.
- Don't talk to strangers. Do not accept friend requests on social media unless you know the person.
- Don't have a boyfriend more than two years older than you.
- Keep yourself safe, protect yourself, and if you get an STD - get treatment.
- Social workers can be very supportive, and can come with you to the police station.
- You need to understand what grooming is to recognise what is happening.

**Young person to parent**

- Try to build a two-way relationship - trust and being comfortable talking about concerns really helps.
- It’s ok to break down in front of your child and show your emotions.
- Talk and listen to your children about CSE.
- You need to try and understand grooming behaviour and why your child may want to continue to spend time with the people who are abusing them.
- Take away phones and tablets at night - but don’t go snooping in our messages unless something is obviously wrong.
- Get rid of stereotypical ideas - CSE can happen to anyone, and the abuser could be anyone.
- Don't jump to conclusions without knowing the full story, and don't blame your child.
Several parents of children who have experienced CSE also contributed:

- Keep your wits about you, try not to pry too much, but carry out random checks on your child’s phone and social media conversations.
- Help children to set-up the right privacy settings on their phone. If you see your child struggling and cannot work out why, consider looking at their devices.
- The impact of internet sexual exploitation can be as bad as if it physically happened.
- The only way to change things is by speaking openly about this.

The Somerset Safeguarding Children Board, which is made up of representatives from all the organisations working to safeguard children, will be looking to raise awareness of CSE across the county in schools, businesses and with the general public.

There are many organisations and agencies working to tackle the issue of CSE, but parents, family members or friends can play an important part too.

**Look out for the signs of CSE:**

- Going missing or regularly returning home late
- Regularly missing school
- Unexplained expensive gifts
- Inappropriate sexualised behaviour
- Suffering from sexually transmitted infections

Having open and honest conversations with children about their friendships and relationships is vitally important. Parents should also get involved in their child’s online life as social media is a major route for CSE.


**Report it.**

If you know or suspect a child is in immediate danger, phone 999 straight away. Report it. If you suspect a child might be at risk, or you need some advice about CSE, you can phone Children’s Social Care on 0300 123 2224.
**ONE YOU**

**DAYS OFF**

As we get older, the lifestyle choices we make can dramatically affect our health later in life. Making small changes in your middle years can improve your health right away, and double your chances of staying healthy as you get older.

One You encourages all of us to take a fresh look at our lifestyle choices, put ourselves first for a change, and do something about our health.

One You gives you all the tools you need to take stock, and it can all help to double your chances of being healthy at 70 and beyond.

**Let the One You Drinks Tracker help you to lose weight, save money and feel healthier. It's there to help you keep an eye on how much booze you're drinking, so you can take control. Get free daily tips by downloading the One You Days Off App – it's an easy and simple way to track your drinking habits. Simply nominate the days you want to take off drinking and get practical, daily support to help you stick to it.**

**Why not also sign up for Dry January?** Run by Alcohol Concern, it encourages people to give up alcohol for the month of January.

Last year 79 per cent of people who took part said they saved money, 62 per cent said they had more sleep and energy and nearly half lost weight.

**How are you?**

Get a free personalised health score now when you complete this 10-minute quiz. It is designed to point you in the right direction.

It's not a medical assessment – if you're worried about your health you should speak to a health professional. Visit www.healthysomerset.co.uk/how-are-you/

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**BORN TO DRIVE**

Last year our 190 volunteer drivers completed, on average, 473 trips each and travelled over two million miles.

Volunteer drivers are described as ‘lifesavers’ and a ‘godsend’ by passengers. They are the unsung heroes of our community, providing transport to NHS patients and social care users, ranging from the elderly to young children.

**Why do they do it?**

**MALCOLM**

“The health service has done a lot for me and my family and I wanted to give something back. I enjoy driving and meeting new people. I have some regulars who I have got to know really well. It’s win-win – they get a familiar face to pick them up, and I feel like I am helping them.”

**RAY**

“I enjoy being a volunteer driver. With my help people can get out of their home and get to their important appointments. I’ve always enjoyed driving and you get to meet lots of different people and go to different places.”

**We need you!**

The demand for transport is growing, and more volunteer drivers are desperately needed. If you have a few hours to spare and enjoy driving and helping people, please get in touch.

**Successful recruits can claim back up to 50p per mile for expenses.**

Anyone can be a volunteer driver – the only criteria is that you must be over 18, have use of your own four-door vehicle, hold a full UK driving licence and be able to commit at least one day a week to volunteering.

We’re also looking for volunteers to be personal assistants. They escort children when extra support is needed.

To find out more about becoming a volunteer driver or personal assistant, please phone CSW You Can Do on (01278) 664180, or visit www.somerset.gov.uk/volunteering
Stay well this winter

Over the festive season let’s keep the Christmas rush for the shops and out of our doctor’s surgeries and hospitals. Here are a few simple things you can do to take care of yourself this winter and avoid sharing any unwanted presents!

**Coughs and colds** – make sure you go and see your local pharmacist for advice at the first sign of a cough or cold before it gets more serious.

**Keep warm** – seems simple, but it may help prevent colds, flu or more serious health conditions, such as heart attacks, strokes and pneumonia. Wearing lots of layered, light clothing can really help.

**Get stocked up** – make sure that you pick up prescription medications before the Christmas holidays start, as many GPs and pharmacies will close over the holidays. Also speak to your pharmacist about medicines you should have in stock over winter.

**Get a flu jab** – If you haven’t had your flu jab there is still time to protect yourself and your family. If you’re eligible for a free flu jab, get it now. It is free because you need it!

**Eat well and look after yourself** – with all the rushing around over Christmas, and added stress, make sure you eat well. Food gives you energy, which helps to keep you warm. So, try to have regular hot meals and drinks throughout the day.

**Don’t be lonely this Christmas**

Loneliness can affect anyone at any time. For some, Christmas time, when families traditionally get together, can be particularly tough.

But the festive season is the perfect time to reach out to those around you.

Building relationships with family, friends and people within your community can have a really positive effect on your wellbeing, and reduce the risk of suffering mental or physical illness.

Many Somerset communities are already very active and offer a whole range of activities to help you to find connections in your local area and meet like-minded people. Whatever your interests there will be a group that is waiting to welcome you.

Somerset Village Agents have put together a list of activities and events, which are going on across Somerset over the Christmas and New Year period.

So, if you’re at a loose end and don’t want to be on your own over the festive period, visit their website at [http://somersetchristmas-directory](http://somersetchristmas-directory).

Or, you can visit [communitychristmas.org.uk](http://communitychristmas.org.uk) for a list of events going on for older people over Christmas.

**Visit [www.nhs.uk/staywell](http://www.nhs.uk/staywell) for more information.**

**COMMUNITY CONNECT**

Get support when you need it - if you are struggling or you need a bit of support, visit a Community Connect drop-in for a friendly informal chat and get all the advice and information you need. Find your local one at [www.somerset.gov.uk/dropin](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/dropin)

The team at the drop-in can help with everything, from finding a local social group and support with money, to help with transport or support for carers. If you need help over the holiday period when your GP surgery or pharmacy is closed, phone [NHS 111](https://www111.nhs.uk) or visit [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk).
There really is no place like home when it comes to getting better after a stay in hospital.

Launched in September, Home First is a new initiative that is seeing Somerset’s health and social care services working even closer together to help people get home from hospital earlier.

Getting back to our lives, our own routines and regaining independence after a stay in hospital plays an essential part in recovery, both mentally and physically.

As soon as you no longer need medical support, Home First allows you to leave hospital rather than wait on the ward for care assessments and rehabilitation planning, which can take time.

If someone can’t go home immediately, they can receive additional support in a specialist unit, in a care home or a community hospital to help them get back on their feet as soon as possible.

In the first two months 230 people were supported to move on from hospital sooner through Home First. This meant that the average hospital stay was reduced by five days for each person.

Andrea is 82 and lives alone. Following a nasty fall at her home, she was admitted to hospital for treatment and scans. Previously, she would have had to wait in hospital for Adult Social Care assessments to be done, and therapy to be arranged, before deciding on the next steps in her recovery.

But instead, under Home First, she went home in 11 days. Initially Andrea had four visits a day from a carer, and use of a walking frame and kitchen trolley to help her move around her home. The visits from the carer were reduced week by week until she could cope on her own.

Andrea said: “At first I thought it was a bit quick to be returning home, but I am so glad I went home when I did. The Adult Social Care staff in the hospital were great. They talked me through my discharge plan and I was able to discuss any worries I had. The therapy and support I received when I was at home was brilliant, and I felt I had the support I needed to stay safe and regain my independence. I’m now fine and I don’t need any more support.”

Patients with long-term health conditions, young people and shift workers are just some of the people expected to benefit from the extended availability of appointments at Somerset’s GP Practices.

GP Practices across the county have now extended the times when appointments are available into the early evening and at weekends. The scheme fulfils a pledge made by the government in 2015 to improve access to primary care services.

All of Somerset’s 71 GP Practices provide appointments each weekday from 8.00am until 6.30pm. Patients will now be able to book a routine appointment from 6.30pm to 8.00pm, Monday to Friday and some appointments over the weekend.

GP practices are working collaboratively to deliver this improved access to routine appointments. Health staff working evenings and weekends will also have access to your medical records and will be able offer the same high standard of care that you would expect from your daytime GP service.

Patients who wish to book a routine appointment in the evening or weekend must book in advance by contacting their GP Practice between 8.00am to 6.30pm on any weekday.

The practice receptionist will advise you of the time and location of your appointment. There may be occasions when the only available appointment will be at a neighbouring GP Practice.

Dr Ed Ford, a GP and Chairman of the Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group said: “Extending the availability of primary care appointments to the evenings and weekends should be more convenient for those patients who find it difficult to attend an appointment during the day time.”
It makes sense that when you visit your GP, go to hospital or see a social care professional, they have access to your health and social care information, so that they can look after you properly, right? In the past, the only information they could see was whatever had been recorded in their own local care system.

Since late 2016, all hospitals in Somerset have been able to access your GP records - but only if you agree to it at the time of your care. This allows clinical staff treating you to deliver better and safer care.

The NHS in Somerset and Somerset County Council are working together to develop a new service, called SIDeR (Somerset Integrated Digital electronic Record), which will allow clinical staff and social workers who care for you, to access all your care information.

This will not only save you time, as you won’t have to tell each of them about your medical and care history, but it will also allow them to focus on safely treating, helping and caring for you.

Your information will be stored securely and only clinical staff and social workers, who are providing your direct care, will have access to your information.

Look out for more information about SIDeR in the next edition of Your Somerset, due out in the spring, or visit www.somersetccg.nhs.uk/your-health/sharing-your-information

For more information about the changes to the law and how it affects you, visit the Information Commissioner’s Office website at www.ico.org.uk
We have a fleet of **23 gritters** and a stockpile of **7,000 tonnes** of salt at depots across Somerset, ready to treat around **900 miles** of road every time ice is expected.

**What roads do we treat?**
We treat just over a fifth of Somerset’s roads, marked in red on the map. Our job is to keep the busiest routes clear whenever ice is expected. We try and prioritise roads that link towns, villages and hospitals, communities on high ground and the important routes across the county for long distance travel. The M5, A303 and A36 are looked after by Highways England.

**Why don’t we salt every road in Somerset?**
We can’t salt every road for several reasons. Firstly, it would mean having enough gritters, drivers and depot staff to organise sending the gritting fleet from Taunton to Alaska five times within that two and a half hour window. This would cost an astronomical £20m per year - £3m of that just on salt!

**Getting about**
Always take extra care in cold weather. Only the busiest roads are salted and most are not. So plan ahead and drive carefully, particularly if frost has followed rain. Remember to:
- Prepare your vehicle for winter
- Allow extra time for your journey
- Give gritters and snow ploughs plenty of room
- Carry a shovel and blankets in your vehicle

For more information about Somerset County Council’s winter maintenance programme, including a searchable map showing all the roads treated, please visit www.travelsomerset.co.uk/gritting
Help with your childcare costs

Getting help with your childcare costs is easier than you think. Childcare Choices brings together all the government childcare offers in one place, including two new schemes for working parents: Tax-free childcare and up to 30 hours a week funded childcare for three and four-year-olds.

Families across Somerset are already benefitting from these offers.

If you’re a working parent, and have a child who turns three by 31 December, you can apply now for up to 30 hours a week of funded childcare to use from January 2018. If you’re successful you will receive an eligibility code, which you can take to your early years provider.

For more information, visit www.somerset.gov.uk/eye30

Log in to your childcare account every 3 months to check your details are up to date. Go to gov.uk/childcareaccount

Don’t forget that if you already benefit from 30 hours of funded childcare you must make sure that you reconfirm your eligibility every three months. It is quick and easy to do – just visit www.gov.uk/sign-in-childcare-account and check the secure messages on your account.

Open Evening
Tuesday 16 January 2018, 6-8pm

Outstanding, specialist post-16 education and training. Wide choice of A Levels, vocational courses and Apprenticeships.

We always mean business.

The business world is big, bright and full of opportunities, so your career options are endless. Our Business and Management degrees give you the knowledge and skills to succeed.

For more information call 01823 320800 or visit; www.huish.ac.uk
**Spaces in the right places**

More than £30m of work to provide hundreds of school and pre-school spaces is currently underway in the county.

**£30M for schools**

A mixture of primary and secondary school new builds and extensions will be making space for more than 1,300 children.

**1,300 children**

These include the new Kingfisher Primary that’s due to open in Yeovil next spring, creating 420 spaces, and a 300-space expansion of Bridgwater College Academy, which should be ready for the September 2019 term.

This follows on from the recently opened Northgate school in Bridgwater, a major extension to Wincanton primary school and the new Primrose primary in Yeovil.

A Pupil Referral Unit in Glastonbury is also under construction, as are two new bases, specialising in autism, on schools sites.

On top of that, more than 330 nursery and pre-school places are on the way through eleven projects across the county. Planning ahead to meet the needs of our growing population is a tough job and means working closely with developers, contractors, district councils, schools and academy trusts.

But we’re committed to making sure that we have the spaces in the right places, so children get a flying start.

**300 space expansion**

**300 nursery & pre**

**ELEVEN PROJECTS**

**1,300 children**

**£30m for schools**

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**School Term Dates**

**2017/18**

Term 2: 30 October - 21 December 2017
Term 3: 8 January - 9 February 2018
Term 4: 19 February - 23 March 2018
Term 5: 9 April - 25 May 2018
Term 6: 4 June - 24 July 2018

**2018/2019**

Term 1: 3 September - 26 October 2018
Term 2: 5 November - 21 December 2018
Term 3: 7 January - 15 February 2019
Term 4: 25 February - 5 April 2019
Term 5: 23 April - 24 May 2019
Term 6: 3 June - 23 July 2019

For all the latest school term dates and holidays, visit www.somerset.gov.uk/schooltermdates

Please note: These are the term dates and holidays for community and voluntary controlled schools. Academies, free schools, foundation schools and voluntary-aided schools have the freedom to set their own term dates.

**HAVE YOUR SAY**

**School Admission Arrangements**

This is an important notice for all parents and carers with children aged between two and eighteen.

A six-week consultation about school admission arrangements for all children who are due to start, transfer or move schools during the 2019-20 school year is starting mid-December.

This consultation applies to all voluntary controlled and community schools, and those voluntary aided and foundation schools and academies that have contracted the local authority to consult on their admission arrangements on their behalf.

This consultation allows parents, schools, religious authorities and the local community to comment on the proposed admission arrangements. The closing date is 31 January 2018

To view the consultation, visit www.somerset.gov.uk/admissions and select ‘School Admissions Policy.’
Volunteering speaks for itself...

Don’t take our word for it - let the volunteers speak for themselves:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suzi</td>
<td>“I always knew there would come a time in my own life when I could do something that would benefit others, but failed to find the right ‘thing’ until now. Volunteering opened my mind to just how many people are out there who need a helping hand with life. I have seen how two people who ordinarily would never have been thrown together socially, can become close and build a true loyal bond.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>“I was a bit bored after I retired and felt I should put something back. I also wanted to feel valued, and above all I needed a purpose to get out of bed. I found a sense of satisfaction from volunteering. It makes a huge difference to so many people.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>“I wanted to use my spare time in a positive way and felt I wanted to put my skills and experience to good use. I also wanted to feel valued and useful. Volunteering helped me gain confidence in myself and in returning to employment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>“I work from home so can be flexible. My previous career history has seen me bring up young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to become graduates successful in their field. I want to help others who, for various reasons, have not been able to get the help and support that I have enjoyed.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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If you’re interested in becoming a volunteer, check out the volunteering opportunities available at [www.somersetvolunteer.co.uk](http://www.somersetvolunteer.co.uk) or, phone CSW You Can Do on (01278) 664 180, or email youcando@cswgroup.co.uk

LOOKING FOR A LIFE-CHANGING JOB?

- Could you help support adults with learning and physical disabilities, older people or care leavers in your home? We’re looking for Shared Lives carers to support these adults as an alternative to residential accommodation.

  It’s very much a family-based experience, and helps people develop independent living skills, friendships and roots in their community. Stays can be for any length of time, from a weekend to a life-time.

- Being a Shared Lives carer

  The scheme is open to couples, families or single people who are aged 18 and over. You just need time, patience, flexibility and plenty of enthusiasm! To find out more, phone 07976 698896, email sharedlivesscheme@somerset.gov.uk or visit [www.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.somerset.gov.uk)

John’s story

John really wanted to work from home, so became a Somerset Shared Lives carer seven years ago. He’s cared for many people over the years - all with mild to moderate disabilities. He talked to Your Somerset about his experiences:

**Why did you become a Shared Lives carer?**

“I get huge personal satisfaction from being a Shared Lives carer. It’s incredibly rewarding to see people’s progress. As they’re all adults, it also gives me the flexibility I like. I can go out and retain some of my own independence, whilst still being a carer.”

**What’s your typical day like?**

“Some days are hectic and chaotic, while others can be quiet.”

My day can vary massively as it really depends on the person I’m looking after. Some people are quite independent, but others may need a little more help with things like shopping, paying their bills or getting to medical appointments.”

What would you say to others interested in becoming a Shared Lives carer?

“It’s very rewarding. If you’re genuinely interested in caring, sharing your life with others, improving their lives, while getting a lot back personally, then becoming a Shared Lives carer is a great choice. Your heart has to be committed, and you have to enjoy caring for others.”

Volunteering is a great way to make new friends, gain a sense of personal achievement and feel valued, while making a real difference to the lives of others. Evidence also shows it’s good for your health and increases life satisfaction too!
Could you consider fostering a young child where adoption is likely, but not certain?

Fostering for Adoption

With Fostering for Adoption, a child is placed with adoptive parents, who have been approved to care for them as their foster carers.

This is Rob’s Story...

We didn’t have kids of our own and we felt that we had a lot to offer someone who didn’t have a great start in life, so adoption seemed like a brilliant idea. We could be loving parents for a child, and hopefully give them a better life.

The process of adoption can be intense, challenging, and at times frustrating. But you do learn a lot about yourself individually and as a family, so it is a useful and valuable experience.

Nothing else really matters; the outcome is so much more important than the temporary inconvenience of a stranger asking questions!

♥ TALK TO ADOPTERS
We were very lucky because several close friends had started the adoption process, so it wasn’t a complete surprise. We would absolutely suggest that anyone considering the adoption process tries to find someone to talk to before formally starting. Having a head start on not only the process itself, but the impact on you and your family before you start is such a help.

♥ TALK TO EACH OTHER
The timescale from knowing our daughter existed to being part of our family was less than two weeks. We went from having lots of freedom and routines as a couple, to having a baby in the house within two weeks. It’s a massive adjustment and can be overwhelming. We both had moments where we wondered whether this was the right choice for us but, ultimately, it absolutely was.

♥ TALK TO YOUR BOSS
On a practical note, we would suggest that anyone thinking of adopting who works starts the conversation with their employers as early as possible to explain the process and the possible timescales for adoption leave. Some employers aren’t as up-to-date as they should be on changes to adoption rights.

♥ KEEP TALKING
You will find depths of strength, compassion and love in yourself that you never knew you had. Having a child is probably the most challenging thing most people will face, and the reality is not always the rosy picture of parenthood that you might imagine. But despite that, our daughter has added so much to our life and we love her so completely that no challenges we face trouble us. We face them as a family.

If you are interested in adoption or fostering, please phone 0800 587 9900 or come to an information evening. Dates can be found at fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk/events

Like us on Facebook @adoptioninsomerset @fosteringinsomerset and following us on twitter @adoptsomerset @fostersomerset and help share real stories from our amazing foster carers and adopters.
New Carers Service for Somerset!

The Community Council for Somerset (CCS) launched the new Somerset Carers Service, commissioned by Somerset County Council, on 2nd October 2017.

CCS is a Somerset-wide charity, established in 1926 offering a range of personalised support and services, often in isolated rural areas, with a focus on the needs of the whole community.

The Somerset Carers Service replaces Compass Carers, and fits perfectly with CCS’s other community work - the combined forces of the Carers Agents, Somerset Village Agents & Community Agents form an army of professionals to help and support the people of Somerset. Combined with CCS’s Community Involvement team, who are catalysts for local action - helping turn ideas into a reality - CCS offers comprehensive and expert assistance.

More information about CCS work can be found at somersetccr.org.uk.

You can access support in many ways, with the aim to make it as accessible as possible, and our professional, friendly team are committed to improving the lives of carers, and those that they care for.

Contact us:

Phone: Our dedicated team of Carers Agents are contactable directly across the County, and for more general advice, we have an advice line & a text support service;

In Person: Drop-in sessions are available at Musgrove Hospital, just by the Marks & Spencer cafe or 1 to 1 advice available by contacting your local Carers Agent;

Online: The website is packed full of useful information & contacts. Launching in December is a web based Live Chat service & a members only online Carers Forum to help connect Carers with others in similar positions, providing an online discussion, social & support with local individuals.

Carers Hub at Musgrove Hospital, Taunton

You can refer yourself or another person to the Somerset Carers Service, just contact our friendly team!
The Somerset Building Control Partnership was formed in 2016 to carry out the Building Control functions for Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council. It covers a combined area of approximately 963 square miles and is the largest Local Authority Building Control Partnership in the South West.

Everyone uses buildings; whether it’s your home or a place of work or whether you are doing your shopping. You want them to be safe, healthy and warm.

What we do
We are responsible for making sure that any regulated building works that are carried out on your home, business, place of work and commercial premises, are carried out to a standard that meets Government guidelines.

Building Regulations set standards for the design and construction of buildings to ensure the health and safety of people in or around buildings, conservation of fuel and power along with access and use to all buildings.

When we are needed
Generally speaking, if the work to be carried out affects the structure of the building, then Building Regulations will apply.

If you are building a new property, extending, converting a loft or garage, or even just knocking down a wall, it is likely that you will need our services.

Building Regulations apply to most types of buildings including domestic, commercial and industrial buildings. They specifically relate to the technical aspects of construction and cover things like structural stability, fire resistance, means of escape, disabled access, weather resistance, thermal insulation, and drainage.

Not to be confused with Planning
Building Regulations approval does not mean the same as obtaining planning permission for your work. In the same way, being granted planning permission is not the same as taking action to ensure that the work complies with building regulations. For many types of building work you may need to apply for building regulations and planning permission separately.

If in doubt – check with both your local Building Control Service and Planning Department.

Who we are
The Somerset Building Control Partnership was

We provide a modern, flexible building control service to businesses and householders on behalf of these Councils. The partnerships administrative office is based in Bridgwater, but also has independent and professionally trained surveyors based in Shepton Mallet, Taunton and Williton.

The Partnerships principal aim is to provide a responsive service, which is of a consistently high standard and gives value for money to all its customers. As a Local Authority administered service, you can be confident that we are independent and operate on a not for profit basis.

As part of the wider Local Authority Building Control (LABC) organisation, the SBCP is able to offer a number of additional services to our clients and the building industry, these services include:

- Fire Risk Assessments
- Registered Details
- Fire and Structural Engineering
- Acoustic Testing
- Acoustic Consultancy
- Code for Sustainable Homes Assessments
- Thermal Calculations
- Construction Design Management Consultancy

Please do not hesitate to contact us directly should you require a quote for any of the services listed.

We also provide Free Continuous Professional Development training events for customers, including updates on the Building Regulations.

The partnership also actively supports the LABC Building Excellence Awards, which are the largest business to business awards in the building control sector; the LABC regional building excellence awards which recognizes quality in all types of building project.

The awards celebrate achievements in the construction industry. They reward excellent buildings, outstanding companies, and partnerships and individuals that go that extra mile.

Our awards
The Somerset Building Control Partnership is proud to announce that their first awards ceremony is to be held at the prestigious Museum of Somerset in Taunton on the 26th January 2018.

The winners and highly commended in each of the twelve categories will then compete at the regional awards in April 2018

Unlike other awards, it’s not all about looks! Consideration is given to other vital elements including:

- High levels of compliance with building regulations
- Effective working relationships with LABC surveyors
- Outstanding craftsmanship
- Technical innovation
- Sustainability and high performance
- Ability to solve technical problems with creative solutions
- Use of innovative products and the skills to overcome difficult site conditions

Regional winners in each category are automatically short-listed for the LABC Grand Finals which are held in London in November each year, with over 800 attendees.

Investing in the future
The Partnership recognises the importance of investing in the future. To this end, we have a surveyor development programme where trainee surveyors undertake a degree in Building Surveying, alongside an in-house training programme. All our business support staff are trained through a joint scheme run by LABC and Cabe (Chartered Association of Building Engineers) which leads to a professional/technical qualification and enables them to provide first point of contact technical advice and support.

For further information, please contact the Somerset Building Control Partnership by telephone, e-mail or post:

Telephone: 0300 303 7790 Service available 8:30am to 5:00pm, Monday to Thursday and 8:30am to 4:30pm, Friday.

E-mail: somersetBCP@sedgemoor.gov.uk

Postal address for all applications and correspondence: Somerset Building Control Partnership, Bridgwater House, King Square, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 3AR.

To find out more about advertising in Your Somerset, email yoursomerset@somerset.gov.uk
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Somerset Care has care homes throughout Somerset. For details of your nearest homes, please call: 0800 9884 337. www.somersetcare.co.uk

Lavender Court, Taunton

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www.mywillows.org.uk

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To find out more about advertising in Your Somerset, email yoursomerset@somerset.gov.uk
With one in four women and one in six men experiencing some form of domestic abuse at some point in their lives, the chances are that you may know someone who is suffering behind closed doors.

Domestic abuse isn’t just physical, it can be psychological, sexual, emotional, even financial, and can happen to anybody.

With the festive season approaching there are plenty of opportunities to spend time with friends and family and talk. But unless someone is open about their experiences it may be difficult, and unwise, for you to deal with the problem yourself.

The important thing to remember is that you can make a difference, and you may be their only lifeline. The first thing you may want to do is to protect that person. However, this could be dangerous.

Help is at hand
If you are concerned, take a look at the ‘Friends and Family’ guide it gives detailed advice on the things you can do to support them, how to keep them safe, and importantly, how to look after your own wellbeing.

You can also speak in confidence with a professional at The Somerset Integrated Domestic Abuse Service on 0800 69 49 999. Or, email heretohelp@knightstone.co.uk

For help and guidance, visit www.somersetsurvivors.org.uk/support-for-a-friend-or-family-member
Christmas dining – last few spaces remaining

Dillington House is the place to celebrate this Christmas. With its roaring log fire and spectacular Christmas trees, it creates a wonderful atmosphere in which to get into the festive spirit.

With carvery lunches, festive dinners and party nights on offer, as well as private dining, corporate and bespoke events – there really is something for everyone!

With time running out and only a few spaces left, book your tickets now on (01460) 258613.

Stargazing Evening
Saturday 3 February – 5pm, 6.30pm and 8pm
Join local astronomer Simon Ould for a fascinating evening of guided stargazing. Cost: £10 for adults and £7.50 for under 16s. Location: Crowcombe Hall. For more information or to book a place, phone (01823) 451884 or visit www.quantockhills.com/events/view

Basic Fire Lighting (adults only)
Saturday 10 March - 10am until 4pm
Enjoy a day out in the beautiful woods at Cothelstone Hill and learn some basic fire lighting techniques, as well as how to best source tinder and kindling, sawing techniques, axe safety and splitting methods, fire safety and building. Location: Cothelstone Hill.

Whittling in the woods (adults only)
Saturday 31 March - 10am until 4pm
Spend the day learning basic carving techniques using hand tools, such as a knife, axe and draw knife, to create your own unique handcrafted spatula and butter knife. You will also find out about selecting the correct timber for carving, which woods to avoid, and how to sharpen and safely use the tools. Location: Cothelstone Hill.

Both woodland workshops cost £60 per adult. For more information or to book a place on the workshop, phone Chris Silverwood on (01984) 633584 or email chrissilverwood@live.co.uk

Volunteer Ranger led spring circular walks

The North Quantocks loop (10 miles)
Tuesday 24 April - 10am until 4pm
We travel north on the Coleridge Way towards West Quantoxhead, through the old deer park to Perry East to Alfoxton. Then we go down into Holford and through Hurley Beacon and onto Bicknoller for tea and medals!

The South Quantocks loop (10 miles)
Friday 11 May - 10am until 4pm
Starting at Cothelstone Hill car park, going to the summit of Cothelstone Hill, before descending to West Bagborough and Triscombe. Depending on the weather there will be some fine views along the way.

Both walks will be quite a strenuous, so please come prepared. For more information or to book a place, phone (01823) 451884 or visit www.quantockhills.com/events/view

Dinner

Christmas at Dillington

Dillington House is the place to celebrate this Christmas. With its roaring log fire and spectacular Christmas trees, it creates a wonderful atmosphere in which to get into the festive spirit.

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With time running out and only a few spaces left, book your tickets now on (01460) 258613.

Dance

New Year’s Eve Black & White Masked Ball
Welcome the New Year in at Dillington House at their New Year’s Eve Black & White Masked Ball.

Enjoy canapes and cocktails from 7pm, followed by a mouth-watering four-course dinner. At only £59 per person (under 12s £29.50), the evening also includes a disco from 9pm to 1am.

Overnight packages are also available.

For more information or to reserve your place, please contact our booking office on (01460) 258613 or visit www.dillington.com