

Somerset Council Monthly Report - January 2026

A very Happy New Year to you all. We hope you enjoyed a good Christmas break. As we move into January and the cold weather sets in, it is especially important that we look after the elderly and vulnerable in our communities. If you know someone who needs support please do let us know.

Our flood wardens and community groups have been working tirelessly, and their efforts have greatly strengthened the resilience of our villages. We are very grateful to everyone who gives their time and energy to this vital work.

If you need help, please get in touch. We always do our best to respond promptly, and if we're unable to help directly, we will signpost you to those who can.

Wishing you a very happy and healthy 2026.

Best wishes

Adam and Jo

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Somerset Council Calls for Fairer Funding Despite Local Government Finance Settlement

Somerset Council's Leader, Bill Revans, cautiously welcomes the three-year Local Government Finance Settlement for 2025/6, which includes a 13% increase in Core Spending Power over three years. However, he emphasises the need for a fairer funding model that doesn't over-rely on Council Tax, as approximately 97% of this increase is expected to come from local taxpayers. Cllr Revans says: "The reliance on Council Tax is unsustainable for essential services".

While the council anticipates being marginally better off next year, it faces significant future funding gaps due to ongoing pressures in children's services, placement costs, and homelessness.

Cllr Revans stated that the current funding model for Local Authorities is inadequate, and Somerset Council is again applying for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) from the Government. He also encourages public participation in the Council's Budget Consultation, which is open until January 14. The online Budget Consultation survey can be accessed here: [Somerset Council Budget Consultation](#). Additionally, paper copies of the survey are available in libraries.

Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) Activated in Somerset

Somerset Council activated its Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) over the festive season to ensure rough sleepers could access emergency accommodation.

Outreach teams contacted rough sleepers to encourage them to accept emergency accommodations and provided additional support for those who remained on the streets.

If you're concerned that someone is rough sleeping in Somerset during the severe weather, please visit [Street Link](#) to refer them, so they can get access to suitable accommodation.

You can also learn more about rough sleeping on the Council's [Help for people who are rough sleeping](#) page.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Somerset Council supports households with the lowest incomes through its Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme, and next year's Scheme (from April 2026) will include a 3.8% increase in income band thresholds to maintain discount values, based on the September CPI figure used by Dept for Work and Pension.

Councillor concerns were raised about individuals transitioning from legacy benefits to Universal Credit who have lost, or will lose, their automatic 100% Council Tax discount. To address this, Somerset Council will assess those adversely affected through the Exceptional Hardship Fund, where appropriate.

Additionally, a Councillor-led Task and Finish Group will be formed, to explore the Government's changes to benefits and how the changes have adversely affected some of Somerset's vulnerable residents. The CTR scheme is reviewed regularly, with a full review scheduled for 2026-27.

Help Expand Electric Vehicle Charging in Somerset

Somerset Council, guided by Liberal Democrat values for a greener county, is investing £3.78 million from the government to enhance electric vehicle (EV) charging. Residents can suggest locations for at least 1,606 new charging points (3.5kW and 7kW), focusing on serving those without off-street parking.

Residents are invited to propose sites near homes, local roads, or busy areas through the Council's webpage: [Electric vehicle charging](#).

Proposals will be assessed based on safety and accessibility. Only Council-owned sites will be considered for installation, with further evaluations conducted by the preferred supplier.

Community engagement is essential, and local input will shape the final locations, ensuring that we create a sustainable and accessible charging network. Regular updates will be provided throughout the process. Your suggestions will help ensure chargepoints are

effectively placed for community benefit. Residents can submit suggested on-street locations via the Council's website: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/electric-vehicle-charging/>

Wessex Leaders Urged Government for Devolution Deal

Council leaders, including Cllr Nick Ireland (Dorset), Cllr Bill Revans (Somerset), Cllr Ian Thorn (Wiltshire), and Cllr Millie Earl (BCP), urged immediate government action to seize the opportunities their combined region offers, warning that delays could hinder regional progress.

All councils in Wessex are unitary authorities, well-placed to deliver devolution and support the government's growth priorities. The English Devolution White Paper emphasises that enhanced funding is tied to devolution deals; without one, Wessex risks being left behind.

Analysis from the councils indicated that creating a Strategic Authority for Wessex could close the funding gap, unlock £16 billion in economic value over 30 years, and attract investment in key sectors like defence and clean energy.

Christine Lawrence Named Honorary Alderwoman

Somerset Council has appointed Christine Lawrence as Honorary Alderwoman, recognising her exceptional service to West Somerset. This announcement came during the Full Council meeting on September 25, 2025, allowing her nomination ahead of the 2027 elections.

With a distinguished career spanning town, district, and county council roles, Mrs Lawrence is celebrated for being the first woman Chair of Somerset County Council and for her leadership in public health and adult social care. Honorary Alderwoman appointments are a lifetime honour, reflecting significant contributions to public service.

New Year Honours Celebrate Remarkable Individuals from Somerset

A number of outstanding individuals from Somerset have been recognised in the New Year Honours list for their significant contributions to the community and their respective fields.

Richard Clothier, managing director of Wyke Farms, based in Wyke Champflower, received an MBE for his innovative work in sustainable agriculture and food production.

Sarah Massey, former managing director of the Women's Rugby World Cup 2025, also received an MBE, highlighting the collective effort behind organising a successful event that celebrated women's sport.

Ron Homer from Yeovil has been awarded a British Empire Medal for his services to blind and partially sighted people. As treasurer of Yeovil Visually Impaired Bowls Club, he works to encourage participation in the sport and improve the lives of those with visual impairments.

Margaret Maltby from Chard was appointed an MBE for her dedicated service to young people as County President of Girlguiding Somerset, inspiring and supporting youth across the county.

Additionally, Marlie Packer received an OBE for her contributions to Rugby Union Football. Her roots in Yeovil serve as inspiration for young athletes, especially girls, although she currently lives in Surrey.

Others appointed MBE in Somerset include Fiona Bloor, Technical Lead at the UK Hydrographic Office; Martin Hodgson, CEO of YMCA Dulverton Group; Alice Potter, Group President of West Hatch Scout Group; and Jonathan Wheatley for his charity and horticulture work.

Those appointed OBE are Paul Freeston, Chair & CEO of Apetito; Jane Louise Hadfield, Board Member of the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education; and Simon Taylor, a volunteer with the Liberal Democrats.

Meanwhile, Joanna Shanmugalingam, Second Permanent Secretary at the Department for Transport, received the Companion of the Order of the Bath.

These honours reflect the remarkable contributions of these impressive individuals to their communities and the broader society in Somerset.

Review Urges Stronger Support for Homeless Adults in Somerset

A recent review by the Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board (SSAB) calls for urgent measures to enhance support for adults facing homelessness. The review examined safeguarding practices related to three men receiving care and support from statutory and voluntary agencies in Somerset.

Key recommendations include ensuring access to legal literacy training for frontline social workers and housing officers, enhancing the involvement of family and friends in support processes, and conducting a review of safeguarding data concerning the homeless population. The SSAB also recommends collaboration with the Ministry of Housing for a dedicated Homelessness Social Work role and outreach to local Prison Governors for input on safeguarding arrangements.

The findings highlight the need for a multi-agency approach to address gaps in services for those experiencing homelessness and multiple disadvantages. For further details and access to the full report, visit the [Safeguarding Somerset Adults Board website](#).

Somerset Council Committed to Addressing Audit Recommendations

Somerset Council recently met to discuss steps taken regarding statutory recommendations from auditors about budget, governance, and transformation plans for the Council. These recommendations were outlined in the Auditor's Annual Report by Grant Thornton and required public consideration by the Full Council.

The first two recommendations, carried over from 2023/24, focused on the need to develop a sustainable budget and robust transformation plans. In response, the Council highlighted

its progress towards financial sustainability, having saved over £50 million in its first two years as a unitary council.

During the same meeting, the Audit Committee addressed a statutory recommendation concerning governance issues in the Glastonbury Town Deal programme, which received £23.6 million from the UK Government's Towns Fund. Somerset Council became the accountable body for this programme in April 2023 and inherited a complex portfolio of externally funded projects. An audit by the South West Audit Partnership revealed governance gaps related to the Red Brick Building Centre Ltd, the parent body for The Life Factory project, prompting the Council to terminate funding for the project and seek repayment of £2.29 million due to financial control concerns.

Ongoing enquiries by Avon and Somerset Police are related to the funding of the Life Factory project, and the Council is committed to protecting public funds while reviewing its governance practices.

Councillors Defer Sunday Parking Charges Rollout in Somerset

Councillors have deferred the proposal to introduce Sunday parking charges across Somerset following public consultation. The aim was to harmonise charges to ensure consistency, but community and councillor feedback led the Council's Climate and Place Scrutiny Committee to recommend against implementation.

Somerset Council's Executive Committee agreed on the need to develop a comprehensive parking policy that addresses all aspects of parking, including on and off-street options, tariff structures, and accessibility. This policy will be reviewed in early 2026, as different charging principles currently exist across the county's 200 council-run car parks.

Somerset Libraries Premiere Short Films

Somerset Libraries will host a premiere of short films showcasing their services at the Bridgwater Arts Centre on January 16. Open to the public, the event features four 90-second films created under the #LoveYourLibrary initiative with funding from Arts Council England.

The films highlight health and well-being, employment support, services for teens, and resources for parents. Free tickets are available via the [Bridgwater Arts Centre website](#) or by calling 01278 422700. The event will also include discussions with authors Chris Evans, CL Taylor, and Tim Weaver. The films will be displayed on digital screens across Somerset.

Octagon Theatre Revamp Plans Submitted

Plans for a £15 million redevelopment of Yeovil's Octagon Theatre have been submitted for Planning Permission, aiming to establish it as a premier cultural venue in the South West. This initiative by Yeovil Town Council and Somerset Council will secure the building's integrity while improving access and facilities both front of house and backstage.

Key improvements include upgraded equipment for productions, increased accessibility, a renewed auditorium, and enhanced front-of-house areas. Funding sources include £10 million from the Department of Media, Culture and Sport, £3.75 million from Yeovil Town Council, and over £1.25 million from ticket levies and fundraising.

The project will enhance the theatre's community role and offerings for audiences and local groups.

Somerset Council Celebrated Volunteers; New Year Opportunities Await

Somerset Council celebrated International Volunteer Day 2025, acknowledging the vital contributions of over 1,400 volunteers supporting 20 different services across the county. The day highlighted the theme "Every Contribution Matters," underscoring the crucial role Somerset volunteers played in strengthening communities and driving positive change.

For those interested in starting their volunteering journey please e-mail volunteer@somerset.gov.uk. Here are places where you can get involved:

- Library volunteers: Roles for under-18s, digital support, and activity/event helpers.
- Ham Hill Visitor Centre: Welcoming visitors.
- Wedding ceremony ushers: Making special days memorable.
- Countryside and Rights of Way: Surveys and conservation work.
- Volunteer drivers: Helping people get to appointments.
- Arts and culture: Supporting events at Octagon and Westlands.
- Youth services: Route1 Advocacy and independent visitors.

South West Heritage Trust Secures National Lottery Grant for Chew Valley Hoard

South West Heritage Trust has secured a £993,345 grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund to celebrate the Chew Valley Hoard over the next two years. Comprising 2,584 silver coins, the hoard represents the highest-value treasure acquisition on record from the Norman Conquest period.

The grant will fund a new gallery at The Museum of Somerset and a dynamic community engagement programme, including events and exhibitions to enhance public access. This project coincides with the 1,000th anniversary of William the Conqueror's birth in 2027. A touring exhibition at the Roman Baths Museum will run from January to March 2027, followed by a special exhibition at The Museum of Somerset.

New Visitor Centre Opens at Ham Hill

Somerset Council has unveiled a new Visitor Centre at [Ham Hill](#), located within the Lime Kiln Car Park. This development is part of the Uncovering Ham Hill's Past for its Future project, supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Wolfson Foundation.

The Visitor Centre features interactive exhibits, a retail space for local products, and the Limekiln Café, which is dog-friendly. It aims to enhance the visitor experience by offering a fully accessible Changing Places facility and modern amenities.

The Visitor Centre will host fresh activities, exhibitions, and enhancements in the coming years, including new footpaths and archaeological restoration efforts.

Residents Urged to Check Tumble Dryers Due to Fire Risk

Residents in Devon, Plymouth, Somerset, and Torbay are being warned to stop using certain integrated heat pump tumble dryers after a national safety alert revealed a serious fire risk. The warning affects models produced by Haier sold under brands such as Baumatic, Candy, and Hoover, with around 85,000 affected appliances still in homes across the UK.

An internal short circuit during normal use can potentially cause a fire. While Haier initially began repairs earlier this year, the fixes were found to be inadequate, and they are now arranging enhanced repairs. Residents are advised to check their dryer model on the manufacturer's website and stop using affected appliances immediately.

Somerset Business Spreads Christmas Cheer to Children in Care

A C Mole, an independent accountancy firm in Somerset, has spread festive joy by donating over 170 chocolate boxes to children in care across the county. This initiative is part of the firm's ACM Community scheme, which supports charitable efforts in the area.

The donations are directed to young people living with Somerset Council foster carers and in children's homes, highlighting the urgent need for more local foster carers. With over 650 children and young people in care in Somerset, this generous gesture not only provides a sweet surprise for the holidays but also raises awareness about the importance of fostering.

To find out more about fostering or other ways to support children in care, visit the Fostering in Somerset website or call 0800 587 9900.

Report it first: useful Links to share with your communities

Visit - Report a Problem on the Road: - *A list of all reporting pages to do with roads, pavements, lighting:*

[Report a problem on the road](#)

Potholes and road damage - *Somerset Council repair potholes and other road defects, and maintain our roads, for the safe access of all road users:*

[Potholes, road damage and edge loss](#)

Report a problem with a street light - *We maintain and repair street lights to national standards to provide safe access to all road users:*

[Report a problem with a street light](#)

Roads, travel and parking, road signs, markings and lighting - *Includes information about non-illuminated bollards, pedestrian crossings, requesting a village nameplate or a new road sign:*

[Road signs, bollards and road markings](#)

Speed limits - *Request information about new or existing traffic calming measures:*

[Speed limits](#)

Traffic lights - *We maintain over 200 traffic light locations throughout the County:*

[Traffic lights](#)

Street and roadworks - *We maintain the roads and pavements that are managed at public expense in Somerset:*

[Street and roadworks problems](#)

Traffic - updates and roadworks follow:

[Travel Somerset on X](#) and [Travel Somerset on Facebook](#).

All ongoing roadworks - *available on the Somerset Council website interactive map*

[Roadworks and travel information](#)

Somerset Waste - *collection days, replacement bins or recycling bags and missed collection reporting:*

[Bins, recycling and waste](#)

Travel and Tourist Information

[Travel Somerset - Art, Culture, Events, History & More](#)

Sign-up for the latest climate news from across Somerset:

[Climate newsletter sign-up](#)

Open Somerset Council Consultations - *which anyone can complete and take part in shaping the future of Somerset*

[Somerset Council - Citizen Space - Consultations](#)

SOMERSET COUNCIL TELEPHONE NO - 0300 123 2224