

# SOMERSET UNITARY COUNCIL REPORT

## CLLR NICOLA CLARK

### DECEMBER 2024

#### Remembrance services

As always, our communities did us proud with our remembrance services throughout the division, and it was a pleasure to attend a service at the lovely Henstridge Church, and learn more about the history of the Church and the community. I am from a military family, and nearly lost my Grandfather in WW2, so it was wonderful to see so many people at the service, taking time to honour the sacrifice of our service personnel.

#### Planning South – Decision on homes in Henstridge

As you will no doubt be aware, on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> November, Somerset Council's Planning South committee approved a request for outline permission for 52 homes in Henstridge. I will continue to speak up for communities on planning applications that are put forward. You can read more here - <https://www.somersetlive.co.uk/news/somerset-news/huge-traffic-increase-fears-somerset-9748409>

#### Could you be a foster carer?

Foster carers make a difference to the lives of vulnerable children and young people.

Could you change a child's story as a foster carer?

Fostering is a paid role. Fees and allowances vary depending on the type of care you offer and the age of the child or children in your care. For specialist schemes such as High Need Fostering carers receive around £45k per year, with full training provided and comprehensive, ongoing support.

You don't have to foster full time - we also need carers who can provide occasional care for a child, such as one night a week or one weekend a month.

To find out more visit [www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk](http://www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk).

#### Improvements to online and phone payment systems

Somerset Council are improving our online and phone payment systems.

Our upgraded automated phoneline will be ready to go from Thursday 5 December. While we switchover systems, our current phone and online payment systems will be unavailable, starting today, Tuesday 26 November to Wednesday 4 December.

During this time you'll still be able to pay in other ways:

- Bus gates by bank transfer
- Invoices by bank transfer

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Council Tax, housing and garage rents, Business Rates at the Post Office or a Pay Point. Setting up a Direct Debit is recommended to make future payment easy.

Once the new system is in place, there will be no need to wait in a queue and you'll be able to pay for services over the phone 24/7. The upgraded automated payment system means you can use your phone's keypad to enter payment details.

Find out more  <https://orlo.uk/mtUxK>

### 'Help through Winter' campaign

Somerset families and residents who are struggling to pay the bills this winter could be eligible for support with the cost of food, energy, water, and other essentials over the coming months.

Somerset Council's 'Help Through Winter' campaign, funded by the Government's Household Support Fund, is supporting local charities and organisations to help residents and families in need across Somerset between October 2024 and March 2025.

All support available and how to apply is on our website: <https://orlo.uk/Q9MzH>

### Muddy roads warning

Somerset Council is reminding farmers and other operators working on the land to make sure they keep roads clear of mud and debris.

As rural county where farming is a major activity and where farmers carry out a lot of important land and vegetation maintenance, it is a common occurrence for mud and debris to end up on the road. The Council's expectation is that operators ensure all mud and debris is removed immediately when this happens.

<https://orlo.uk/pAMz8>

### A message from Spark Somerset

With the help of community partners and supported by [Somerset Council](#)'s Help Through Winter programme, we're building a network and online map of Warm Welcome spaces to support those affected by the cost-of-living crisis.

You can view the map at <https://warmwelcomesomerset.org.uk>. Please share it far and wide to help more people find the warmth, company, and support they need this winter.

If you would like to add your group or venue to the map, please visit our website, where you can register your details: <https://www.sparksomerset.org.uk/warm-welcome-somerset>. You'll also find useful resources to help you set up, run, or fund your Warm Welcome space.

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### DECEMBER 2024

If you hosted a Warm Welcome space last year, you should have heard from our colleague Laura by email. If you missed the message, or haven't set up a space before and would like some guidance on how to get started, please get in touch: [support@sparksomerset.org.uk](mailto:support@sparksomerset.org.uk).

Looking for funding? [Somerset Community Foundation](#)'s Help Through Winter Fund opens next week with grants of up to £20,000 to help community hubs continue their work this winter. These grants can support warm spaces, cooking and budgeting classes, community meals and more! Funding is limited, so keep an eye on their website (<https://www.somersetcf.org.uk/>) and apply as soon as possible.

#### **Somerset Council seeks public opinion on the future of local pharmacy services**

We are calling on residents to help shape the future of pharmaceutical services in the county.

Somerset Council is conducting a Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) consultation for the public to share their thoughts and contribute to the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment statutory report produced by the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board.

Find out more: <https://orlo.uk/0w3iM>

#### **The Octagon theatre – reflecting on the last 12 months**

2023 marked a new chapter for Somerset, and for The Octagon Theatre & Westlands Entertainment Venue, as we embarked on our journey as one of Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisations, and of Somerset Council.

We reflect on the last 12 months in our Annual Review of the Octagon Theatre, Westlands Entertainment Venue and our Arts Engagement & Outreach Service.

From April 2023 to March 2024, we hosted hundreds of memorable performances, inspiring screenings, and fantastic participation classes. We have entertained audiences, inspired children & young people, boosted the wellbeing of our participants, empowered our community, and brought people together where they live.

Read all about it online at <https://www.westlandsyeovil.co.uk/.../12-month-review.../> (or pick up your copy at our Westlands Entertainment Venue Box Office!)

#### **Share your views on the new Local Validation checklist**

Views are being sought on a new Local Validation Checklist covering the Somerset Council area.

Local Validation Checklists (LVCs) help inform applicants and agents about the type of documents and level of information required to be submitted in order for the Council to validate a planning application and/or other consents.

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The consultation is open now until 23 December 2024. Find more details at <https://orlo.uk/HPvyN>.

#### Can you help?

Join Somerset's Volunteer Drivers! 🚗

Make a real impact in your community by becoming a volunteer driver. Your help is urgently needed to assist those who rely on us for transportation to vital hospital appointments.

Sign up now 👉 <https://orlo.uk/2104p>

#### Applications now open for South Western Railway's successful Customer and Community Improvement Fund (CCIF)

Bids are now being welcomed for the next round of South Western Railway's Customer and Community Improvement Fund, or CCIF, for the 2025/26 railway year. The deadline for applications is **31 December 2024**, with a decision due at the start of April for projects to then be delivered over the next 12 months.

For more information and to download the handbook and application form, please visit [www.southwesternrailway.com/ccif](http://www.southwesternrailway.com/ccif)

If you have any questions about the fund, please email [ccif@swrailway.com](mailto:ccif@swrailway.com)

Please see the below press release from SWR:

- The 2025/26 Customer and Communities Improvement Fund will support projects that have a community benefit or address an area of social need on the South Western Railway network
- Interested bidders can apply for funding from today, Friday 22 November, with a deadline for applications of Tuesday 31 December
- Since the first round in 2018, grant funding of more than £7 million has been awarded to over 100 projects.

South Western Railway (SWR) is inviting applications for the latest round of its successful Customer and Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF).

CCIF is SWR's funding programme to support projects that have a community benefit or address an area of social need across its network, which serves Berkshire, Devon, Dorset, Greater London, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Somerset, Surrey and Wiltshire.

As announced at SWR's annual stakeholder conference last week, the new funding round has now opened, with applications judged on criteria including:

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### DECEMBER 2024

- Addressing community or social need
- Demonstration of benefits
- Deliverability against costs and timescales
- Alignment with our charitable giving policy
- Links to the railway

Match funding is not a necessity for a grant application, however having additional funding available will be considered in the scoring and judging of applications.

Applications can be submitted until Sunday 31 December 2024 and more information on the 2025/26 window can be found on SWR's [CCIF webpage](#).

This year, funding of £400,000 was awarded to 15 projects across the SWR network ranging from supporting an outreach worker to reach vulnerable young people around our stations in the Southampton area, to cycle repair training in the London Borough of Hounslow.

A video highlighting the work and impact of PEDALL, an inclusive cycling charity based in the New Forest, who were a leading recipient of funding in the latest round, can be viewed [here](#).

SWR's grant enabled PEDALL to employ a full-time ride leader to deliver inclusive cycling sessions and other community services from their base at Ashurst, opening up the New Forest for the enjoyment of groups with additional needs.

**Peter Williams, South Western Railway's Customer and Commercial Director, said:**

"We're pleased to announce that applications are now open for the latest round of our highly successful Customer and Communities Improvement Fund.

"Supporting the many local communities we serve is a priority for South Western Railway, and we look forward to receiving applications for projects that can bring them real benefit."

More information on the 2024/25 CCIF programme can be found [here](#).

### **£83 million Government funding to boost bus services across the South West**

This is positive news in terms of supporting our aims to improve bus provision in Somerset. In broad terms whilst it appears to be a fairer allocation, there's still some way to go in terms of addressing the balance for public transport deprived rural areas. We are awaiting full detail on the funding from the Department for Transport. Once we have this information the Council can look at how funding could be used to maximum effect. You can find out more here - <https://dft-newsroom.prgloo.com/news/gbp-83-million-government-funding-to-boost-bus-services-across-the-south-west>

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### DECEMBER 2024

#### Maintenance of local path networks

Guidance should have been shared with Parish Councils with a request for them to consider taking on maintenance of their local path network under their own statutory powers. Please do let me know if you haven't received this.

Some parishes are already active for which we are very grateful. Increasing the amount of help from parish councils with this task will be very necessary if we are to maintain or improve current service standards with reducing budgets.

Setting up a local volunteer group will be the most cost-effective way of helping us, but should they wish to employ a local contractor or expand an existing contract, this guidance will hopefully be timely for some with regard to the setting of precepts for the coming financial year.

#### A welcome to Cllr Hayward Burt

I'm sure you are aware by now, but just a short note to welcome Hayward as my new co-councillor for the Blackmoor Vale division. I have sent out Cllr Burt's email address, but do let me know if you haven't received this.

#### Somerset Council meetings

Just a reminder for you and your communities that members of the public can access agendas for all council meetings. They can also ask questions at these meetings. Details of how to do this can be found in the link below:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/>

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/speaking-at-a-council-meeting/>

Details of all upcoming meetings can be found here –

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/committees-agendas-and-minutes/>

#### This month I have been involved in:

- Attending planning South meeting and spoke against the planning application in Henstridge.
- Reporting and chasing up highways repairs, including potholes, ice and dangerous muddy roads.
- Attended the Remembrance service in Henstridge.

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**SOMERSET UNITARY COUNCIL REPORT  
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DECEMBER 2024**

- Working with the police to get action on speeding and dangerous driving.
- Visited residents to discuss concerns about dangerous driving.
- Working with the waste team on issues with bins (domestic, business and dog poo – all types of bins covered this month!).
- Advocated for communities with ongoing planning and enforcement matters

**Cllr Nicola Clark**

07429 831737 / 01935 840667

[nicola.clark@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:nicola.clark@somerset.gov.uk)

My available Cllr hours:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Sunday - all day

Thursday, Saturday - not available on phone.

Please text/WhatsApp or email on these days.

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