

# SOMERSET UNITARY COUNCIL REPORT

## CLLR NICOLA CLARK

### JANUARY 2025

#### Happy New Year!

Wishing you all a very happy 2025. I hope that you all managed to have some downtime over the Christmas break. Thanks again for all that you did in 2024.

#### Have your say on Somerset's budget consultation

Have your say on our annual budget consultation which will help to help influence Councillors as they look to set a balanced budget in February 2025.

The survey closes on 15 January 2025. Take part now <https://orlo.uk/XDmuX>

If your PC is unable to meet in the remaining 11 working days before the consultation ends we would be delighted to receive a later written response or a contribution at Executive, Scrutiny or Full Council in public speaking time.

#### Decision sheet for Somerset's Full Council meeting of December 18th

The decision sheet for Full Council, Wednesday, 18th December, 2024, 1.00 pm has been published.

To see the publicly available information, follow the link: [Decision sheet details on public web site](#)

The following items are included in the decision sheet:

#### No. Item

- 6 Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Exceptional Hardship Policy 2025-26
- 7 Non-Domestic Rating Discretionary Rate Relief and Hardship Policy 2025-26
- 8 HRA sewage treatment tank replacements using MHCLG Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund Grant
- 9 Annual Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2024-25
- 11 Chief Executive's Pay Award 2024/25
- 12 Report of the Monitoring Officer
- 13 Review of Part B of the Council's Constitution - Retention of Committee Meeting Recordings
- 14 Motions
- 15 Report of the five Scrutiny Committees

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#### MHCLG Homelessness Funding Announcement

Prior to Christmas, the Housing Secretary announced an addition £1bn to help tackle homelessness in England, which will be introduced from April 2025. The fund includes more than £633 million for the homelessness prevention grant, which is a £192 million increase from this year, which will be allocated based on 'local pressures'.

Whilst we are fortunate in Blackmoor Vale to not have a prevalence of these issues, I thought you might find this interesting.

The full breakdown of new funding includes:

Over £633 million for the Homelessness Prevention Grant supporting councils to prevent homelessness and provide temporary accommodation where required for families who recently became homeless. This will be allocated based on local pressures.

£185.6 million for the Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant, consolidating the main rough sleeping and single homelessness focused grants into a single pot of money.

More than £37 million for the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme, providing ongoing support costs to help rough sleepers into longer term accommodation alongside specialist staff supporting their mental health and substance abuse problems to pave the way for job opportunities.

£58.7 million for the Rough Sleeping Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant to continue supporting evidence-based drug and alcohol treatment as well as providing wrap-around support staff who offer child-focused, family-centred, mental health programmes.

£10 million to the Changing Futures Programmes which offers long-term support for adults experiencing multiple disadvantage, including combinations of homelessness, substance misuse, mental health, domestic abuse.

£7.6 million for Sector Support grants that will strengthen the capacity the voluntary sector with more staff, including StreetLink that encourages people to notify their authority if they've seen someone sleeping rough and what local services are available to provide immediate help into emergency accommodation.

£5 million for Emergency Accommodation Reduction Pilots, to work with 20 local councils with the highest use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for homeless families to put in place specialised plans to reduce the use of emergency accommodation, including B&Bs.

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#### Department for Transport announcement – Roads Maintenance funding

In late December the Department for Transport announced an additional £1.6bn of funding for road maintenance and to fill potholes. Government says the investment represents a 50% increase overall in road maintenance funding compared to the previous year and the Government claims that it will be enough to fix the equivalent of over 7 million extra potholes in 2025 to 2026.

Funding allocations that have been awarded to highway authorities and mayoral combined authorities for the period covering 2020 to 2026 for:

- Highways Maintenance Block (HMB)
- Potholes Fund
- Integrated Transport Block (ITB) – 2026 figures not yet published

Across England, highways authorities will receive a £500 million uplift in funding as part of it's 'Plan for Change'. Part of the funding will be 'incentive-based' with 25% of the total funding pot held back until 'authorities are shown that they are delivering'.

Each local authority can use its share of the £1.6 billion for 2025 to 2026 to identify which of their roads are in most need of repair and to deliver immediate fixes for communities and raise living standards across every area of the country. The allocations include:

- Over £300 million for local authorities in the South West

The Government also announced that at least 50% of surplus lane rental funds will be reinvested into highway maintenance, so that even more roads can be improved. Lane rental schemes allow local highway authorities to charge companies for the time that street and road works occupy the road. Additionally, the department is also consulting on devolving powers to approve lane rental schemes, which are currently with the Secretary of State, to local mayors. This will support the delivery of more lane rental schemes and put power back into local hands. On top of this funding, the Transport Secretary is announcing a clampdown on disruptive street works, doubling fixed penalty notices for utility companies who fail to comply with rules and extending charges for street works that run into the weekend.

The CCN welcomes the additional funding that has been announced , but will be calling on the Government to revisit the decision to hold back 25% of it as incentive-based funding, and instead allocate this money to councils to ensure longer-term certainty which is vital if we are to tackle road maintenance head-on.

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#### Campaign to increase metal recycling at home

Somerset Council's contract with collections contractor, SUEZ, includes targets to increase the amount of waste residents are recycling. When we recycle rather than throw away, this saves the authority money.

Somerset Council and SUEZ have been given the opportunity to take part in Alupro's Metal Matters campaign. Alupro have been running the campaign for 11 years and other councils have seen varying metal recycling increase from 3% to 30%.

The Metal Matters campaign is 70% funded by metal packaging manufacturers (Alupro), the other 30% is being funded by the SW:EEP (Somerset Waste: Enhanced Environmental Performance) fund – a joint Somerset Council and SUEZ fund that uses ring-fenced income from the sale of recyclable materials to support projects that help reduce waste and take action on climate change.

Somerset Council and SUEZ have agreed to partner with Alupro to run a Metal Matters campaign across the county in the New Year. Please do look out for this and share it with your communities when it comes around.

#### National Planning Policy Framework changes

Following the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework on 12 December, please find a briefing (attached to the main email) summarising the key provisions and DCN's views on the changes.


The Chief Planner has written to all local authorities about how to apply for grant funding that will be provided to support local authorities to implement the required policy changes. A copy of her letter is attached to the main email.

£14.8m has been set aside to support local authorities with local plan delivery and Green Belt reviews. Eligible local authorities are invited to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) form **by 17 January 2025** to request a share of this funding for local plans [here](#) and Green Belt review funding [here](#). The eligibility criteria are set out below and further information is provided on GOV.UK [here](#).

#### Becoming a volunteer driver

Can someone in your community make a real impact by becoming a volunteer driver?

Their help is urgently needed to assist those who rely on us for transportation to vital hospital appointments, please do share this message with your residents.

Step up and volunteer today!  <https://orlo.uk/KtGRv>

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#### Emergency Phone numbers

With the weather set to continue being chilly and troublesome, please do feel free to share the following graphic on your local social media platforms.

The graphic features the Somerset Council logo (a horse head) and the text 'Somerset Council' on the left. On the right, the title 'Emergency Phone Numbers' is displayed in two stacked white boxes. Below the title is a stylized illustration of a landscape with snow-capped hills and a blue sky. The bottom half of the graphic is a table with a teal background and white text, listing emergency numbers and their corresponding services.

☎ 999	Police, Fire, Ambulance and Coastguard
☎ 101	Police (non-emergency)
☎ 111	NHS non-emergency number - use this if you urgently need medical help or advice but it's not life-threatening situation
☎ 0800 807060	Environment Agency
☎ 0345 9881188	Floodline
☎ 0800 111999	National Gas Emergency Number
☎ 105	National Power Cut Helpline
☎ 0800 6783105	Western Power Distribution
☎ 0345 6004600	Wessex Water

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#### 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:

- Reporting fly tipping and working with communities to keep on top of waste and rubbish collections.
- Speaking with residents about ongoing concerns about planning.
- Pushing for drain clearance and maintenance in Henstridge.
- Working with residents to keep on top of the fallen trees and road closure issues during the storms at the beginning of December.
- Pushing for better road safety outside our local schools (this will continue to be a priority).
- Working to encourage providers to improve broadband connectivity in the more rural areas of our division.

**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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