

SOMERSET UNITARY COUNCIL REPORT

CLLR NICOLA CLARK

JANUARY 2025

Planning concerns

Planning continues to be an important issue within the Blackmoor Vale division. Please do encourage members of your communities to get in touch if they have any concerns about planning, or any questions that they would like to put forward.

Somerset Council's budget

In March 2025, Somerset Council approved its budget for the 2025/26 financial year, addressing a significant £52.2 million budget gap. To mitigate this shortfall, the council implemented £48 million in savings, including a £34 million reduction achieved by decreasing staff and management positions. Additionally, the council received Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) from the government, permitting a 7.5% increase in Council Tax—exceeding the standard cap of 5%—resulting in an additional £129 annually for Band D properties. Despite this increase, Council Tax rates in Somerset remain below the national average.

Even with these measures, a £43 million deficit remained, which the council plans to address through a capitalisation direction. This approach allows the council to sell assets or borrow funds to finance everyday operational costs. Council Leader Bill Revans emphasized that while these steps are necessary to balance the budget, they are not sustainable long-term solutions. He highlighted the urgent need for systemic reform in local government funding, particularly concerning escalating expenses in social care and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services.

You can find out more here - <https://orlo.uk/iAMpk>

Our bus service

I received the following update on the bus service from Somerset Council's transport team:

"In our discussions with First South West regarding Bus Service Improvement Plan funding (BSIP) they indicated to us that a small number of services that were no longer commercially viable due to insufficient patronage across the journeys operated, and needed assistance, one of these was service 58/58A Yeovil to Wincanton. This is not the first time that they have approached us for financial assistance for this service as we previously provided some funding through a similar scheme (BSIP plus) a couple of years ago.

They were clear that without funding this service would be withdrawn and as a result we are stepping in to save the service (which we are able to do under the BSIP funding scheme). As a result, the service will largely be maintained except for the withdrawal of 58A journeys, but in removing these journeys there has been some adjustments to service 58 to cover some of the gaps left by the removal of the 58A's.

The main changes are on Mondays to Fridays the current 1645 58 and the 1715 58A journeys from Yeovil Bus Station have been merged into one journey from the Bus Station at 1710, with a return from Wincanton at 1815, instead of 1746.

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On Saturdays, the two 58A journeys at 0711 and 0831 from Wincanton have been replaced by one journey at 0735.

The two journeys from Yeovil at 0730 and 0830 have been replaced by one journey at 0835 and in the afternoon the two 58A journeys from Yeovil at 1645 and 1745 have been replaced by one journey at 1655 with a last journey from Yeovil at 1855."

If you don't have a copy of the new timetable, please let me know and I will forward it on.

Have your say on dog fouling in our area

Have your say on dog control in South Somerset! Somerset Council have launched a consultation on Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) for:

Tackling dog fouling across the area: <https://orlo.uk/s1AcF>

The consultation closes on 5th May 2025. Make sure you share your views and help shape the future of our community spaces. Please do feel free to share this with your communities.

A message from Somerset Waste Partnership

A message from Somerset Waste Partnership - Thank you Somerset! You helped to recycle 145,133 tonnes last year! And 96% was re-processed in the UK.

SWP publish their tracker every year, so that you know that we do the right thing with your recycling.

- No recycling is burned, dumped or ends up in the ocean.
- Our recycling in Somerset could become anything from cardboard boxes and plastic pipes to soil conditioner and car parts.

Read more at: www.somerset.gov.uk/recycling-tracker/

Customer service - what you can expect from Somerset Council.

We've recently been receiving a high volume of calls, and if you are calling Somerset Council you may experience long wait times. If your issue isn't urgent, please consider visiting the website for more information or to report any issues.

Find direct links for some of our most asked-for services:

Missed rubbish or recycling collection

www.somerset.gov.uk/missed-collection

Report a pothole or problem on the road

<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/.../report-a-problem-on-the-road/>

Questions about your Council Tax bill

<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/.../your-council-tax-bill.../>

Pay for your Somerset Lifeline or another invoice

<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/benefit.../pay-a-council-invoice/>

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Apply for or renew a Blue Badge

<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/.../apply-for-or-renew-a-blue.../>

If what you're looking for isn't in this list, you can find lots of information about council services and different ways to contact us at www.somerset.gov.uk/contact-us/

Thank you for your patience.

A better deal for councils is needed.

Somerset Council Leader Bill Revans joined local government leaders from across the country at Parliament to put the case for a better deal for councils nationwide.

Cllr Revans told the committee that funding from central government had almost halved in recent years – down by 40 per cent – and that it was not realistic to expect Council Tax income to pay for essential services such as social care for adults and children 🙌

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/news/leader-joins-local-government-leaders-at-westminster/>

Tackling rural crime

The government has announced a boost of over £800,000 in funding to tackle rural and wildlife crime, supporting both the National Rural Crime Unit and the National Wildlife Crime Unit. This investment will help crack down on theft, hare coursing, and the exploitation of endangered species, with a focus on using better data and stronger collaboration between police forces. Local initiatives are already making a difference — including new partnerships and targeted projects like extra CCTV in rural hotspots — but this national support is a significant step forward. You can read more about the announcement here: gov.uk/government/news/more-funding-to-combat-rural-and-wildlife-crime

That said, we know that funding alone won't fix everything. We need to keep encouraging people to report crime in our area — no matter how small it might seem. If anyone feels that a crime they've reported hasn't been taken seriously or if they're unsure where to turn, please do get in touch with me directly. You all (I think!) know how I feel about local police response to crime in our area and I'm here to help make sure your concerns are heard and followed up properly.

Help for local businesses

Businesses and organisations in Somerset are being encouraged to find out if they are eligible for capital funding grants aimed at supporting businesses and community infrastructure in rural areas.

The funding is available following Somerset Council's successful £3.4 million submission into Government's Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF).

This first call for applications is seeking to allocate a total of £850,000 to eligible capital infrastructure projects. These projects must be delivered – and grant funding spent – by the end of

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March 2024. Grants can be between £5,000 and £100,000 and match-funding contributions are required.

The REPF has very specific criteria set by Government. Therefore, Somerset Council's Economic Development team is urging businesses and organisations to carefully check eligibility on their website: [Funding and grants for business](#)

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

In February 2025, Somerset Council introduced the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, inviting farmers, landowners, and land managers to participate in efforts to restore and enhance local biodiversity. The strategy outlines funding opportunities and environmental benefits, encouraging collaboration to achieve nature recovery goals across the county.

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/>

CLlr Nicola Clark

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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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