

Somerset Council Report – August 2025

‘Together for West Somerset Appeal’ Somerset Council gives financial support

Somerset Council has contributed £50,000 to the Together for West Somerset Appeal launched by Somerset Community Foundation to support those affected by the July 17th Exmoor coach tragedy. The fund, guided by partners including NHS, local schools, and national agencies, aims to provide immediate and long-term assistance to families, children, and the community.

The donation is from the Council's Corporate Contingency Budget. The Council is also developing a support plan involving mental health services, family support, and the voluntary sector, including child psychologists to assist affected children and staff. For donations or more information, visit <https://www.somersetcf.org.uk/giving/collective-giving-funds/together-for-west-somerset-appe/>

Somerset Moves Forward with Plans to Deliver a Sustainable Council

Since becoming a Unitary Authority in April 2023, Somerset Council has been dedicated to building a fairer and more resilient future for everyone in the county. The merger of five councils into one makes it all the more vital that we work more closely with local communities, listen to your needs, and improve services. Like many local councils, we face significant financial pressures caused by rising costs, increasing demand for support, and reduced government funding. Despite these challenges, Somerset has managed to avoid declaring a section 114 notice, by making tens of millions of pounds in savings, helping us maintain democratic control over our services.

Building on our early efforts, we are now entering an important new phase of transformation with the adoption of the whole-council “Inspiring Innovation” transformation plan. This initiative aims to make our council financial sustainable and better able to deliver for the people and residents of Somerset. We are redesigning how we work, making use of digital technology, and creating a culture of teamwork and inclusion within the council, and partnership working outside, focusing on prevention and locality working. The full draft Transformation Plan can be found [here](#).

Council Leader Welcomes Local Government Finance Report

Somerset Council Leader Bill Revans supports a new report calling for urgent reform of the broken local government funding system. He emphasised the need to overhaul Council Tax and address the financial pressures from services like social care, SEND and housing, with rising demand and costs associated.

Cllr Revans stated, “The system is broken, and we simply cannot continue without urgent action.” The report highlights decreasing funding, rising taxes, and impacting services, and calls on the government to grant councils greater control and responsibility.

Somerset Council Acts to Reduce Planning Application Backlog

Somerset Council has launched a 12-week plan to address delays in processing planning applications. The measures include limiting applicant updates, reducing non-essential meetings, and prioritising site visits to streamline decision-making. The aim is to clear the backlog, improve response times, and create a sustainable service for residents and developers.

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The Council recognises the challenges caused by staff recruitment, system issues, and application complexity, and is committed to long-term improvements over 2025-2026 to deliver a better, more efficient planning service.

Community Hospital Beds in Somerset Could Be Closed or Relocated following “trial”

Somerset NHS Foundation Trust is considering closing local community hospital beds across its 11 community hospitals to provide more treatment closer to home. They say this aligns with the government's ten-year NHS plan and its aims to increase pathways helping patients leave hospitals sooner and wherever safe and possible to receive care at home.

The trust currently operates 13 inpatient wards in hospitals across Somerset, including Bridgwater, Burnham-on-Sea, Frome, Glastonbury, Minehead, and Crewkerne. The trust says no final decisions have been made, but they are consulting internally with staff—including changing contracts and consulting with unions—and this process is nearing completion. This has raised local concerns about transparency, community involvement, and the long-term impact on local NHS services.

Somerset Councillors and MPs have called for urgent scrutiny ahead of upcoming decisions in the autumn. They have been critical of the trust for its limited public engagement and lack of transparency, as no business case has so far been presented to the public or to Somerset Council. The trust emphasises its commitment to improving services and testing “temporary” changes. However, some residents remain concerned about the potential for permanent bed reductions and the impact on local healthcare.

Somerset Council, a key partner of NHS Somerset, has invited the trust to its [Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee on August 21st](#) to discuss their plans in more detail and in response to concerns raised by the public.

Improvements to Accessibility in Glastonbury

Work is continuing on key Glastonbury Town Deal projects to promote active travel and improve access around the town and countryside, aligning with our values of sustainability, health, and inclusive communities.

Projects featured include:

- The Robert Richards Initiative: Installation of all-weather, multi-use paths at Tor Leisure, used by walkers, cyclists, and those with mobility aids. Plans are underway to expand these routes for year-round access.
- St Brigid’s Chapel and Field: Creation of new accessible paths to protect and interpret historic and natural sites, including Bride’s Mound and an apple orchard. An eco-friendly roundhouse is being built to increase access to this heritage site.
- Willow Walk: Resurfacing of paths and bridges to encourage more walking and cycling along the River Brue, with scenic views of Glastonbury Tor.
- The Glastonbury Way: Exploration of further improvements to this 7.5-mile active travel route, making it easier and safer for residents and visitors to cycle or walk.

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These projects support healthier, greener communities and safer, inclusive travel options for everyone, which are important Lib Dem values.

Keeping Somerset Connected: Vital Bus Services Secured for Local Communities

Somerset Council is proudly maintaining 82 bus routes across the county, ensuring people can travel easily for work, school, shopping, or leisure. Funding from the Government's Bus Service Improvement Program (BSIP) and the Council's budget helps keep these vital links alive, strengthening communities and supporting local mobility. At Somerset Council we believe in accessible, sustainable transport that empowers individuals and connects communities. It's important that our residents support these routes by using them regularly — every journey helps keep Somerset connected!

Funding Approved for Somerset Transport Improvements

The government has confirmed funding for key projects, including A38 improvements from Burnham-on-Sea to Barrow Gurney and a new Wellington train station. The A38 project will enhance safety, journey times, and connectivity, supporting local economy and housing plans. The Wellington station and station upgrades at Yeovil and Castle Cary will also improve rail links.

Have Your Say on Somerset's Future Transport Plan

Somerset Council has launched a 20-year Local Transport Plan to develop a greener, better-connected transport network. The plan aims to support health, protect the environment, and boost the economy by promoting walking, cycling, and public transport, especially in new developments.

The public is encouraged to share feedback via the consultation page until September 7. The plan considers the diverse communities across Somerset, with policies tailored for different rural and urban areas.

20-year Local Transport Plan: <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/active-travel/copy-of-local-transport-plan-2025/>

Share your views here: <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/active-travel/copy-of-local-transport-plan-2025/consultation/intro/>

Somerset Plans New SEN Units in Schools from September

Twelve special education needs (SEN) units will open in existing Somerset schools this year, with the first six launching in the upcoming academic term. The aim is to provide more local, accessible support for children with social, emotional, mental health, or neurological needs, potentially saving the council £17 million over five years. Lead Member for Children, Families and Education Heather Shearer emphasised that these units will help children learn in their communities, reducing long travel times. Each unit will have six to eight students, supported by trained teachers and assistants, drawing on expertise from local special schools.

The new provision responds to a 124% increase in Somerset children requiring Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), with many placed in expensive independent settings due to limited state school capacity. This initiative aims to offer more inclusive, community-based options while supporting early identification of needs. Feasibility studies are also underway for such units in an additional 12 schools across Somerset.

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Focus on Food Waste Recycling as New Collection Calendars Arrive

Somerset residents will soon receive (or have already received) an 18-month recycling and rubbish collection calendar, with a focus on improving food waste recycling. While participation is high, a large amount of food waste still ends up in general bins. Recycling food waste reduces costs and produces renewable energy and fertiliser through Anaerobic Digestion, with tea bags also suitable for recycling. Somerset Council, alongside SUEZ Recycling, will remind residents to separate food from packaging and recycle regularly. Free kitchen caddies and bins are available online.

Wessex Flood & Coastal Committee Summary Report

Recent discussions at the Wessex Flood & Coastal Committee, as detailed in the latest report, highlight a worrying rise in flood risks across Somerset and the wider Wessex region. Climate change is driving a 20-30% increase in rainfall, placing greater pressure on flood management efforts. At the same time, the Environment Agency (EA) is scaling back its flood prevention activities, leaving local councils and communities more vulnerable to flooding and its devastating impacts. This escalating situation emphasises the urgent need for coordinated responses and increased support to safeguard residents and critical infrastructure.

Positive Developments

- The Bridgwater Barrier, the largest recent project in the country, is under construction.
- The EA has requested budgets to replace failing pumps on the Levels & Moors, though funding is uncertain.
- Somerset Rivers Authority's (SRA) additional 1.25% on council tax funds more proactive flood work here than anywhere else in the country.
- Recent floods have been flash floods, differing from the slower 2014 floods that prompted the SRA.

Challenges

- Reduced EA maintenance has shifted responsibilities to landowners, increasing costs and risks.
- Funding has decreased by 40%, limiting flood management efforts.
- Limited SRA funds will need to be redirected towards flood repairs previously managed by the EA.
- Permitting processes for work on main rivers remain slow and unchanged.

Despite these hurdles, the council and partners are committed to maintaining pressure on DEFRA and the EA to address flood risks effectively.

Community Groups in Somerset Thrive with CAG Support

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Support from Community Action Groups (CAG) Somerset has helped local volunteers save thousands of items, reduce waste, cut carbon emissions, and strengthen community bonds through repair cafés, food sharing, and reuse initiatives.

In 2024-25, volunteers:

- Contributed 14,500 hours (£234,000 value)
- Saved 51,000kg of food from waste
- Swapped 65,200kg of items
- Hosted 1,700 items and sharpened 200 tools at repair cafés

Their efforts diverted 49 tonnes of waste from landfill, avoided 194 tonnes of CO₂, and saved Somerset Council £9,500. Additionally, 73% of volunteers felt more connected to their communities, and 57% made new friends. CAG Somerset aims to grow, diversify, and strengthen its network further in the coming year, supported by Somerset Council and partners. More information can be found here:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/news/community-groups-across-somerset-are-thriving-with-cag-somerset-support/>

The Hidden Danger: Gas Canisters in Recycling Fuel Fire Risks

Residents are warned not to put gas canisters in kerbside recycling due to a serious fire risk at Somerset's recycling facilities. Recently, a fire was narrowly prevented thanks to quick action by staff, but incidents caused by gas canisters have become more frequent, with nearly 1,500 canisters collected in six months. Somerset Council urges residents to dispose of gas canisters safely at recycling sites, as pressure from crushing can cause explosions, endangering staff and risking facility closure. Fire officials emphasise the importance of proper recycling of electronic devices and vapes, which also pose explosion risks.

Wessex Leaders Back Regional Projects to Drive Devolution

Council leaders in Wessex have committed to regional projects supporting devolution and a Mayoral Strategic Authority. Key initiatives include a Wessex Joint Growth Plan for economic development, housing, and infrastructure; an integrated infrastructure and transport strategy focusing on greener, more reliable public transport; and a Nature Recovery Strategy to protect biodiversity and green spaces.

These efforts aim to boost local growth, improve connectivity, and protect the environment, with the partnership engaging with government to secure devolution and additional support for innovation and clean energy.

Somerset Highlights Business Opportunities at September Events

In September, Somerset will showcase its economic strengths through the Invest Somerset Showcase 2025, focusing on growth sectors like low-carbon energy, aerospace, manufacturing, and digital innovation. The series of events, open to all local businesses, will offer networking, support opportunities, and insights into Somerset's future economy. Key sessions include low carbon energy, workforce development, SME support, aerospace, and digital growth. Booking is essential, with some events by invitation only. For details, visit the Somerset Council's Invest Somerset page.

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More is available on the Council's [Invest Somerset](#) page.

Somerset Launches 2025 Summer Reading Challenge

Somerset Council invites primary school children to join the Summer Reading Challenge, themed *Story Garden: Adventures in Nature and the Great Outdoors*. In Somerset libraries, children aged 4–11 can sign up, read six books over summer, earn rewards, and earn a medal. The theme features whimsical illustrations and outdoor adventures that inspire curiosity. The initiative aims to encourage reading, boost wellbeing, and connect children with nature through fun activities and storytelling. It's part of a nationwide tradition, with nearly 600,000 children participating in 2024 and over 100,000 new library memberships.

To find out more about how to take part in the Summer Reading Challenge or to find your local participating library, visit [Summer Reading Challenge 2025](#).

Somerset Launches Food Waste Story Competition for Kids

Somerset Council, SUEZ, and author Ben Pulletz have launched a storytelling competition for children aged 7-16 to promote food waste recycling. Kids are invited to submit stories (up to 500 words) on the theme of recycling, with prizes including book vouchers and a copy of Ben Pulletz's *Luna explores Somerset*. Entries are due by 7 September 2025. For more details, visit:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/bins-recycling-and-waste/join-the-food-waste-revolution-in-somerset/>

Moor Screen Time for Somerset

Somerset is back on the big screen with *Unmoored*, a Swedish thriller filmed mainly in Exmoor. The story follows TV presenter Maria Holinek fleeing to Exmoor during a personal crisis. Filming in late 2021 took place in locations like Simonsbath, Exford, Minehead, and Wiveliscombe.

The film will stream from September 15 and may hit local cinemas from August 15. Screen Somerset highlights the film's boost to local economy and tourism, with last year's productions bringing over £4 million.

Team Repair Empowers Over 150 Somerset Students to Embrace Green Skills

A Somerset Council-funded project, Team Repair, successfully taught over 150 students in 12 weeks across schools and youth groups how to repair everyday gadgets. The workshops aimed to reduce electronic waste, promote sustainability, and inspire interest in STEM careers.

Participants repaired 300 gadgets, with many experiencing their first repair activity. 40% of students said they were more likely to repair things in future, and teachers rated the programme 10 out of 10. The initiative highlights the importance of green skills for the circular economy and environmental conservation.

Boot Up for Somerset Coast Walking Challenge

Somerset Council invites residents to walk 80 miles in 8 days from 28 September to 5 October, supporting coastal schools. Starting at County Gate on Exmoor and ending at Brean Down,

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participants can join any or all days of the event. The challenge aims to raise funds for The Outdoor Guide Foundation's Waterproofs and Wellies campaign, supporting Somerset's coastal primary schools. Last year, £350 was raised to buy waterproofs for West Huntspill Primary School. Visit somersestcoastfestival.co.uk for details on how to join and donate.

Review Recommends Improvements After Somerset Resident's Death

The Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board (SSAB) has made 12 recommendations following the death of Juliet, a woman affected by domestic abuse, coercion, and alcohol dependency. The report highlights the need for better information sharing between agencies, consistent application of safeguarding policies, and improved support for vulnerable adults.

Key suggestions include enhanced multi-agency risk assessments, better recording and monitoring by GP practices, and increased awareness of support services for perpetrators and victims. The review aims to ensure that similar cases receive the help and protection they need.

For more, visit safeguardingsomerset.org.uk.

Statutory Consultation Begins on Somerset's Pupil Referral Unit Merger

Somerset Council has launched a consultation on merging its 4 Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) into 2 larger sites—one in the east and one in the west of the county. The consultation is open until **12 September 2025**, with decisions to be made in October. All feedback from parents, staff, and local organisations is encouraged to help shape the future of education support for children and young people. A link to the consultation can be found via the Council's: [Pupil Referral Unit Consultation](#) page.

Paper copies of the consultation can be viewed, or printed on request, at [Bridgwater](#), [Taunton](#), [Shepton Mallet](#) and [Yeovil](#) libraries.

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](#)

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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