

Somerset Council Report

Stoke Sub Hamdon Parish Council 5th August 2026

Somerset Issues

1.0 - Somerset must make its voice heard in the Big Conversation on Care

Baroness Casey of Blackstock, Chair of the Independent Commission on Adult Social Care, has launched the Big Conversation on Care — a national engagement exercise inviting the public to help shape what a National Care Service in England could look like, and how it is paid for.

This lands as Somerset Council published its own new Adult Social Care Strategy for 2026 to 2029, which confirms that adult social care alone accounted for 38% of Somerset Council's budget in 2025/26 (£230.867m). Council Leader Cllr Bill Revans has long raised this pressure with central Government. Giving evidence to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee at Westminster in March 2025, he told MPs that adult and children's social care combined then accounted for 66% of the Council's budget: "We've almost slow walked into a situation where Council Tax is funding social care – Council Tax based on 1991 property values. Some 66% of our budget goes to fund social care. What we are saying is Council Tax is the wrong way to do it. That's my message."

Council sets out vision for adult social care in Somerset: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/news/council-sets-out-vision-for-adult-social-care-in-somerset/>

Big Conversation on Care platform: <http://caseycommission.co.uk/bigconversation/>

1.2 - One week left to have your say on the new Somerset Local Plan

With one week remaining before it closes, Somerset Council is urging residents and businesses to take part in the Somerset Local Plan Scoping Consultation before it ends on Sunday 9 August 2026. The Council is developing a new Local Plan that will guide where and how change happens across Somerset's towns, villages and countryside over the next 20 years, and is inviting views on what policies should be included before detailed work gets under way.

The Council has been clear that this stage of consultation is not for comment on specific sites and that no sites have been agreed; anyone wishing to put forward a site can still do so separately through the Council's ongoing Call for Sites process.

Have your say: <https://orlo.uk/ZHS0E>

Full consultation and documents: <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/planning/local-plan-scoping-consultation-2026/>

Local Plan background pages: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/planning-buildings-and-land/somerset-local-plan/>

1.3 - Free bus travel for all 5 to 15 year olds this summer

Throughout August, all 5 to 15 year olds can travel free on participating bus services across Somerset, under the Government's Kids Go Free scheme. This builds on the existing concession for under-5s, who already travel free, and sits alongside the £3 cap on single adult bus fares, making it easier and cheaper for families to get out and about together over the summer holidays.

Not every operator or route is included, so residents are encouraged to check which bus operators and routes are taking part before travelling.

More information: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/bus-it-you-know-it-makes-sense/>

1.4 - Best Value Notice issued to Somerset Council

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government issued Somerset Council with a Best Value Improvement Notice on 15 July 2026, formally notifying the Council of Government concerns about its capacity to

comply with the Best Value Duty. It follows the May 2026 CIPFA review, which found the Council's financial position fragile, and cites continued reliance on Exceptional Financial Support, low reserves, and demand pressures in Children's Services, Adult Social Care and SEND. The Council is expected to engage with the Department at least quarterly on progress; the notice will be reviewed by 15 January 2027.

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/best-value-notice-issued-to-somerset-council/>

1.5 - Somerset Council awarded funding to explore bus franchising

Somerset Council's transport team has been awarded funding by the Department for Transport (DfT) to carry out a bus franchising pre-feasibility assessment. Bus franchising is a system where the local transport authority — Somerset Council — awards exclusive contracts to private operators to run services on specific routes or areas; unlike the current enhanced partnership arrangement, franchising would mean the Council keeps control over routes, fares, timetables and service standards.

Recent changes to Government legislation and guidance, together with this new funding, mean the Council can now carry out a formal, evidence-based assessment of the different franchising models available, to get a clear picture of whether any could deliver better outcomes for operators and passengers in Somerset.

1.6 - Walk for a Life 2026 – suicide prevention walk in Taunton, September 5th

Somerset Council's Public Health team and partner organisations are inviting residents to Walk for a Life 2026, Saturday September 5th, held to remember those lost to suicide, raise awareness and encourage and empower people in Somerset to take action to prevent suicide. The walk starts at 10.30am from the Quaker Meeting House, 13 Bath Place, Taunton, TA1 4EP, following a wheelchair and pushchair-friendly loop around Taunton and ending at Vivary Park; assistance dogs are welcome inside the venue.

Participants are invited to re-join organisers back at the Quaker Meeting House from 12.00pm to 1.00pm for refreshments and a chance to speak to local support services. Organisations attending include Open Mental Health, Mind in Somerset, Somerset Suicide Bereavement Support Service, Somerset Council, Young Somerset, Samaritans, Somerset Sports and Activity Partnership (SASP), and Help for Heroes.

Anyone with queries about the event can contact publichealth@somerset.gov.uk. The Council has also highlighted Mindline, Somerset's 24/7 confidential emotional support and mental health helpline, which can be reached locally on 01823 276 892 or freephone on 0800 138 1692. Details & downloads: <https://walkforalife.org.uk/>

1.7 - Somerset Council appoints new Chief Financial Officer

The Council announced the appointment of Lizzie Watkin as its new Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and statutory Section 151 Officer, following approval by Full Council. Lizzie Watkin joins Somerset Council from Wiltshire Council, where she served as Corporate Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, and brings extensive experience of local government finance, organisational transformation, governance and strategic leadership.

1.8 - Council Leader reaffirms commitment to safe, welcoming communities in Somerset

At Full Council on 15 July, Council Leader Cllr Bill Revans responded to a question from Cllr Habib Farbahi about a protest march that took place in Taunton on Saturday 27 June, and about concerns that a further demonstration might follow.

Cllr Revans reaffirmed the Council's commitment to community safety, cohesion and respect, describing the scenes witnessed in Taunton in June as "deeply concerning." He went on to say: "While most of those present conducted themselves peacefully and lawfully, I am appalled by the behaviour of a group whose actions and language sought

to divide our communities, intimidate others and undermine the values that Somerset stands for. Somerset is a county built on decency, respect and neighbourliness."

He confirmed that the Council would continue to work closely with Avon and Somerset Constabulary, community organisations, faith groups and local leaders to support cohesion, and that he would be seeking assurances from the police that the public would be kept safe in the event of any future marches or similar events, in Taunton or elsewhere in the county. He pointed to existing initiatives, including the Somerset Diverse Communities project, the annual Together events, and the newly formed Interfaith and Belief Network, as practical examples of the Council's ongoing cohesion work, and reiterated the Council's status as a signatory to anti-racist organisation commitments.

1.9 - Council spotlights new affordable homes for rural communities (#RuralHousingWeek)

To mark Rural Housing Week, which ran nationally from 6 to 10 July and is led by the National Housing Federation, Somerset Council highlighted the importance of affordable housing in helping rural communities across the county to thrive. According to the 2011 census, 48.2% of Somerset's population live in rural areas, making it one of the ten most rural authorities in England, and the Council's Affordable Housing team works with housing providers, developers, parish councils and community partners to support delivery where it is most needed.

The Council reported that 117 affordable homes were completed in Somerset's rural communities during 2025/26, with a further 25 rural applications currently in progress that could deliver around 450 additional affordable homes, three of which include wheelchair-adapted units. A further 43 sites already have planning consent, with the potential to deliver around 1,600 affordable homes in total, underlining the scale of the pipeline the Council is seeking to bring forward in rural parts of the county.

1.10 - Somerset Council approves multi-million investment in SEND

The Council's Executive has agreed a major package of one-off investment worth £5.331m over two years to strengthen support for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The funding will be used to increase capacity across SEND services, support a restructure aimed at reducing duplication and improving efficiency, and help teams keep pace with rising demand and statutory timescales.

It will also expand capacity within the Preparation for Adulthood function in the Virtual School, including additional Learning Mentors to support young people with SEND who are at risk of becoming, or already are, not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The investment responds to a sharp rise in need: the number of children and young people in Somerset with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) stood at 6,578 at the end of May 2026, with EHCP numbers rising from 2.6% of the school population in 2019/20 to 5.8% in 2025/26, close to the 6% national average. The additional resource is intended to be temporary and time-limited, allowing the Council to reduce current backlogs while it assesses the impact of wider reforms to the SEND system.

1.11 - Developer and Somerset Council work with utilities to co-ordinate essential work

Essential utility works are being co-ordinated on the A358 in north Taunton to minimise disruption and avoid repeated roadworks in the same area. Wales and West Utilities and National Grid are due to replace ageing gas services and electrical infrastructure along Staplegrove Road and Minehead Road, with work starting on 20 July and continuing through to October.

The programme has deliberately been timed so that the bulk of the disruptive work takes place during the school summer holidays.

At the same time, developer Bloor Homes and its contractors will continue related highway improvements to support access to a new development in the area, including works at the Silk Mills junction. Bringing the utility and development-related works together under one co-ordinated programme is intended to reduce the need for further major traffic management and excavation once the development's infrastructure is complete.

A one-way system will operate inbound to Taunton on the A358, with outbound traffic diverted via Silk Mills. A public drop-in session was held at Taunton Vale Sports Club on Monday 6 July for residents and businesses to discuss the scheme with representatives from WWU, National Grid, Somerset Council and Bloor Homes.

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/news/developer-and-somerset-council-work-with-utilities-to-co-ordinate-essential-work/>

1.12 - Council bangs the drum for Summer Reading Challenge

Somerset Council has encouraged primary school children across the county to take part in the Reading Agency's 2026 Summer Reading Challenge, which launched on Saturday 4 July. The initiative forms part of the wider National Year of Reading 2026 and is aimed at keeping children engaged with books over the summer holidays, helping to prevent the seasonal dip in reading levels that can occur when schools break up.

Somerset's libraries are supporting the challenge locally, offering activities and incentives to encourage participation, with the Council framing the campaign as part of its broader commitment to literacy and childhood development across the county.

More information can be found via this link: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/news/council-bangs-the-drum-for-summer-reading-challenge/>

1.13 - Schools Against Waste marks milestone 500th Somerset school visit

The Council's Schools Against Waste (SAW) programme has reached a significant milestone, completing its 500th school visit at Priddy and St Lawrence's Federation school. Delivered on behalf of Somerset Council by Carymoor Environmental Trust, the programme provides practical, curriculum-linked sessions for primary and secondary pupils covering recycling, waste reduction and wider environmental responsibility.

The milestone reflects the scale of the programme's reach across the county since it began, and the Council has highlighted it as evidence of its ongoing commitment to embedding waste-reduction education in schools as part of its broader climate and waste strategy.

2 - Local Issues

2.1 - Roadside trees at East Stoke – Included in the next contract out for tender now. Still awaiting details of this tender. Ongoing monitoring. Work anticipated End July/August

2.2 - Traffic and Road Safety - Request to update lines and 'SLOW' at the end of West Street to improve visual notification of junction, complete. New pole sign – Complete.

New speed data taken by Avon and Somerset Police indicating no significant concern that would prompt further action or active measures by them at this time. Work back on the programme as potholing closes. Gary Warren from SC will be arranging a meeting to discuss possible options.

2.3 - Brocks Mount – John N to follow up with officers on confirming the current situation and seek solutions to outstanding missing digital plans and data. No Update at July meeting with John N.

2.4 - Stoke drainage Survey - Report shared with Highways for comment and action. Productive meeting with John N, to which he will put forward requests for more in depth inspections to then ascertain the work that needs to be carried out to rectify broken gullies and damaged pipes. Paper docs issued which assisted in full understanding whilst discussions and walk around took place. Action plan being produced. This is still ongoing.

2.5 – Seawall – Discussed and viewed condition and concerns during drainage meeting. Communications between SC and the Duchy proposed to look for solutions before further deterioration and possible collapse. Overgrowth to be cut back below the retaining wall to complete a survey. No update of dates for cutback, survey or survey report.

2.6 – Empty Property off West Street – Enquiries will be made into last known Council involvement and what further information on ownership and then what possible enforcement action could be taken. This will be a long process as SSDC stopped working on it some years ago.

Regards Emily and John

Report it first: useful Links to share with your communities

Visit Report a problem on the road: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/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:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/potholes-and-road-damage/>

For traffic updates and roadworks follow @travelsomerset on X and Facebook.

Live travel information

<https://www.travelsomerset.co.uk/>

Report a problem with a street light

We maintain and repair street lights to national standards to provide safe access to all road users:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/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 and how to apply for a new road sign Speed limits:<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/road-signs-bollards-and-road-markings/>

Speed limits

Request information about new or existing traffic calming measures:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/speed-limits/>

Traffic lights

We maintain over 200 traffic light locations throughout the county

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/traffic-lights/>

Street and roadworks

We maintain the roads and pavements that are managed at public expense in Somerset

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/street-and-roadworks/>

Sign-up for the latest climate news:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/environment-and-food-safety/climate-and-ecological-emergency/newsletter-sign-up/>.