

Somerset Council Report

Stoke Sub Hamdon Parish Council 8th April 2026

1 Somerset Matters

1.1 - Somerset recognised nationally for boosting food waste recycling rates

Efforts to boost the amount of food waste recycled in Somerset have been recognised nationally in the Awards for Excellence – the waste and recycling industry’s most prestigious awards.

Somerset Council and its household waste collections contractor, SUEZ recycling and recovery UK, have been shortlisted in the Food Waste and Organics Initiative of the Year category for work to boost food waste participation in the county.

Despite Somerset’s strong 72% participation rate in kerbside recycling collections, Somerset Council and SUEZ set out to tackle the 21% (by weight) of food waste that still ends up in household rubbish.

Almost half of the food waste put out with the rubbish is thrown away in its packaging, and up to £1 million could be saved annually if this was recycled instead.

The campaign recognises the many barriers to recycling participation and builds on the county’s strong history for backing recycling initiatives and helping to keep Somerset green and sustainable.

During the first 7 months of the year-long campaign, it has seen an impressive:

- Increase of 5% in certain targeted recycling rounds
- A 38% rise in year-on-year food waste bin orders
- A 5% increase in food waste collected between June and October, saving more than £40,000 in disposal costs
- A fall in the amount of general rubbish collected during June to October

Cllr Richard Wilkins, Executive Member for Transport and Waste services said: “We’re absolutely delighted that our efforts have been recognised with this shortlisting for the Awards for Excellence.

“It’s a testament to the hard work and forward-thinking of both our teams and the Somerset community, who have embraced food waste recycling. By working together, we’re not just reducing waste, but making real savings and supporting a greener Somerset for future generations.”

Matthew Canning, SUEZ Contract Director for Somerset said: “Being shortlisted for this award is thanks to the expertise, collaboration and dedication shown across our partnership and the commitment of Somerset residents.

“We’re moving in the right direction to increase the amount of food waste we’re recycling, but there is always more we can do. Ensuring food is recycled properly means that we can generate more sustainable energy and other useful by-products, rather than letting it go to waste. It’s fantastic to have our efforts recognised with a prestigious nomination, but the key message remains – please recycle your food waste.”

The winners of the 2026 Awards for Excellence will be announced in May, with the [shortlist available online](#).

1.2 - Councillors approve major transport delivery blueprint for Somerset

Somerset’s four-year Local Transport Delivery Plan, focusing on active travel and accessibility, has been endorsed by the Council’s Executive.

The Council must submit its spending plans to the Government for the first of the four years by 20 March setting out where money will be spent in 2026-2027, including road maintenance, bus services and active travel.

The plan focuses on active travel, accessibility and local transport and has been developed with input from a range of organisations and interest groups including Somerset Bus Advisory Board, the Local Community Networks' Active Travel Group and bus passenger groups.

Accessibility plays a key role in the plan to make sure that everyone can use local transport easily and safely, from buses, cycleways and pavements to street lighting, bus stops and rail stations.

The plan includes preparation for the Government's Project Coral providing a back-office system for multi-operator tickets and real-time information at key transport interchanges.

It covers proposed spending on:

- Active travel
- Bus service enhancement
- Traffic signals renewal and refurbishment
- Bus shelters
- Transport hubs
- Bus priority scheme
- Road safety
- Better integration with rail services
- Highways maintenance

Improvements to the rights of way network are in the plan, along with road safety schemes at collision hotspots and a countywide programme to improve the condition of Somerset's roads.

Following Government announcements in December 2025, two funding streams are now available: the Bus Services Fund and the Integrated Transport Fund. The allocations, both revenue and capital funding, total £282.75m over the four years.

Councillor Richard Wilkins, Lead Member for Transport and Waste Services, said: "I would like to thank everyone who has helped shaped this plan within a very tight timeframe.

"While we will continue to maintain our road network and assets like traffic signals, we are keen to encourage more people to look at alternatives to the car, where appropriate, whether it's walking, wheeling and cycling, or using public transport.

"It is important that alternatives are accessible and are safe and easy to use."

You can download the plan here: <https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s63749/Appendix A Draft Local Transport Delivery Plan March 2026 Submission.pdf>

1.3 - Somerset Council publishes first Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Somerset Council's first Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) – a long-term, landmark plan to protect and restore wildlife and habitats – has been published and endorsed by the Council's Executive.

The LNRS aims to reverse the decline in nature across the county. It outlines priorities for nature recovery, recommended actions, and target areas to achieve the greatest environmental benefits.

It will help to guide action and investment in areas where nature recovery is most needed. It will also support land managers, developers, planners, environmental groups, and residents in identifying opportunities for nature recovery.

The plan contains:

- Statement of Biodiversity Priorities – Defines goals and actions based on input from stakeholders
- Local Habitat Map – Shows where nature recovery actions can be most effective

By identifying where nature recovery and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) actions will have the highest impact, the LNRS means environmental spending can be targeted more efficiently and helps reduce long-term financial pressures through natural flood management, climate resilience and improved ecosystem services.

It has been developed and consulted on with input from landowners, environmental organisations, community groups and statutory agencies.

Councillor Graham Oakes, Somerset Council's Executive Member for Public Health, Climate Change and Environment said: "This strategy is about working together to make sure that our wildlife, green spaces, and natural landscapes can thrive for future generations.

"The Local Nature Recovery Strategy sets out the most important actions for nature recovery which can be taken by the council, partner organisations and by local residents.

"Being surrounded by thriving, nature-rich landscapes is often what draws people to live in Somerset, it is so important for our health and wellbeing. This plan is an essential step towards restoring habitat and diverse ecosystems across the county by mapping out areas for nature restoration.

"We would like to thank everyone who took part in the strategy's development work."

Simon Stonehouse, Principal Manager, Natural England said: "Somerset's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is the result of dedicated collaboration between Natural England, Somerset Council, and a host of other local organisations and people. It is a blueprint for protecting and restoring the remarkable wildlife that makes Somerset so special. Natural England fully endorses the strategy and looks forward to working with partners to translate it into action."

Georgia Dent, Chief Executive, Somerset Wildlife Trust, said: "We're delighted that Somerset's Local Nature Recovery Strategy has been published. We are in the midst of a nature crisis, with 1 in 4 species at risk of extinction globally.

"Somerset's State of Nature report shows that this is true even in Somerset, home to a fantastic range of wonderful species, but with a 60% decline in species like fritillary butterflies, and annual loss of species rich grasslands. We need now, more than ever, to work together to turn this around and this strategy sets out how we can do this.

"Developing this strategy was a huge piece of work involving an incredible amount of people and organisations coming together to find opportunities to protect, celebrate and restore Somerset's fantastic habitats and species. It is vital that we now continue working together, with communities, with businesses and with individuals, to deliver this strategy and realise these opportunities."

Somerset Council will now work with partners through delivery groups, community networks, land management clusters and strategic partnerships to put the strategy into action. Annual updates will report on progress and highlight opportunities for further collaboration.

The full strategy, Local Habitat Map, and summary materials are available here: [Somerset's Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#)

1.4 - New investment aims to boost gully clearance and spruce up signs, lines and footpaths

Somerset Council's Executive is set to give the green light to a £5m enhanced maintenance programme featuring a huge gully clearance push and work to tackle faded road markings, broken signs and overgrown pathways.

Councillors are expected to agree the first £2 million for 2026/27 next week (April 1) to get the programme running during this month.

Current road maintenance programmes prioritise safety critical works which can mean lower-level issues like faded road markings, broken signs and overgrown hedges are left unresolved, often for many years.

The new spending proposals will deliver a range of visible improvements like clearing more drains and gullies, fixing and cleaning road signs, repainting faded road markings, collecting litter, and clearing overgrown vegetation, particularly on walking and cycling routes.

Improvements will also be made to the council's public reporting system, to make it even easier for residents to highlight any issues on the roads.

The work will be carried out by one of the Council's current highways contractors, Kier, which will deal with signing, lining and gully clearance, as well as the Council's own Open Spaces Team, which will tackle overgrown vegetation and other tidying work alongside collecting litter.

The enhanced gully emptying will see an intensive one-year intensive clearance in areas vulnerable to a 1 in 100-year flood events – adding up to about 65,000 extra gullies during the current year.

The £5 million maintenance programme will run for 3 years – 2026/27 to 2028/29 with the aim of making a big visible difference to communities from the start and during year one.

While focusing mainly on vegetation clearance, the extra open spaces operatives will also be able to pick up other tasks while they are out and about such as graffiti removal and picking up litter.

Councillor Richard Wilkins, Somerset Council's Lead Member for Transport and Waste Services said: "We listen to our communities when it comes to things they say are important.

"Yes, urgent, safety critical maintenance of roads is paramount, and that will of course remain a key focus, but what we have heard time and time again is those less safety critical issues – dirty, damaged signs, cycleways and pathways that are continually overgrown, faded road markings – these are the things that frustrate people when they are left neglected."

£2m has already been identified from uncommitted funds following the setting of a balanced budget for 2026/27 and the balance of funding for subsequent years will be identified over the coming year.

If you spot a problem of the road visit Somerset Council website [Report an issue on the Road](#)

1.5 - Somerset Council launches Best Start in Life programme

A new early years programme to help children, parents and carers thrive from pregnancy through to school is being rolled out by Somerset Council (1 April 2026).

Called 'Best Start in Life', it's designed to support families during the first five years of a child's life through a collaborative, community-focused approach.

Best Start in Life is a government programme with an ambition to see 78.3 per cent of five-year-olds in Somerset obtain a good level of development by 2028.

A Best Start in Life Somerset Plan has been launched to kick-off the programme. It sets out the vision and aims, and outlines how it will work here in Somerset.

Key to the Best Start in Life Programme will be accessible, co-ordinated support and services through a local Family Hubs approach. It will build on support already on offer across Somerset and will be present in both rural and urban communities.

The first Best Start in Life Family Hub has already been established in Wellington in collaboration with Wellington Town Council. Sited in the former Kings Arms public house, it provides a mix of services and will form part of a campus model that includes local schools, the library, health visiting team, NHS services, and leisure amenities.

Best Start in Life will prioritise parenting support, early identification of additional needs, improved access to SEND support, and better coordination across services for families.

Rachael Parker, Head of Public Health Nursing and Best Start in Life Family Hubs at Somerset Council, said: “Our aim is to ensure parents and carers throughout Somerset can easily access excellent support, information, and resources designed to meet their individual needs”

“By working closely with local services, communities, and our schools, we can make Somerset a place where children start school prepared, develop lifelong learning skills, and fulfil their potential in an inclusive, safe, and thriving environment.”

Lead Member for Children, Families and Education, Cllr Heather Shearer, said: “Becoming a parent or carer brings joy, pride and purpose, however we know at times it can feel overwhelming. All parents and carers need support, advice or information at different points - this is a normal part of raising children.

“Today we have launched our Best Start in Life Somerset Plan which is the blueprint as to how we will make our vision a reality.

“Parents and our partners have helped co-produce the Plan and will play a critical role in the programme’s design and its delivery across Somerset.

“Partnership working across childcare, education, health, and the voluntary community faith sectors will continue to grow and strengthen as the programme rolls out.

“I am very much looking forward to seeing the Plan come to life, transform services and enable better support for families no matter where they live.”

Take a look at the [Best Start in Life Somerset Plan](#).

The Best Start in Life Programme aligns with [Somerset’s Children and Young People’s Plan 2024–2030](#) the also the [Connect Somerset Blueprint 2024-2030](#), a local system for reducing pressure on families.

1.6 - Somerset Council joining forces with local charities to support residents in crisis

Somerset Council has formed a three-year partnership with Citizens Advice Somerset, awarding them a contract to help and support residents using the Government’s Crisis and Resilience Fund.

Somerset Council has received £22.661 million from the Government to provide vital assistance to residents facing financial hardship and cost-of-living pressures in the county which are to be distributed over the next three years via the community sector and direct payments. The funding, called the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF), is designed to offer targeted help to people facing sudden financial difficulties.

The support is provided in three ways:

1 Crisis Payments

- Immediate, accessible financial support for families and individuals facing financial shocks or hardship.
- Delivered through a cash-first approach to ensure dignity and choice, with flexibility for vouchers or goods-in-kind where needed.

2 Resilience Services

- Wraparound support to prevent recurring crises, including debt advice and budgeting guidance.
- Income maximisation and benefits advice.
- Employment and skills pathways.
- Focus on building financial stability and reducing dependency on emergency support.

3 Community Coordination

- Working in partnership to ensure everyone in Somerset has access to the right support at the right time, to build resilient communities
- The CRF is being co-produced and delivered by a range of partner organisations across Somerset – the Crisis & Resilience Fund Alliance.

Somerset Council has appointed Citizens Advice Somerset as the CRF Alliance Lead to help it deliver support to Somerset communities using the funding. As Alliance Lead, Citizens Advice Somerset will work with Somerset Council and other VCFSE partners such as Age UK Somerset, SASP, Somerset Community Foundation and Thrive, to deliver targeted support, strengthen community resilience, provide crisis intervention, and ensure access to wellbeing and financial assistance for vulnerable residents.

More information about all the support available can be found on the [Council's website](#), search 'cost of living support'. To apply for crisis payments only, visit Citizens Advice Somerset's [website](#).

Claire Winter, Executive Director for Children, Families and Education at Somerset Council, said:

"Our local VCFSE partners are in an excellent position to identify the needs of our most vulnerable residents early, and the work they do is well suited to giving these individuals the support they need.

"This is why we're really pleased to be working with Citizens Advice Somerset and other local partners to provide a wide variety of support for the people who need it, ensuring that everyone in Somerset has access to the right support at the right time."

Angela Kerr, CEO of Citizens Advice Somerset, said:

"Citizens Advice Somerset is thrilled to have been confirmed as the Alliance Lead for the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) across Somerset. We're looking forward to building on our existing work with VCFSE partners and Somerset Council, to make sure help and support is easily available at a local level. Combining crisis payments with preventative and wraparound support will make a real difference."

The CRF ensures continued support for residents facing the ongoing pressure of rising living costs.

If parents are concerned about the change, especially during the Easter holidays, other existing sources of help are available.

Families of children receiving free school meals who are struggling with food costs during the Easter school break (3 April to 19 April 2026), can access Citizens Advice Somerset's Easter Holiday Family Support service. Eligible households will receive supermarket vouchers funded by the CRF, upon completion of an application and submission of relevant evidence.

For further details, including eligibility and the application form, visit [Citizens Advice Somerset's website](#).

During the Easter break, families can also benefit from the [Happy Healthy Holidays \(HHH\)](#) programme organised by Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership (SASP), running from 3 April to 19 April 2026. Eligible families can register for holiday clubs and camps, which include meals.

There's also the Council's [#Help4All scheme](#), [Community Hubs](#), [the Healthy Start – NHS – healthy food and milk](#) and [The Local Pantry Network in Somerset](#).

Urgent financial assistance is also available for households struggling to pay for heating oil. If you are a low-income household and are at risk of running out visit the [Citizens Advice Somerset](#) website for full details and to apply using the application form. If you are unable to use the internet, call 0808 278 7842 and select option 3.

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. Recent report suggests no current action. Adjacent gully for jetting likely 2026-27

2.2 - Traffic and Road Safety

Request to update lines and 'SLOW' at the end of West Street to improve visual notification of junction. This has been agreed by Rebecca, no known date for it to be done at this time. New sign design to be implemented.

2.3 - Ongoing Drainage schedules – to request any new schedules for clearing gullies and improvements to regularity.

2.4 - Bins – An ongoing situation which Gilly keeps us updated with until all is complete. Thank you for latest update regarding the difficulties in getting this working as it should.

2.5 - Stoke drainage Survey– Report shared with Highways for comment and action.

2.6 - EV Charging at Millenium Hall– Being investigated

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/>.