

SOMERSET COUNCIL

Briefing Sheet for Parish & Town Councils October 2026

Somerset Council Warns Financial Position Remains “Deeply Fragile”: Somerset Council’s [latest Medium Term Financial Plan](#) shows a £40.3 million budget gap for 2027/28, rising to a cumulative £63.5 million by 2031/32, even after revised assumptions and planned savings. The position could deteriorate further, with the Chief Finance Officer warning that pressures emerging this year could add around £30 million to next year’s gap if they prove ongoing, potentially taking the challenge to around £70 million. The Council is already forecasting a £29.1 million overspend this year, its reserves remain below the minimum level recommended by the Section 151 Officer, and it has required Exceptional Financial Support to balance its budget in each year since 2024/25. The Council rates its medium-term financial sustainability risk at the maximum 25, “very high”, and warns that failure to identify sufficient recurring savings and transformation could mean seeking further Government support or, if a balanced budget cannot be achieved, the issuing of a Section 114 report, which would impose controls on non-essential spending and could require significant service reductions.

Nearly 42,000 Working Days Lost to Staff Sickness: Somerset Council lost 41,822 working days to staff sickness in the last year, equivalent to an average of 10.04 days for every full-time equivalent employee, more than [twice the 4.4 days per worker recorded across the UK workforce by the Office for National Statistics in 2025](#). The associated employment cost was £6.3 million. Stress, anxiety and psychological ill health accounted for around a quarter of all sickness absence. The Council says its strengthening absence management, manager training, stress risk assessments and targeted support in services with the highest absence levels.

Planning Enforcement Backlog Exceeds 1,200 Cases: Somerset Council has confirmed it has [more than 1,200 outstanding planning enforcement cases](#), with additional agency staff being brought in to help reduce the backlog. The issue was raised at Full Council after concerns that enforcement action at Stoney Ridge in Wrantage, where 16 static caravans were placed despite a previous planning refusal, could take up to 18 months. The Council currently has ten officers within the enforcement team structure, with 11 staff in total covering the service including agency roles. A review of the service has been undertaken and the Council says a case is being progressed for further resources.

More Than 4,000 Residents Sign Parking Charges Petition: A petition calling on Somerset Council to rethink proposed increases to parking charges has been signed by 4,177 residents and submitted to the Council. The petition opposes new Sunday charging where parking is currently free, substantial tariff increases, charges at currently free council car parks and new on-street charges without local support. Since the original proposals were published, the Council has revised its approach. If approved by the Executive on 7th October, existing charges would rise by 10% from January 2027, while the new county-wide tier system would be brought in in autumn 2027. Further engagement is promised before proposals on free car parks, on-street parking, permits and concessions are brought forward.



Somerset Council Backs Dementia Friendly Commitment: Somerset Council has [unanimously backed plans to become a more dementia-friendly organisation](#) and improve support for people living with dementia and their carers. The motion, put forward by the Conservative Group, commits the Council to increasing dementia awareness among councillors and staff, encouraging participation in dementia awareness training and the Alzheimer's Society's Dementia Friends programme, and working with the NHS, charities and community organisations to strengthen support. The Council Leader will also write to the Health Secretary supporting a national 18-week referral-to-diagnosis target.

£50 Million Flood Resilience Programme Agreed: Somerset Council has approved the next stage of a £50 million Government-funded flood resilience programme, focusing on 15 projects across the county. More than £650,000 will be allocated ahead of this winter for community resilience, emergency response and additional gully clearance, including £100,000 for Somerset Prepared grants, £50,000 for emergency communications and power equipment, and £500,000 for more frequent gully maintenance in flood-prone areas. The wider programme will also include desilting, pumping improvements, maintenance works, new flood structures and the Council's My Community programme, which will work with local communities on tailored flood-prevention measures. The first phase of community-led schemes is expected to begin by spring 2027.

Somerset Local Plan Moves to Next Stage: The first consultation on Somerset's new Local Plan has now closed, with responses being analysed before the next stage of work begins. The Local Plan will guide where and how development takes place across Somerset's towns, villages and countryside over the next 20 years. The Council is now developing its spatial strategy for future growth, with the next consultation expected in 2027. Further public consultations are planned for 2028, before the final Local Plan is submitted later that year, with formal adoption currently scheduled for 2029.

Somerset Health and Care Academy Approved: Somerset Council has approved the Full Business Case for a new Somerset Health and Care Academy, developed jointly with Somerset NHS Foundation Trust and NHS Somerset Integrated Care Board. Based at the former Bridgwater Hospital site, with additional digital training, the Academy will focus on recruitment, retention, training, innovation and clearer career pathways across health and social care. Once fully operational, it aims to train more than 2,500 people a year and will include simulation facilities, careers support, innovation space and an Independent Living Centre. The project forms part of the Levelling Up Fund programme secured in 2022 and will operate through a formal joint venture between the three partner organisations, subject to final NHS approvals.

Health and Wellbeing Evidence Conference in Taunton: The Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) Somerset and Somerset Council Public Health's Behavioural Science team will host a one-day conference on 11th November 2026 at Somerset County Cricket Club in Taunton. The event, titled *Using Evidence to Create Healthier, Happier and Fairer Lives in Somerset*, will bring together public sector, community and research partners to explore how evidence, behavioural science and community insight can improve health and wellbeing, reduce inequalities and shape better services. The programme will include keynote speakers, local project examples, practical sessions and opportunities for organisations to share learning and develop future collaborations. Find out more and reserve a spot here: <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/public-health/using-evidence-to-create-healthier-happier-and-fairer-lives-in-somerset>

