

SOMERSET COUNCIL

Conservative Group Briefing Sheet for Parish & Town Councils August 2025

Emergency Planning Measures: Somerset Council has [suspended normal planning services](#) for at least 12 weeks, citing a failure in capacity and rising risk of service collapse. Officers have warned the system is at a “past fail point” and that the Council could face a “catastrophic event” if urgent action is not taken. During this period, new and straightforward applications will be prioritised. Older or more complex cases will likely face further delays, and planning enforcement will be deprioritised. Site visits will be heavily restricted, and applicants, agents, and councillors will receive standardised holding responses rather than individual updates. The crisis stems from unresolved staffing shortages, IT system integration failures, and a growing backlog.

£190 million Transformation Plan: Somerset Council has approved its delayed “Inspiring Innovation” Transformation Plan, which outlines how the authority aims to save £190 million over five years. The Council says “*We do not know exactly how we will save £190 million. But we do know... we can do it because of our brilliant workforce and amazing residents.*” A strategic transformation partner will be sought to help develop detailed business cases and support delivery.

Free Car Parks Under Review: Somerset Council has declined to confirm whether free parking will continue in Wincanton’s town centre car parks. Wincanton Town Council currently funds the cost of maintaining free parking, but this arrangement will be reviewed with the potential for new charges or increased contributions from the Town Council. There are several towns and parishes in Somerset in the same position and further discussions with them are expected later in the year.

Pay Review Costs: Somerset Council has confirmed that its pay and grading review could add up to £8 million to the annual payroll bill by 2026/27, in addition to £3 million already allocated to deliver the review itself using an outsourced partner. At Full Council, councillors questioned the cost and timing of the review given the Council’s current financial emergency.

West Somerset Appeal: Somerset Council has confirmed a £50,000 contribution to the Somerset Community Foundation’s *Together for West Somerset Appeal*, following the tragic coach incident involving Minehead Middle School on 17 July. The fund will provide immediate and long-term support to children, families, and the wider community affected. It will be coordinated by SCF in partnership with Somerset Council, the NHS, schools, and national emergency bodies.

New Waste Calendars and Food Recycling Push: Somerset residents are receiving updated recycling and rubbish collection calendars which sets out collection days for the next 18 months. While Somerset has one of the highest food waste recycling rates in England, around 45% of food in household rubbish is still discarded in its packaging. The

Council and contractor SUEZ will run a year-long campaign to encourage better food waste separation and promote the environmental and cost benefits of using food caddies. Residents can order free kitchen caddies and food waste bins online.

Taunton Park and Ride Diversions: Temporary changes will affect Taunton's Silk Mills Park and Ride service from 28 July to 16 August due to gas mains replacement works by Wales and West Utilities. Mountway Road will be closed at the junction with Silk Mills Road, requiring buses to divert via Staplegrove Road and Tangier Way. During the diversion, buses will not stop until reaching Musgrove Park Hospital, where they will resume their normal route.

Summer Reading Challenge 2025 Launches: Primary school children across Somerset are being encouraged to take part in the 2025 Summer Reading Challenge, launched this month in local libraries. This year's theme, *Story Garden: Adventures in Nature and the Great Outdoors*, invites children aged 4–11 to read six books over the summer holidays, earning rewards and a medal along the way. The free challenge is designed to promote reading for pleasure and help maintain literacy levels over the summer break. Libraries will also host themed events and offer activity packs to support participation.

www.somerset.gov.uk/libraries/summer-reading-challenge-2025

Transport Plan Consultation Opens: Somerset Council has launched a public consultation on its draft Local Transport Plan (LTP), which will guide transport priorities across the county for the next 20 years. The plan outlines goals to promote walking, cycling, and public transport, support the transition to electric vehicles, and improve infrastructure and road safety. It also aims to tailor policies to the needs of different community types, from small villages to large towns. You can respond to the consultation by 7 September here <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/active-travel/copy-of-local-transport-plan-2025>

Consultation on PRUs: Somerset Council has launched a statutory consultation on plans to consolidate the management of Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) across the county. The proposal would see four existing PRUs continue to operate, but under a new structure split between east and west Somerset. While two PRUs would formally close and be amalgamated into the other two, no places would be lost and all sites would remain in use. You can respond to the consultation by 12 September here

<https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/pupil-referral-unit-consolidation-consultation/>