

SOMERSET COUNCIL

Briefing Sheet for Parish & Town Councils December 2025

External Auditors Issue Somerset Council with multiple ‘Red Flags’: Somerset Council has received its latest Interim Auditor’s Annual Report for 2024/25, which identifies continued significant weaknesses in the authority’s financial management, governance, and oversight of grant funded projects. The auditors have issued three statutory recommendations, an increase from the two issued last year. Two relate to incomplete work on delivering detailed savings plans and developing costed transformation programmes, both of which remain critical to reducing the large budget gap forecast for 2026/27. A new statutory recommendation has been issued following failures in the Council’s role as the accountable body for the Life Factory project, where auditors found that operational, governance and financial controls were inadequate.

Cost of Temporary Planning Director Confirmed: Somerset Council will be appointing a temporary Service Director for Planning to provide additional leadership capacity within the Planning Service. The temporary post will cost between £800 and £1,000 per day, including agency fees, equating to a maximum of around £250,000 over the full term. The role will be in place for up to 12 months and will be funded through a one off virement from planning fee income.

Election Costs and Responsibilities for Town and Parish Councils: Somerset Council is advising town and parish councils to plan ahead for the significant costs associated with running local elections. Councils will be responsible for the full cost of any by elections to fill casual vacancies, including nomination papers, poll cards where requested, postal vote packs, ballot papers, accommodation hire, staff, and transport. For the next ordinary elections on 6 May 2027, local councils will cover the full cost of nomination papers, postal vote packs and ballot papers, and will share other costs with Somerset Council where elections are combined, such as polling place hire, inspection, staff training, count venues, and staffing.

Sunday Parking Charges Decision Due on 3 December: Somerset Council’s Executive will decide on Wednesday 3 December whether to introduce a Somerset wide Sunday parking charge, following a six week consultation which received over 4,100 responses. The proposal was first considered by the Climate and Place Scrutiny Committee on 19 November, where Members voted to recommend that the Executive should not proceed, citing overwhelming public opposition and concerns about the potential impact on town centres.

Sale of Council Asset Under Scrutiny After Reported £5 Million Loss: A property sale by Somerset Council, the former Marks & Spencer store in Yeovil, is reported to have resulted in a loss of nearly £5 million, prompting concern about the financial impact. The store was originally acquired in 2017 for £7.65 million by the predecessor district council, and the sale price has been reported at around £2.8 million. The Council has declined to confirm the final sale price or outstanding borrowing, citing commercial sensitivity. Since declaring a financial

emergency in November 2023, Somerset Council has been selling off commercial investments and other 'non-operational assets' in a bid to balance its budget.

Consultation Reopens on Future Electoral Boundary Arrangements: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England has reopened its consultation on new division boundaries for Somerset Council, running to 14 January 2026. When the One Somerset business case was put together for the Unitary Council, it was the case that Somerset were recommending that, to keep councillors as close to the electorate as possible, there should be single member divisions. Apparently, when Somerset Council submitted their response to the consultation earlier this year, they did not make “a formal request for a uniform pattern of single-member divisions” but the commission had continued to take the steer from the previous position. So, in order that there is no claim of the process being unfair or biased, the LGBCE are carrying out a further consultation. You are invited to share your views, with any previous submissions still being taken into account. The final recommendations will be published in March 2026 in readiness for the May 2027 elections. You can share your views here <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/somerset>

EV Charging Partnership with Blink Charging UK: Somerset Council has partnered with Blink Charging UK Ltd to deliver the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure programme across the county. Following a competitive procurement process, Blink has been appointed to install at least 1,606 low powered public EV charging sockets, with work scheduled to begin in early 2026. The £3.78 million programme will prioritise residents without off street parking, with 75 per cent of chargepoints in higher demand areas and 25 per cent in rural and lower demand locations. A new “Request a Chargepoint Location” webpage has been launched to gather local suggestions on suitable sites here <https://service.somerset.gov.uk/suggest-a-chargepoint-location>

Have Your Say on 2027/28 School Admission Arrangements: Somerset Council has opened a public consultation on proposed admission arrangements for Somerset schools for the 2027/28 academic year, running from 24 November 2025 to 5 January 2026. The consultation covers matters such as catchment areas, the number of available school places, and how places are allocated when schools are oversubscribed. Parents and carers with children due to start or transfer school from September 2027 may wish to review and comment on the proposals for their local schools, and all members of the public are invited to take part through the online consultation here <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/2027-arrangements/>