

## Monthly Somerset Councillor Report March 2026

At last it is beginning to feel like Spring is on its way. There is still a lot of clearing up to do following the rain and floods but the land is not as saturated as it was and the sun is shining.

We were hoping to give you news of the budget decisions, but the Full Council Budget meeting is not until Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March. We will send round a budget bulletin later in the week.

Please let us know if we can help with any local problems.

Best wishes

### Adam and Jo

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### **Plan in place to smarten Somerset's roads, pavements and cycleways**

Somerset Council to spend up to £5m over 3 years to smarten roads, pavements and cycleways — more drain and gully clearance, improved signs and road markings, litter collection and vegetation clearance near walking/cycling routes.

Current road maintenance programmes focus on safety critical works which can mean lower priority issues like faded road markings, broken signs and overgrown hedges have been left.

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.

Cllr Bill Revans, Leader of Somerset Council, said: "we know the public want us to do much more than simply keep our roads safe, and we want to see improvements across our council area.

We will continue to prioritise pothole repairs and are working hard to clear the backlog caused by the many weeks of wet weather and flooding we have experienced this winter. We plan to allocate additional funds to tackle the backlog of potholes if we need to."

Since January the council has received 16,332 defect reports (4,417 in the same period last year). As of 20 Feb, 35 teams have fixed 4,577 potholes. Repairs are prioritised by severity and will be completed within 2 hours, 24 hours, 7 days or 28 days depending on the category.

### **Somerset reduced its projected funding gap from £101m (Mar 2025) to £25m (Feb 2026).**

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has approved in principle £30m of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS): £25m to close the remaining budget gap and £5m for service transformation. Somerset reduced its projected funding gap from £101m (Mar 2025) to £25m (Feb 2026).

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The EFS will be delivered via a Capitalisation Direction, allowing day-to-day costs to be spread over time through borrowing or asset sales. An external assurance review is a mandatory condition of EFS to provide independent scrutiny of the council's finances and governance.

The Executive approved a recommended 4.99% Council Tax rise on 25 Feb; final budget decisions are due at Full Council on 4 Mar.

Inspiring Innovation investments of £15.3m are projected to deliver £20.6m of immediate savings, with further opportunities estimated to save a total of £31m–£57m by 2030/31.

#### **SEND reform proposals 'encouraging' but urgent, sustained reform needed says Council Leader**

The government's SEND reform proposals (12-week consultation) set out a shift towards supporting more pupils in mainstream schools, rebalancing the EHCP system, strengthening prevention and early intervention, and reworking funding and tribunal arrangements. Somerset Council welcomes the direction but warns major challenges remain — rising independent placement costs, SEND transport pressures in rural areas, and the need for sufficient, fairly distributed funding during the transition.

#### Key points

- More support in mainstream: Somerset plans 250+ new SEN unit places over 3 years to teach more children closer to home.
- EHCP rebalancing: aim to reserve EHCPs for those most in need and reduce costly plan maintenance. Somerset currently has 1,000+ EHCPs awaiting completion; demand up 47% in five years.
- Tribunals and funding: proposals seek to rebalance tribunal powers and funding responsibilities; councils remain concerned about historic cost pressures.
- Private placement costs: independent special school spending is rising (budget £35m vs forecast £42m); some providers show high profit margins.
- Prevention and early intervention: increased support proposed from early years onward.
- SEND transport: ongoing cost pressures for rural areas like Somerset (projected spend c. £15m this year).
- Council role: schools to carry more per-pupil costs, while councils continue to commission specialist services and curate local offers.
- Timescales and funding: proposals include staged change; Somerset stresses the announced investment must be sufficient and fairly allocated, and calls for financial bridging support during transition.

Cllr Bill Revans said: "The direction of travel set out today is encouraging. However it's vital that the next 12 weeks are not a talking shop. We cannot keep ploughing on with the same system that patently isn't working. We must now analyse the detail and grasp this opportunity for root-and-branch reform."

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### **Somerset shortlisted for two LGC Awards**

Somerset Council has been shortlisted for two 2026 Local Government Chronicle Awards: Campaign of the Year for the '[Our Story](#)' fostering recruitment campaign, and the Diversity & Inclusion Award for 'Imagine the Possibilities', which supports young people with SEND into paid work.

The nominations recognise work to recruit and support foster carers and to expand Supported Internships (now 15 placements, supporting 100+ young people annually). Winners announced in June.

Cllr Heather Shearer said: "These nominations reflect the real-world impact of services helping vulnerable children and enabling young people with SEND to move into paid employment."

In 2026, more than 1,000 entries were submitted from councils across the country, making shortlisting a significant achievement.

### **Planning approved for £15m Octagon Theatre transformation**

Planning permission granted for a £15m refurbishment of Yeovil's 50-year-old Octagon Theatre to secure its structure and deliver major front-of-house, backstage and accessibility upgrades. Works will improve the auditorium and rehearsal space, renew plant and infrastructure, add accessible toilets and a Changing Places facility, upgrade technical stage systems (including fly and backstage crossover), and introduce energy-efficiency measures.

Funding comprises £10m from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, £3.75m from Yeovil Town Council (loan and reserves) and just over £1.25m from ticket levy income, fundraising and Section 106 contributions via Somerset Council. The tender process can now proceed and work is expected to start in the 2026/27 financial year.

### **World Book Day Costume Swap launches in Somerset libraries**

Families can donate and swap pre-loved World Book Day costumes at participating libraries from half term ahead of World Book Day on 5 March. Donate a clean, good-quality costume, browse the costume rail and take an outfit free of charge — no donation required.

"This Costume Swap makes a big difference — helping parents save money, reducing waste and bringing more people into our welcoming library spaces." — Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts

Participating libraries: Chard, Glastonbury, Ilminster, Langport, Minehead, Porlock, Shepton Mallet, Street, Watchet, Williton, Yeovil, Taunton and Burnham-on-Sea. For details visit your local branch, follow [@SomersetLibrariesUK](#) or email [librariesmail@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:librariesmail@somerset.gov.uk).

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### Report it first: useful Links to share with your communities

**Visit - Report a Problem on the Road:** - A list of all reporting pages to do with roads, pavements, lighting:  
[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:  
[Potholes, road damage and edge loss](#)

**Report a problem with a street light** - We maintain and repair street lights to national standards to provide safe access to all road users:  
[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 or a new road sign:  
[Road signs, bollards and road markings](#)

**Speed limits** - Request information about new or existing traffic calming measures:  
[Speed limits](#)

**Traffic lights** - We maintain over 200 traffic light locations throughout the County:  
[Traffic lights](#)

**Street and roadworks** - We maintain the roads and pavements that are managed at public expense in Somerset:  
[Street and roadworks problems](#)

**Traffic - updates and roadworks follow:**  
[Travel Somerset on X](#) and [Travel Somerset on Facebook](#).

**All ongoing roadworks** - available on the Somerset Council website interactive map  
[Roadworks and travel information](#)

**Somerset Waste** - collection days, replacement bins or recycling bags and missed collection reporting:  
[Bins, recycling and waste](#)

**Travel and Tourist Information**  
[Travel Somerset - Art, Culture, Events, History & More](#)

**Sign-up for the latest climate news from across Somerset:**  
[Climate newsletter sign-up](#)

**Open Somerset Council Consultations** - which anyone can complete and take part in shaping the future of Somerset  
[Somerset Council - Citizen Space - Consultations](#)

**SOMERSET COUNCIL TELEPHONE NO - 0300 123 2224**