

Monthly Somerset Councillor Report Sept 2026

News, decisions and dates from across Somerset Council, for sharing with your parishes and communities.

Auditors place Somerset Council in the top category for accounts recovery

External auditors have placed Somerset Council in the highest category for financial accounts assurance recovery, recognising the progress made in improving how the Council delivers its statutory accounts.

The assessment was prepared by Grant Thornton and reported to the Council's Audit Committee on Thursday 27 August 2026. It places Somerset in "Category A", the highest rating available, reflecting auditor confidence that the Council can regain a fully unqualified, or clean, audit opinion by 2027/28.

The judgement follows historic local government audit backlogs nationally, and a substantial programme of work locally, including the completion of 11 sets of accounts over an 18-month period alongside improvements to financial processes and governance arrangements.

The Council is clear that significant challenges remain and continues to respond to the Best Value Notice issued by Government in July. The auditor's assessment, which is also sent to Government, nonetheless provides independent assurance that the leadership, capacity and plans are in place to continue the improvement journey. Progress will continue to be reported publicly through Audit Committee, Scrutiny and Executive.

Cllr Liz Leyshon, Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance, said the assessment reflects the work of the finance team, auditors, councillors and officers to strengthen financial management and governance, adding that while there is still more to do, particularly in responding to the Best Value Notice and the wider improvement programme, the assessment gives confidence the Council is moving in the right direction.

Wessex leaders issue joint statement on devolution

The leaders of Somerset Council, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, Dorset Council and Wiltshire Council have issued a joint statement following the Government's invitation to areas without a devolution arrangement to express an interest in establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority.

They say Wessex is ready and uniquely placed to move forward, describing this as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to bring decisions closer to local people, unlock investment and drive long-term prosperity across the region.

[Joint statement on devolution](#)

Monthly Somerset Councillor Report

Sept 2026

Somerset Can: four-year plan to tackle economic inactivity and skills shortages

Somerset Council is proposing an ambitious four-year programme, Somerset Can, to make sure the jobs created by major investment in the county go to local people. Schemes such as the Agratas battery cell manufacturing facility at Gravity, Hinkley Point C and Leonardo aerospace hub in Yeovil bring growth, but can also leave existing employers short of skilled staff. Somerset's jobless figures are below the national average at 3.6%, yet around one in five working-age residents is not economically active, and the county has a relatively high number of young people not in education, employment or training.

Funded by central government, the programme has three themes: Dream, raising ambition in schools; Grow, supporting entry into education, training and employment; and Thrive, enabling progression and retention. Delivery includes school resources, mentoring, and a revitalised employment hubs network.

More information: [Somerset Can](#)

Launch: Somerset Community Resilience Action Calendar 2026 to 2027

Information about resilience, flooding, extreme weather, grants and training arrives from a lot of different directions, and it is hard to keep track of what matters and which deadlines are coming up. The Community Resilience Action Calendar brings it together in one place: every dated event through the year, in order, with a single suggested action alongside each one. Most take under ten minutes. It is written to be forwarded to parishes and communities and will be updated regularly.

The current edition includes: Community Resilience Awards nominations closing Tuesday 22 September; the Somerset Prepared small grant scheme (up to £5,000 for equipment and training), deadline Wednesday 30 September; the free Community Resilience Day at Millfield School, Street, on Wednesday 21 October; October as Somerset Flood Awareness Month across the library network; and the Community Flood Action Fund (£3,000 to £20,000), next closing Tuesday 24 November. It also covers the current drought and wildfire risk, the new statutory guidelines on disposable barbecues, and the reissued Community Risk Register 2026.

To get the calendar and monthly updates, email claire.sully@somerset.gov.uk.

Monthly Somerset Councillor Report Sept 2026

Walk for a Life comes to Shepton Mallet for the first time as the event marks its fifth year

Somerset Council's Walk for a Life returns for a fifth year in Taunton on Saturday 5 September, and for the first time will also be held in Shepton Mallet on Thursday 17 September. Organised by the Council's Public Health team with statutory and voluntary sector partners, the walks remember those who have lost their lives to suicide, raise awareness and encourage open conversation about mental health and suicide prevention.

The Shepton Mallet walk starts at 5.30pm from Shepton Mallet Library, 2 Market Place, on a wheelchair and pushchair friendly loop around Collett Park, with refreshments back at the library from 6.30pm to 8.30pm. The Mind Hub, 57c High Street, will also be open during the event for anyone who would like additional support.

The Taunton walk starts at 10.30am from the Quaker Meeting House, Bath Place, on an accessible loop ending at the "Afterlife" bench in Vivary Park, where flowers are laid to commemorate loved ones. Refreshments and local support organisations follow back at the Meeting House, including Open Mental Health, Mind in Somerset, Somerset Suicide Bereavement Support Service, Somerset NHS Talking Therapies, Young Somerset, Taunton Samaritans, SASP and Help for Heroes.

One person dies by suicide in England every 90 minutes, and one in four people will experience thoughts of suicide at some point in their lives. The walks offer a space for reflection, remembrance and action: to talk openly, reduce stigma, and help people find support before they reach crisis.

The expansion to Shepton Mallet follows work by Cllr Evie Potts-Jones, Lead Member for SEND, Public Health and Equalities, with Cllr Claire Sully, Associate Lead Member for Community Resilience, and local partners, to improve access to suicide prevention and remembrance activities in the east of the county, where the issue has affected many local families.

If you or someone you know is struggling, call Mindline, Somerset's 24/7 mental health helpline: local 01823 276 892, freephone 0800 138 1692.

More information: [Walk for a Life](#)

Major programme approved to improve outcomes for children and families

The Council's Executive has approved My World, My Tomorrow, a programme aimed at supporting children earlier and reducing avoidable escalation into care. It responds directly to areas for improvement identified by Ofsted, and was named by the young people at the centre of the plans.

It forms part of the council-wide Inspiring Innovation transformation programme, expected to deliver £135m in cashable savings by March 2030 from investment of up to £45m. My World, My Tomorrow itself involves £7m of investment with an expected return of £28.4m by 2031/32.

More information: [Programme to transform outcomes for children and families](#)

Monthly Somerset Councillor Report Sept 2026

New Revenues and Welfare system goes live across Somerset

The Council has launched a single integrated Revenues and Welfare system, replacing the four separate Council Tax, Benefits and Business Rates systems inherited at unitarisation with one cloud-based platform. It brings improved digital self-service, a new electronic document management solution, and more scope to automate processes and reduce duplication.

More information: [New Revenues and Welfare system goes live](#)

County-wide parking review moves to next stage, new tariffs possible from December

The new county-wide parking charges structure agreed by the Executive in March has moved a step closer. Information gathered on all Council car parks where charges currently apply has been used to assess each site and place it within a new five-tier pricing structure, on a sliding scale depending on location and usage.

The tiers range from 1, for high-demand town centre car parks, to 4 for rural and village locations, which will keep free parking for the first hour, and 5 for custom sites that do not fit the other tiers, such as residential, seasonal or EV. The Review proposes that charges apply seven days a week to all existing chargeable car parks, as they already do in some of the towns in Somerset, and the new tariffs include the annual review of fees and charges, which have not changed since 2025.

There will be no changes at this stage to free car parks or to current on-street parking arrangements in towns, until further engagement with communities, local members and businesses begins in October.

The report goes to the Climate, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee on 3 September and to Executive for approval on 23 September. More information: [Somerset parking review moves to next stage](#)

Development partner sought for Firepool, Taunton

Somerset Council Executive on 2nd September is being asked to approve the procurement of a development partner to bring forward regeneration at Firepool, the 17-acre brownfield site between Taunton Railway Station, Trenchard Way and the River Tone. The site has already had significant public investment in land assembly, remediation, transport infrastructure, public realm, active travel connections and the Firepool Centre for Digital Innovation.

The existing Firepool Masterplan will continue to shape development, with its principles informing future proposals while allowing flexibility to respond to market conditions. No sale is being approved

Monthly Somerset Councillor Report

Sept 2026

at this stage: any preferred partner, land transaction or Development Agreement would return to Executive for a further decision, and any planning application would follow the normal process.

More information: [Development partner proposed to regenerate Firepool](#)

Funding bid submitted to reopen Cleeve Hill, Watchet

The Council has submitted a bid to the Government's Structures Fund towards reopening the B3191 at Cleeve Hill near Watchet, closed to vehicles since January 2023 after cliff movement was detected. A later report found the route safe for pedestrians and cyclists, but it has remained shut to motor traffic, leaving only one road into the town over a 150-year-old bridge.

More information: [The Structures Fund](#)

Partnership approach agreed to reduce M5 incidents and their impact

Following recommendations from the Climate, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee, which invited National Highways, Avon and Somerset Police and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to discuss M5 incident management, Executive has backed the creation of a multi-agency working group. It will analyse incident data, identify opportunities for improvement and develop a co-ordinated plan to help reduce the frequency and duration of motorway closures.

Members also supported further exploration of a Somerset Road Safety Partnership, bringing organisations together to improve road safety through prevention, education and enforcement, and agreed that the Leader should write to Government highlighting the issue of repeated M5 closures.

More information: [Partnership approach agreed on M5 incidents](#)

Castle Cary's Station Road reopens after complex sinkhole repairs

Station Road in Castle Cary reopened to traffic on Friday 14 August, following repairs to a sinkhole first signalled by temporary traffic lights in July 2024. What appeared to be a localised depression in the carriageway turned out to involve the culvert beneath the road and nearby utility services, and the restricted watercourse could not be fully examined until the road was excavated.

The scheme required deep excavation, extensive investigation, carefully designed temporary works to protect nearby utilities, and close co-ordination with utility companies and contractor Kier. The design was adapted as conditions on site became clearer, and the Council has thanked residents and businesses for their patience during a longer-than-expected closure.

Monthly Somerset Councillor Report Sept 2026

Youth Hubs supporting more than 3,000 young people across Somerset

More than 3,000 young people attended Somerset's Youth Hubs in the past year. The free weekly drop-in sessions, delivered by Young Somerset with Avon and Somerset Police and funded by Somerset Council through the Violence Reduction Partnership, were set up in response to young people asking for more support and advice about staying safe. They offer a place to talk about anti-social behaviour, knife crime, violence, exploitation, substance misuse and violence against women and girls, alongside mentoring, workshops, activities and practical advice.

Sessions are open to young people, parents and carers, are free and need no booking: Bridgwater, Fridays 3pm to 5pm at Bold & Brave, Angel Place; Yeovil, Fridays 4pm to 6pm at Hollywood Bowl; and Taunton, Saturdays 3pm to 5pm at McDonald's, East Street. A Chard hub restarts during the autumn half-term at Boden Street Community Centre, and pop-up hubs will launch in Taunton and Bridgwater schools over the coming months.

More information: [Youth Hubs](#)

Record 570 nominations as Somerset celebrates care experienced young people

More than 570 children looked after and care experienced young people were recognised at the Council's Celebrating Care and Achievement event at Wellsprings Leisure Centre, Taunton, a record number of nominations. Previously the Annual Achievement Awards, the event was refreshed this year to celebrate all children looked after and care experienced young people, with attendance widened so more families, carers and supporters could take part.

Nominations came from social workers, foster carers, leaving care workers, schools and other professionals, and were reviewed anonymously by a panel. Young people were also able to nominate teachers, workers and carers who had made a positive difference. The day was hosted by members of Somerset's in Care Council and Leaving Care Council alongside the Council's Engagement and Participation Team.

With over 650 children in care in Somerset, more foster carers are needed. Carers must be aged 21 or over with a spare room; full training, ongoing support and weekly payments are provided.

Useful links:

[Fostering in Somerset](#)

[Somerset's in Care and Leaving Care Councils](#)

Monthly Somerset Councillor Report Sept 2026

Encouragement for Somerset students receiving exam results

Students across Somerset received their results last month, with A Level, technical and vocational results published on Thursday 13 August and GCSE results on Thursday 20 August. The Council recognised the commitment, learning and determination behind them, and thanked the families, carers, teachers and school staff who supported young people through their studies.

For anyone still weighing up next steps, whether continuing in education, starting an apprenticeship, moving into training or employment, support is available through schools, colleges and training providers, the Council's next steps and apprenticeships pages, and the National Careers Service on 0800 100 900.

Useful links:

[Next steps](#)

[Apprenticeships](#)

Healthier eating workshops win praise, and more places are available

Somerset's Focusing on MORE workshops have drawn strong praise from health and community professionals, with hundreds of post-training evaluations completed and one participant describing it as one of the most useful sessions on nutrition and food they had ever attended.

The half-day workshop builds knowledge and confidence in supporting positive, compassionate and sustainable approaches to healthier eating. Rather than focusing on restriction or judgement, it explores the practical changes people can make by eating more of the foods that support their health, covering the gut microbiome, how compassionate and non-judgemental conversations support behaviour change, the impact of food processing on nutritional quality, and practical ideas for overcoming common barriers.

Useful links:

[Focusing on MORE](#)

[Council news release](#)

Monthly Somerset Councillor Report Sept 2026

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol activated during August's heat

Somerset Council's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) was active in the county during August's hot weather. Summer SWEP is triggered automatically when the Met Office predicts temperatures above 26°C; severe weather also includes temperatures at or below 0°C, high winds and flooding.

While SWEP is active, outreach teams contact people sleeping rough to offer support, and the Council increases welfare checks, providing drinking water, sunscreen and sun hats, and signposting to cool, safe spaces during the hottest parts of the day, with trained staff able to recognise and respond to heat-related illness. SWEP has two aims: that no one dies on the streets because of severe weather, and that every effort is made to engage individuals with support.

Anyone concerned about someone sleeping rough in Somerset, in any severe weather, can make a referral through StreetLink, or call 0300 123 22 24 during office hours and 0300 123 23 27 out of hours.

More information: [Emergency help in severe weather](#)

Bridgwater South Pride in Place Board wants to hear from residents

The Bridgwater South Pride in Place Board held its second meeting on Friday 21 August, with representatives from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government also attending and encouraged by the progress being made locally.

Bridgwater South is one of 169 neighbourhoods across England selected to receive up to £20 million through the Government's 10-year Pride in Place programme. The area includes Hamp and parts of Westover, covering the communities surrounding The Meads. Funding is intended to support community-led projects that build stronger communities and give residents a greater say in shaping their local area.

Board members have been out gathering views at Bridgwater Playday and other local events, and residents who live or work in the area are encouraged to complete the online survey to help shape plans.

Useful links:

[Bridgwater South Pride in Place](#)

[Council news release](#)

Monthly Somerset Councillor Report Sept 2026

The Strawberry Line named Britain's favourite path

The Strawberry Line, the traffic-free path linking the Mendip Hills to the sea, has been named Britain's favourite path by The Ramblers. The search began in May during National Walking Month, with the public asked to submit pictures and explain why their choice was special; a panel of judges shortlisted eight routes from across Scotland, Wales and the South West.

The route is a multi-partnership project between charities, volunteers, contractors, community groups, councils, Historic Railways Estate and private landowners. Somerset Council, and previously Mendip District Council, has been a long-standing supporter.

Useful link: [The Strawberry Line](#)

Rural active travel toolkit launched

A new toolkit is available to help rural communities develop and deliver their own active travel schemes, from large-scale projects such as a multi-user path down to smaller improvements like dropped kerbs. It takes groups from identifying a need and engaging local people through route design, funding, consents, delivery and ongoing maintenance.

Useful links:

[Somerset rural active travel toolkit](#)

[Toolkit training: expression of interest](#)

Off-road mobility scooter now available at Ham Hill Country Park

A Trampler off-road mobility scooter is now available for hire from Ham Hill Visitor Centre, introduced in partnership with Disability Together. Designed for countryside trails and uneven terrain, it opens up more of the site's landscape, wildlife and heritage to people with limited mobility.

More information: [Ham Hill Trampler hire](#)

Somerset Libraries use 3D printing to bring the Ilminster Ring to life

The Council's Library Service has created a replica of the Ilminster Ring, a Roman treasure dating from 297 AD, using a 3D hand scanner funded by the British Library. The scan produces a highly detailed digital model, allowing an accurate replica to be printed so people can see and handle an object that would otherwise need to remain protected. The original and the replica were displayed

Monthly Somerset Councillor Report

Sept 2026

at the Ilminster Roman Ring Discovery Day on 20 August, organised by South West Heritage Trust and Ilminster Arts Centre.

Somerset Libraries have offered 3D printing for around ten years, supporting schools, community groups, businesses and individuals with design, scanning and printing, from bespoke parts for a local mobility company to oversized dice for a community project.

Pandaemonium screened at Hestercombe, Saturday 26 September

Pandaemonium, the Somerset-shot film about the time Coleridge and Wordsworth spent in the county, will be screened twice at Hestercombe House near Taunton on Saturday 26 September, at 2pm and 7pm, to mark its 25th anniversary. A key scene was filmed at Hestercombe's Pear Pond, and the screenings will be held in the property's wood-panelled dining room, used this way for the first time. Other locations included Wills Neck, Kilve Beach, Nether Stowey, West Bagborough, Exmoor's Holnicote Estate, Hodder's Combe and Wookey Hole. Tickets are £10 plus booking fee and include entry to Hestercombe House and gardens.

The event is organised by Screen Somerset, the Council's film office, and the Hestercombe Gardens Trust. Film and TV production brought an estimated £6.6m of spend to the county last year.

Useful links:

[Somerset Film: what's on](#)

[Screen Somerset](#)

Fridge and freezer recycling limit extended through September

Somerset Council and its recycling site operator Biffa have extended the one-appliance-per-household limit for fridges, freezers and other cooling appliances at Somerset's 16 recycling centres throughout September. The limit is the result of a continuing national shortage of UK reprocessing capacity, likely caused by a fire and other unplanned outages at specialist treatment facilities alongside increased volumes in warmer weather. Proof of Somerset residency continues to be required.

Useful links:

[Extension of temporary changes to fridge and freezer recycling](#)

[Pass it on and furniture reuse](#)

Monthly Somerset Councillor Report Sept 2026

Get involved in your Unitary Council

Residents don't have to wait for an election to have a say in how Somerset is run. The Council's Council and Democracy pages set out the main ways to get involved, including having your say through open consultations and engagement, finding and contacting your local councillor, following or speaking at council and committee meetings, checking committee agendas, reports and minutes, submitting or signing a petition, and exploring what's involved in standing to become a councillor yourself.

Further information: [Council and democracy](#)

Upcoming Council meetings

Meeting dates are subject to change. When looking for details of a particular meeting, please contact the relevant officer to confirm that the meeting is going ahead as scheduled.

September 2026 meetings

- Executive: 2 September at 10.00am
- Scrutiny Committee – Climate, Environment and Place: 3 September at 10.00am
- Constitution and Governance Committee: 3 September at 2.00pm
- Scrutiny Committee – Adults, Health and Housing: 4 September at 10.00am
- Scrutiny Committee – Corporate and Strategic: 9 September at 10.00am
- Somerset Rivers Authority Board: 11 September at 9.45am, Taunton Town Council Offices (public questions by noon on Monday 7 September)
- Full Council: 16 September at 1.00pm
- Executive: 23 September at 10.00am in Frome

Useful links:

democracy.somerset.gov.uk – Council calendar

[Somerset Rivers Authority – meetings and public questions](#)

Report It First

Useful links to share with your communities

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- **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: [Report a problem with a street light](#)
 - **Road signs, markings and lighting** - Includes bollards, pedestrian crossings, requesting a village nameplate or 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 managed at public expense in Somerset: [Street and roadworks problems](#)
 - **Traffic updates and roadworks** - follow [Travel Somerset on X](#) and Facebook: [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](#)
 - **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 Prepared** - Community resilience information, funding support and the Community Resilience Awards: [somersetprepared.org.uk](#)

SOMERSET COUNCIL TELEPHONE NO - 0300 123 2224

[SOMERSET COUNCIL WEBSITE HOMEPAGE](#)