

SOMERSET COUNCIL

Briefing Sheet for Parish & Town Councils January 2026

Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2026/27 Published: Somerset Council has received the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2026/27. The settlement is a one-year allocation but includes illustrative funding figures for 2027/28 and 2028/29. For Somerset, Core Spending Power increases from £653.6 million in 2025/26 to £684.95 million in 2026/27. The Council's structural budget gap now stands at £54.9 million, reduced from £101 million earlier in 2025. The remaining gap is expected to be managed through one off measures, savings, transformation activity, and council tax increases above the standard referendum threshold. Somerset Council has confirmed that it has again asked Government for Exceptional Financial Support to help balance the books for 2026/27.

Planning Service Recovery Motion Approved: Somerset Council has approved a motion calling for improvements to the planning service following the temporary emergency measures introduced in July 2025 to address backlogs, staffing shortages, and unsustainable workloads. The motion, put forward by Conservative councillors, seeks a Planning Service Recovery Plan with measurable targets, improved engagement with councillors and parish councils, action to address the enforcement backlog, and greater transparency through performance reporting. Climate and Place Scrutiny supported the motion and recommended additional measures to strengthen governance, decision quality, and oversight. The recommendations will now be considered by the Executive as part of a Planning Service Recovery process.

Council 'Got It Wrong' After Cutting Over 500 Job Posts: Somerset Council's Chief Executive has acknowledged that the authority "got it wrong" in at least three departments after more than 500 posts were cut over the past year. He told councillors that recruitment is now one of the biggest challenges facing the Council, with shortages of experienced and qualified applicants making services harder to run. He said the Council is using reserves to rebuild capacity in areas such as housing, where teams are no longer considered large enough to manage workloads.

Sunday Parking Charges Decision Deferred: Somerset Council has decided not to proceed with the introduction of Sunday parking charges in council run car parks at this stage, following strong public opposition. Proposals to introduce charges in towns including Taunton, Yeovil and Bridgwater were considered after a public consultation held in September and October, which attracted around 4,200 responses, with almost 93% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Instead, the executive has agreed to carry out a wider review of parking arrangements across the county.

Somerset Council 'Took Too Long' to Suspend Life Factory Project in Glastonbury: Somerset Council has published a "lessons learned" report into the Life Factory project in Glastonbury, which concludes that the Council took too long to suspend the project after concerns were raised. The report follows independent audit work and identifies significant

failings in governance, financial oversight, and project management, including the absence of a fully costed delivery plan and insufficient controls to measure progress. The project involved £2.89 million of public funding and was formally terminated in November 2025, with the Council now seeking repayment of £2.3 million. A series of actions have been identified to strengthen risk management, assurance, and decision making for future regeneration and government funded projects.

Supporting Somerset's Town Centres and High Streets Motion Approved: Somerset Council has approved a motion put forward by Conservative councillors aimed at supporting town centres and high streets across the county. The motion highlights the pressures facing local shops, pubs, cafés, and restaurants from rising costs, empty units, and reduced footfall, and calls for council decisions to better reflect the importance of high streets to local economies and community life. It includes commitments to consider the impact of parking policies, work with the police to address antisocial behaviour in town centres and write to the Chancellor to request a review of business rates for hospitality and retail.

Focus on Fostering: January is a key month for fostering recruitment, and Somerset Council is promoting a series of local fostering information sessions in January, giving residents the opportunity to speak directly with experienced carers about the realities of fostering. Sessions will take place on Monday 12 January in Somerton, Wednesday 14 January in Yeovil, and Thursday 15 January in Wellington. Parish and town councils are encouraged to help promote these sessions locally to support recruitment efforts across Somerset. Visit the Fostering in Somerset website for latest updates: <https://www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk/>

Somerset Council Budget Consultation 2026/27: Somerset Council's Budget Consultation for the 2026/27 financial year opened on 3 December and runs until 14 January, inviting residents, businesses and local organisations to have their say on spending priorities and resource allocation for services such as social care, waste collection, roads, education and leisure. Feedback will help shape budget decisions ahead of final proposals being considered by Executive and Full Council in early 2026: <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/comms/budget-consultation-2026-2027/>