

Hayward Burt. Blackmoor Vale June Report 2025

Reform of Planning Committees Consultation

The Government is carrying out a consultation on the Reform of planning committees, this opened on May 28 and will last for 8 weeks, it covers issues relating to delegated powers, which planning applications could go to committees etc. The link is below and I hope you will be able to input

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reform-of-planning-committees-technical-consultation/reform-of-planning-committees-technical-consultation#delegation-of-planning-functions>

Household support Fund A scheme designed to help residents struggling with pressures caused by the ongoing cost of living crisis has been extended until the end of March 2026.

Somerset Council has been allocated £6.74million from the Government via the **Household Support Fund**, this will be directed towards providing critical support for families, older residents, and people facing financial challenges in Somerset.

The funding will be allocated by the Council in several key areas, including: **Food Vouchers:****Funding for community hubs:** **Community Support:** (Supporting existing Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) organisations such as Age UK, Citizen's Advice Somerset, and Community Council for Somerset) **Hospital Discharge Grants:** **Emergency Grants:** **Council Tax Support:** and **Support for Young People:**

The delivery of the Household Support Fund will be overseen by the Connect Somerset transformation programme, a collaborative effort involving Somerset Council, NHS Somerset, and various VCFSE organisations. Find out more about Connect Somerset [on their website](#).

Safe Vape Disposal: Somerset Council and its waste contractor, SUEZ, are urging residents to dispose of used vapes separately due to rising safety concerns. Improper disposal—such as placing vapes in general waste or with other recyclables—can lead to fires when compacted in collection vehicles. To safely recycle both reusable and non-reusable vapes the council now asks residents to keep them separate by putting them into a small, clear tied bag, such as a sandwich bag, and leave it on top of one of the recycling boxes.

Somerset on Screen: Somerset Council has reported that film and TV productions generated more than £4 million for the county's economy in the 2024/25 financial year. Much of this economic boost benefited local hospitality, accommodation, and catering businesses. Screen Somerset, the Council's dedicated film office, supported a range of projects, including the upcoming adaptation of The Salt Path, filmed in locations such

as Cheddar and Minehead. The Council is promoting screen tourism as a growing opportunity for Somerset, aiming to attract further productions and showcase the county's landscapes and communities on screen.

Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment Consultation 2025: Somerset Council has launched a public consultation on its draft Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA), which evaluates the current and future provision of pharmaceutical services across the county. The consultation closes on Monday 16 June, 2025.

You can view and respond to active consultations at <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/>

Other Interesting News

South Western Railway recovers £3.4million of taxpayer money from fare dodgers

- New data from the train operator has revealed the total recovered from revenue protection work totalled £3.4 million last year
- Unpaid fares cost the railway close to £240 million a year and new research reveals over three-quarters (76%) of Brits say that those who deliberately avoid paying the correct fare are exploiting the system and it's not fair to paying customers

Somerset Council and the Ukraine The Council approached by the Ukrainian Embassy to explore a non-legally binding cooperation agreement between Somerset and the Vinnytsia region for an initial period of five years. A number of other local authorities are developing similar agreements as the basis for long term collaboration with regions of the Ukraine.

The Vinnytsia region, also known as Vinnytsia Oblast, is in the southwest of Ukraine. Its administrative centre is the city of Vinnytsia, and it borders Moldova to the south. The region has a population of 1.5m (2022).

The economy of the region is focused mainly on agriculture, including grain and sugar production, minerals, quarrying, manufacturing and electricity generation are also important to the economy of the region. There is a growing digital sector and a thriving education system. The region of Vinnytsia also has rich historical and cultural heritage and hosts three of the seven Wonders of Ukraine which attracts a number of tourists each year.

The Council is also working with the Somerset Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Further Education College partners in Somerset on the collaboration.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) aims to achieve knowledge transfer, educational and trade exchanges, and encourage inward investment opportunities between Vinnytsia Region and Somerset.

Other areas exploring similar agreements include Norfolk who are working with Lviv and Kent who are working with Chernihiv, as well as Local Government Association colleagues, and Peterborough, twinned with the city of Vinnytsia, to help Somerset learn from their experience.

The Local Government Boundary Commission review of Local Government Boundaries is due to Open on June 3rd

[Have your say on a new political map for Somerset Council | LGBCE](#)

Councillors and MPs Respond to Yeovil Hospital Maternity Service Closure

On 12 May, Somerset NHS Foundation Trust announced the closure of the Special Care Baby Unit and inpatient maternity services at Yeovil Hospital for an initial six months, citing safety concerns.

In response, **every Somerset Lib Dem councillor and MP** has collectively written to NHS Somerset leadership at the hospital to voice opposition and dismay over the plans for a 'temporary' closure. Somerset Council has not received any guarantee that the unit will reopen after six months, and the matter has been raised at Prime Minister's Questions by Adam Dance MP.

The closure has caused widespread alarm, leading to a peaceful protest attended by hundreds of residents, maternity unit staff, and many Lib Dem councillors. The decision forces pregnant women to travel to **Taunton, Dorchester, or Bath**, leaving **only one operational maternity unit in the county**.

The Yeovil facility is vital for **South East Somerset** — including many rural villages — and we are demanding **clear assurances about its future**.

Somerset Council Delivers First Council Houses in West Somerset for a Generation

Somerset Council is delivering the **first new council homes in West Somerset in decades**. All 54 homes at Rainbow Way in Minehead will be allocated to people with a strong local connection — either current residents or those with family ties to the area.

This scheme has been nominated for a major regional construction award.

There has been recent debate at Full Council questioning the impact of government-funded migration schemes on housing availability. However, the council confirmed that **affordable and council housing schemes explicitly exclude applicants without a local connection**, and Somerset hosts relatively few asylum seekers — just **297 individuals, or 0.05% of the population**.

This development is a significant achievement for the **Lib Dem-led council**, reinforcing its commitment to affordable housing and strong communities.

Trial of Smart Lighting Systems to Reduce Falls in Care Homes

Somerset is trialling **Nobi smart lighting systems** in four care homes to help prevent falls among elderly residents. The lights **alert carers immediately if a fall occurs** and provide data that may help prevent future incidents.

The trial is being **externally evaluated with support from Oxford University** and could inform wider applications in Somerset's adult care settings.

Household Support Fund Extended




The **Household Support Fund** has been extended until **March 2026**, with **£6.74 million** allocated from the UK Government to support:

- Families and older residents
- Crisis support
- Food vouchers
- Hospital discharge
- Community hubs
- Energy and water bills

You can find more details on Somerset Council's website. If you know someone who might benefit from this fund but cannot access the internet, please do feel free to give them my number.

Changes to Reporting Highways Issues

Somerset Council has made changes to how highways issues should be reported:

-  **Do not use Fix My Street**
-  Use the official Somerset Council portal:
 [Report a problem on the road](#)

This covers potholes, blocked drains, overgrown vegetation and more. Issues are now automatically tracked and assigned with reference numbers.

 If you don't have internet access, call **0300 123 2224**.

Partnership with Ukraine's Vinnytsia Region

Somerset Council has signed a **non-binding partnership agreement** with the **Vinnytsia region of Ukraine**, supporting collaboration in:

- Education
- Trade

- Community support

Chair of Somerset Council, **Cllr Mike Best**, visited the Ukrainian Embassy in London as part of the delegation. The agreement focuses on **knowledge exchange, inward investment, and solidarity**.

Vinnytsia has a population of **1.5 million** and is known for agriculture, digital innovation, and cultural heritage.

Foster Care Fortnight and Urgent Need for Local Homes

With **630 children in care** and fewer than **150 foster households**, Somerset Council is encouraging more residents to explore fostering.

One of the Lib Dem administration's key goals was to **"bring our children home."** Since taking office:

- Out-of-county placements have dropped from **18 to 5**
- Annual placement costs have dropped significantly

The council now works with the **Shaw Trust** to run **Homes and Horizons** — therapeutic children's homes with tailored support, education, and care.

Interested?

 [Visit **fosteringinsomerset.org.uk**](https://www.visitfosteringinsomerset.org.uk)

 Or call **0800 587 9900**

Blood Pressure Monitors Available from Libraries

Somerset libraries now lend out **blood pressure monitors** for free, helping with **early detection of hypertension**.









 More info from Somerset Council

Update on the Glastonbury Life Factory Project

Town Deal funding for the Glastonbury Life Factory has been halted following an internal audit which revealed **financial and governance concerns**.

 [Read the full update](#)

Useful Reporting Links

-  [Report a problem on the road](#)
-  [Live travel updates](#)
-  [Report a streetlight issue](#)
-  [Road signs, markings and lighting](#)
-  [Speed limits and calming measures](#)
-  [Traffic lights](#)
-  [Street and roadworks](#)
-  [Sign up for climate news](#)

Ongoing casework

- Tricky planning enforcement cases in several villages
- Heavy vehicle movements affecting lives
- Planning queries – process and timings
- The state of our local parks
- Dog poo bins – chasing collections and information posters
- Fly tipping – reporting and monitoring

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My available Cllr hours:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Sunday - all day

Thursday, Saturday - not available on phone.

Please text/WhatsApp or email on these days.

Somerset Council won three prestigious awards from the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation SW (CIHT).

The Council, alongside its appointed contractor Milestone Infrastructure, won the Transportation Infrastructure Project of the Year and the Sustainability Award for the Firepool Northern Boulevard scheme in Taunton.

None of the waste generated by the work went to landfill – it was all reused as part of the construction. The project achieved carbon savings of 26,481kg CO₂e in transport alone, with an overall net saving of 25,120kgCO₂e, and reduced the impact on the local road network.

Around 7,500 tonnes of material was reused, avoiding the need to use “virgin” materials on the project, resulting in a cost saving of £140,000.