Hayward Report October 2026

Flood Resilience Fund

£50 Million Flood Resilience Programme Agreed: Somerset Council has approved the next stage of a £50 million Government-funded flood resilience programme, focusing on 15 projects across the county. More than £650,000 will be allocated ahead of this winter for community resilience, emergency response and additional gully clearance, including £100,000 for Somerset Prepared grants, £50,000 for emergency communications and power equipment, and £500,000 for more frequent gully maintenance in flood-prone areas. The wider programme will also include desilting, pumping improvements, maintenance works, new flood structures and the Council's My Community programme, which will work with local communities on tailored flood-prevention measures. The first phase of community-led schemes is expected to begin by spring 2027.

Each community will receive a report including the flood defence inspections, assessment of potential measures and a flood risk map.

Flooding is an issue at hundreds of locations across the county. Parish and Town Councils and flood groups have expressed an extraordinarily high level of interest in this programme. This means we can't commit to including every location straight away and have had to prioritise.

When prioritising locations, the council looked at flood events that have happened before, flood risk and the impacts of flooding. We also prioritised places where information about the causes and impacts of flooding is already known, so we can get work done quickly.

There are no local locations selected in the first 2 phases in Spring and Summer of 2027

Phase 3 (expected to begin during Summer 2027 and begin delivering on the ground in Autumn 2027)

• Central Cam Valley (Queen Camel, Sparkford, Martston Magna, West Bampflyde)

Phase 4 (expected to begin during Autumn 2027 and begin delivering on the ground in Winter 2027)

• East Cam Valley (Galhampton, North Cadbury, South Cadbury, Yarlington, Blackford & Compton Pauncefoot)

Further locations will be added to the programme as capacity becomes available.

If you have any queries, comments or suggestions, or would like to find out more, please contact floodresilience@somerset.gov.uk

Regional Devolution Update: Wessex Strategic Authority

Somerset Council is continuing to work with Dorset, Wiltshire and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Councils, through the Wessex partnership to respond to the Government's evolving devolution agenda.

On 31 July 2026, Government set out its vision for “rewiring the state”, with stated commitments to greater powers, funding and decision-making moving away from Whitehall and closer to local areas. Strategic Authorities are intended to play an increasingly important role in economic rowth, transport, skills, housing, investment and public service reform, with devolution becoming the default approach to governance.

The Government has signalled its intention that, every area wishing to do so should establish as Strategic Authority by the end of 2027. - Strategic Authorities should be in place across England by the end of 2028. - Areas will be invited to pursue either a mayoral or non-mayoral model. - Future powers, funding and investment opportunities will increasingly be channelled through Strategic Authorities

The Government has indicated that it will be publishing a further policy statement about how the “rewiring the state” agenda will progress and further announcements about regional devolution for different parts of the country during the autumn.

Further announcements are needed from Government to clarify about its appetite to work with Wessex partners on the devolution agenda, including about timescales for this and whether Government is willing to match the stated ambition for a Mayoral Strategic Authority for the Wessex area.

For Somerset, this work presents an opportunity to shape the design of future regional governance arrangements and ensure that local priorities are reflected in any future devolution settlement. It also has the potential to strengthen access to future funding, powers and investment opportunities. Current estimates suggest that devolved funding across the Wessex area could amount to approximately £464 million per year. The proposals could also support key Somerset growth ambitions, including Hinkley Point C, Gravity/Agratas and the wider clean energy economy, while ensuring that Somerset remains at the heart of regional decision-making.

Next Steps . Over the coming months, work will continue with Government to establish the position and next steps for Wessex. Any plans with Government for a Strategic Authority on the Wessex footprint will need to be the subject of a consultation process and it is likely that Government will require this to be led by the local authorities. The Council anticipates bringing the matter forward for formal consideration this autumn (potentially through Executive in November and Full Council in December 2026), including consideration of any consultation requirements.

Temporary Road Closure: ttro089287S - Holbrook Roundabout To Jack Whites Gibbet, Bratton Seymour

Please follow the link to view the above road closure; https://one.network/?tm=GB151593875 and the link for the Notice 2: https://api-gb.one.network/downloads/tm/1111/03-notice-2_151593875_4216356_22b4446f33.pdf

The order becomes effective on 14th October 2026. The works are expected to commence on 22nd October 2026 and last for 6 hours (09:30 - 15:30) to enable Openreach to carry out pole testing works. The contractor has indicated that access for Emergency Services through the site is permitted on this occasion. For any further information about this closure please contact Sunbelt Rentals on 0370 050 0792, quoting reference: ttro089287S.

Autumn and winter opening times begin at Somerset recycling sites

Somerset Council's 16 recycling sites moved to their autumn and winter opening hours on Thursday, 1 October 2026. Sites will be open from 9am to 5pm on weekdays and from 9am to 4pm at weekends. The autumn and winter timetable will apply until 31 March 2027.

Somerset Council Warns Financial Position Remains "Deeply Fragile": Somerset Council's latest Medium Term Financial Plan shows a £40.3 million budget gap for 2027/28, rising to a cumulative £63.5 million by 2031/32, even after revised assumptions and planned savings. The position could deteriorate further, with the Chief Finance Officer warning that pressures emerging this year could add around £30 million to next year's gap if they prove ongoing, potentially taking the challenge to around £70 million. The Council is already forecasting a £29.1 million overspend this year, its reserves remain below the minimum level recommended by the Section 151 Officer, and it has required Exceptional Financial Support to balance its budget in each year since 2024/25. The Council rates its medium-term financial sustainability risk at the maximum 25, "very high", and warns that failure to identify sufficient recurring savings and transformation could mean seeking further Government support or, if a balanced budget cannot be achieved, the issuing of a Section 114 report, which would impose controls on non-essential spending and could require significant service reductions.

Auditors recognise Somerset Council's strong progress on accounts management

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

The assessment, prepared by Grant Thornton and reported to Somerset Council's Audit Committee, places Somerset in "Category A". This is the highest rating available and

reflects auditor confidence in the council's ability to regain a fully unqualified, or clean, audit opinion by 2027/28.

The Council recognises that significant challenges remain and continues to respond to the Best Value Notice recently issued by Government. However, the external auditor's assessment provides independent assurance that the council has the leadership, capacity and plans in place to continue its improvement journey.

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

The council continues to work closely with its auditors, government and improvement partners as part of its wider transformation and financial sustainability programme. Progress will continue to be reported publicly through Audit Committee, Scrutiny and Executive meetings.

SWR NRW - Rail industry crackdown as trespassing criminals cause more than six and half days of delays on the South Western network in a year

New figures released by Network Rail and British Transport Police reveal that trespass caused 9,437 minutes, equivalent to around six and a half days, of delays to customers across the South Western network last year. You will see examples of how SWR is trying to tackle this through the new Crime with Consequences campaign, appearing in stations and social media channels etc. The release below provides more information about this and how it fits into the wider No Second Chances campaign which deals with multiple forms of trespass and accidents.

Somerset's Local Plan: What happens next

The first consultation in the process that will lead to Somerset's new Local Plan has been completed with responses now being analysed.

The Local Plan Scoping Consultation enabled people to have their say on how Somerset could change in future and marked the first stage in the development of the Local Plan. It will help guide where and how change happens across towns, villages and the countryside over the next 20 years, but was not a consultation on specific sites.

The Council is still developing its spatial strategy for future growth across Somerset. This work will help determine broad patterns of development before decisions are made about whether any individual sites are suitable, available, achievable, and consistent with that strategy.

Any sites that are eventually proposed for allocation in the Local Plan would be subject to further evidence gathering, assessment and public consultation before any decisions are taken.

The next consultation on the content of the emerging Local Plan, including the proposed spatial strategy and supporting evidence, is currently planned for 2027. This will be followed by further public consultations in 2028, with the final Local Plan being submitted later that year. Formal adoption is scheduled for 2029. Further information on the Local Plan and the timetable is available here

Parking Charges review

Since the original proposals were published, the Council has revised its approach. If approved by the Executive on 7th October, existing charges would rise by 10% from January 2027, while the new county-wide tier system would be brough it in autumn 2027. Further engagement is promised before proposals on free car parks, on-street parking, permits and concessions are brought forward.

Somerset Council Backs Dementia Friendly Commitment: Somerset Council has unanimously backed plans to become a more dementia-friendly organisation and improve support for people living with dementia and their carers. The motion, put forward by the Conservative Group, commits the Council to increasing dementia awareness among councillors and staff, encouraging participation in dementia awareness training and the Alzheimer's Society's Dementia Friends programme, and working with the NHS, charities and community organisations to strengthen support. The Council Leader will also write to the Health Secretary supporting a national 18-week referral-to-diagnosis target.