

COUNCILLOR ANNUAL UPDATE

Somerset Council | April 2026
Your Lib Dem Local Councillor

Somerset Council Budget — The Gap is Closing

Funding gap: Cut from £101m (March 2025) to £25m (February 2026) — a significant turnaround in just 12 months.

Government support: £30m Exceptional Financial Support approved — £25m to close the gap, £5m for service transformation.

Council Tax: 4.99% rise confirmed at Full Council on 4 March 2026. Somerset's rate remains lower than Wiltshire, Dorset and Cornwall.

Around 66% of Council Tax funds Social Care and Children's Services, where demand and costs continue to rise. Over 60% of residents consulted backed an increase to protect essential services. Somerset has balanced its budget every year since formation in 2023, despite a 40% reduction in Government funding to local authorities in recent years.

Savings on track: Investments of £15.3m projected to deliver £31m–£57m in savings by 2030/31.

What residents said (Dec 2025 consultation, 1,400+ responses)

- 62% backed a council tax rise to protect services
- 86% want the council to lobby central government for more funding
- Top priority: roads and pavements (55%), then crime (29%), public transport and schools (28% each)
- 83% opposed cuts to road maintenance; 68% opposed cuts to waste services

Roads — Potholes & Defects

County-wide: 16,332 defect reports since January 2026 — nearly four times last year's figure — driven by the exceptionally wet winter. As of February, our teams had fixed 4,577 potholes county-wide. We have increased the number of teams fixing potholes to 35 as of 20 February.

New investment: Up to £5m over 3 years for smarter roads — more gully clearance, improved signs and markings, and better public reporting.

Somerset holds Green ratings from the DfT for both road condition and preventative maintenance — one of the best-performing councils in the South West.

Report defects: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/report-a-problem-on-the-road/> or call 0300 123 2224 (urgent/out of hours)

Flooding & Drainage

Storm Chandra (January 2026): Somerset declared a major incident as heavy rain hit already saturated ground, causing rapid river rises. All available pumps were deployed. By 31 January, no further property flooding was reported.

Somerset Rivers Authority 2026-27: £4m programme approved — including Natural Flood Management schemes across Somerset's catchments, continued River Parrett dredging, and a Community Flood Action Fund with small grants available directly to local communities.

The SRA council tax charge remains frozen at £14.65 for a Band D property — unchanged since 2016.

Active Travel — Strawberry Line & Green Lanes

Strawberry Line — £730,000 grant approved: Somerset Council has awarded funding to Greenways and Cycleroutes to deliver sections of the Strawberry Line (Shepton Mallet to Yatton via

Wells and Cheddar) and Somerset Circle (a 76-mile mostly traffic-free circular route linking Somerset to Bristol and Bath).

- Off-road, flat route following the former Cheddar Valley railway — suitable for cycling, walking, wheeling and mobility vehicles
- Boosts local tourism, reduces car use, improves connections between rural communities
- Delivered using volunteers and local contractors — exceptional value for money

Green Lanes consultation

- Somerset Council consulting on trial changes at five rural/edge-of-residential routes to improve access for walkers, cyclists, horse riders and wheeling users
- Trials would be followed by further consultation before any permanent changes; nearby residents and businesses will be notified by letter

Key consultation locations:

- Burcott Lane, Wells: South of a 47-home development
- Comeytrove Road, Taunton: Near Lloyd Close, connecting to Galmington Stream
- Neville's Batch (Highcroft Lane), Gurney Slade
- Downend Road, Puriton: North of A39 near Dunball roundabout
- Touches Lane, Chard: Near Chard Reservoir and the household recycling centre

Have your say: somerset.gov.uk/consultations

Bus Services

Somerset has secured a Government Bus Service Fund award of £11.4m capital and £13.1m revenue to improve local bus services to 2029. Plans include expanded Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT), better bus to rail links, and improved connections to employment and health services — benefiting rural communities across Somerset.

Housing & Planning

New council homes — Minehead

- 54 zero-carbon council homes opened on Seaward Way/Rainbow Way — 33 flats, 21 houses
- First council housing scheme in West Somerset for a generation; all let to local people under a local lettings policy
- Described nationally (Guardian) as part of a wider revival in publicly-led council housebuilding

Octagon Theatre, Yeovil — £15m refurbishment approved

- Planning permission granted for major overhaul of the 50-year-old theatre
- Works include: accessibility upgrades, backstage and front-of-house improvements, energy efficiency measures, new Changing Places facility, upgraded stage systems
- Funding: £10m from DCMS, £3.75m from Yeovil Town Council (loan and reserves), £1.25m+ from ticket levy, fundraising and Section 106 via Somerset Council
- Tender process now under way; work expected to start in 2026/27

SEND — new school places

- Somerset plans 250+ new SEN unit places over 3 years to teach more children closer to home
- Current pressures: 1,000+ EHCPs awaiting completion; demand up 47% in five years; independent special school spending running at £42m vs £35m budget

Adult Social Care: Saving Millions, Supporting Independence

Somerset Council's award-winning 'My Life, My Future' programme has transformed adult social care, delivering £10m in savings between 2022/23 and 2024/25, with a further £3.7m projected for 2025/26. The programme focuses on supporting, enabling and maintaining people's independence — helping the Council avoid unnecessary long-term care costs while providing support to more residents. It won the health and social care category at the LGC Awards 2025. Somerset Council is now refreshing its Adult Social Care Strategy for 2026–2029 and encouraging residents, unpaid carers and organisations to share their views to shape future services.

Recycling — changes for flats

- From end of March 2026: expanded communal recycling collections for ~13,000 households in flats
- New collections include: plastic bottles, pots/tubs/trays, tins/cans/foil, glass, cartons, food waste and plastic bags/wrappers
- Funded by Government's Simpler Recycling programme