

# **SOMERSET COUNCIL**

## **Briefing Sheet for Parish & Town Councils June 2026**

**Somerset Council Receives One-Star Financial Management Rating:** [An independent review by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy](#) (CIPFA) has awarded Somerset Council an overall one-star rating for financial management out of a possible five, describing arrangements as "weak". The review identifies concerns relating to financial planning, internal controls, accountability, organisational culture and the pace of transformation activity. The report also highlights inconsistent budget ownership, incomplete organisational integration following local government reorganisation and staff concerns around "financial fatigue". Somerset Council has acknowledged the findings and will be expected to demonstrate progress against the review's recommendations.

**£18.9 Million Spent on Consultants Since 2023:** Somerset Council has confirmed [that it has spent £18.9 million on consultants](#) and external advisory support since becoming a unitary authority in April 2023. The figure was revealed following questions about the council's reliance on external support at a time when it has declared a financial emergency, is selling assets to pay for day-to-day spend and continues to face significant budget pressures. Concerns have also been raised about whether this level of spending is delivering sufficient value for money for residents as households face higher council tax increases.

**Four-Day Finance Chief Costs £290k:** Somerset Council has confirmed that interim Chief Finance Officer Clive Heaphy will remain in post until April 2027 after the council's latest attempt to recruit a permanent replacement was unsuccessful. The Somerset County Gazette noted that the interim Chief Finance Officer "[will earn more than the Prime Minister over the next 12 months, while only working four days a week](#)". The extension is expected to cost approximately £291,000 and will be funded through the council's capitalisation direction, which allows the authority to sell assets to pay for day-to-day spend.

**Planning Enforcement Backlog:** Somerset Council has acknowledged a significant backlog of planning enforcement cases, particularly in parts of the former Mendip area, following concerns raised by councillors about delays in investigating alleged planning breaches. The authority has also confirmed that a business case is being developed for further investment in planning enforcement, including additional staffing and agency support, to help reduce the existing backlog and improve response times.

**Conservative-Led Motion Secures Cross-Party Support for SEND Improvements:** Somerset Council has unanimously backed a Conservative-led motion calling for [urgent action to improve delays in Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments](#) (EHCNAs). The motion was brought forward following continued concerns raised by Conservative councillors about SEND performance and lengthy waits for assessments. Current performance data shows that only 0–5% of assessments have recently been completed within the statutory 20-week timeframe, with average waiting times reaching around 47 weeks. The motion called for targeted investment of approximately £1.3 million to £1.4 million over 12 months to increase Educational Psychology, SEND casework and business support capacity. Officer modelling suggests the investment could significantly reduce the current backlog within a

year and improve assessment timeliness. The motion received unanimous cross-party support.

**Holiday Tax Debate at Somerset Council:** Conservative councillors have continued to campaign against proposals that would allow Strategic Authorities to introduce a holiday tax on overnight accommodation. At May's Full Council meeting, Conservatives brought forward a motion seeking a commitment that Somerset Council would not support or seek the introduction of such a levy in Somerset. The motion followed concerns raised by tourism and hospitality businesses about the potential impact on Somerset's £1.3 billion visitor economy, particularly in coastal and rural communities that rely heavily on domestic tourism. However, amendments tabled by the Liberal Democrat administration removed the commitment to oppose any future holiday tax. As a result, the motion was pulled and Somerset Council has not formally ruled out supporting such a levy in the future should the necessary powers become available through legislation or devolution arrangements.

**£318,000 Outstanding from Housing Developer Contributions:** Somerset Council has confirmed that it is owed £317,774.50 in outstanding Section 106 contributions from five housing developments across the county, with some sums dating back several years. Section 106 agreements are used to secure funding from developers for local infrastructure and services, including affordable housing, community facilities, public open space and education provision. The largest outstanding amount, £188,419.83, relates to a development in Keinton Mandeville, where the Council has confirmed legal action has been taken and repayments are now being made through an agreed instalment plan. Other outstanding contributions relate to developments in Burnham-on-Sea, Yeovil, Wedmore and Bridgwater.

**Vaping Survey Open:** Somerset Council's Public Health team is seeking feedback from schools, colleges and organisations working with children and young people on the challenges associated with vaping. Responses will help inform future public health work and support across Somerset. The survey closes on 19 June 2026. Have your say here <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/public-health/vaping-survey-2026/>

**Alcohol Support Survey:** Somerset Council is seeking feedback to better understand why some people who may benefit from support with alcohol use do not access help from Somerset Drug and Alcohol Service (SDAS). The *anonymous* survey can be completed about yourself or someone you know and will help shape future alcohol support services across Somerset. The survey closes on 15 June 2026. Have your say here <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/public-health/alcoholneedssurvey/>

**Food Waste Recycling Pledge:** Somerset Council is encouraging residents to pledge to recycle their food waste as part of a county-wide campaign to reduce waste and increase recycling. Residents who take the pledge before 31 July 2026 will be entered into a prize draw to win a year's supply of compostable liners for their kitchen caddy. Feedback gathered through the accompanying survey will help shape future waste reduction campaigns. Find out more and take the pledge here: <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/waste/pledge-to-recycle-food-jun-jul2026/>