

SOMERSET COUNCIL

Briefing Sheet for Parish & Town Councils May 2026

Somerset Council Chief Finance Officer Recruitment: Somerset Council's efforts to appoint a permanent Chief Finance Officer faced further disruption after the latest candidate withdrew just days before taking up the role. The appointment would have marked the fifth Chief Finance Officer in four years. The authority has relied on interim arrangements, with the current interim officer costing approximately £7,000 per week. It has now been confirmed that the interim Chief Finance Officer, Clive Heaphy, will remain in post until the end of March 2027, meaning responsibility for overseeing the council's financial position and next budget will continue under interim leadership.

Somerset Council SEND Services and EHCP Delays: A recent report by Somerset Council has highlighted significant delays in the delivery of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), with between 0–5% of assessments being completed within the statutory 20-week timeframe. The report identifies delays in Educational Psychology advice, currently averaging 27 weeks, as a key contributor to the growing backlog, and warns that without additional resource waiting times could exceed 52 weeks. At the Council's budget meeting Somerset Conservatives proposed targeted investment to increase capacity and speed up assessments, but the amendment was not supported by the Liberal Democrat administration. However, proposals to allocate additional resource to SEND services will now be brought forward for discussion in June.

Somerset Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA): Somerset Council has published its latest Local Housing Needs Assessment, setting out the level and type of housing needed across the county from 2025 to 2045. The report highlights pressures around affordability, future housing demand and the need for accessible and specialist housing. While it does not set policy, it will inform the Somerset Local Plan and future housing strategies. The full assessment can be viewed here: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/planning-buildings-and-land/somerset-local-plan/evidence-gathering-and-early-engagement/>

Somerset Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment (RLNA): Somerset Council has published its Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment, which reviews future retail and leisure demand across the county up to 2045. The report considers expenditure trends, town centre performance and whether additional retail or leisure floorspace may be required. While not a policy document, it will inform the Somerset Local Plan and future decisions on town centre development. The full assessment can be viewed here: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/planning-buildings-and-land/somerset-local-plan/evidence-gathering-and-early-engagement/>

Somerset Council Gritter Fleet Investment: Somerset Council has approved plans to invest up to £2.3 million in new gritter lorries over the next four years, replacing ageing vehicles within its fleet of 23. Ten vehicles are nearing the end of their operational life, with increasing maintenance costs and reliability concerns. The council currently spends around £200,000 a year on servicing, with risks identified to winter service delivery if the fleet is not renewed. The new vehicles will be procured through Romaquip as part of the council's capital programme.

Somerset Leisure Centres to See Limited Investment: Somerset Council has confirmed that no major investment will be delivered in five leisure centres over the next two years, following the collapse of operator Fusion Lifestyle. The council has provided £370,000 of interim funding to keep sites in Frome, Glastonbury, Shepton Mallet, Street and Wells open while a new operator is procured. A short-term two-year contract is expected to be awarded, with providers including Everyone Active and Freedom Leisure expressing interest. Officers have confirmed the focus will be on maintaining services, with no significant upgrades planned during this period while a longer-term strategy is developed.

Foster Care Fortnight (11–24 May): Somerset Council is supporting Foster Care Fortnight, a national campaign to raise awareness of fostering and encourage more people to come forward. There are currently more than 670 children in care in Somerset, highlighting the need for more local foster carers to provide stable homes and keep children close to their communities. Everyone is encouraged to support the campaign through community engagement and social media activity. More information about fostering can be found here: www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk

SEND Reform Plan Consultation Now Open: Consultation on the Government's SEND reforms is underway, alongside the national process for local areas to submit SEND Reform Plans by 19th June. Children's Services teams are working intensively to engage a wide range of partners and stakeholders, including children and young people with SEND, whose views are essential. If you know a young person with SEND, please encourage them to complete the SEND Reform Plan Survey for Children and Young People by Friday 15 May 2026. Have your say here: <https://www.menti.com/aln9dtyib2no>