



**Somerset Liberal Democrats
Tatworth & Forton
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Gritters at the ready for winter

Somerset Council's fleet of 23 gritters is ready to be mobilised across 900 miles of road as soon as the temperature drops below zero this winter. Last year the gritter fleet went out on 67 occasions when freezing temperatures were forecast. There were 2,058 route actions in total, helping to prevent the formation of ice across 83,200 miles of Somerset's roads. It's important road users drive according to conditions – ice can still form on roads that have



been gritted and extra care needs to be taken in winter weather. It's vital too that drivers do not try to overtake gritters while they are treating roads – amazingly, this happens on a regular basis in icy, hazardous conditions. Last year, Somerset's farmers were hugely helpful in supporting the Council's winter services, by taking on snow ploughing duties when conditions became challenging.

Daily gritting updates will be posted on Travel Somerset's Twitter and Facebook channels throughout winter.

What roads are treated?- Somerset Council treat over a fifth of Somerset's roads, marked in red on the map here: <https://tinyurl.com/5e45d8tb> The gritting network covers all last year's routes plus it has been increased slightly this winter. The main priority is to keep the busiest routes clear whenever ice or snow is expected. The priority is roads that link major towns, villages and communities on high ground and the important routes across the County for long distance travel.

When do the gritters come out? - Somerset Council carry out gritting when road surface temperatures are predicted to drop below 1°C and ice or snow is expected. Precautionary gritting normally takes place before the formation of ice – so that generally means teams are out in the evening or early morning.

In the event of snow, there are established plans in place, working alongside the emergency services and partners to clear the network as quickly as possible. Gritters can be quickly equipped with snowploughs and there are arrangements with farmers and snowplough operators who are employed to clear snow on the council's behalf. The primary network is prioritised before moving on to clear secondary and minor networks as resources allow.

Why don't the Council salt every road in Somerset? - Somerset Council can't treat every road, as there aren't enough gritters, drivers and depot staff to make this cost-efficient. However, the Council is carrying on work with parish councils to fill roadside grit bins on request and are continuing to run a community-led snow warden scheme.

Local start-up businesses get ready to launch

Ten start-up businesses have been given a helping hand from Somerset Council's innovative Launch Pad programme. The businesses have all received a wide range of fully funded help to get them ready to move to the next level. The ten-week programme has included workshops, masterclasses and one-to-one mentoring tailored to businesses' individual needs, and delivered by professionals, entrepreneurs and experts from industry.

Council taking action to address social care funding blackhole

Latest budget figures which go before Somerset Council's Executive on 8 November are expected to show an estimated £70m increase in expected adult social care costs for 2024/25.

This means the Council cannot rely on reserves to cover the gap for next year and without action will need to issue a S114 notice, or effectively declare the council bankrupt, at the point of setting next year's budget in February.

Several councils nationally have been forced to do this in recent months, including Woking and Birmingham, with many others warning it could be a possibility without Government support.

Cllr Liz Leyshon, Somerset Council's Lead Member for Resources and Deputy Leader, said: "The funding model for local Government is clearly broken, with many councils struggling in light of soaring costs and demands on services.

"But while at Woking and Birmingham their finances were also impacted by a policy decision or legal action, here in Somerset we're simply running out of money due to the soaring costs of demand-led services, particularly the costs of residential and nursing care for adults.

"This is not because of poor control of service spend, it is simply an exceptionally large increase in our costs for demand-led services which we have no choice but to manage."

In August, Somerset Council warned that it would need to use reserves to balance the books for this year. Latest figures show the budget gap for the current financial year now stands at £27.3m. Although this figure could be covered by reserves, the projected shortfall for the following year is now £100m, far exceeding levels of reserves.

The main driver of this is an £70m increase in adult social care costs, caused by proposed changes to national policy which aimed to make the cost of care fairer. Although the policy change was later abandoned by Government, in Somerset this has led to significant rises in the costs of residential and nursing care placements. For example, residential care placement costs have risen from around £577 per week in 2022/23 to £900 per week next year.

Officers are now drawing up savings proposals which will be voted on by Executive at its December meeting. These could include selling assets and buildings, including offices; increasing Council Tax, fees and charges as much as possible; reducing staffing levels; and reducing council services to statutory levels.

Cllr Leyshon added: "Our priority will be to maximise all opportunities, work with partners and do everything we can to ensure we can continue to take care of those most in need.

"No-one wants to be in this position, but we are well aware of the implications of a Section 114 notice. It is our intention to take the difficult decisions now and to set a direction for the new Council with the benefit of our local knowledge and commitment to Somerset.

"The alternative is to leave it to Government Commissioners, paid by the people of Somerset, to find a financial answer that does not take into account local factors or experience."



Don't chuck it, recycle it! Half of what's in our bins could have been recycled.

Nearly half the content of the average Somerset bin could have been recycled, Somerset Council can reveal. The 48% figure found this year is an impressive 11% decrease in 2018 – the last time the 'composition analyses was carried out in the county. But there is still much more to do, especially when it comes to food waste. And as national Recycling Week begins, Somerset Council are asking residents to think twice before throwing something in the bin. The contents of some 550 households refuse bins were painstakingly emptied, sorted, and weighed, with a representation from across the county. Of the 48% of contents that should have been recycled:

- 14% recyclable at the kerbside (e.g. cardboard or drinks cans)
- 21% food waste, recyclable in the food waste bin
- 7% garden waste and pet bedding
- 7% recyclable at a recycling site (e.g. wood and metal)

The 11% reduction on 2018 figure is thought to have been driven by the expanded Recycle More collections, with less plastic pots tubs and trays being put in the refuse.

Residents have also reduced the amount of food that's being thrown in the bin, with a 5% drop since 2018.

The results are shared as national Recycling Week begins. This year's theme - The Big Recycling Hunt - focuses on "missed capture": the items that can be recycled but are commonly missed in the home.

The Council surveys what is in our bins every five years to help understand what is being thrown out and how it can be made it easier to reduce waste and recycle more.

Somerset's highest ever recycling rate was recently published as part of our Recycling Tracker, which shows what happens to every tonne of collected recycling. The 2022-23 figures show that 96.6% stayed in the UK to be turned into new products and packaging.

