



Somerset Liberal Democrats

Chard South

January 2026



## New Year Honours Celebrate Remarkable Individuals from Somerset

A number of outstanding individuals from Somerset have been recognised in the New Year Honours list for their significant contributions to the community and their respective fields.

Richard Clothier, managing director of Wyke Farms, based in Wyke Champflower, received an MBE for his innovative work in sustainable agriculture & food production. Sarah Massey, former managing director of the Women's Rugby World Cup 2025, also received an MBE, highlighting the collective effort behind organising a successful event that celebrated women's sport.

Ron Homer from Yeovil has been awarded a British Empire Medal for his services to blind and partially sighted people. As treasurer of Yeovil Visually Impaired Bowls Club, he works to encourage participation in the sport and improve the lives of those with visual impairments.

Margaret Maltby from Chard was appointed an MBE for her dedicated service to young people as County President of Girlguiding Somerset, inspiring and supporting youth across the county.

Additionally, Marlie Packer received an OBE for her contributions to Rugby Union Football. Her roots in Yeovil serve as inspiration for young athletes, especially girls, although she currently lives in Surrey.

Others appointed MBE in Somerset include Fiona Bloor, Technical Lead at the UK Hydrographic Office; Martin Hodgson, CEO of YMCA Dulverton Group; Alice Potter, Group President of West Hatch Scout Group; and Jonathan Wheatley for his charity and horticulture work.

Those appointed OBE are Paul Freeston, Chair & CEO of Apetito; Jane Louise Hadfield, Board Member of the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education; and Simon Taylor, a volunteer with the Liberal Democrats.

Meanwhile, Joanna Shanmugalingam, Second Permanent Secretary at the Department for Transport, received the Companion of the Order of the Bath.

These honours reflect the remarkable contributions of these impressive individuals to their communities and the broader society in Somerset.



## Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Somerset Council supports households with the lowest incomes through its Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme, and next year's Scheme (from April 2026) will include a 3.8% increase in income band thresholds to maintain discount values, based on the September CPI figure used by Dept for Work and Pension.

Councillor concerns were raised about individuals transitioning from legacy benefits to Universal Credit who have lost, or will lose, their automatic 100% Council Tax discount. To address this, Somerset Council will assess those adversely affected through the Exceptional Hardship Fund, where appropriate.

Additionally, a Councillor-led Task and Finish Group will be formed, to fully explore the Government's changes to benefits and how the changes have adversely affected some of Somerset's vulnerable residents. The CTR scheme is reviewed regularly, with a full review scheduled for 2026-27

Council Tax Reduction

Advice for people younger than state pension age



# Review Urges Stronger Support for Homeless Adults in Somerset

A recent review by the Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board (SSAB) calls for urgent measures to enhance support for adults facing homelessness. The review examined safeguarding practices related to three men receiving care and support from statutory and voluntary agencies in Somerset.

Key recommendations include ensuring access to legal literacy training for frontline social workers and housing officers, enhancing the involvement of family and friends in support processes, and conducting a review of safeguarding data concerning the homeless population. The SSAB also recommends collaboration with the Ministry of Housing for a dedicated Homelessness Social Work role and outreach to local Prison Governors for input on safeguarding arrangements. The findings highlight the need for a multi-agency approach to address gaps in services for those experiencing homelessness and multiple disadvantages. For further details and access to the full report, visit the [Safeguarding Somerset Adults Board website](#).



## Councillors Defer Sunday Parking Charges Rollout in Somerset

Councillors have deferred the proposal to introduce Sunday parking charges across Somerset following public consultation. The aim was to harmonise charges to ensure consistency, but community and councillor feedback led the Council's Climate and Place Scrutiny Committee to recommend against implementation.

Somerset Council's Executive Committee agreed on the need to develop a comprehensive parking policy that addresses all aspects of parking, including on and off-street options, tariff structures, and accessibility. This policy will be reviewed in early 2026, as different charging principles currently exist across the county's 200 council-run car parks.



## Octagon Theatre Revamp Plans Submitted

Plans for a £15 million redevelopment of Yeovil's Octagon Theatre have been submitted for Planning Permission, aiming to establish it as a premier cultural venue in the South West. This initiative by Yeovil Town Council and Somerset Council will secure the building's integrity while improving access and facilities both front of house and backstage.

Key improvements include upgraded equipment for productions, increased accessibility, a renewed auditorium, and enhanced front-of-house areas. Funding sources include £10 million from the Department of Media, Culture and Sport, £3.75 million from Yeovil Town Council, and over £1.25 million from ticket levies and fundraising.

The project will enhance the theatre's community role and offerings for audiences and local groups.



## Keeping in Contact

**COME AND TALK WITH US  
AT A LIB DEM SURGERY**  
**FIRST SATURDAY IN THE MONTH**  
With your Town and Unitary Councillors  
AT THE GUILDHALL, CHARD  10am to 12pm

You can meet with me to discuss any concerns or for help dropping into our monthly surgery or I can arrange an appointment on a day and time that suits you feel free to give me a call on 07736 310805 or email

Jason.baker@somerset.gov.uk