



**Somerset Liberal Democrats**  
**Chard South**  
**March 2023**

## Budget agreed for new Somerset Council

Councillor Liz Leyshon, Deputy Leader and Executive Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources, said: "This has been the most difficult budget setting that any of us can remember. Inflation has been a huge pressure on the cost of providing council services and post-Covid we have seen rises in demand from Somerset residents for very complex support from both Adult Social Care and Children's Services."

The budget confirms an overall rise of 4.99% in the council's share of council tax, made up of a basic rise of 2.99 per cent in council tax and the 2 per cent adult social care levy. The increase is in line with Government policy and councils across the UK that have responsibility for Adult Social Care and Children's Services. The first budget for Somerset Council includes substantial increases in funding for Adult Social Care and Children's Services by £28million and £19 million respectively, to reflect that growth in demand and cost. The new budget provides start-up support for the Local Community Networks (LCN) and has protected funding for the voluntary and community sector.

Clr Leyshon continued: "We have had the challenge of bringing five council budgets together into the new unitary Somerset Council. In doing this we've been at great pains to defend the frontline services that touch everybody's lives. "We are prioritising support for our most vulnerable residents, but we have rejected options to close some of our household waste recycling centres and all of our libraries will remain open with unchanged hours. That won't be the case elsewhere in the country, but I feel we have a contract with residents, both through council tax and voting, and they expect their council tax to be spent on services available to all. We would have not been able to do this without the savings that have come from the move to a single council. "Of course, we know a great many residents are struggling to deal with the cost-of-living crisis. We have created a new and simplified Council Tax Reduction Scheme and in creating the new Council we have also expanded the Exceptional Hardship Scheme to the whole of Somerset and increased the funds available for people who need support for the first time, or more support with their household overhead costs."

The Council dropped a proposal to remove funding for many parish grit bins after the option was criticised during public consultation and through Scrutiny, and will now concentrate on pilot projects to work with local communities to improve gritting of the secondary network of roads in Somerset. The rise in Somerset Council's share of Council Tax is made up of basic rise of 2.99 per cent in Council Tax and the 2 per cent adult social care levy. As a result of these proposals the council tax proposed for a Band D property will increase by £78.24 each year, or £1.50 per week.

## Council Plan sets priorities for new Somerset Council

With one month to go until the launch for the new unitary Somerset Council, councillors have published the priorities for the new Council. The new Council Plan was approved unanimously at a meeting of the outgoing Somerset County Council, whose councillors will form the new Somerset Council. The Somerset Council Plan highlights four key priorities. A further Business Plan, outlining how the Council will deliver services in support of these priorities, will be developed in the coming months.

The key priorities for the new Council are:

- A Greener, More Sustainable Somerset
- A Healthy and Caring Somerset
- A Fairer, Ambitious Somerset, and
- A Flourishing and Resilient Somerset

The text of the Council Plan is available here: <http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s25969/Paper%20B%20-%20Appendix%20B%20-%20Council%20Plan%20Final%20Text.pdf>

## Have your say in the School Term Dates and Holidays

Somerset's residents have been invited to have their say on proposed school holiday, term and staff training dates for Voluntary Controlled and Community Schools for the next two years.

Somerset County Council has published two separate consultations: one for the 2024/25 academic year and one for the 2025/26 academic year. Both consultations are open to the general public, but are particularly relevant to all school staff, parents and caregivers with responsibility for school age children. Academies and other school types set their own dates, but may choose to align their dates with neighbouring schools.

The consultations include proposed school holiday dates, term dates and 'inset days' (school staff training days when pupils stay at home) run from 13th February until the 17th March, with results being published in April this year.

Inset days are set by individual schools and can vary considerably. The consultation seeks feedback on the idea that schools co-ordinate their inset days. This could help parents plan childcare and holiday arrangements, help schools work together which may save money and have more impact.

To complete the consultation for the 2024 to 2025 academic year visit:

<https://somerset.inconsult.uk/Termdates2425/consultationHome>

To complete the consultation for the 2025 to 2026 academic year visit:

<https://somerset.inconsult.uk/Termdates2526/consultationHome>

The consultation runs from Monday 13th February until the 17th March with results being published in April.

## Could you support a child in care in Somerset?

More volunteers are needed to help children in care and act as a significant someone in their lives.

For many children in care, everyone who features in their day-to-day lives is part of the care system. Somerset County Council's Route1 Advocacy service is seeking Advocates and Independent Visitors in both short and long term roles to spend quality time with them and transform their lives.

The independent visitor role involves taking a long-term interest in the life of a young person in care – something which many of them have never experienced. Trained volunteers are matched with a child in care and provide an invaluable service, one which is potentially life-changing for the young person involved, and even for the volunteer themselves.

Volunteers are asked to commit to visiting their young person in care twice a month for two years. Visits are intended to be fun, supportive and to allow the child in question time to spend with someone they look forward to seeing and trust.

Those who are unable to commit to a long-term role may be interested in becoming a Route1 volunteer advocate instead. This opportunity is about assisting children and young people with having a voice at meetings about their wellbeing, where their own wishes and feelings are made clear.

Advocacy is a short-term commitment, in which new advocates attend an additional 2 days of training before being added to a 'bank' of volunteer advocates, to be contacted when needed.

Full training is provided by Route 1 Advocacy. To find out more about the roles and apply, please visit:

<https://volunteering.somerset.gov.uk/route1>

Email [Volunteers@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:Volunteers@somerset.gov.uk) or call 01823 359200 to make a difference to young people in your community.