



**Somerset Liberal Democrats
Chard South
February 2024**

Urgent need for Somerset residents to support local children in care

Somerset residents have the potential to make a difference to a vulnerable child's life and future, providing better outcomes for local children in care and long-term cost savings for Somerset Council.

You can change a child's story as a foster carer. This is the powerful and emotive message behind a new short film from Somerset Council's Fostering Service, which aims to highlight the important role of foster carers and encourage families and individuals with room in their homes and hearts to consider fostering.



'Willow's Story' is the third instalment in the 'Change A Child's Story' series from Fostering in Somerset; a 50 second promotional video which shares the positive impact of a foster carer on the lives of four children. The advert had support and involvement from local sports club and team, Somerton Rugby, who took to social media to share the film and their participation. With over 580 Somerset children currently in care, and only 152 in-house foster carers, there is an urgent need for more foster homes to provide stability and safety for vulnerable children of all ages, but particularly teenagers. In September 2023, there were almost 300 children aged between 13 – 17 in care across Somerset.

Placing looked after children with a nurturing family and stable foster home provides better outcomes for children and young people in care, ensuring that local children remain in their local communities, surrounded by the faces and places they know. However, recruiting more in-house foster carers will also reduce high-cost external placement numbers, providing significant long-term cost savings for Somerset Council, at a time when finances are under intense pressures and scrutiny.

Foster care is a rewarding paid role, with full training and support provided. No experience is necessary to foster, but you need to be aged over 21 with a spare room in your home, though what matters most is that you have the compassion, resilience and time to support a young person who may have experienced trauma. For more information on fostering, visit www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk or call 0800 587 9900 and speak to our friendly team. You're not committing to anything by getting in touch to find out more, and you could change a child's story.

Council renews successful partnership with lighting contractor



A new contract which will see cheaper and greener lighting on roads around the county has been signed Somerset Council. The contract with Enerveo Ltd will see essential maintenance services delivered on council's illuminated and non-illuminated electrical equipment across the county. Following a process and approval by Somerset Council's Executive, the tender for the new eight-year contract (the potential to be extended by four years) was awarded to current service provider, Enerveo Ltd. The contract covers the County's highways lights, illuminated signs, bollards and electrical equipment.

- Somerset Council has 59,593 illuminated assets to look after, consisting of lights, illuminated signs and bollards
- 65.9 per cent of these have already been changed to LED, helping towards Somerset's 2030 carbon neutral target
- Part of the new contract includes the provision of new EV charging stations

Trio prepares to become the voice of young people in Somerset

Three Somerset teenagers are about to be passed the torch of young democracy in action as they prepare to take up their roles as members of the county's Youth Parliament. James Lawson, 14, Ellie Bealing, (re-elected) 16, and Emma Brown, 14, have been elected as the three representatives and will formally take up the posts in March, taking over from Jas Fowler, who campaigned on youth crime and safety, and Joel Fowler who championed mental health and wellbeing. Ellie focused on equality, respect and inclusion and will be launching a new campaign.



Members of the Youth Parliament (MYPs) are elected through schools, colleges and youth clubs across Somerset every two years and represent Somerset at the national UK Youth Parliament. They are supported by an advisory group of self-selected young people aged 10 to 25 from all backgrounds. More members are needed to make sure young people across Somerset have a voice and make the democratic process relevant.

Make sure you are ready to vote in 2024



Residents in Somerset are being encouraged to get 2024 off to a good start by making sure they are ready to vote in elections – both local and Parliamentary.

The next scheduled elections in Somerset are for the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Avon and Somerset on Thursday 2 May 2024. More details will be published nearer the time. The PCC is responsible for holding the Chief Constable and police force to account on the public's behalf. They oversee how crime is tackled in their area and aim to make sure that the police are providing a good service.

Voter registration is at the top of the list as everyone who votes must be on the electoral register. For those unsure if they are registered, Somerset Council's Electoral Services team on 0300 123 2224 will be able to help.

Voters may need to update their details if they have moved house or changed their name. This can be done by re-registering. It's a quick and simple process: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/register-vote-and-update-your-details>

People planning to vote in person at a polling station must provide photo ID to make sure they can cast their ballot. Accepted forms of ID include a passport, driving licence and older person's concessionary travel pass. Documents must be original, not a photocopy – check out the information from the Electoral Commission.

Those without suitable ID can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. Applicants need to provide their name, address, date of birth and National Insurance number.

The process is available online via <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate> Somerset Council can provide a paper form, or it can be downloaded here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-a-voter-authority-certificate-by-post-if-youre-living-in-the-uk>

People can apply for a postal vote if they are away on holiday or because their work schedule means they can't get to polling station. They may also choose to vote by post simply because it would be more convenient. Applications can be completed online, and applicants have to reapply every three years. Full details on how to apply can be found here: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/apply-vote-post>

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 by dropping into our monthly surgery or I can arrange an appointment on a day and time that suits you or feel free to give me a call on 07736 310805 or email Jason.baker@somerset.gov.uk