

## **Cllr Claire Sully, Somerset Councillor Report for Mendip South - November 2024**

### **Parish Conference November 13<sup>th</sup>, will you be there?**

Location: The Canalside Conference Centre, Marsh Lane, Bridgwater TA6 6LQ

Join us to celebrate Somerset's city, town and parish councils working together to improve the lives of our communities.

The Somerset Parishes Conference 2024 is in partnership with Somerset Council, to mark the launch of our "Charter for Somerset".

The day will highlight success stories from our joint work to build city, town and parish council capacity to improve the Health and Wellbeing of our communities, and develop our collective vision for the next phase of local solutions across our county.

We are delighted that Jonathan Owen, Chief Executive of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) will be joining us to share learnings from devolution in other counties, as well as NALC's "Civility and Respect" programme.

Are you attending? Please let me know. I've been made aware that SALC have health and wellbeing grants available, which maybe of interest to our local communities?

More info can be found here:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/somerset-parishes-conference-2024-tickets-1035007353857>

### **Council Leader reacts to Autumn Budget**

Council Leader welcomes additional funding but highlights ongoing financial challenges.

The Leader of Somerset Council has cautiously welcomed today's news of the potential for more funding for local government, but says further action is required to fix a fundamentally broken system.

Cllr Bill Revans made the comments following the Government Autumn Budget statement.

Cllr Revans said:

"Along with other councils we have lobbied hard in the lead up to this Budget and I'm pleased the Chancellor has made reference to some of our areas of concern, however there is still a long way to go to address social care, homelessness and SEND pressures. There were no resolutions proposed to resolve the pressures and deficits in the Dedicated Schools Grant referenced.

While the proposed increase in minimum wage is welcome, it will increase costs in areas like social care contracts creating additional pressures.

There is also disappointing news for Somerset that the A358 dualling scheme between Ilminster and Taunton has now been dropped.

We await the full details with interest, but it is clear this Budget will not go far enough to fully address the financial emergency facing councils across the country.

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What we really need is proper reform, with multi-year financial settlements and appropriate funding to ensure councils can meet ever-increasing demands for core services.

Having greater flexibility over funding, including fewer ringfenced grants, would allow us to put money where it is best needed for Somerset residents.”

### **Support for Somerset households with food and energy bills this winter**

Somerset Council will be distributing £3.8m to those in need between October 2024 and March 2025 as part of the Government’s Household Support Fund. The funding will be spent as follows:

- To provide food and fuel vouchers and essential items directly to those in need. These applications can be made by Social Workers, Health Visitors, Village Agents, Social Prescribing Link Workers and Parent Family Support Advisers on a household’s behalf, which will ensure that those who are unable to apply themselves can still benefit.
- To support Age UK Somerset, Citizens Advice Somerset, Community Council for Somerset and Somerset Activity & Sports Partnership to deliver their vital support for the county’s most vulnerable families and residents.
- To be used during the school holidays to provide food vouchers worth £10 a week to children eligible for Free School Meals, supporting at least 15,000 children this winter.
- To support Somerset Community Foundation’s Help Through Winter Fund, including support for four initiatives:
  1. Support for hard-to-reach rural communities via local warm hubs, using local community spaces to support families and residents to access help such as help with training or employment opportunities and food banks, larders and pantries.
  2. Cost of living grants for frontline organisations who are experiencing increased demand during the winter period to ensure they can continue to supply services for the community such as free wellbeing activities or free-to-use community transport.
  3. Grants for vulnerable families and older people to help cover heating costs and activities to reduce loneliness and isolation.
  4. Supporting charities which help homeless people, including helping fund essential furniture such as white goods.

For more information, visit: [Somerset Household Support Fund](#).

In addition to the Household Support Fund, the following support is available for Somerset communities:

- **Food support for families** – Anyone in need of urgent food supplies can find out about food support here: [Food support for families in Somerset](#).

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- **Foodbanks and pantries** – There are many food banks in Somerset where individuals can go to collect free food. Find out more and see an interactive map here: [Food banks \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/food-banks).
- **Libraries** – All Somerset libraries have been designated as Warm Welcome Spaces, which means anyone in the community is welcome to come and spend time in the library. Find a local library here: [Our libraries \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/libraries).
- **Pension Credit** – Residents are also encouraged to check if they could be eligible for Pension Credit, which provides extra money to help with living costs for people over state pension age and on a low income. Apply online at [www.gov.uk/pension-credit](https://www.gov.uk/pension-credit), or call the Pension Credit claim line on 0800 99 1234.
- **Help4All** – There is further information and advice, including help with Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction and Public and Community Transport on the Help4All website. Find out more: [#Help4All \(connectsomerset.org.uk\)](https://www.help4all.org.uk).

Somerset families and residents who are struggling to pay the bills this winter could be eligible for support with the cost of food, energy, water, and other essentials over the coming months.

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### **Winter Coat Exchange expands across Somerset. All are welcome to donate or pick up a coat for free.**

Somerset Council is pleased to expand its coat exchange to 12 of Somerset's libraries.

Now in its second year, the scheme is open to everyone and designed to support the community by providing access to warm coats to everyone, and especially those in need.

The libraries service is pleased to support this initiative in the following libraries: Taunton, Priorswood (Taunton), Wellington, Dulverton, Bridgwater, Yeovil, Minehead, Shepton Mallet, Glastonbury, Street, Langport, Chard.

Last year the scheme ran in eight libraries, with Minehead, Shepton Mallet, Street and Langport the new additions for 2024.

The Winter Coat Exchange also helps to support a green and sustainable Somerset. November marks 'Buy Nothing New' month, a campaign led by Keep Britain Tidy.

From the water and energy used in production, to the fuel used in delivery, every new item we buy comes with an environmental price tag. The campaign highlights that 'Recycling is good, but we can do better'. Reusing, swapping, renting and buying second hand are all great ways to waste less.

With more libraries on board than ever before, the expansion makes it even easier to avoid buying new. Across the 12 libraries 546 coats have already been donated – with more than 200 already finding new homes.

### **Somerset Council and Lendology low cost loans can help homeowners keep the heat in**

Somerset homeowners encouraged to take steps towards more energy-efficient homes and lower energy bills.

Somerset homeowners are encouraged to take steps towards more energy-efficient homes and lower energy bills with a Somerset Council-backed Lendology loan.

With energy prices rising this winter, Lendology CIC, a Social Enterprise lender and Somerset Council, are reminding residents about their council-backed, fixed rate loans that help homeowners and landlords with repairs, energy efficiency improvements, and renewable energy upgrades like insulation, windows, solar panels, and air source heat pumps.

These can help to save money, improve comfort and wellbeing, increase property value, and reduce carbon emissions.

[Lendology](#) has been a trusted partner with Somerset Council and the former district councils since 2005. They work with a diverse range of homeowners and landlords, offering a fixed interest rate for everyone, regardless of the loan amount, term, or financial circumstances.

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Loan decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, making it accessible for those who might struggle to borrow elsewhere, such as the self-employed, benefit recipients, or retirees.

The Lendology scheme was funded by the former Somerset district councils and this original pot of money is recycled. This means that every time a Somerset homeowner makes a monthly repayment, the money becomes available for another Somerset homeowner.

Residents who are interested in making energy saving improvements to their homes can see how much a loan would cost with the Lendology [Loan calculator](#).

Lendology also partners with local organisations like [The Centre for Sustainable Energy](#) to provide impartial energy advice, grant eligibility assessments, and home retrofit support and the Councils Home Improvement Agency Somerset Independence Plus (SIP) SIP can assist with any essential repairs to the home, applying for various benefits that you may be eligible for and advising on how to save energy.

For more information about Lendology loans, visit their website at [www.lendology.org.uk](http://www.lendology.org.uk).

Somerset Council can also help with energy saving advice support through [Somerset Independence Plus](#).

You can also [loan a free thermal imaging camera](#) through Somerset libraries to help you find out exactly where your home leaks heat.

### **New Sustainable Food & Farming Conference for the South West 22 + 23 November 2024 Bath & West Showground**

LandAlive is a major new conference making the case for transition to a more localised, regenerative farming and food system in the region and across the UK. It will feature talks on climate-friendly farming from leading practitioners, advisors, soil specialists, policy makers, wildlife organisations and representatives from across the food supply chain.

There will also be an exhibition which will showcase the latest innovations, services and support to help farmers transition to a more environmentally friendly way of farming.

You can find out more here and buy tickets: <https://www.landalive.co.uk/>

### **Have your say on ward boundaries in Somerset Council, consultation set up by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England boundaries**

There is 10-week public consultation inviting proposals for new council divisions and division boundaries for Somerset Council. The consultation closes on 20 January 2025.

This could lead to a reduction in the number of Councillors and different ward boundaries.

The electoral review, (conducted by Local Government Boundary Commission for England Boundaries) will recommend new electoral arrangements for Somerset Council. This includes:

- the total number of councillors elected to the council in the future;
- the number of divisions;
- the number of councillors representing each division;
- division boundaries; and the names of divisions.

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Draft recommendations will be published in June 2025.

There will be a further period of consultation on the draft recommendations. Final recommendations are expected to be published in December 2025.

The new electoral arrangements will come into effect at the local elections in 2027.

If you represent a local organisation or community group in Somerset, please pass this message on to your members or anyone who you think might be interested in the review.

This is a public consultation and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England boundaries welcome views from individuals and organisations across Somerset on where they think new division boundaries should be drawn.

In drawing up new electoral divisions, we must balance three legal criteria, namely:

to deliver electoral equality: where each councillor represents roughly the same number of electors as others across the county; that the pattern of divisions should, as far as possible, reflect the interests and identities of local communities; that the electoral arrangements should provide for effective and convenient local government.

We will treat all submissions equally, and judge each case on its merits and against the legal criteria.

If you wish to put forward a view, we would also urge you to ensure that evidence supports your submission.

For example, if you wish to argue that two areas should be included in the same electoral division, make sure you tell us why they should be together, providing evidence about community facilities, ties, organisations, and amenities, rather than simply asserting that they belong together.

Find out more and have your say here: <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/somerset>

### **Winter is coming – Somerset Council's gritters, snow ploughs, and snow blowers are ready, are you?**

Somerset Council's fleet of 23 gritters is ready to be mobilised across 900 miles of treated road as soon as temperatures drop below 1 °C this winter. What roads do we treat?

We treat over a fifth of Somerset's roads, marked in red on the map [here](#). Our gritting network covers all previous routes.

Our 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?**

We undertake gritting when the road surface temperatures are forecasted to fall below 1°C and there is an expectation of ice or snow. Precautionary gritting occurs before ice forms, which usually means our teams are out in the evening or early morning.

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In the case of snow, we have pre-established plans and work alongside emergency services and partners to clear the roads as quickly as possible. Our gritters can be fitted with snowploughs, and we also have agreements with farmers and snowplough operators to remove snow on our behalf. We give priority to our primary network and then move on to clear secondary and minor networks as resources permit.

### **Why don't we salt every road in Somerset?**

We can't treat every road, as there aren't enough gritters, drivers and depot staff to make this cost-efficient. However, we are carrying on our work with parish councils to fill roadside grit bins on request and are continuing to run a community-led snow warden scheme.

### **Report it first: useful Links to share with your communities**

Visit Report a problem on the road:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/report-a-problem-on-the-road/>

For traffic updates and roadworks follow @travelsomerset on X and Facebook.

Sign-up for the latest climate news:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/environment-and-food-safety/climate-and-ecological-emergency/newsletter-sign-up/>.

#### *Live travel information*

<https://www.travelsomerset.co.uk/>

#### *Potholes and road damage*

Somerset Council repair potholes and other road defects, and maintain our roads, for the safe access of all road users:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/potholes-and-road-damage/>

#### *Report a problem with a street light*

We maintain and repair street lights to national standards to provide safe access to all road users:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/report-a-problem-with-a-street-light/>

#### *Roads, travel and parking, road signs, markings and lighting*

Includes information about non-illuminated bollards, pedestrian crossings, requesting a village nameplate and how to apply for a new road sign Speed

limits: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/road-signs-bollards-and-road-markings/>

#### *Speed limits*

Request information about new or existing traffic calming measures:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/speed-limits/>

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*Traffic lights*

We maintain over 200 traffic light locations throughout the county

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/traffic-lights/>

*Street and roadworks*

We maintain the roads and pavements that are managed at public expense in Somerset

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/street-and-roadworks/>