

SOMERSET UNITARY COUNCIL REPORT

CLLR NICOLA CLARK

NOVEMBER 2024

A thank you to Sarah Dyke

As you will no doubt be aware, Sarah has chosen to stand down from Somerset Council to concentrate on her work as an MP. I'd just like to express my thanks to her for all the hard work she has done for our communities.

This means of course that there will be a by election in the Blackmoor Vale division, which is scheduled for the 21st November.

You can find out details here - <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/current-election-notices-and-statements/>

Can you help?

All, I've had the message below from Jane Monk, of Blackford:

"The bank we currently use are going to turn our account into Community banking and charge us £8.50 a month. Any ideas on free banking for a Parish Meeting that really has no powers to spend money, so we really do very little, precept comes in and grants go to the two churches"

Jane would love to hear from you if you are able to help – you can contact her on jane_s_monk@hotmail.com

Thank you! (Jane's email address shared with her permission)

Somerset Parish Conference 2024

Date: Wednesday 13 November

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

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

We are organising the Somerset Parishes Conference 2024 in partnership with Somerset Council, to mark the launch of our "Charter for Somerset".

The day will celebrate success stories from Somerset's Local Community Networks and SALC's Community Health and Wellbeing programme and develop our collective vision for the next phase of local solutions for our county.

We are delighted that Jonathan Owen, Chief Executive of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) will be joining us to open the day.

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The morning will feature workshop sessions on:

- How Somerset Councils can work more closely with parishes to deliver the vision of the Charter
- How city, town and parish councils are improving the health and wellbeing of our communities
- How we can all work together to improve council standards across our county

The conference will also feature a marketplace for organisations that deliver services to local councils, and our partner organisations.

The final session of the afternoon will feature SALC's AGM, where we will elect new Directors for the coming year.

We regret that, owing to venue capacity and that Somerset boasts 276 city, town and parish councils, tickets will be restricted to two representatives of each local council. For SALC's AGM, this must include an elected councillor to qualify for a vote.

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

LCN update

The latest LCN meeting was held on the 23rd October 2024 at Caryford Hall, Ansford. For those who attended, there are updates and links below.

Links related to Flooding Working Group update:

Follow the Upper River Cam & Tributaries.

Flood Alerts from Blackford River Level Gauge. Channel on WhatsApp:

<https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029VaDbh9KCXC3GHj3iAv3t> or <https://tinyurl.com/BlackfordAlerts>

New **Environment Agency website** with live & historic river & rainfall levels in Somerset:

<https://cfh.aquaticinformatics.net/AQWebPortal> or <https://tinyurl.com/SomersetGauges>

Free apps are available (for iPhone/iOS & Android) with alerts, which people are encouraged to download:

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- **RiverApp** to view live & historical river levels

<https://www.riverapp.net/en>

- **PegelAlarm** currently does not include the latest River Level Gauges on River Cam but will do in in New Year. Upgrade with support of Somerset Council via Henry Hobhouse.

<https://pegelalarm.at/>

The Community Engagement Officer (Flooding) for Somerset Rivers Authority / Somerset Council – Emergency Planning, Response & Recovery is Dr Paul Elliston. He can be contacted on by mobile 07825 054667 or email paul.elliston@somerset.gov.uk

Somerset Prepared is hosting a Community Resilience Conference 2024 on Wednesday 6 November 2024, Bridgwater and Albion Rugby Football Club 9.45am-4.00pm. Free lunch provided.

This interactive and informative day offers a range of workshops, talks, demos and 1:1 support with experts in a range of resilience topics. [Flood Mary](#) will be there from Floodhub – where you can see property flood resilience kit and get top tips from this world-renowned expert.

Links relating to Highways Working Group Update:

Recap about Enhanced Highways Maintenance Pilot & Volunteer Training (also see documents attached):

[Enhanced Highway Maintenance Pilot and Volunteer Training launch event - August 21 2024 - YouTube](#)

[Somerset Council Levels of Service Sept 2024 pdf.pdf](#)

The email for Kier is SomersetEHM@kier.co.uk and the point of contact is Nathan Turnbull.

Somerset Council's link to register your interest in volunteering is:

[Register an interest | Somerset Council Volunteering](#)

Links relating to Any Other Matters:

Somerset Council is encouraging village halls to register as "Community Places of Safety" in the event of major incidents where emergency evacuation is required. You can register here: <https://www.somersetprepared.org.uk/get-involved/shelter-and-support/>

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Information about your LCN's profile that may be helpful for activities such as priority setting, project planning, grant applications etc is available here:

[LCN profiles - Somerset Intelligence - The home of information and insight on and for Somerset - Run by a partnership of public sector organisations](#)

Thank you again, and we look forward to welcoming you at our **next meeting on 22nd January 2025 at Wincanton Sports Ground** and/or at one of our working groups.

Somerset Council Restructure

An internal 45-day consultation on proposals for Somerset Council's Restructure has just started, and lasts until 7th December.

This is likely to involve over 100 redundancies, and could mean up to 450, approximately 10% of the workforce, so consultation is being undertaken with staff and unions before any redundancies are made.

The restructuring will complete the work of bringing 5 councils into a single authority, whilst also addressing financial challenges.

Council leader Bill Revans was interviewed about this on this morning's BBC Somerset radio Charlie Taylor breakfast programme from 7.09am – [Radio Somerset – Listen Live – BBC Sounds](#).

Details will be scrutinised at the Council's Scrutiny Committees and the Executive over the next few months.

Check Somerset Council's news site for updates [News from across the Council](#).

Have your say on a new political map for Somerset Council

A public consultation has been launched to help shape new council divisions for Somerset Council.

The *Local Government Boundary Commission for England* wants to hear people's views on an electoral review, and has decided that the number of councillors in Somerset Council should be **96**, which is 14 less than the current council's **110** members.

Please see here for more: [Have your say on a new political map for Somerset Council](#).

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Winter fuel allowance, Pension Credit and the Somerset Household support fund

Following a motion and debate at Full Council in September, the Leaders of all political groups in Somerset have written to the Prime Minister to express concerns about the recent decision to remove the Winter Fuel Allowance from many pensioners – please see [Somerset Council Leaders raise concerns over winter fuel allowance removal](#).

This winter, Somerset Council will be distributing £3.8m from the Government's Household Support Fund, to help provide food, fuel vouchers and essential items to residents in need – please see the Council's [Somerset Household Support Fund](#) page for how your residents could qualify.

Please do encourage people to check if they might be eligible for **Pension Credit**, extra money to help with living costs for people over state pension age and on a low income. People can apply online at gov.uk/pension-credit, or call the Pension Credit claim line on [0800 99 1234](tel:0800991234).

Urgent call for more foster carers in Somerset

There is a real need to recruit more foster carers in our area, to offer better care for Somerset's looked after children whose parents cannot look after them.

We currently have 34 'cared for' children in expensive out-of-county accommodation who should really be in foster homes closer to home.

So please do encourage your residents to consider if they can make a huge difference to a child's life by fostering. Please see [Urgent call for more foster carers in Somerset](#).

Somerset's unpaid carers

The vital role of Somerset's unpaid carers has been highlighted following an information day in Taunton in September. 'Unpaid carers' is the term used for anyone who provides unpaid help and support for others. It is estimated there are 50,000 unpaid carers in Somerset, and many are not aware they are eligible for support.

In March, Somerset Council published its *Commitment to Carers 2024* report which recognised the invaluable contribution and challenges faced by unpaid carers, and aims to enhance the quality of life for carers and those they care for. The report can be read online [here](#).

Please see here for more: [Supporting Somerset's unpaid carers](#)

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Somerset recycles and reuses more

Somerset Council has published the latest reuse and recycling results, showing reuse is on the increase and the amount of waste going to landfill is a record low. Nearly 96% of the 145,000 tonnes of recycling materials collected stayed in the UK (54% in Somerset), to be turned into new products and packaging.

Somerset's recycling rate of 56% puts it in the top 20% of waste authorities in England.

Please see here for more: [Somerset Council reveals recycling and reuse results](#)

The annual canvass of voters

As a Local Authority, we are required to write to each household in Somerset every year, to check that the data we hold on the electoral register is accurate. This is called the annual canvass.

We write to households using two different letters. Which letter you receive will depend on the data we already hold.

The letters are being posted to residents during September and October in batches, meaning that households are not all contacted at the same time. That could mean that you find that your neighbour has received a letter, while you have not, as yet. This is quite normal.

Find out more - <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/electoral-services/annual-canvass-of-voters/>

Chew Valley Hoard

An unprecedented hoard of coins, from the time of the Norman Conquest of England, has been acquired for the nation by the South West Heritage Trust thanks to major funding including from the National Lottery and Art Fund.

The Chew Valley Hoard is the largest coin hoard ever found from the period of turmoil immediately following the Norman Conquest. It consists of 2,584 silver pennies from the period c. 1066-68, and was likely buried for safekeeping in the turmoil of the Conquest. The Treasure Valuation Committee established the value of the hoard at £4.3 million. This makes it the highest value treasure acquisition on record.

From 26 November 2024 coins from the hoard will go on display at the British Museum.

They will later be displayed at museums across the UK, including in Bath, before finding a permanent home at The Museum of Somerset.

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The first opportunity to see the hoard in the South West will be at the Museum of Somerset, Taunton in summer 2026.

<https://swheritage.org.uk/museum-of-somerset/chew-valley-hoard/>

Taking steps toward more energy efficient homes

We're encouraging homeowners in Somerset 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.

Find out more  <https://orlo.uk/sgPjl>

Somerset Children and Young People's plan

Children and young people's voices have been heard in shaping the new Somerset Children and Young People's Plan.

Over 6,000 children & young people in Somerset have helped shape the plan, letting us know what they need to lead happy and healthy lives. Ensuring that services are fit for their needs.

To read the plan visit <https://orlo.uk/Hyspa>

Help preserve Somerset's trees

Help Preserve Somerset's Trees!

Are you passionate about tree preservation? We need enthusiastic groups with small outdoor sites (approx. 10m x 15m) to set up tree nurseries using local seeds.

If you can gather and grow local tree seeds, contact our woodland creation team at Woodlandcreation@somerset.gov.uk. Successful applicants will receive funding and support.

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Somerset Council meetings

Just a reminder for you and your communities that members of the public can access agendas for all council meetings. They can also ask questions at these meetings. Details of how to do this can be found in the link below:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/>

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/speaking-at-a-council-meeting/>

Details of all upcoming meetings can be found here –

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/committees-agendas-and-minutes/>

This month I have been involved in:

- Attending Parish Council and Parish meetings.
- Reporting and chasing up highways repairs, including re-lining, fallen trees and blocked drains.
- Attended the Police and Crime Commissioner's consultation event, and pushed the PCC for better, more visible rural policing.
- Made contact with the new South East Somerset Beat Officer team.
- Visited residents to discuss ongoing planning enforcement cases.
- Attended the LCN meeting on the 23rd October.
- Assisted communities with ongoing concerns over speeding
- Advocated for communities with ongoing planning and enforcement matters

Cllr Nicola Clark

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