Parish Information Sheet

Ref: A3July/2026

Date:	16th July 2026

To:	**All Parishes**

Purpose

This briefing has been prepared following the Government's announcement that Somerset Council is being issued with a **Best Value Notice**.
It provides:

- An overview of what a Best Value Improvement Notice is.
- The Council's response to the announcement.
- Frequently asked questions and background information.

What is a Best Value Notice?
All local authorities have a statutory duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to secure continuous improvement in the way their functions are exercised, having regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

A Best Value Improvement Notice is a formal notice issued by Government where Ministers require additional assurance that a council is taking the necessary action to meet that duty. It sets out Government concerns and provides a framework through which improvement can be monitored and supported.

In practical terms, it means Government wants evidence that:

- Somerset Council is improving.
- Governance arrangements are effective.
- Financial management is robust.
- Services are delivering value for money.
- The organisation is moving towards long-term sustainability.

Key Messages

- Somerset Council recognises the seriousness of the Government's decision to issue a Best Value Notice.
- The notice is a formal, non-statutory improvement and assurance process.
- Somerset Council remains responsible for local decision-making and service delivery.

- The notice reflects Government concerns regarding financial resilience, the pace of transformation and pressures in key service areas including Adult Social Care, Children's Services and SEND.
- The Council has already established significant improvement arrangements and welcomes the additional support, challenge and oversight that will come through the process.
- Essential services will continue to be delivered.
- The Council will work constructively with Government, the Local Government Association (LGA) and its independent advisers.

Public statement:

Somerset Council sets out response to Best Value Notice

Somerset Council has acknowledged the Government's decision to issue a Best Value Notice to the authority.

The Council recognises the seriousness of this step. A Best Value Notice is a formal, non-statutory improvement and assurance process through which Government monitors progress against agreed improvement plans. Simply, it means the Government wants evidence that the Council is improving, strengthening governance, delivering value for money and securing long-term sustainability, and we already have much of the required evidence through the work we're already undertaking.

Crucially, Somerset Council remains responsible for making decisions locally, delivering services and driving improvement.

While this is a serious development, it is not an unexpected one. Somerset Council has consistently been open about the scale of the challenges it faces and has already taken steps in anticipation of increased external scrutiny, including establishing an independent Improvement Advisory Board to provide challenge, support and oversight.
Like many councils across the country, Somerset is facing rising demand and costs in essential services including Adult Social Care, Children's Services, SEND and homelessness, alongside a local government funding system which does not adequately reflect the cost of delivering services in a large rural county. The Council continues to argue that relying on Council Tax increases to fund demand-led services is not sustainable.

At the same time, the Council accepts that it must continue to improve financial management, governance, transformation and performance across key services.
Many of the actions Government would expect to see are already underway. The Council has strengthened governance, commissioned an independent CIPFA review, established an Improvement Advisory Board and is progressing its Building Better Finance and Inspiring Innovation programmes.

The Council is also taking action in areas identified as under pressure. This includes responding to the recent Children's Services Ofsted inspection and investing £5.3 million

to improve SEND support, reduce delays and strengthen services for children, young people and families across Somerset. Similarly, since the Care Quality Commission conducted its assessment of adult social care in September 2025 the Council has made progress across the areas the regulatory body identified. This includes improving the timeliness of assessments and reviews and making better use of data to shape services. The Council's focus remains on delivering improvement, protecting vital services and demonstrating progress through action and results.

Council Leader Bill Revans said: “We recognise the seriousness of today’s announcement and we accept the need to demonstrate continued improvement. We also want to give every assurance that the work needed is already under way and we are on the front foot. Residents should be reassured that Somerset Council remains responsible for making decisions locally. Essential services will continue to be delivered and our commitment to improving services and achieving financial sustainability remains unchanged.

This is a challenging moment, but not an unexpected one. We have been honest about the challenges we face, we have a clear plan, and we are taking the actions needed to secure Somerset’s future. Our focus now is on maintaining momentum, delivering improvement and demonstrating progress. We welcome the opportunity to demonstrate that progress to Government and to our residents, and this will help us access further advice and support. It is our aim to set a balanced budget in 2027-28 without the use of external exceptional financial support.

But the challenges facing Somerset are complex. Demand and costs in essential services, particularly care services, have risen sharply, and the current funding system does not properly reflect the pressures faced by large rural councils. But we also recognise that we must continue to improve how we manage our finances, strengthen governance and transform services.

Above all, our responsibility is to the people of Somerset. Our focus remains clear: protecting vital services, supporting the most vulnerable people in Somerset, doing everything we can to put the Council on a sustainable footing for the future, and ensuring Government understands how it needs to support local services.”

Further background information:

The notice is here - Best Value Notice issued to Somerset Council – and for clarity it:

- **Is not the appointment of commissioners.**
- **Is not statutory intervention.**
- **Does not remove decision-making powers from Somerset Council.**
- **Does not change responsibility for local services.**

Somerset Council remains responsible for governance, budgets, service delivery and all local decision-making.

Why has Government issued the notice?

According to the draft notice, Government concerns include:

- Somerset's continued fragile financial position.
- The need to accelerate transformation activity.
- Weaknesses in financial resilience and financial management.
- Continued reliance on Exceptional Financial Support.
- Low reserves.
- The need to address external audit recommendations.
- Demand and performance pressures in key services including Children's Services, Adult Social Care and SEND.

What has Somerset Council already done?

The Council has already taken a range of actions to strengthen governance, improve performance and address financial challenges, including:

- Declaring a financial emergency and introducing strengthened financial controls.
- Delivering significant savings and reducing workforce costs through transformation activity.
- Establishing an independent Improvement Advisory Board to provide challenge, support and oversight.
- Commissioning an independent CIPFA review of financial management.
- Developing the Building Better Finance improvement programme.
- Launching the Inspiring Innovation transformation programme.
- Creating additional focused oversight arrangements for Children's Services.

The Council has also recently:

- Responded publicly to the Ofsted inspection of Children's Services, acknowledging areas requiring improvement while setting out actions already underway.
- Approved £5.3 million of investment to strengthen SEND services, reduce delays and improve statutory compliance.
- Similarly, since the Care Quality Commission conducted its assessment of adult social care in September 2025 the Council has made progress across the areas the regulatory body identified

Frequently Asked Questions

Does this mean Government commissioners are coming into Somerset?

No. A Best Value Improvement Notice is not the appointment of commissioners and is not statutory intervention. Somerset Council retains responsibility for local decision-making and service delivery.

Will services continue to be delivered?

Yes. Essential services will continue to be delivered. The Council's focus remains on protecting vital services and supporting vulnerable residents.

Is this purely a financial issue?
No. While financial resilience is a significant factor, the notice also references the pace of transformation and pressures in key services, including Adult Social Care, Children's Services and SEND.

What additional support will Somerset receive?
The Council expects to work closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the Local Government Association and independent advisers as part of the improvement process. The Council welcomes that additional challenge and support.

What should residents take from today's announcement?
The notice is a serious development, but it should not be viewed as a loss of local control. Somerset Council has already acknowledged the challenges it faces, has improvement plans in place and will continue to work openly and constructively with Government and partners to demonstrate progress.