

## **Somerset Councillors' Report to Wells City Council – July 2025**

### **Finance**

Somerset Council's Draft Statement of Accounts for 2024/25 was published at the end of June and can be viewed here:

<https://somersectcc.sharepoint.com/sites/SCCPublic/Council%20Finances/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FSCCPublic%2FCouncil%20Finances%2FSomerset%20Council%20Draft%20Statement%20of%20Accounts%2024%2D25%20%28FINAL%29%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FSCCPublic%2FCouncil%20Finances&p=true&ga=1>

As of 1<sup>st</sup> July, Somerset Council's new Interim Chief Finance Officer and s151 Officer is Clive Heaphey. He has previously served in senior roles in other local authorities facing financial challenges including Middlesbrough, Nottingham and Birmingham.

### **Transformation**

The Executive adopted the Somerset Council Transformation Plan – “Inspiring Innovation: doing things differently, doing things better” at its meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> July.

This document sets out the next phase of Somerset Council's plan to deliver a sustainable council, able to deliver for the people and communities of Somerset.

The plan includes five sections:

- Budget workstream – continuing to make efficiencies in how we work and increase opportunities for generating and raising income.
- Change projects - simplifying processes, removing duplication, streamlining systems.
- Transformation initiatives – more radical, fundamental and long-term than change projects, greater use of digital and AI, local devolution, changes to commissioning.
- Culture and capacity - developing skills across our workforce and creating a more agile, collaborative and use-centred council.
- Future direction – developing a locality-working model, with a focus on early help and intervention.

The full plan can be read here:

<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s55424/Appendix%20A%20-%20Draft%20Transformation%20Plan%20-%20Inspiring%20Innovation.pdf>

The Council is currently working on a range of initiatives outlined within the plan and is also currently undergoing a procurement process to bring in a strategic partner to help deliver further transformation, with a view to delivering a financially sustainable council which can deliver for the people and residents of Somerset.

### **“My Life, My Future” LGC Award**

Somerset Council's Adult Social Care transformation programme, “My Life, My Future” has won the Health and Social Care Award at this year's Local Government Chronicle (LGC) award ceremony.

Somerset Council commissioned external consultant Newton Europe to work with the Council team and partners to reorient services towards reablement. As a result, the programme has

delivered savings of £10m across older people's residential and home care, and the learning disability, supported living, homecare and residential services.

## **Economic Development Strategy**

Somerset Council's Executive adopted an Economic Development and Prosperity Strategy to last until 2045. The strategy outlines three cross-cutting principles (a flourishing economy, a fair economy, and a green economy) and five strategic priorities:

### **1) Distinctive Assets and Opportunities**

*"We will capitalise on our distinctive assets and opportunities for good growth, driving economic transformation in Somerset"*

- Capitalising on Somerset's distinctive assets and opportunities for productivity-led growth
- Improving productivity and sustainability in our bedrock sectors

### **2) People**

*"We will build an aspirational workforce that responds to the current and future needs of our local economy, aligning skills provision and enabling all residents to access opportunities for education, training and employment to achieve their full potential and to thrive"*

- Empowering young people to achieve their full potential and to create a future for themselves within Somerset
- Supporting workforce mobility and lifelong learning
- Supporting in-work progression
- Identifying and addressing current and future skills needs
- Promoting and building upon Somerset's higher-level skills offer
- Removing barriers to participating in work and creating an inclusive workforce
- Creating a healthy and fulfilled workforce

### **3) Business Environment**

*"We will create an environment that stimulates and supports business start-up, scale up, innovation and investment, driving growth, competitiveness and productivity"*

- Fostering business innovation
- Attracting and supporting high-value inward investment
- Supporting, and removing barriers to, business start-up and growth
- Encouraging businesses to decarbonise and to manage resources more efficiently

### **4) Places and Community**

*"We will shape flourishing rural, coastal and urban places and communities which foster economic opportunity and well-being"*

- Growing and retaining local wealth
- Facilitating regeneration and enhancement of Somerset communities
- Supporting the evolution and ongoing vitality of our town and city centres
- Realising the economic potential and benefits of our outstanding natural capital

### **5) Infrastructure**

*“We will support delivery of the resilient infrastructure needed for economic inclusion and growth”*

- Accelerating delivery of strategic employment sites and business accommodation to support growth
- Enabling delivery of the housing needed to support workforce attraction and retention
- Securing the digital infrastructure and connectivity needed to support growth, productivity and inclusion
- Providing the transportation needed to support economic growth and productivity as well as access to opportunity
- Ensuring Somerset has the energy infrastructure, as well as water infrastructure and management, to support economic growth

The Council will now develop detailed implementation plans translating the ambitions and priorities of this strategy into deliverable actions and interventions, with tangible impacts.

The full Economic Development and Prosperity Strategy can be found here:

<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s55420/Appendix%20A%20-%20Somerset%20Economic%20Prosperity%20Strategy%20-%20Draft%2025.06.25.pdf>

### **Local Transport Plan Consultation**

Somerset Council is in the process of updating its Local Transport Plan, a consultation on this commenced on 7<sup>th</sup> July and runs until 7<sup>th</sup> September.

The plan groups Wells together with Glastonbury, Shepton Mallet and Street as “Linked Towns” and highlights that:

*“There are higher than Somerset average serious injury collisions within these areas, but the historic layout and network of narrow streets mean there are more constraints on infrastructure changes. Measures such as reducing vehicle dominance, providing more pedestrian and cycle crossings, lowering speed limits and reducing HGVs could significantly improve both road safety and general quality of life.”*

The strategy for the Linked Settlements includes the following:

#### **1) Sustainable First Choice**

- Deliver a strategic active travel network between the linked towns and surrounding area, focusing on the A39 and Strawberry Line.
- 15-minute bus frequency corridor, improved bus stop facilities (particularly along the A39 corridor) with real time information, cycle parking and Wi-Fi.
- Explore shared transport options and introduce Mobility Hub at key locations.
- Improve quality of the public realm in settlements centres, including crossing upgrades, wayfinding and cycle parking facilities.
- Work with local communities to identify and deliver local priorities for walking and wheeling.
- Introduction of safer speeds to improve road safety, including 20mph towns.
- Reduce the speed and volume of vehicles on the school run and around schools using School Street principals

#### **2) Reduce Environmental Impacts**

- Work with private sector to deliver EV charging at hubs at key locations, as well as EV charging infrastructure for people without off-street parking.
- Reduce dominance of vehicles and through traffic in town centres to improve safety and create cleaner air.
- Support greening and enhance biodiversity in town centres.

### 3) Reliable and Resilient Transport Network

- Support the safeguarding of rail for freight movements, particularly on the mineral lines.
- Maintain active travel networks in and between the linked settlements, focusing on safety, vegetation clearance and explore feasibility of winter treatment.
- Journey time reliability enhancements to support bus services.

Full details of the plan and how to participate in the consultation can be found here:

<https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/active-travel/copy-of-local-transport-plan-2025/>

### **Accessible Wells**

Somerset Council is continuing to work with Accessible Wells and the City Council on implementing the recommendations of Accessible Wells' report into accessibility around the city.

Work is likely to happen in future months on increasing the number of drop curbs, ensuring they are appropriately sighted, and removing unnecessary barriers.

Wells City Council needs to resurrect its proposal to expand the city's 20pmh limit/zone as agreed by the city council in July 2023.

### **Support for the community in Minehead and West Somerset**

Members will be aware of the tragic incident which happened on Exmoor on 17<sup>th</sup> July involving a coach taking children to Minehead Middle School. Somerset Council is working closely with partners in response.

Anyone who wishes to offer financial support to the community, to help the children and everyone affected can donate to Somerset Community Foundation's Together for West Somerset appeal which will support:

- Individuals experiencing psychological distress, hardship, injury as a result
- Children and staff from Minehead Middle School who are affected by the events
- Individuals in the wider community affected by the events

A link to the appeal can be found here:

<https://www.somersetcf.org.uk/giving/collective-giving-funds/together-for-west-somerset-appe/>

### **Wells and Mendip Hills LCN**

The AGM of the LCN took place on 17<sup>th</sup> June at 7pm at Gurney Slade Memorial Hall. The current Chair of the LCN, Cllr Tony Robbins, did not stand for re-election. Wells City Councillor Denise Denis, was elected as Chair of the LCN 2025-26. With the Chair not being a Somerset

Councillor, it is necessary for the Vice-Chair to be one, Cllr Ros Wyke (Mendip West) was chosen as Vice-Chair.

The Active Travel and Highways working groups continue to meet regularly. The Flooding Working Group has not met recently, though it may be restarted.

#### **Contacting Somerset Council**

The general enquiries number for Somerset Council is: **0300 123 2224**, there's also a general enquiries email address: [generalenquiries@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:generalenquiries@somerset.gov.uk)

**Theo Butt Philip and Tessa Munt MP**

**Somerset Councillors for Wells**

**24<sup>th</sup> June 2025**