

Somerset Councillors' Report to Wells City Council – September 2025

Transformation

The Executive has agreed to appoint Newton Consulting Ltd to act as strategic partner. The programme is the key next step of the Council's response to its financial emergency, aiming to achieve savings while maintaining high-quality public services for Somerset residents.

Newton was the partner used by Somerset Council to help develop its award-winning My Life, My Future programme (as reported on in July),

The decision follows a comprehensive and transparent procurement process to identify a partner with the expertise, capacity, and experience to co-design and deliver change initiatives across the organisation.

Initial work will focus on:

1) Review of Change Projects

The partner will work with us to review the current change projects to make sure each project has clear outcomes (financial and non-financial), a realistic timeframe, and the right level of resources. They will also review performance and make suggestions for how we can speed up delivery, including providing extra resources if needed.

2) Short-Term Tactical Solutions

The partner will work with us to find smart, quick fixes that can help the Council work faster, save money, or solve problems right away. These ideas will still need to fit with the Council's bigger plans and not cause issues later.

3) Identification of Transformation Opportunities

The partner will work with us to analyse data - such as demand for services, expenditure, workforce allocation, and service performance. They'll use this to spot areas that are expensive or not working well and help to scope out and understand where there are new ways to improve or save money. These ideas can help shape future budgets and plans.

4) Culture Change

The partner will work with us to help everyone at the Council - from managers to councillors - learn new ways of thinking and working that support change. This includes leadership training, helping staff learn how to improve services on an ongoing basis, and encouraging a workplace where people share ideas, learn from each other, and feel trusted, empowered and confident to make continuous improvements.

Over the course of the Inspiring Innovation Transformation Programme, we expect to see a return on investment of £2.5 - £3 per £1 spent.

Changes on Somerset Council

Very sadly, Cllr Nick Cottle, Somerset Councillor for Glastonbury (Liberal Democrat) died in August. In September, Cllr Christine Lawrence, Somerset Councillor for Dunster (Conservative) retired from Somerset Council.

By-elections will take place in both Glastonbury and Dunster on 23rd October.

Cllr Nick Cottle, was Chair of the Area East Planning Committee. At the Full Council meeting today, Cllr Ros Wyke (Liberal Democrat – Mendip West) was appointed as the new Chair of the Area East Planning Committee, Cllr Tony Robbins (Liberal Democrat – Mendip Hills) was appointed as Vice Chair.

Local Transport Plan

As reported in July, Somerset Council is currently consulting on a new Local Transport Plan, this consultation closes on 28th September. 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>

Parking

Somerset Council is currently consulting on introduction of Sunday parking charges in those Somerset Council car parks which charge Monday-Saturday, but not Sunday (or which charge different fees on Sundays).

This will impact car parks in Bridgwater, Highbridge, Chard, Crewkerne, Ilminster, Yeovil, Frome, Shepton Mallet, Taunton and Wellington.

The consultation concludes on 20th October and can be accessed here:

<https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/parking/copy-of-consultation/>

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Somerset Council is also currently consulting on the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), developed in partnership with the Local Nature Partnership, this consultation runs until 31st October and can be seen here:

<https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/climate-and-environment/local-nature-recovery-strategy/>

Planning Service

As members are aware Somerset Council's Planning Service is under significant pressure. To help address the service's backlog and reduce delay, a series of temporary measures were introduced from 28th July for an initial 12 week period, these include:

- Asking our customers, members and applicants not to chase for updates to allow the time created to focus is on making decisions. Application progress can be tracked online.
- Planning officers reducing attendance at events or meetings that don't support the objective of reducing the backlog.
- Only accepting amendments to applications in limited circumstances
- Only undertaking essential site visits
- With a high volume of applications failing validation, applicants will only be given one chance post submission to provide the required information within 14 days. Full pre-application guidance remains available on our website and this needs to be followed.
- Strict adherence to the call-in criteria (when applications are brought in for committee discussion) as set out in our constitution.

- A new triage approach being introduced when applications are first received to speed up decision making.
- All planning teams having “all in” office-based days to support the above.

Initial indications are that these measures have helped to reduce the backlog, although it remains higher than is desirable. We will be a position to report further at the November meeting.

Licensing

On Wednesday, 24th September the Licensing sub Committee considered an application for a license to sell alcohol 24 hours a day (subject to conditions agreed with the police). This does not mean that the shop will now be able to sell alcohol 24 hours a day.

There remains a planning condition on the site that the shop may only be open between the hours 7am-10pm, in order for the shop to be allowed to open 24 hours a day, a planning application would be required. The granting of the license does not indicate that a planning application for 24 hour opening would be successful.

Wells and Mendip Hills LCN

The next meeting of the LCN will take place next Tuesday, 7th September at 7pm at Godney Village Hall. Some Items on the agenda are:

- The purpose and scope of the Wells and Rural LCN
- Knowledge of enforcement powers by statutory organisations
- Working groups and LCN contacts
- Successes and future possibilities

All are welcome to attend.

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

Theo Butt Philip and Tessa Munt MP
Somerset Councillors for Wells
25th September 2025