

Councillor Update

*From your
Unitary Councillors
Andy Sully and Mike Rigby*



Somerset
Council

A358 works co-ordinated to minimise disruption



Major works are taking place on the A358 between Norton Fitzwarren & Staplegrove, local residents and businesses will understandably be concerned about the disruption this could cause. Somerset Council, Bloor Homes and the utility companies are working together to co-ordinate the works and, wherever possible, keep the impact on the local community to an absolute minimum.

Wales and West Utilities and National Grid are replacing ageing gas and electricity infrastructure along Staplegrove Road and Minehead Road. The works started on 20 July and are expected to continue through to October. The timing has been planned so that the most disruptive work takes place during the school summer holidays, when traffic levels are generally lower.

Bloor Homes and its contractors are also continuing highway improvements associated with the new development, including works around the Silk Mills junction. Carrying out these works alongside the utility upgrades should help avoid the roads being dug up and traffic restrictions being introduced again at a later date.

However, there will inevitably be disruption, particularly for residents, local businesses and those travelling in and out of north Taunton. A one-way system is operating for traffic travelling into Taunton on the A358, with outbound traffic diverted via Silk Mills. It is important that the works are properly managed, clearly communicated and completed as quickly as possible.

The priority now must be to ensure that the promised co-ordination delivers the minimum possible disruption to the local community

Best Value Notice issued to Somerset Council

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government issued Somerset Council with a Best Value Improvement Notice on 15 July 2026, formally notifying the Council of Government concerns about its capacity to comply with the Best Value Duty.

It follows the May 2026 CIPFA review, which found the Council's financial position fragile, and cites continued reliance on Exceptional Financial Support, low reserves, and demand pressures in Children's Services, Adult Social Care and SEND. The Council is expected to engage with the Department at least quarterly on progress; the notice will be reviewed by 15 January 2027.

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/best-value-notice-issued-to-somerset-council/>

Somerset explores new powers to improve bus services



Somerset Council has secured funding from the Department for Transport to investigate whether bus franchising could help deliver a better bus service for people across Somerset.

For too many residents, particularly in rural communities, bus services can be unreliable, infrequent or simply unavailable when they are needed. Poor connections can make it harder for people to get to work, attend appointments, access education and shops, and stay connected with their communities.

Mike Rigby says “Bus franchising could give Somerset Council much greater control over how the network operates. Rather than simply working with private operators through the current enhanced partnership, the Council could set routes, timetables, fares and service standards, with operators running services under contracts agreed with the Council”.

The new Government funding will allow the Council to undertake a proper, evidence-based assessment of whether franchising would work for Somerset. It is important that this looks beyond the main towns and considers the needs of rural communities, older residents, young people and local businesses.

No decision has yet been made on whether to introduce franchising. But this assessment is an important opportunity to look seriously at how we can put passengers first, reduce gaps in the network and build a bus service that people can rely on.

Somerset invests £5.3m to improve SEND support



Somerset Council's Executive has approved a one-off investment of £5.331 million over two years to strengthen support for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Growing demand has put significant pressure on SEND services. At the end of May 2026, 6,578 children and young people in Somerset had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The proportion of the school population with an EHCP has more than doubled, from 2.6% in 2019/20 to 5.8% in 2025/26.

The investment will increase capacity, help reduce backlogs and improve the Council's ability to meet statutory timescales. It will also support changes to reduce duplication and make better use of resources.

Additional Learning Mentors will support young people with SEND through the Preparation for Adulthood programme, particularly those at risk of becoming, or already, not in education, employment or training.

This is welcome investment, but families need to see it translate into faster decisions, better communication and practical support. The Council must use this opportunity to tackle current pressures while developing a SEND service that meets the needs of Somerset families in the longer term.



*Best wishes to you all,
Andy and Mike*

Andy: andy.sully@somerset.gov.uk

Mike: mike.rigby@somerset.gov.uk