



From Your Unitary Councillors
Andy Sully & Mike Rigby

Good news for Somerset Council's finances

There is some genuinely good news about Somerset Council's finances and, importantly, it comes from the council's independent auditors, **Grant Thornton**.

Grant Thornton has placed Somerset Council in **Category A for accounts assurance recovery**. That is the highest category and recognises the significant progress the council has made in getting its accounts and financial systems back on track.



But this matters because accurate, properly audited accounts are fundamental to making sure residents can have confidence in how their money is being managed.

Somerset Council has had a difficult few years. The creation of the new unitary council brought together the finances and systems of the former district councils and Somerset County Council. At the same time, there was a national backlog in local government audits.

Since then, however, there has been a huge amount of work behind the scenes.

The council has completed **11 sets of accounts in just 18 months**, helping to clear the backlog and provide auditors with the information they need. Grant Thornton now believes Somerset is on a credible path towards achieving a **fully unqualified audit opinion by 2027/28**.

That is a significant improvement.

Of course, we shouldn't pretend that everything is suddenly fixed. Somerset Council continues to face very substantial financial pressures, and there is still considerable work to do to improve financial management, balance future budgets and make sure residents receive good value for money.

The council is also continuing to work through the Government's Best Value intervention and the recommendations arising from external reviews.

But those challenges shouldn't detract from the progress that has been made.

As councillors, we should always be prepared to ask difficult questions and scrutinise how taxpayers' money is spent. That is our job.

But when independent auditors recognise real progress, I think it is only fair that we acknowledge that too.

Category A is not the finish line — but it is a very encouraging step in the right direction.

Wessex leaders speak with one voice on devolution

There's an important conversation taking place about the future of local government, with the leaders of Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire and Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole joining together to make the case for a **Wessex devolution deal**.



The four councils have issued a joint statement saying they believe the area has a strong case for greater powers and funding to be transferred from Westminster to the South West.

The idea is about giving local leaders more control over decisions that affect our communities — from transport and infrastructure to skills, housing and economic development — rather than having decisions made hundreds of miles away.

For Somerset, this could be a real opportunity to make sure investment reflects the needs of our towns and rural communities.

There are still plenty of details to be worked through, but having the four areas speaking together gives Wessex a much stronger voice.

It's certainly a debate worth watching.

Somerset Can: making sure local people get the jobs

Somerset is seeing some of the biggest investment and employment opportunities in generations, with major projects such as **Hinkley Point C, Gravity and Leonardo** creating thousands of jobs and bringing new businesses into the county.



But there is an important question: **how do we make sure local people get their fair share of those opportunities?**

That is the thinking behind **Somerset Can**, a four-year programme designed to help local people gain the skills, experience and confidence they need to benefit from the jobs being created right here in Somerset.

Whether it is engineering, construction, advanced manufacturing, digital skills or the many other jobs being created around these major investments, the aim is simple **give Somerset residents the best possible chance of getting through the door.**

We need to make sure our young people don't feel they have to leave Somerset to build a successful career.

Somerset Can is about making that happen.

With Hinkley Point C, Gravity and Leonardo all helping to transform our economy, this four-year programme is about making sure **local people are ready to take advantage of the opportunities on their doorstep.**

That has to be good news for Somerset.

Best wishes to you all.

Andy andrewpsully@gmail.com

Mike mike@mikerigby.org

Andy & Mike

