

## STORM BERT

Affected communities right across the county with dozens of roads flooded and over 200 trees downed.

Teams from the Council's contractor Kier dealt with 644 reports of incidents on the roads across Somerset during and after Storm Bert. These included Flooding on the A37 near Ilchester, the A36 in Beckington was blocked by fallen power cables and roads across the Levels were also under water.

By Monday evening (25th November) around 300 incidents had been dealt with and crews were continuing to work to clear roads of trees and flood water.

## SOMERSET BY ELECTION RESULTS

The result of the by election held on 21 November 2024 for the vacant seat in the 2-seat Blackmoor Vale division on Somerset Council is as follows: (only included results top 2)

Hayward Burt (Conservative) – 1,120 (elected); Howard Ellard (Liberal Democrat) – 714; The turnout was 26.07% and there were 4 rejected ballot papers.

The result of the by election held on 21 November 2024 for the vacant seat in the 2-seat Rowbarton and Staplegrove division Somerset Council is as follows:

Nick O'Donnell (Liberal Democrat) – 817 (elected); Pete Prior-Sankey (Conservative) – 396; The turnout was 18.32% and 2 ballot papers were rejected.

## PROPOSED CHANGES TO COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

Somerset Council is bringing forward proposals which protect its 100% Council Tax discount for working age residents on the lowest incomes, while also making savings to help balance its budget for next year.

The initial changes proposed would have saved the council around £12.1m a year. However, many of these proposals, such as those which protect carers and disabled residents, were removed by the council's Executive in July this year.

A public consultation was then held to seek views on changes which could have saved up to £6m by reducing the level of discounts on offer. Following feedback from the public and the council's Scrutiny process, the revised proposals now being considered would help the council save £3.9m a year. These include:

- \* Protecting the 100% discount offered to working age adults on the very lowest incomes, while reducing the other discount bands to 50%, 25% and 10%.
- \* Continuing the current system of exempting certain income, such as that from disability benefits, carers allowance and child benefit, as well as the first £25 of employment income from the income calculations.
- \* Retaining the policy of providing a discount to care leavers, foster carers and special guardians (but funding it from the Exceptional Hardship scheme).
- \* Reducing the discount by £10 per week for each non-dependent adult living in a property.
- \* Limiting the discount available to the maximum available for a band D property.
- \* Reducing the period of backdating claims to 1 calendar month.

## SLINKY BUS

People living in Somerset are being reminded they have access to a demand responsive transport service known as Slinky.

Demand responsive transport is a bookable, flexible service which residents can use if there is no public transport alternative. All users need to do is register online to start using the Slinky bus to get to the shops, to visit friends and family, get to college or social clubs, or access medical appointments.

You can also call: \* 01823 331266 for Sedgemoor, Taunton and Wellington area

The service is available to anyone in Somerset who does not have access to a regular bus service, which is especially helpful to those in more rural locations.

Previously having your own transport precluded you from using the service but from 1 September, that has changed – car owners can use Slinky.

## SOMERSET COUNCIL SEEKS PUBLIC OPINION ON THE FUTURE OF LOCAL PHARMACY SERVICES

Somerset Council is conducting a Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) consultation for the public to share their thoughts and contribute to the

Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment statutory report produced by the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board.

The PNA is a comprehensive assessment of the current and future pharmaceutical needs of the local population and is used to review local community pharmaceutical services and evaluate whether they adequately meet the county's needs.

NHS commissioners use the results of the PNA to work out if any changes might be needed in local pharmacy services.

The Council is encouraging the people of Somerset to share their thoughts and experiences by completing the online survey before 1 January 2025. To take part, visit: the Council's Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment 2024 consultation page

## COUNCIL TO PRESS FOR ALTERNATIVES AFTER NEW GOVERNMENTS DISAPPOINTING DECISION TO DROP THE A358 DUELLING

A decision by THE Labour Government to drop a major scheme to dual one of Somerset's key transport arteries is a 'big disappointment' for the county but 'not the end of the road'.

The decision to shelve a £328 million National Highways upgrade of the A358 between Ilminster and Junction 25 of the M5 at Taunton came on 30 October as the Chancellor Rachel Reeves announced a series of measures to balance the Government's books which included cancelling a number of rail and road infrastructure projects.

The Council will lobby hard for Government support and funding to deliver smaller scale improvements on the route.

A scheme to build a tunnel on a section of the A303 under Stonehenge was shelved in the summer.

## HAVE YOUR SAY ON A NEW POLITICAL MAP FOR SOMERSET COUNCIL.

The Boundary Commission has launched a consultation on new division boundaries in Somerset - <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/somerset>

A public consultation has been launched to help shape new council divisions for Somerset Council. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England wants

to hear people's views on where they live, to help make sure that the new divisions reflect the size and shape of local communities.

An electoral review is being carried out to make sure that each local councillor represents about the same number of electors, and that the divisions they represent reflect community identities.

The Local Government Boundary Commission has decided that the number of councillors in Somerset Council should be 96. This is a change from the current council, which has 110 members.

This stage of the consultation last for 10 weeks and closes on 20 January

Boundary Commission Timetable:-

22 October 2024 - 20 January 2025 carry out an initial public consultation with communities

3 June 2025 - 11 August 2025 carry out a public consultation on our proposals

2 December 2025 publish our recommendations

TBC ask Parliament to approve our recommendations

2027 New arrangements apply to local elections