

Briefing Sheet for Parish Councils July 2025

Internal Audit Annual Opinion: Somerset Council has received a "Limited Assurance" rating for the second consecutive year, signalling that key risks and controls still require improvement. The Internal Audit Annual Opinion report notes progress during 2024/25, but not enough to change the overall rating. Auditors remain concerned about financial sustainability, governance, and oversight of major projects. Weaknesses were identified in procurement, budget monitoring, and capital delivery.

Somerset Council Transformation Plan: Somerset Council has published its *Inspiring Innovation* plan - the second phase of its transformation programme - following £34m in staff redundancies delivered under Phase 1. This new plan is intended to plug a projected £101m budget gap in 2026/27, rising to £190m by 2029/30. The delivery of Phase 2 will require investment in a Strategic Transformation Partner (STP) to provide capacity and capability for change.

Somerset Parking Proposals: Somerset Council has confirmed that new Sunday parking charges remain scheduled for introduction this autumn, despite delays in progressing its wider parking changes. The Executive admitted that staffing shortages had stalled delivery but said a public consultation on Sunday charging is expected "by the end of summer." No timeline has yet been set for new on-street or free car park charges. An economic impact assessment has been commissioned, though details remain unclear.

Boundary Review Draft Proposals Published: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England has published draft recommendations for Somerset Council's new electoral divisions. The proposals reduce the number of Somerset councillors from 110 to 96, creating 96 single-member divisions across the county. All current boundaries would be redrawn. A public consultation on the draft recommendations runs until 11 August 2025. Final proposals are due in December, with changes expected to take effect at the May 2027 elections. Councillors and residents are encouraged to submit views on the proposed boundaries. www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/somerset

Virtual Reality Comes to Somerset Libraries: Somerset Libraries are hosting free virtual reality sessions across Bridgwater, Yeovil, and Chard as part of their *Digital Spaces* programme. The tour began in Taunton on Saturday 28 June and continues with immersive experiences including WWII flights, orchestral performances, and Wallace and Gromit adventures. Upcoming sessions include:

- Bridgwater Library: Thurs 3 July (10am–3pm) & Fri 4 July (10am–1pm)
- Yeovil Library: Sat 5 July (10am–1pm) & Mon 7 July (10am–3pm)
- Chard Library: Tues 8, Thurs 10 & Fri 11 July (all 10am–3pm)

No booking required. Under 12s need signed consent.

West Somerset House Reopens: West Somerset House in Williton has reopened following refurbishment and is now home to Williton Library, the Registration Office, a Customer Access Point, and Health Visitors. The building had been closed since December and reopened with the new services in place on 25 June. The updated facility brings multiple services under one roof. The new Customer Access Point replaces the former reception, with staff on hand to assist and a Video Assistance Link available for more complex enquiries.

Safeguarding Review Following Resident's Death: A safeguarding adults review has been published following the death of a Somerset resident, "Hazel," who died in 2019 after choking on food not prepared in line with her care plan. The Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board (SSAB) has issued a series of recommendations to improve how care risks are recorded, shared, and managed - particularly in relation to choking risks, autism-specific care, agency staff training, and inter-agency coordination. The review highlights the need for improved legal literacy, better oversight of provider performance, and consistent dysphagia training. Findings will be shared with all relevant health and care providers across Somerset. For more information about the SSAB and a copy of the report, visit www.somersetsafeguardingadults.org.uk

Youth Parliament Nominations Now Open: Nominations are now open for the 2025 Youth Parliament elections in Somerset. Young people aged 11–17 who live or study in the county can stand for election to become a Member of Youth Parliament (MYP), representing Somerset at a national level. Three MYPs will be elected to lead campaigns and work with local organisations to raise young people's voices. The deadline for nominations is Monday 3 November 2025, with elections taking place in December. More information, including how to stand or join the Youth Parliament Advisory Group, is available at: www.somersetyouthparliament.org.uk/elections