

SOMERSET COUNCIL

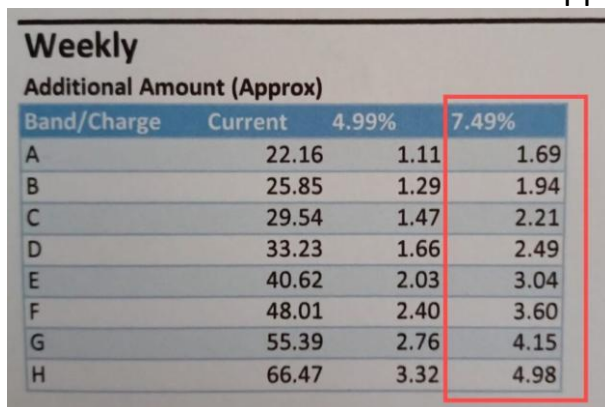
March 2025

Council Tax

Somerset Council Leader Bill Revans has reiterated calls for reform of local government funding by the Government, as councillors voted on a balanced budget for the 2025-26 fiscal year during the Full Council meeting on March 5th.

As part of the budget proposal, the Government has authorised Somerset Council to increase Council Tax by 2.5% above the usual 5% cap, acknowledging the Council's challenging situation. Not supporting the budget could have resulted in a section 114 notice for Somerset Council, leading to a double-digit Council Tax rise, a sell-off of more assets, halting essential capital projects, and cuts to frontline services. In this scenario, Government commissioners would run the Council, leaving local people with very little say on decisions affecting their lives.

Somerset's financial difficulties are part of a national problem. One in four councils in England say they are likely to apply for emergency government bailout agreements to stave off bankruptcy in the next two financial years (2025/26 and 2026/27), according to a stark survey by the Local Government Association. Somerset's Council Tax levels are below the national average. Somerset's Council Tax remains lower than that of Wiltshire, Dorset, and Cornwall. Following a resident consultation, 52% of respondents supported an increase in Council Tax to match the national average to protect essential services. Around 66% of Council Tax revenue is allocated to Social Care and Children's Services, sectors experiencing increasing demand and rising costs. Acknowledging the financial strain many residents face due to rising inflation and utility costs, Somerset Council chose to maintain support for the Council Tax assistance



Weekly			
Additional Amount (Approx)			
Band/Charge	Current	4.99%	7.49%
A	22.16	1.11	1.69
B	25.85	1.29	1.94
C	29.54	1.47	2.21
D	33.23	1.66	2.49
E	40.62	2.03	3.04
F	48.01	2.40	3.60
G	55.39	2.76	4.15
H	66.47	3.32	4.98

scheme.

T

The above graphic from the budget documents outlines potential weekly increases in Council Tax with a 7.5% increase.

If you need help, please see below:

- Apply for a reduction in your Council Tax bill here
<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/benefits-and-payments/council-tax-reduction/>
- Apply to the Council's Hardship Fund here: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/health-safety-and-wellbeing/financial-hardship-support/>

Secondary School Placements

In March children across Somerset found out which secondary school they would be attending from September 2025. This year, the Council received 4,743 secondary school applications compared to 4,772 in 2024. In total, 92.43% (4,384) of children received a place at their first preference school, with 96.96% (4,599) offered one of their top three choices. From the applications received this year, figures show:

1st preference met – 4,384 (92.43%)

2nd preference met – 173 (3.64%)

3rd preference met – 42 (0.88%)

There were initially issues for some children in the catchment of the Castle School not being offered places there but due to work between the school and Somerset Council funding has been found to support a “bulge form “for that year. This is due to increasing numbers of children in the catchment area. Work is taking place to look at forecasts for next years’ intake.

My Life, My Future

An innovative Adult Social Care transformation programme will save Somerset Council over £10 million by the end of March 2025 while also improving outcomes for residents. At their meeting on 26 February, the Council's Executive Councillors received an update on the 'My Life, My Future' programme which is also projecting additional recurring savings of over £3 million in 2025/26.

Like all councils, Somerset Council is under pressure financially due to a combination of increasing demand and costs, particularly for vital services looking after older people and adults with disabilities. In 2023, the Council began working with Newton on the 'My Life, My Future' programme, which aimed to support people with lived experience and their carers to live healthier and more independent lives. This included using new ways of

working to support people to regain skills and confidence, helping them to stay at home and supporting people to learn new skills and to do more things for themselves. 'My Life, My Future' has delivered significant operational improvements, and latest reports state the Council has delivered over £10 million in recurring savings. Alongside the benefits to Somerset Council, there has also been a positive impact for the NHS Somerset Integrated Care Board (ICB), by supporting more people to go home after a stay in hospital.

Due to its success in Somerset, 'My Life, My Future' has been shortlisted for the prestigious Local Government Chronicle (LGC) award for 'Health and Care' for its achievements, with the award ceremony set to take place in June of this year.

Leader joins local government leaders at Westminster

Somerset Council Leader [Bill Revans](#) joined local government leaders from across the country on Tuesday 11 March at Parliament to put the case for a better deal for councils nationwide.

He represented Somerset at the Housing Communities and Local Government Committee at Westminster that is considering whether the model is fit for purpose as the Government seeks to reform local government funding.

Cllr Revans told the committee that funding from central government had almost halved in recent years – down by 40% – and that it was not realistic to expect Council Tax income to pay for essential services such as social care for adults and children.

He told MPs:

“We’ve almost slow walked into a situation where Council Tax is funding social care – Council Tax based on 1991 property values. We are funding social care from a property tax of 1991. Some 66% of our budget goes to fund social care. What we are saying is Council Tax is the wrong way to do it. That’s my message”

With other council leaders he pressed the case for recognising the increased costs faced by rural areas such as Somerset where basic services, such as transport and waste collection, were more expensive because of the geography.

Somerset applied for – and was successful – in [gaining Exceptional Financial Support \(EFS\)](#) measures offered by the Government, which includes increasing Council Tax by 7.49% – above the referendum limit of 4.99% – and a capitalisation direction of £43m.

Capitalisation direction is a form of one-off assistance which allows the Council to finance everyday revenue costs by selling assets or borrow money.

Cllr Revans said:

“But 31 councils applying for **EFS** no longer makes it exceptional. It’s welcome because we can manage our own affairs but incredibly difficult because our residents are having to pay more while seeing less services.

He added that while Somerset’s reorganisation to a unitary council had produced significant savings, these were not enough to keep pace with demands:

The cost pressures of social care are rising at a rate faster than our ability to make savings. It’s like running up a down escalator. We are making these savings but cannot do it fast enough to meet the demands”.

The Committee heard from council leaders in Derbyshire, London, and the Chair of Local Government Association Economy and Resources Board. It provides an avenue for MPs to hear evidence before a report is prepare

Council unveils its latest cycling and walking blueprints for towns in Somerset

Somerset County has published major new plans for safe cycling and walking routes in the county’s towns to help create greener, healthier and more active streets.

The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) for Wellington, Chard, Burnham and Highbridge were published this week.

The Council has already created and published plans for Yeovil, Taunton, Bridgwater and Frome.

The **LCWIPs** are focused, 10-year plans for developing a cycle and walking network within each local area.

The aim is to secure funding over the next decade for significant new safe routes for cyclists and pedestrians across all Somerset’s towns.

You can access and comment on the plans via the Council’s [Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans](#) page.

These are evolving plans which will continue to develop over time, with the views and suggestions from the public central to the process.

Having a plan in place is key to unlocking Government funding to build the infrastructure and enable people in Somerset to choose to walk or cycle to work, school, the shops or for other short trips for the benefit of people's health and the environment.

Expanding the active travel network is an essential part of Somerset Council's strategy for developing sustainable transport. The Council has worked closely with Local Community Networks, cycling charities and local cycling groups to develop the plans.

Retrofit Academy event to recruit new retrofitters in Somerset

Somerset Council is excited to announce a special event to address the growing need for Retrofit Coordinators and installers in the Southwest.

Partnering with [Retrofit Academy](#) and [Bridgwater and Taunton College](#), a range of Retrofit courses are being launched in September to offer training that could lead to rewarding and exciting careers in the rapidly expanding sustainable building sector.

The free event, on **Thursday, 20 March at 5pm** at the college's [Taunton Campus Conference Centre](#) is a great opportunity for prospective students to find out more. It is also a chance for construction industry professionals to find out about upskilling their retrofit skills. No need to book, just drop in between 5 and 7pm.

Meet Somerset Council's retrofit team, along with sustainable energy experts, local installers and coordinators, and representatives from Bridgwater and Taunton College.

Retrofitting involves upgrading existing structures to improve their energy efficiency, comfort, and sustainability. This can involve adding insulation, installing energy-efficient windows and doors, upgrading heating and cooling systems, and incorporating renewable energy sources like solar panels. The goal is to reduce energy consumption, lower carbon emissions, and create healthier living environments.

To meet the government's Net Zero ambition of 2050, there is a need for more Retrofit Coordinators. The role of the Retrofit Coordinator is to ensure low carbon technology and energy efficient measures are installed and operating in compliance with [PAS 2035](#), a specification introduced by the [British Standards Institution \(BSI\)](#), that details the necessary standards for all future domestic retrofit projects.

To meet this challenge, the Retrofit Academy has set itself a target to certify 50,000 coordinators by 2030. The Council has partnered with the Retrofit Academy and Bridgwater and Taunton College to provide a local offer.

Join us to see how you can benefit communities and the planet while advancing your career.

[Councillor Graham Oakes](#), Somerset Council's Lead Member for Public Health, Environment and Climate Change said:

We are thrilled to support the Retrofit Academy Event at Bridgwater and Taunton College. This initiative is a significant step towards building a more sustainable future for our community.

By training new people for retrofit careers, we are not only preparing students for valuable job opportunities but also ensuring that our buildings are energy-efficient and environmentally friendly.

I encourage everyone with an interest in construction, climate, and sustainability to go along to this event and find out more.

For further details about the event, email retrofit@somerset.gov.uk.

Joint 'Smokefree Somerset' campaign launched on national No Smoking Day

As part of [National No Smoking Day](#) on Wednesday, 12 March, a 5-year 'Smokefree Somerset' campaign was launched by [NHS Somerset](#) and the Council's Public Health Team to meet the ambitious government target of reducing the number of people smoking to only 5% by 2030.

In Somerset, this equates to helping 45,000 smokers to quit by 2030.

Kate Anderson from Somerset Council's Public Health team said:

Whether you're thinking about quitting, ready to quit, or need help staying smoke free, we've got tips and support to help you at every stage. Learn how to get through the tough times, stay focused, and quit for good.

In Somerset, we're focusing on **"What is Your Why?"** to inspire Somerset residents to quit smoking by encouraging smokers to identify their personal reasons for quitting.

This approach shifts the focus from health warnings to personal motivation, making quitting feel more achievable and relevant.

With a target of around 45,000 needing to quit smoking in the county, we need to have a better understanding of not only what motivates people to quit smoking but also what motivates them to start and how best to communicate with them.

The Smokefree Somerset campaign targets those in high-risk groups such as pregnant women, individuals with mental health issues, adults experiencing homelessness and ethnic minority communities where smoking rates are higher or pose specific health concerns.

Why does it matter?

Smoking is the leading changeable lifestyle habit, which impacts both the length and quality of life. Smokers are 35% more likely to see their GP and 36% more likely to be admitted to hospital compared to non-smokers, highlighting the substantial burden smoking places on the healthcare system.

There are immediate benefits, when individuals quit smoking, including reduced hospital readmissions, shorter hospital stays, and fewer visits to A&E departments.

Smoking is also an expensive habit. On average, a smoker spends £2,488 annually on tobacco products. Estimates suggest that every cigarette takes 11 minutes off a person's life. Tobacco is the only legal product that, when used as intended, kills a significant number of its users.

Key smoking statistics

- 12.6% of Somerset's population smokes – that's around 60,000 people
- 700 people die due to smoking each year with 1,700 being out of work due to ill health from smoking
- 21% of people in Somerset's Core 20 (most disadvantaged) areas smoke compared to 11% in non-Core areas
- An estimated 26,100 children live in smoking households in Somerset
- Children are 3 times more likely to start smoking if their loved ones around them do
- An estimated 1,200 children start smoking each year

Smoking costs Somerset £190 million a year – through the impact on:

- Productivity – £152m
- Social care – £13.6m
- Health – £20.4m
- Fires – £ 3.58m

Thinking of giving up?

1. Visit the Council's [Smokefree Somerset](#) website
2. Find out what made ex-smokers in Somerset quit by watching [Steve's Story](#) NHS Somerset's YouTube channel
3. Watch [Carl's Smokefree Story](#) on the Council's YouTube channel
4. Download the free NHS [Quit Smoking app](#)

Do you have experience with smoking, are you currently on your journey to quitting, or successfully quit in the past, the Council would love for you to be part of the campaign. Your stories can inspire and support others on their path to a smoke-free life.

Share your journey via the Council's [online questionnaire](#). Your story could motivate someone else to take the first step towards quitting.