

Somerset Voice

The Official Magazine of
Somerset Chamber of Commerce

**August /
September
2026**

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FUTURE TO DEVELOPERS
AND INDUSTRY EXPERTS**



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Front page: Weston College student Izzy Tanner learning new skills at the college's construction centre. Photo: Weston College

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FIRST WORD



As we look ahead, Somerset's business community continues to demonstrate the ambition, resilience and innovation that make our county such a great place to live, work and invest.

Nationally, Andy Burnham and his team are setting out their priorities for growth and dealing with the cost of living. At Somerset Chamber, we will continue to be a strong and independent voice for business, working with decision makers to ensure the needs of employers are heard. Businesses need confidence, support and the right conditions to thrive, and we will keep championing policies that help firms grow, invest and create opportunities across Somerset.

Supporting growth also means investing in people. That is why we are proud to have helped shape the new Somerset Local Skills Improvement Plan for 2026. Developed with employers, education providers and local partners, it identifies the skills needed to support key sectors. By aligning training with real workforce demand, we can help local people access rewarding careers while enabling businesses to succeed.

We are also celebrating success. This year sees the launch of the Somerset Business Awards 2027, recognising the outstanding achievements of organisations across the county, alongside the new Somerset Future 30 Awards, which will shine a spotlight on the next generation of young business leaders. You'll find more information elsewhere in this magazine.

Finally, I am delighted to welcome Teapot Creative as Somerset Chamber's latest Business Partner. As a long-standing member and award-winning B Corp agency, Teapot shares our commitment to growth, skills, sustainability and creating positive impact across Somerset.

Thank you for your continued support of Somerset Chamber. Together, we are building a stronger future for Somerset business.

David Crew

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Growing Somerset, Strengthening the South West

Somerset's economy continues to evolve. From innovative start-ups and growing SMEs to established employers and family-owned businesses, the county is attracting investment, creating new opportunities and playing an increasingly important role in the South West's economic success.

As one of the region's leading law firms, Stephens Scown is continuing to strengthen its presence in Somerset to support that growth. The firm's investment reflects both the opportunities it sees across the county and its commitment to helping businesses and communities thrive.

That commitment extends beyond legal advice. Stephens Scown is a key sponsor for Insider Media's Opportunity Great South West Breakfast, bringing together business leaders, policymakers and organisations from across the region to discuss the issues shaping future prosperity, including investment, infrastructure, skills and innovation.

Supporting discussions that help drive regional growth is a natural fit for Stephens Scown. The firm works alongside businesses at every stage of their journey, helping them navigate opportunities, manage risk and plan for the future.

From corporate transactions and commercial property matters to employment issues, dispute resolution and succession planning, the firm supports organisations operating across a wide range of sectors.

As Somerset continues to attract investment and entrepreneurial talent, businesses increasingly want advisers who understand both the local landscape and the wider economic forces influencing growth.

Richard Baker, Managing Partner at Stephens Scown, said:

"Somerset is home to a vibrant and diverse business community, and we're proud to support organisations of all sizes as they grow, innovate and adapt. We see first-hand the ambition that exists across the county and the important contribution local businesses make to the wider South West economy."

"As we continue to strengthen our presence in Somerset, our focus is not simply on growing as a firm, but on helping our clients and communities thrive. What makes Stephens Scown different is that our values shape every decision we make. As an employee-owned and B Corp Certified™ business, we're committed to building long-term relationships, delivering an exceptional client experience and contributing positively to the places where we work. Supporting initiatives such as the Opportunity Great South West Breakfast is part of that commitment, bringing together the people and organisations that are helping to shape the future of our region."

That combination of commercial expertise and client-focused service continues to resonate. Stephens Scown was recently recognised as one of the South West's most highly recommended law firms in Legal 500's client satisfaction research, ranking among the region's top ten firms based on client recommendations.



Stephens Scown Strategy Board: Paul Morrish, Brian Dolan, Tom Chartres-Moore, Verity Slater, Malcolm Dickinson, Eljie Hibberd, Dave Robbins, Bill Wilkins, Joy Vollans, Richard Baker, Sam Moles, Dave Beaumont, Alex Mackie. Photo credit Aisling Magill

As the UK's first large employee-owned law firm and one of the first large law firms in the country to achieve B Corp Certification™, Stephens Scown combines specialist expertise with a values-led approach that places equal importance on people, relationships and long-term success.

As the firm continues to invest in Somerset, its ambition is clear: to be a trusted partner for businesses across the county while playing an active role in supporting the long-term prosperity of Somerset and the wider South West.

YOU'RE NOT LIKE EVERYONE ELSE. NEITHER ARE WE.

We're not here to blend in. We're a law firm bringing bold, values-led legal support to Somerset.

We provide expert, professional advice for individuals and businesses at every stage of your life or business journey.

Whatever the client or sector, we push, improve and deliver, proudly going beyond expectations.

Crafted legal advice for those who expect more. From the South West's leading law firm.

stephens-scown.co.uk



BRITISH CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

QUARTERLY ECONOMIC SURVEY Q2 2026

The proportion of firms planning to increase investment has fallen to its lowest level since the pandemic. The BCC's Quarterly Economic Survey (QES) for Q2 2026 - the UK's largest independent survey of business sentiment, made up of 4,744 respondents - shows conditions weakened, with fewer firms increasing sales and inflation re-emerging as the leading concern.

Only 17% of responding firms plan to increase investment

Just 44% of businesses expect improved turnover in the next 12 months

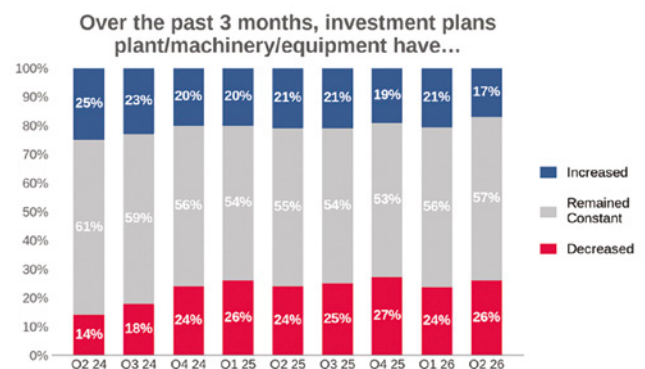
Inflation has become the top concern for businesses

AT A GLANCE

Investment

A quarter (26%) of businesses say they have cut back on investment plans, while 57% say they have remained unchanged, and just 17% of firms increased their plans (down compared to 21% in Q1).

The slump in planned investment levels is more marked in certain sectors. Over a third of hospitality (38%) and retail (35%) firms reported they'd scaled back investment plans.

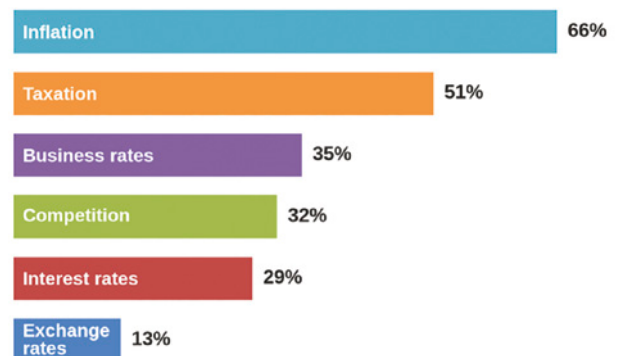


External factors

With high domestic costs and geopolitical headwinds, inflation leapt to become the top concern for businesses in Q2, cited by 66% of firms (up from 50% in Q1). Half of firms (51%) cited taxation as a worry.

With interest rates expected to stay on hold in the coming months, concern about the cost of borrowing rose to 29% (up from 24% in Q1).

External factors of greater concern than three months ago





SOMERSET CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

QUARTERLY ECONOMIC SURVEY Q2 2026

Business confidence across Somerset remained weak in Q2 2026, with survey responses indicating a more pessimistic outlook than earlier in the year. While some businesses remain optimistic about future performance, the balance of opinion has shifted firmly towards caution, reflecting ongoing economic uncertainty and concern about trading conditions over the coming 12 months. The latest Somerset data shows a predominantly negative outlook for turnover, with 59% of businesses expecting conditions to worsen over the next year. In contrast, 23% anticipate improvement, while 18% expect no change. This suggests that many firms are preparing for more challenging market conditions, with confidence in future growth remaining limited. The picture is even more concerning when it comes to profitability. Almost three-quarters of Somerset businesses (74%) expect profits to decline over the next 12 months, compared with just 13% who expect profitability to improve, while a further 13% foresee no change. This points to widespread concern that rising costs and continued pressure on margins will outweigh any gains in business activity. Taken together, the results suggest that Somerset businesses remain under significant pressure, with profitability emerging as a particular area of concern. While some firms continue to see opportunities for growth, the dominant mood is one of caution, with many businesses expecting a difficult trading environment and ongoing challenges in maintaining financial performance over the coming year.



Somerset skills plan published to help train local people for local jobs

A new 2026 Somerset Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) has been published, setting out the skills priorities that will help local people access local jobs while supporting businesses to grow and thrive across the county.

From agri-food, low carbon energy and advanced manufacturing to digital, construction, logistics and health and care, the plan reflects the real needs of Somerset employers and the opportunities shaping Somerset's future economy.

Produced in partnership between Somerset Chamber of Commerce and chamber colleagues at Business West, the Somerset LSIP provides a summary of:

- The key sectors driving the economy and future growth
- The main skills challenges facing employers
- Current activity and collaboration across employers, providers and local partners
- Priority actions to improve access to training and strengthen workforce development
- Opportunities linked to major investments and emerging industries

The Somerset LSIP has been developed through collaboration between employers, education providers and local partners, ensuring training provision responds to genuine workforce demand and future growth opportunities.

It highlights the priorities linked to Somerset's distinctive economy, including agri-food and land stewardship, visitor and cultural sectors, low carbon energy, high-value manufacturing, digital and data, construction, transport and logistics and



health and care, while also recognising the importance of essential skills, employability and work readiness in helping people move into and progress within local jobs.

David Crew, Somerset Chamber MD, said: "Somerset Chamber of Commerce is proud to help shape the 2026 Local Skills Improvement Plan, ensuring it reflects the real needs of businesses across the county.

"This plan sets out a shared commitment: to equip people with the skills they need, enable businesses to grow and compete and support a resilient, inclusive economy for Somerset. We look forward to continuing to work with partners across the system to turn these priorities into reality."

There are 39 LSIPs in England and 33 of them are run by Chambers of Commerce. They bring together businesses, education providers and other stakeholders in their areas to identify the skills needed to support local economies.

The full 2026 Somerset LSIP report can be found on Somerset Chamber's website at www.somerset-chamber.co.uk.

Join us for the official launch of the Somerset Business Awards 2027

Prospective entrants are being invited to discover more about the county's biggest and most prestigious awards at the official launch of the Somerset Business Awards 2027.

Entries open next month for the awards which celebrate the best of Somerset's business community and voluntary sector and are organised annually by Somerset Chamber of Commerce.

Leading accountancy firm, Albert Goodman, is returning as the headline sponsor for the 17th consecutive year!

The awards will officially open on Wednesday, September 9, with a special event at Henlade House - formerly the Mount Somerset - near Taunton, where would-be entrants will be able to meet sponsors and judges and find out more about the awards.

There is no charge to attend the launch event but people must register in advance via the Somerset Chamber of Commerce website.

And it's an exciting year to be taking part with new categories and new judges and sponsors, too!

David Crew, Managing Director of Somerset Chamber of Commerce, said:

"The Somerset Business Awards are far more than a competition. They are a chance for organisations of every size to showcase their achievements, recognise the people behind their success and gain valuable exposure across the county.

"Every year we are inspired by the innovation, resilience and ambition



on display, and 2027 promises to be no exception. I would encourage businesses, charities and organisations from every sector to get involved and tell us their story.

"The awards are only possible thanks to the continued support of our sponsors and judges, and I am incredibly grateful to the many leading Somerset organisations that share our passion for celebrating the very best of our county's business and voluntary communities."

- ◀ Winners, judges and sponsors from the 2026 Somerset Business Awards attended a celebratory winners' reception at UCS College Group's Quantock Restaurant, in Taunton.

Nominations open for Somerset Future 30 rising stars



Somerset Chamber of Commerce is calling on businesses, charities and other organisations to shine a light on the county's next generation of talent as nominations open for a new award scheme – the Somerset Future 30.

Entries are open for nominations for 30 outstanding young professionals aged under 30 who are already making a meaningful impact across Somerset. But you'll need to be quick as the closing date is fast approaching on August 14!

The Somerset Future 30 awards is a fresh and forward-looking initiative designed to recognise emerging leaders in business, innovation and community impact. There is no charge to take part and all entries will be judged by an independent panel of local business leaders.

Entrants must be aged 30 or under and be employed or self-employed for an organisation based in Somerset. Unlike traditional awards, the programme will spotlight a group of individuals, celebrating those who are helping to shape Somerset's future.

Businesses are encouraged to nominate rising stars within their teams, while individuals are also welcome to put themselves forward. Judges will be looking for people who go beyond expectations, demonstrate ambition and create real impact in their workplace or community.

The selected Somerset Future 30 will be recognised and profiled, culminating in a vibrant celebration event bringing together young professionals and senior leaders from across the county.

David Crew, Managing Director of Somerset Chamber of Commerce, said: "We are launching The Somerset Future 30 to recognise the incredible young people already making a difference right here in our county.

"We know there is exceptional talent across Somerset and this is an opportunity to celebrate those who are driving change, showing leadership and shaping the future of our economy.



"I encourage businesses of all sizes, as well as individuals, to put forward nominations and help us showcase the very best of Somerset's emerging leaders."

The Chamber has worked with creative partner Hatched Agency to develop the programme's branding and website and leading businesses Barclays, Elite Staffing Solutions and Yeovil College/NextGen have already confirmed their support as sponsors. Additional sponsors are set to be announced in the coming weeks.

More information about The Somerset Future 30 is available on the dedicated website <https://www.somerset30.co.uk/>. Nominations must be submitted online via the awards website before August 14.

Somerset Chamber welcomes digital agency Teapot Creative as new Business Partner

Somerset Chamber is delighted to welcome award-winning Somerset brand growth agency, Teapot Creative, as the Chamber's latest Business Partner.

Headed by Barry and Lizzie Tottle, Teapot is known for its expertise in design, marketing, SEO and website development. They aim to help clients grow while positively impacting people and the planet and achieved B Corp status last year.

The team is proud to deliver a full digital service and describes Teapot as a 'growth partner', helping clients find creative solutions from their company base in Hambridge.

All our Business Partners share the ambitions of Somerset Chamber, supporting and developing a vibrant local economy and promoting the region of Somerset as a great place to live and work.

They are recognised as supporters of the local economy and all share a common passion for growth and prosperity, people and skills, ESG and social impact. Teapot has been a Chamber member for 12 years and we are looking forward to continuing our partnership with them.

Teapot.



Summerfield colleagues celebrate half a century of service

Two dedicated members of Summerfield Homes' After Sales team are celebrating a combined 50 years of service, marking an incredible milestone for the Taunton-based, family-run developer.

Build Quality and After Sales Manager, Jim Wheeler, and After Sales Supervisor, Ian Cassling, have dedicated five decades helping homeowners across the South West, ensuring customers continue to receive exceptional support long after they move into their new homes.

For Jim, the milestone marks more than 40 years with the wider Summerfield business. He first joined as an apprentice with Stansell Builders, which later became the development arm of Summerfield, arriving at the company's South Road headquarters with his parents to sign his apprenticeship papers - a tradition at the time.

Starting as a labourer, Jim went on to qualify as a painter and decorator before returning to college to gain management qualifications. One of the highlights of his career was overseeing the construction of a block of flats in Teignmouth, a project the company was so proud of that it arranged for

SUMMERFIELD



colleagues to travel together to see the completed development.

Jim joined Summerfield Homes in 2001 and now leads the Build Quality and After Sales team. Outside work, he enjoys spending time with his six grandchildren.

Ian has also built a long and successful career with Summerfield Homes. Joining the business in 2001 as a labourer and has steadily worked his way through the company to become After Sales Supervisor. In his role he works closely with homeowners, resolving any issues and ensuring every customer enjoys the best possible experience in their new homes.

For Ian, helping customers is what makes the role so rewarding. "Every day is different, I enjoy the challenge that comes with the role," he said. "The best part is knowing you've solved a problem and left a customer happy. That feeling of achievement never gets old."

Jim added: "I've seen the business grow and evolve over the years, but one thing has always stayed the same



- our commitment to quality and looking after our customers. I'm proud to have been part of that journey."

James Holyday, Managing Director of Summerfield Homes, said: "Jim and Ian have made an outstanding contribution to Summerfield over many years. Their knowledge, dedication and commitment to delivering excellent customer service are invaluable, and we are incredibly grateful for everything they have done. Reaching a combined 50 years of service is a fantastic achievement and one we are delighted to celebrate."

As a long-established family business, Summerfield believes its people are at the heart of its success, with the long service of colleagues such as Jim and Ian reflecting the company's commitment to quality, continuity and customer care.

WPA celebrates triple success at South West Contact Centre Awards

WPA is celebrating a triple success at the South West Contact Centre Awards 2026, after its Customer Help Desks were named Contact Centre of the Year and Best Contact Centre Culture, while Ellie Bentley was recognised as best Customer Service Agent of the Year.

The awards celebrate excellence across the South West's contact centre industry and recognise outstanding performance, innovation, leadership and commitment to customer service.

The wins reflect WPA's long-standing customer service credentials and the care, professionalism and dedication shown every day by colleagues supporting customers.

Zoe Burne, General Manager of WPA's Customer Help Desk Team, said: "We are incredibly proud to have been recognised with three awards at this

year's South West Contact Centre Awards.

"These achievements are a powerful reflection of the care, commitment and professionalism that the team bring to every customer interaction. Our culture is built on creating an environment where colleagues feel supported, valued and empowered to deliver their best. At WPA, service is not just a function; it is central to who we are.

She continued: "Our teams are obsessed with doing the right thing for customers and treating others as we would want to be treated ourselves. To see that culture recognised externally is a wonderful moment for everyone involved."

The Contact Centre of the Year and Best Contact Centre Culture awards recognise the collective strength of WPA's Customer Help Desks and the



Health Insurance

wider business culture that enables colleagues to deliver a positive experience for customers.

Ellie Bentley's Customer Service Agent of the Year award further highlights the individual excellence, empathy and commitment found across WPA's teams.

Bristol Airport's state of the art energy centre arrives



Bristol Airport has announced the arrival of its new £10million energy centre, a facility designed to provide low-carbon heat and cooling. The airport will become one of the first in the UK to remove gas heating from its terminal, a major step towards achieving its target of net zero airport operations by 2030.

The energy centre is designed to produce, store and distribute low carbon thermal energy to heat the main terminal buildings and the terminal extensions in the winter, and cool them in the summer months. Swapping gas boilers for air source heat pumps at this scale is largely unprecedented and will involve 22 air source heat pumps.

The energy centre will save around 625 tonnes of CO₂e annually, the equivalent of taking 135 passenger vehicles off the road for an entire year. Bristol Airport already utilises on-site renewables to generate electricity, including a three-acre solar farm on its airfield.

For the past four months, the plant room of the energy centre has been constructed off-site. Its modular design meant that it was transported in four parts, before being lifted into position using a 200-tonne crane.

Since March, specialist teams have been working at the airport laying new underground pipes that will transport energy and connect to the heating and cooling system via the terminal basement.

The plant room facility contains the pump sets, pipework

and valves, which will control the flow of heated and chilled water and manage the overall heating system. Work will now continue to fully connect all the pipework through to the terminal's air handling units.

Hannah Pollard, Bristol Airport's Head of Sustainability, said: "Bristol was the first airport to commit to net zero operations by 2030 and to ensure we remain on track, we set ourselves an interim target of reducing carbon emissions by 73% compared to pre pandemic levels. This demonstrates the airport's commitment to lowering its carbon footprint."

The energy centre is part of a broader sustainability programme at Bristol Airport. Decarbonising buildings is one of the three key pillars to achieving net zero operations by 2030, alongside transitioning to electric vehicles and investing in renewable energy.



Brown & Brown UK rounders event raises funds for Children's Hospice South West

Brown & Brown UK welcomed insurance market partners to Bath for its annual rounders event, raising more than £600 in support of Children's Hospice South West.

Brown & Brown UK brought together team mates, insurers and specialist market partners for its annual rounders event in Bath, combining informal networking with fundraising in support of Children's Hospice South West.

Held close to Brown & Brown UK's Bath office, the event provided an opportunity for brokers, insurers and partners from across the market to connect outside the usual trading environment. The afternoon combined friendly competition with relationship-building, reflecting the

importance of collaboration across the insurance sector.

A raffle held during the event raised more than £600 for Children's Hospice South West, which provides care and support for babies, children and young people with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions, as well as their families across the region.

Will Hone, Brown & Brown UK, said: "Our annual rounders event is a great example of what can be achieved when our market partners come together. It was fantastic to see so many colleagues and partners supporting Children's Hospice South West, while also strengthening the relationships that are so important across our market."

The charity's work includes hospice stays, emergency care, palliative care, end-of-life care and wider family support. Funds raised through corporate and community activity help support the delivery of these services across the South West.

The combined Coalition UK and Bridge Specialty International team



were named winners following a competitive afternoon of rounders. A number of insurer and specialist partners took part, contributing to a strong cross-market turnout.

Market partners represented at the event included Arch, Markel, Allianz, Bridge Specialty International, Coalition, Hiscox, Zurich, Aviva and Travelers.

Brown & Brown UK would like to thank all participants, prize donors and organisers who supported the event.

For Brown & Brown UK, the annual rounders event reflects its focus on building long-term relationships with market partners while supporting the communities in which its teams live and work.

The afternoon concluded with a renewed commitment to continued collaboration across the market and further support for charitable initiatives that make a positive difference locally.





Albert Goodman announces new audit partner

Albert Goodman, the leading South West-based accountancy firm, has promoted Lizzie Walpole to audit partner, strengthening its senior leadership team within the firm's audit department.

Having joined Albert Goodman in 2019, Lizzie steps up to Partner level from her previous role of audit director. Working closely with some



of Albert Goodman's largest clients, Lizzie is highly skilled in delivering audit, accountancy and business advisory services to owner-managed businesses, scaling companies and academy trusts.

A Chartered Certified Accountant, Lizzie has over a decade's audit experience both in accounting firms and with in-house finance teams. This background gives her a well-rounded understanding of audit from both adviser and client perspectives, which she brings to her work across the South West.

Lizzie's appointment reflects Albert Goodman's continued commitment to building the strength of its audit team ensuring it's well placed to support clients as their businesses develop and regulatory requirements continue to evolve.

Goodman Managing Partner, Iain McVicar, said: "Lizzie's appointment

is very well deserved. She is a highly respected member of the audit team and has consistently demonstrated technical excellence alongside a strong commitment to client service. Her experience brings real value to our clients, and we're delighted to see her take this next step."

On her new role, Lizzie Walpole said: "I'm very proud to be made a Partner at Albert Goodman. I've had the opportunity to work with a wide range of clients and colleagues since joining the firm, and I'm looking forward to continuing to support the audit team and our clients as they navigate an increasingly complex economic environment."

Albert Goodman has been helping businesses across the South West for over 150 years, providing accountancy, audit and business advisory services to organisations of all sizes, with offices in Taunton, Bristol, Yeovil, Weston-super-Mare and Weymouth.

Skills Bootcamps deliver strong results across Somerset and Dorset

The Skills Bootcamps programme across Somerset and Dorset has celebrated another successful year, with hundreds of learners progressing into employment and training outcomes while significantly exceeding national performance targets.

During Wave 6 (April 2025 to March 2026), the programme was supported by a £4.75 million allocation and delivered through 14 training providers, offering 106 Skills Bootcamp cohorts across a diverse range of sectors including digital, engineering, health and social care, logistics, business, hospitality and early years education.

Skills Bootcamps are developed in partnership with employers and training providers to ensure training reflects current workforce needs and emerging opportunities across the local economy.

The initiative has supported a wide mix of learners and employers across the region. Approximately 138 businesses, many of them SMEs, have benefited from the programme through workforce development, recruitment support and progression opportunities for existing employees.



Performance throughout the year remained consistently high, with 828 learners starting training, 761 achieving completion milestones and 726 progressing into employment or other positive outcomes. The programme comfortably exceeded Department for Education targets and recorded its strongest performance to date.

The programme has now moved into Wave 7 (April 2026 to March 2027) under a new national arrangement following the transfer of Skills Bootcamps from the Department for Education to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Under the revised funding model, Somerset and Dorset received an allocation of £1.5 million, significantly



lower than previous years and based on historic programme spend.

Wave 7 is being delivered through 14 training providers, offering 45 Skills Bootcamp cohorts across priority sectors including engineering, construction, digital technologies, artificial intelligence, health and social care, logistics, agritech and early years education.

Early indicators are encouraging. To date, providers have been allocated 352 learner places, with 42 starts, 33 Milestone 1 achievements, 17 Milestone 2 achievements, and 7 job outcomes as delivery continues.

The continued success of the programme highlights the important role Skills Bootcamps play in helping employers address skills shortages, develop their workforce and access job-ready talent, while supporting residents to gain the skills needed for careers in Somerset and Dorset's key growth sectors.

Weston College prepares to launch new AMTEC flagship training facility

Weston College Group is entering an exciting new chapter for technical education following its recognition as one of only four Technical Excellence Colleges (TECs) for Advanced Manufacturing in England.

As it prepares to open its flagship technical training facility at Airbus Filton this September, the College has unveiled its new identity: AMTEC – the Advanced Manufacturing Technical Excellence College.

Previously announced as the Aerospace Skills Academy (ASA), the new name reflects both the college's new Technical Excellence College status and feedback from employers, who said the facility's curriculum, partnerships and opportunities extend far beyond aerospace into the wider advanced manufacturing sector.

The announcement follows Weston College being named one of only four Technical Excellence Colleges (TECs) for Advanced Manufacturing in England alongside Yeovil College and UCS College Group. TECs are a Government designation recognising excellence in delivering the higher technical skills needed by one of the UK's fastest-growing industries.

Based at Airbus in Filton, AMTEC will continue to work closely with employers across aerospace, engineering, composites, defence and wider advanced manufacturing, delivering apprenticeships and technical education from Level 2 through to degree level.

The decision to launch the new facility as AMTEC followed

extensive discussions with employer partners, who highlighted

that while aerospace

remains central to its identity, its facilities, expertise and curriculum will support businesses across the wider advanced manufacturing sector.

Pat Jones, Principal and Chief Executive of Weston College Group, said: "Becoming a Technical Excellence College for Advanced Manufacturing was a defining moment for Weston College Group, and launching the new facility as AMTEC reflects that ambition.

"The name better reflects the breadth of industries we will support. Aerospace remains a core strength, but our employer partners made it clear the opportunities extend across the wider advanced manufacturing sector.

"We are creating something truly distinctive for learners, employers and the wider region. Together, our Technical Excellence College status, world-class facilities and employer partnerships position us to become one of the UK's leading centres for advanced manufacturing skills."

When it opens this September at Airbus Filton, AMTEC will provide industry-standard learning environments designed alongside employers, helping more learners access high-quality technical education while supporting the workforce needs of businesses across the South West and beyond.



Clarke Willmott announces strong financial results for 2026

Ahead of filing annual accounts, national law firm Clarke Willmott LLP has announced another year of strong financial results.

At the end of the second year of its three-year strategy, Clarke Willmott reports that it is on track to deliver on all key strategic goals and metrics. Revenue has increased to over £68 million and the firm is on track to meet its three-year ambitious growth target.

The success was underpinned by strong performances across the firm, notably in the firm's private client, litigation and strategic property sectors.

Core profit grew for the third consecutive year and Clarke Willmott's commitment to its diversity of practice areas continues to deliver strategic benefits as some markets feel challenges while others are more buoyant.

Clarke Willmott CEO, Peter Swinburn, is now looking to the future. He said: "Activity really built over the course of the last financial year, to record levels in the last quarter - 17% ahead of the previous year.



"This has meant that we have carried excellent momentum into the new financial year and we are optimistic for the future. Our people are committed to sustainable, profitable growth and we are attracting new clients and new people in greater numbers than ever."

Reflecting on feedback from staff and clients, Swinburn added: "Whilst we are delivering on our financial and growth goals, as CEO it was especially pleasing for me that during the year, our clients continued to rate our service highly.



"Over eight in ten clients rate us as 'excellent' and recognise the quality of relationships as a specific strength. Our strong, inclusive culture underpins continued positive feedback from our people, over 90% of whom state that they are proud to work for the firm."

Clarke Willmott, which has seven regional offices across the country, prides itself on maintaining high financial standards and reports that it is entirely committed to maintaining and building upon its financial strength sustainably.

The firm has maintained a debt-free cash position of over £8 million at the financial year end. Lock-up was the best in the firm's history, surpassing its strategic goal a year earlier than planned.





Construction

Melhuish & Saunders

When people look at a completed building, they see the finished result. What they don't see is the hundreds of conversations, decisions and partnerships that brought it to life.

Every construction project begins with a vision, but it takes a team to turn that vision into reality. Clients, architects, surveyors, engineers, suppliers, specialist subcontractors and the principal contractor all play a vital role. Each brings their own expertise, and successful projects are built on trust, communication and a shared commitment to achieving the best outcome.

At Melhuish & Saunders, we've been fortunate to work alongside many of the same consultants, suppliers and subcontractors for years. Those long-standing relationships mean we understand each other's strengths, communicate openly and work together to overcome

challenges before they become problems.

Whether we're extending a medical centre while it remains operational, refurbishing a heritage building or delivering a commercial development, collaboration is at the heart of everything we do. Every project presents different challenges, but the common thread is always the people behind it.

Construction is often judged by the finished building, yet the real success lies in the relationships that made it possible. Buildings may stand for decades, but it's the trust built between clients, consultants and project teams that creates lasting value.

We're proud to be part of an industry that doesn't just construct buildings, it creates places where communities can thrive, businesses can grow and essential services can continue to support future generations.



Safety in Design

The New Civil Engineer Awards were held this summer at the London Hilton hotel, and Chamber member Safety in Design Ltd. attended as a finalist in the Advisory Service Provider of the Year category.

A team of three, whose core offering is training teams to thrive using the Construction (Design & Management) Regulations 2015, Safety in Design has an extensive

track record as a critical friend to major construction and infrastructure projects across the UK, alongside co-founding the Equitable Safety Initiative, which works to improve safety inclusion in the built environment.

"Safety in Design combines exceptional technical insight with a human centred approach that consistently elevates safety and inclusion across our industry," Jenny McLaughlin, Senior Project Manager – Heathrow, and ESI Lead on the CLC EDI Group, explained in the awards submission.

Host and former Welsh Rugby Union referee, Nigel Owens, spoke to a rapt room about his struggles with depression and feelings of shame around his sexuality. He spoke about how it taught him a critical lesson: "How important it is that we create an environment in the workplace where people are respected and valued; being able to take their authentic selves to work; judged on the content of their character and their ability to perform their work, and nothing else."

The award went to consulting firm, WSP, which has over 83,000 employees worldwide.



C2 Safety

One of the biggest assumptions in construction is that health and safety slows everything down and gets in the way of getting the job done. But in reality it's poor planning, unclear responsibilities and reactive decision-making that cause delays.

The Health and Safety Executive's latest annual figures are a very timely reminder of why this matters. 126 workers lost their lives in work-related incidents during 2025/26, with construction once again among the sectors with the highest number of fatalities. Never forget that behind every statistic is a family whose life has changed forever.

The good news is that many of these risks can be reduced long before work starts. When everyone from clients, designers, architects, surveyors, contractors and

suppliers collaborate early, hazards can be designed out, responsibilities become clearer, and projects are far more likely to run smoothly.

That's exactly what the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations were intended to achieve. Not more paperwork, but better planning.

Good health and safety isn't about stopping you from getting on with things and creating obstacles, it's about creating confidence. Confidence that work has been properly considered, that everyone understands their role, and that projects can be delivered safely, efficiently and to a high standard.

When safety is considered at every stage of a project it not only helps to prevent accidents, but it protects programmes, strengthens relationships and helps ensure everyone goes home safely at the end of the day.



Summerfield Developments

Choosing the right location is about far more than buying land. For Summerfield, it's about creating places where businesses can grow and communities can thrive.

That philosophy is evident at Westpark 26 in Wellington, Summerfield's flagship 40-acre mixed-use business park, strategically located close to Junction 26 of the M5. Designed for distribution, warehousing, manufacturing and logistics businesses, the park continues to evolve, with Summerfield Court delivering 16 high-quality, energy-efficient commercial units, eight of which have already been pre-sold.

The development has required 188 tonnes of steel, 5,471

square metres of cladding and 352 gabion baskets to create retaining walls. Looking ahead, each unit will feature 15 solar panels, EV charging points, covered cycle storage and landscaped surroundings incorporating mature hedgerows, tree planting and habitats for birds, bats and dormice.

The same careful approach shapes Summerfield's residential developments. Its latest scheme, The Old Pottery in Horton, offers an exclusive collection of three, four and five-bedroom homes, combining contemporary design with traditional craftsmanship and energy-efficient features.

Set on the edge of the Blackdown Hills, the development enjoys far-reaching countryside views while remaining well connected to nearby Ilminster and Taunton, offering homeowners the best of rural living without compromising on accessibility.

Whether delivering commercial developments that help businesses prosper or creating homes where families can put down roots, Summerfield believes lasting success starts with choosing the right place and creating the right space.

Find out more: website: www.summerfield.co.uk; telephone: 01823 257961; email: reception@summerfield.co.uk





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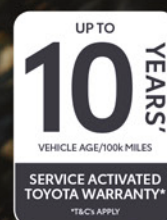
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SCC Toyota

The construction industry is evolving. Rising operating costs, changing environmental expectations and advances in vehicle technology mean many businesses are reassessing what they need from their fleet.

While diesel continues to play an important role for many trades, today's options are far more varied than they were just a few years ago. The key isn't simply choosing the latest technology - it's choosing the right vehicle for the way your business operates.

For businesses that rely on towing, off-road capability and carrying heavy loads, the new Toyota Hilux Hybrid 48V combines the proven durability and capability the Hilux is renowned for with the efficiency benefits of a mild hybrid system.

Hybrid technology can help reduce fuel consumption without changing the way you work, while battery electric vehicles are becoming an increasingly practical

option for businesses operating predictable daily routes and returning to a depot or office each evening. Equally, businesses covering high motorway mileage or travelling long distances may still find a conventional powertrain the most practical choice.

There is no single solution that fits every construction business. The most effective fleet is the one matched to the way your business actually operates. Understanding journey patterns, payload requirements, towing needs and whole-life running costs is often the difference between simply choosing a vehicle and choosing the right vehicle.

At SCC Toyota Fleet and Business Centre, we work with businesses across Somerset to understand their operational needs and recommend vehicles that genuinely support them - whether that's a pickup, van, hybrid or electric vehicle. By taking the time to understand how your business works, we help you make informed decisions with confidence.

SCC | Roundswell
Taunton
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Weston College

At Weston College, construction is more than just learning a trade - it's about developing skilled, work ready individuals who understand both the technical and human side of the industry. We deliver a wide range of programmes across trades including bricklaying, carpentry, plumbing, electrical, and plastering, all rooted in real world application.

From day one, learners are expected to meet workplace expectations through punctuality, teamwork, accountability, industry-standard uniform and their own tools. They gain experience through employer-

led projects, live briefs, work placements and trade-specific practical skills identified by employers as essential for success on site.

Alongside technical training, we prioritise mental health and wellbeing. Staff are trained to recognise when learners may be struggling, while tutorials and personal development sessions encourage open conversations and provide access to support services.

In a predominantly male industry where suicide rates are significantly higher than average, we work to challenge stigma, promote help-seeking and encourage learners to support one another.

Construction can be mentally demanding due to long hours, tight deadlines, physical strain, job insecurity and time away from home. These pressures can affect wellbeing, safety, productivity and relationships, making early support and open communication essential.

We believe mental health should be treated with the same importance as physical safety. A healthier workforce is a safer, more productive and more resilient one.

By embedding wellbeing into training, we aim to prepare learners not only to succeed in construction but to build sustainable careers while helping shape a more supportive industry culture for the future.



Clarke Willmott LLP

Construction remains a key driver of Somerset's economy, but businesses across the sector are navigating significant legal and commercial change. In 2026, three issues continue to dominate: building safety, financial pressures and procurement reform.

The Building Safety Act has transformed the industry's approach to compliance. The focus is now on demonstrating safety throughout a building's lifecycle, with accountability extending across the supply chain.

Clients are increasingly required to prove competence, maintain detailed records and document decision-making. Designers, consultants and contractors face greater scrutiny, making robust governance, clear contractual responsibilities and strong record-keeping essential on projects of all sizes.

At the same time, financial stability remains a major challenge. Construction continues to experience high insolvency levels, with subcontractors particularly exposed to cashflow pressures, delayed payments and reduced margins.

Many businesses are still dealing with the impact of fixed-price contracts agreed during periods of inflation and rising costs. To manage risk, organisations should ensure contracts contain clear provisions for variations and cost recovery, review payment mechanisms carefully, monitor supply-chain financial health and consider guarantees or performance security where appropriate. Early action and clear communication can often prevent disputes from escalating.

The introduction of the Procurement Act has also created new opportunities, particularly for SMEs and regional businesses. By increasing transparency, simplifying bidding processes and placing greater emphasis on value rather than lowest cost alone, the legislation allows businesses to highlight local expertise, sustainability initiatives and social value commitments.

However, firms must also understand new obligations around performance monitoring, reporting and payment compliance throughout the supply chain.

Together, these developments are reshaping how construction businesses manage risk, secure work and deliver successful projects.

*
clarke
willmott

YAS Solutions

When margins are squeezed the instinct is to win more work. When growth is the goal the instinct is to reach for larger contracts. Both are valid ambitions - but without the right financial foundations either can make the problem worse, not better.

Construction materials are over a third more expensive than pre-pandemic, with labour, National Insurance and borrowing costs all attacking margin from different angles.



At the same time, significant opportunities exist on our doorstep - from Hinkley Point C and Agravas to government infrastructure contracts - but winning that work requires demonstrating financial stability and infrastructure to cope with longer payment terms.

The businesses that are navigating this best have one thing in common. This isn't about year end accounts and tax returns - it's about having operational financial infrastructure working for your business throughout the year:

- Cash flow forecasting - knowing exactly where you'll be in 3, 6 and 12 months to act before a crisis
- Real-time project profitability - knowing which jobs are making money and quoting from current costs, not last year's rates
- Management accounts - tracking monthly performance against budget so you can adjust before it's too late

Samira Taylor FCA, founder of YAS Solutions Ltd, fractional Finance Director and CFO working hands-on with South West construction businesses.

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Charities and CICs

PROMISEworks

At PROMISEworks, we believe every young person deserves the opportunity to thrive. As a Somerset-based charity, we work alongside vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people, providing mentoring, advocacy and positive relationships that help them build confidence, resilience and brighter futures.



The local business community has an important role to play in creating lasting social impact. By partnering with PROMISEworks, Somerset businesses can invest directly in the wellbeing of young people while demonstrating their commitment to the communities they serve.

There are many ways to get involved. Businesses can book our CPD-

endorsed training, equipping staff with valuable knowledge and skills while supporting our charitable work.

We also encourage organisations to offer two corporate volunteering days each year, giving employees the opportunity to contribute their time and expertise to meaningful community initiatives.

Companies can further support PROMISEworks by choosing us as their Charity of the Year, organising fundraising events, making corporate donations, or sponsoring specific projects that enable us to reach more young people across Somerset.

Together, we can help ensure vulnerable young people have access to the support they need to overcome challenges and realise their potential.

If your business is looking to make a genuine difference in Somerset, we'd love to hear from you. Together, we can build stronger communities and brighter futures for the next generation.

Promiseworks.org.uk; info@promiseworks.org.uk; 0300 3651 900.

PROMISEworks

Somerset Film

For over 25 years, Somerset Film has helped people of all ages and backgrounds discover the power of creativity through film and digital media. We believe everyone has a story to tell and use creativity to bring people together, develop new skills and give communities a voice.

In 25/26, we reached 5,601 beneficiaries, including 1,353 children and young people, through workshops, screenings, exhibitions, learning opportunities and community projects.

We delivered 125 learning sessions, 69 workshops, 50 film screenings, 29 creative activities, 14 public events, 10 Repair Cafés and many more opportunities for people to learn, connect and create.



Our creative resource hub, The Engine Room in Bridgwater, welcomed more than 4,000 people, alongside exhibitions, events and community activities. Beyond our venue, our films reached even further with 140,000 YouTube views, while we produced work celebrating organisations including Thrive, SWEDA and Bridgwater Town Council.

These achievements represent more than numbers; they reflect creativity, confidence, collaboration and lasting positive impact across Somerset. In September, we will be taking 'Brick by Brick' a short film made with and for the community of Bridgwater, to the House of Commons to screen to MPs. Currently we're working with Public Health and others to support young people to shape messaging about vaping.

All of this was made possible by everyone who commissioned a film, rented a meeting room, hired equipment or bought a cup of coffee in our café. If you can help us to do more contact: info@somersetfilm.com or call 01278 433187.

somerset film

Somerset Community Foundation

Across Somerset, change often begins close to home – in youth groups offering young people support and belonging, in community hubs keeping older neighbours connected, and in arts and wellbeing projects that ease isolation.

Somerset Community Foundation exists to support that local spirit, connecting people and businesses who care with grassroots groups working across the county, from Exmoor to the Levels, from villages to coastal towns.



Last year, we awarded more than £4m in funding to hundreds of local organisations, many of them small, volunteer-led groups rooted in the places they serve.

For businesses, we can be your strategic partner for charitable giving – offering free, impartial advice and a variety of simple and rewarding ways for your business to give back to small, local charities.

Global brand Mulberry set up a Fund with us in 2021. Rosie Wollacott, Head of Group Sustainability at Mulberry, said: “They take the time to understand the business values and translate that into a genuinely impactful approach. It means you can focus on what you want to achieve, knowing your funding is being distributed thoughtfully and responsibly.”

We have a range of simple, impactful ways to give – whether you want to make a small donation that has a big impact, support a cause that matters to your team, or create your own corporate charitable fund.

Together, we can help Somerset thrive, today and for generations to come.

Find out more: somersetcf.org.uk/business.



Spark Somerset

If you think about the people who work for you, buy from you, or depend on your business the chances are that at some point this week, someone in their community has supported them or a family member.

A health walk. A community group. A youth club. These aren't abstract or unconnected to you. They are part of the infrastructure that keeps your workforce and customers happy and healthy.

To highlight the work of this infrastructure, local charity Spark Somerset has launched #WednesdayWithoutUs. This campaign invites other charities and community groups across the county to share a snapshot of what they do every Wednesday, and what would be lost if they weren't there.

Organisations from across Somerset are already taking part, from small village groups to county-wide services. Together, they're making the case for why this work matters, at a time when nearly 62% of Somerset's voluntary sector has

six months or fewer of financial reserves.

There's a practical way for Chamber members to support local causes and get involved.

You can join Spark Somerset's SkillShare programme delivered in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, which connects skilled professionals with local charities needing expertise (whether that's finance, HR, digital, marketing, or governance).

You bring your knowledge; a local charity gets the kind of support that makes a real difference. And your team gains connections, a broader perspective, and the satisfaction of skills put to good use.

You can also join the #WednesdayWithoutUs conversation on social media by engaging with the stories you read and talking about how your organisation or colleagues have contributed to the wellbeing and sustainability of a local charity or group.

Find out more about both initiatives at sparksomerset.org.uk.



SS&L

When people hear the term Community Interest Company (CIC), they often think of organisations that exist to do good. They're right, but there's another side to the story.

At SS&L, being a CIC influences every decision we make. We measure success not just by financial performance, but by the difference we make to people, businesses and communities. It's a mindset any organisation can benefit from.

Each year, we work with thousands of learners and hundreds of employers across Somerset and the South

West, so we see firsthand the challenges that businesses face, from attracting the right people to preparing for future growth.



Every day, we work with employers to help them develop the skills they need for the future. Whether supporting a young person into their first role, helping an existing employee progress or recruiting new talent through apprenticeships, we see the difference that investing in people can make.

Our partnership with Somerset Larder is just one example of how learning can strengthen both individuals and businesses.

As a Somerset SME ourselves, we understand these challenges because we experience them too. That's why we make learning flexible, practical and relevant.

Putting people at the heart of your organisation isn't just good for communities. It helps businesses become stronger, more resilient and better prepared for the future.

At SS&L, we call that Changing Lives Through Learning. If you'd like to explore how apprenticeships, skills development or partnerships could support your organisation, visit www.sslcourses.co.uk or call 0330 332 7997. We'd love to start a conversation.



Ferne Animal Sanctuary

Ferne Animal Sanctuary was founded in 1939 by the late Nina, Duchess of Hamilton & Brandon, at the very start of the Second World War.

Deeply concerned about the fate of pets belonging to service men and women being deployed overseas, she created a haven where their animals could be cared for until their owners returned.



Sadly, many never did, and their pets remained at Ferne. From this poignant beginning, the story of the sanctuary took root.

More than 85 years later, Ferne continues to honour the Duchess's vision, offering refuge to

animals of all shapes and sizes from across the county and beyond.

While it is unfortunate that such a need still exists, and in fact grows each year, the sanctuary remains committed to providing safety, compassion and second chances. Thanks to the generosity of donors and the dedication of volunteers, Ferne can continue this vital work.

Ferne offers various opportunities for businesses to get involved. From sponsorships at specific events such as our upcoming dog show or gala, to sponsoring one of our kennels or cattery.

We also love to work with companies' long term on a mutually beneficial basis. This could include a corporate volunteer away day here at the sanctuary, increasing employee engagement, team fundraising or initiatives such as promotional products.

If you'd like to have a conversation about what we could achieve together, please get in touch via frm@ferenanimalsanctuary.org. Book a tour of the sanctuary to see first hand the work we do.



ESS Education and Support Services

This year, ESS Education and Support Services celebrates three years of delivering education, wellbeing support, and life-changing opportunities to vulnerable young people and families across the Southwest.

Built on the belief that every individual deserves “Every Person, Every Opportunity, Every Chance,” ESS provides bespoke educational programmes for young people aged 10–25 who are at risk of disengaging from mainstream education or have disengaged alongside adult and family learning workshops and community wellbeing initiatives.

In just three years, the charity has made a measurable impact, including a 12% increase in learner intake, supporting 80 learners, awarding 124 certificates,

delivering 570 delivery days, and providing an impressive 5,772 sessions. ESS has also welcomed 100 adult workshop attendees and developed six key partnerships across the region.

A key part of the organisation's success is The Bluebell Social, Learning Community Hub in Langport, Somerset, which offers a safe and inclusive environment for learning, social connection, and practical work experience.

Led by Chief Executive Frances Deeley, ESS is now focused on ambitious plans for growth, including expanding services across the Southwest, launching a youth café and charity shop, and increasing support for families and carers.

As ESS marks its third anniversary, the organisation continues to demonstrate the power of education, community, and opportunity to create lasting change.



ARK at Egwood

In business, success is often measured by growth, innovation and impact. But what if your next partnership could deliver something even more meaningful—transforming lives, strengthening communities and inspiring your team?

Set across 12 acres of beautiful land and woodland, ARK at Egwood an intergenerational therapeutic day service that supports people of all ages and abilities to improve their health, wellbeing, confidence and sense of belonging, ARK provides opportunities for people facing a wide range of challenges to reconnect with themselves, develop new skills and build brighter futures.

The organisation's outstanding contribution to Somerset has been recognised nationally through The King's Award for Voluntary Service—often described as the MBE for volunteer groups—highlighting the remarkable dedication of its staff, volunteers and supporters.

Are you a business that is looking beyond traditional Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Employees want to work for organisations that make a genuine difference, while customers and stakeholders value businesses that invest in their communities. ARK offers a unique opportunity to do exactly that.

Whether you're a small local business or a large employer, there are countless ways to become involved while creating lasting benefits for both your organisation and the people ARK supports.

Corporate volunteering days at ARK are not only rewarding—they also strengthen teamwork, improve wellbeing and give colleagues the chance to connect in a completely different environment. Tel: 01460 391974; email: office@arkategwood.com; website: <https://arkategwood.com>.



Somerset Wildlife Trust

After almost 60 years of working on the ground, Somerset Wildlife Trust has an unparalleled knowledge of the county, its habitats and wildlife.

This, combined with our expertise and skills, underpinned by pioneering science and sound data, enables us to support, lead and co-ordinate nature's recovery in Somerset.

The trust is focused on restoring habitats to support a wide range of wildlife, and restore natural processes that are essential for healthy landscapes, and provide vital services such as clean air and water, food, carbon

absorption and flood alleviation.

The trust offers a wide range of skills and services – from supporting individuals at home, community groups and businesses, through to landowners and farmers who want to help restore nature.

Whether people are looking to 'wild' a public space or increase wildlife on their land, think big for nature and ask us how we can help.

For more information, find us online at Home | Somerset Wildlife Trust or email Jamie.Monkhouse@somersetwildlife.org.



Big Carl lifts Hinkley Point C's second nuclear reactor into place



Big Carl, the world's largest crane, has lifted Hinkley Point C's second nuclear reactor into place before its precision installation inside the reactor building.

Using Big Carl to lift the 500-tonne cylinder was an innovation for Unit 2 and another example of the project finding ways to improve performance between Units 1 and 2. The first reactor was lifted using a large temporary overhead lifting system. The new method saves space, time and money.

Once inside the reactor building, the 13-metre-long reactor pressure vessel was lifted and rotated into a vertical position by the large internal "polar" crane and lowered carefully onto a support ring with just 40mm clearance on either side. The installation comes less than 12 months after the huge steel dome was lifted into place to close the second reactor building.

Unit 2 is being built 20-30% more quickly than Unit 1, thanks to innovation and experience of building an identical design with the same teams.

The Unit 2 reactor building is further ahead than at the same stage for Unit 1, with more equipment installed, as well as more structural steel work and the outer containment layer already in place. For example, three large heat exchangers have been installed in Unit 2, compared with none at the same point on Unit 1. These advantages and innovations will benefit Sizewell C from the start.

The reactor pressure vessel uses nuclear fission to make heat and steam for the world's largest turbines, the Arabelle.

Together, the two reactors will power 6 million homes around the clock with reliable, low carbon electricity, cutting the country's reliance on imported fossil fuels



Weston business breakfast at the Winter Gardens Pavilion, Weston-super-Mare



▲ Kirsty Simmons of Weston Hospicecare with Alex Howells (left) of Amarin Rubber & Plastics and Steven Lovell of Unity Trust Bank.



▲ Pat Jones and Simon Dunn of Weston College.



▲ Mandy Bishop, CEO of North Somerset Council, gave an update on regeneration and business support.



▲ Labour MP for Weston-super-Mare, Daniel Aldridge, gave an insight into the Westminster issues affecting the area.



▲ Sam Orchard of SO&SO Consulting and Nathan Mode of Dome Marketing who also head up Somerset Chamber's Somerset Supply Chain which is delivering the Epic supplier support programme for North Somerset Council.



▲ From left, David Goodall of FW Capital, Nigel Beacom one of Somerset's Deputy Lieutenants, David Crew of Somerset Chamber, Sue Shillabeer of Weston Chamber of Commerce, Pat Jones of Weston College, Mandy Bishop of North Somerset Council and Weston-super-Mare MP Daniel Aldridge.



Meet the Neighbours with Dorset Chamber of Commerce at Lore of the Sky, Compton Abbas Airfield

troo.



▲ Liam Robson and Dan Daines of event sponsor Troo.



▲ Richard Bromley of My CFO Ltd and John Murray of SWIG Finance.



▲ Sam Whittaker (left) of Dusk Til Dawn Cleaning Services and Sarah Hickling of Your Time Coaching.

Somerset Entrepreneurs Group at The Grand Pier, Weston-super-Mare



▲ Matt Haskell of Bishop Fleming and Samira Taylor of YAS Solutions.



▲ From left, Chantelle Znideric of TopStylisa Image Consultancy, Rosie Wicks of Blossom HR Consultancy and William Murray of William Murray Financial Planner.



▲ Somerset Chamber MD David Crew (centre) with Nick and Amanda Spicer of Your Eco who spoke about their own entrepreneurial journey.

Bath & West breakfast with The Royal Bath & West Society at The Royal Bath and West Show



▲ Ceri Stephens (left) and Laura Heatley of event sponsor Battens Solicitors with Somerset Chamber MD David Crew.



▲ Nigel Pearce of The Pearce Practice and Hannah Sprague of FSE Group.



▲ Peter Quintana of hgkc and Somerset Chamber Board Director with Amanda Sheppard of FSE Group.



County Connections at Hornsbury Mill, Chard



▲ Rosie Wicks of Blossom HR Consultancy and Deputy Chair of Somerset Chamber's Board of Directors welcomed attendees on behalf of the Chamber.



▲ Tim Knowles (left) of Impact IT Solutions and Jon Stocker of Milsted Langdon.



▲ From left, Tony Pizii of Halo Protection UK, Julie Grant of Blueloop, Derek Smart of Amberley Management Selection and Hayden Allen-Vercoc of Orbital.

Construction Connections at the Grand Pier, Weston-super-Mare

abatec
recruitment



▲ From left, Tricia Griggs and Kelvin Mason who were the guest speakers from Galliford Try, Ian Colio of Somerset Chamber and Rob Dyer and David Hughes of event sponsor Abatec.



▲ Nick Gray (left) of Powrmatic and Jason Salmon of SunGift Solar.



Annual economic update with Lloyds at Somerset County Cricket Club, Taunton



▲ From left, Somerset Chamber MD David Crew, with Paul Kharbanda and Chris Loach of Lloyds Bank.



▲ John Harris (left) of Aspire Commercial Finance and Andrew Martin of AM Consulting.



▲ Chamber MD David Crew introduces the morning.



▲ Tracey Matthews (centre) of SS&L with Barry and Lizzie Tottle of Teapot Creative.



▲ Jessica Hayter of Lloyds Bank and Mike Lind of Monkton Elm Garden Centre.



▲ From left, Graeme Crosbie of Level Up (South West), Joe Routledge of Sycamore Process Engineering and Chair of Somerset Chamber's Board of Directors and Simon Davidson of Lloyds Bank.



Somerset Food and drink forum at Thatchers Cider, Sandford



▲ Representatives from a wide range of organisations were in attendance.



▲ Nick Hancock (left) of Somerset Larder and Duncan James of Lyons Seafoods.



▲ Paul Jobin of Snugs Custom-Fit and Peter Grocock of Brown & Brown UK.



▲ Sarah Green of Marston Foods and member of Somerset Chamber's Board of Directors with forum Chair Christopher Milton.



▲ Mike Anderson of Hale Events and Tom Chartres-Moore of Stephens Scown.



▲ From left, Eleanor Thatcher of Thatchers Cider who spoke at the forum, Ashley Loxon and Carmelo Lattuca of PKF Francis Clark and forum Chair Christopher Milton of Christopher Milton Executive Coaching.

Somerset engineering and manufacturing forum

Tuesday
8 Sep

Designed for senior level leaders in engineering and manufacturing businesses, join us at Haynes Motor Museum for our Somerset engineering and manufacturing forum to network with industry professionals and discuss ways to showcase this sector in the region. You'll also be able to tour nearby Sycamore Process Engineering, the go-to process engineering company in the country for the dairy, food, beverage and plant-based industries.



Time: 9am - 12 noon at Haynes Motor Museum, Sparkford followed by Sycamore Process Engineering, Sparkford
Cost: £24.99 plus VAT members
£34.99 plus VAT non-members

County Connections - Weston-super-Mare

Tuesday
15 Sep

Set yourself up for a great day in the office by enjoying a cooked breakfast in fantastic company at our ever-popular networking breakfast event! Join like-minded business professionals at Worlebury Golf Club for the opportunity to make new connections and raise the profile of your business.

Time: 8.30am - 10.30am at Worlebury Golf Club, Monks Hill, Weston-super-Mare, BS22 9SX
Cost: £24.99 plus VAT members
£34.99 plus VAT non-members

Somerset entrepreneurs' group

Wednesday
16 Sep

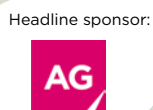
The Somerset entrepreneurs' group gives all attendees the opportunity to introduce themselves to the room, highlighting their company or organisation and giving delegates more information about themselves and what they do. There will also be an optional tour of Harry's Cider.

Time: 9am - 11.30am at Harry's Cider, Long Sutton, Langport, TA10 9NS
Cost: No charge for members
£20 plus VAT non-members

Somerset Business Awards 2027 - official launch

Wednesday
9 Sep

Could 2027 be your award-winning year? Join us for the official launch of the Somerset Business Awards 2027 and discover what it takes to stand out from the very best in Somerset business. Meet this year's sponsors and judges, gain valuable insight into the awards process and hear why entering could be one of the best business decisions you make this year!



Time: 4pm - 5.30pm at Henlade House (formerly The Mount Somerset), near Taunton, TA3 5NB
Cost: No charge to attend for members and non-members

Elevate Somerset - autumn leadership event

Thursday
10 Sep

Elevate Somerset is a new strategic leadership network developed by Somerset Chamber of Commerce and hosted on behalf of our Honorary Patron, His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Somerset, Mohammed Saddiq. It brings together senior leaders from across Somerset as part of a collaborative initiative designed to shape the county's long-term economic future. Speakers will include Nigel Colman, Managing Director, Leonardo Helicopters UK, Mark Bolton, Principal and Chief Executive, Yeovil College and Bill Revans, Leader of Somerset Council.

Time: 4pm - 6pm at the iAero Centre, Bunford Lane, Yeovil, BA20 2EJ
Cost: Exclusively for Elevate and charity Chamber members - no charge to attend.

Yeovil breakfast Circle

Thursday
17 Sep

Welcome to a networking morning like no other! The breakfast circle is where business creativity meets diversity in a welcoming and supportive setting. This isn't your typical gathering dominated by a single profession - our attendees come from a wide range of industries, each adding their unique flavour to the mix.

Time: 8.30am - 10am at Yeovil Town Football Club, Lufton Way, Yeovil, BA22 8YF
Cost: £10 plus VAT members
£15 plus VAT non-members

*Prices are plus VAT unless otherwise stated

Please note due to high demand, some of these events may be fully booked by the time of printing.

Annual breakfast update with the Bank of England

Tuesday
22 Sep

Join Somerset Chamber and the Bank of England for a must-attend breakfast briefing at Taunton Racecourse. Hear from the bank's South West Agent about the latest UK economic outlook, covering GDP, inflation, the labour market and monetary policy—packed with insights relevant to South West businesses. Enjoy a cooked breakfast and valuable networking, followed by a Q&A exploring the key pressures and opportunities which are shaping today's business landscape.

Sponsored by:

Handelsbanken

Time: 8am -10am at Taunton Racecourse and Conference Centre, Orchard Portman, TA3 7BL
Cost: £28.50 plus VAT members
£33.50 plus VAT non-members

Unlocking Somerset talent in partnership with Passion for Somerset

Tuesday
29 Sep

Skills and recruitment continue to be among the biggest challenges for Somerset businesses. We are bringing businesses and education leaders together to develop practical solutions that address employers' skill needs to support long term economic growth. This event is an opportunity for business leaders and decision-makers to hear the latest insights from the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) research, discover how employers are already making a real impact through education partnerships and explore how your company can benefit from getting involved.

Sponsored by:

EURILAIT
YOUR SOLUTION FOR SPECIALITY DAIRY

Time: 8.30am – 1pm at Waterside Barn, Bradford-on-Tone, near Taunton, TA4 1EP
Cost: No charge for members or non-members

Construction Connections - Taunton

Wednesday
23 Sep

Looking to build your network in the construction or property industry? Join us for Construction Connections, the go-to networking event for construction professionals. Expect relaxed conversations over breakfast rolls and refreshments, plus you'll also hear from our event sponsor, too!

Sponsored by:

SID
Life outside the tick box.

Time: 8.30am – 10.30am at Somerset County Cricket Club, Taunton, TA1 1JT
Cost: £25 plus VAT members
£30 plus VAT non-members

Meet the neighbours - with Business West

Tuesday
6 Oct

Join Somerset Chamber and or Chamber colleagues from Business West at Ashton Gate Stadium for a powerful cross-border networking lunch. Connect with businesses from Somerset and the Bristol area, expand your network, exchange ideas and explore new opportunities. With more than 100 attendees expected, book early to secure your place!

Time: 12noon – 2pm at Ashton Gate Stadium, Ashton Road, Bristol, BS3 2EJ
Cost: £37.99 plus VAT members
£47.99 plus VAT non-members

Somerset directors' forum

Thursday
24 Sep

Join us for our popular Somerset directors' forum which gives the county's senior decision-makers the opportunity to discuss common growing pains and other challenges in a confidential setting. There will also be an opportunity to network with fellow senior leaders, both before and after the main discussions.

Time: 9.30am – 11.30am at WPA Health Insurance, Blackbrook Park Avenue, Taunton, TA1 2PE
Cost: £35 plus VAT members
£40 plus VAT non-members

County Connections - with Frome Chamber

Tuesday
13 Oct

Stay connected with existing contacts and make valuable new ones at this friendly networking breakfast. Delivered in partnership with Frome Chamber of Commerce, the event brings together members from across the local business community to share ideas and create new opportunities for growth.

Time: 8.30am – 10am at The Cheese and Grain, Justice Lane, Frome, BA11 1BE
Cost: £17.50 plus VAT Somerset and Frome Chamber members
£27.50 plus VAT non-members

Amicus Law promotes Emily House to Head of Taunton Office

South West legal firm Amicus Law has promoted Residential Conveyancer Emily House to the Head of Office for its Taunton branch.

Previously responsible for residential conveyancing at the firm's busy Bridgwater office, she will now lead a multidisciplinary team of 18 employees based at Hammet Street in Taunton.

Emily said: "I'm proud to take on the role of Head of Office in Taunton. Since joining Amicus Law, I've been fortunate to work alongside a fantastic team in Bridgwater and have been given opportunities to develop and progress. This promotion is an exciting next step in my career.

"While my background is in residential conveyancing, I'm looking forward to leading a multidisciplinary team and supporting colleagues across a range of legal services. It's a fantastic opportunity to broaden my experience while continuing to deliver the high standards of client care and service that are so important to us.

"We've built real momentum as a

business and I'm excited to contribute to the continued success and growth of the Taunton office. My focus will be on supporting the team, strengthening relationships within the local community and ensuring we continue to provide the best possible outcomes for our clients."

Since joining Amicus Law in 2021, Emily has progressed rapidly through the firm, becoming its youngest associate at the age of 24 in October 2025. Following this latest promotion, she is now the youngest head of office within the business.



Claire Lovett, Managing Partner at Amicus Law, said: "Emily's promotion is thoroughly deserved and reflects the exceptional contribution she has made to the firm since joining us.

"She has consistently demonstrated outstanding technical ability, professionalism and a genuine commitment to delivering the highest standards of client care.

"Emily's ability to manage a substantial caseload while maintaining excellent client feedback and supporting the wider team is particularly impressive. She has built strong relationships with clients, estate agents and professional contacts, helping to strengthen our reputation and drive our continued growth.

"She is an excellent role model for her colleagues, and her energy, ambition and dedication make her a valuable asset to the business.

Taunton Brewhouse secures Arts Council funding after reaching £20,000 target

Taunton Brewhouse has successfully reached its £20,000 fundraising target to secure the match funding required for the first phase of its ambitious Fit at 50 campaign.

Achieving the milestone will unlock £527,000 of funding from Arts Council England, enabling the Brewhouse to move forward with a series of essential upgrades designed to enhance the venue for audiences, artists, and the wider community.

Planned improvements include new automated doors to improve accessibility, replacement of the

main house carpet, and a complete comprehensive upgrade of the theatre's lighting systems in both the Main House and Studio, replacing ageing equipment with modern, energy-efficient LED fixtures.

The Fit at 50 campaign has been developed to ensure the Brewhouse remains a vibrant, welcoming, and sustainable cultural venue for future generations, as the organisation prepares to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2027.

Vickie Robbins, Executive Director, said: "We are truly humbled by the support of our community and all of the donations that have achieved this milestone. We can't wait to get the project up and running – which will hopefully be completed by August 2027."

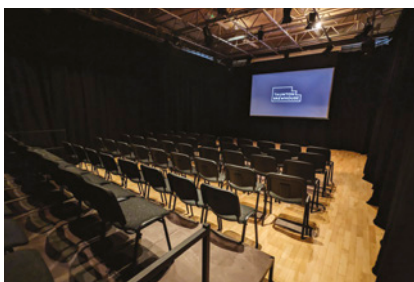
This first phase marks the beginning of a wider programme of investment in the building. Future projects will include roof repairs and maintenance, air conditioning improvements, and



a range of additional enhancements designed to improve visitor comfort, accessibility, and the overall customer experience.

Anyone who would like to support the future of Taunton Brewhouse can still make a donation. Every contribution, large or small, will help the charity continue its programme of improvements, attract further external investment, and create a more accessible, sustainable and enjoyable venue for audiences, participants, and performers alike.

To donate and find out more, visit www.tauntonbrewhouse.co.uk/support-us/fit-at-50 or contact the Box Office on 01823 283244.



First Class Comms achieves record-breaking Net Promoter Score

First Class Comms (FCC), the award-winning B Corp telecommunications and IT provider, is celebrating a significant milestone after achieving a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of +94 — one of the highest customer satisfaction scores in the industry.

This latest result marks a remarkable journey for the business, which last recorded an NPS score above +90 four years ago. Since then, FCC has continued to invest heavily in both its people and customer experience, with a singular focus: delivering service that customers genuinely value and are proud to recommend.

“Four years ago, we broke the +90 barrier and set ourselves a new benchmark,” said Mark Burland, Managing Director of First Class Comms, “But we didn’t want to stand still. Achieving +94 today is proof that consistent effort, listening to feedback, and putting customers first really does pay off.”

FCC prides itself on taking a consultative, multi-vendor approach, rather than pushing customers into restrictive, network-only solutions. This commitment to flexibility,



transparency, and long-term relationships has been central to its continued NPS success.

Over the past four years, FCC has:

- Strengthened its onboarding and support processes
- Increased proactive account management
- Embedded customer feedback loops through regular NPS surveys
- Invested in new technologies to enhance service delivery

Net Promoter Score is widely recognised as one of the most important indicators of customer loyalty and experience. A score above +50 is considered excellent, while anything above +70 is deemed exceptional.

Achieving +94 places FCC in a category few companies ever reach: “We don’t chase the score, we chase the experience behind it,” Burland added, “Every piece of feedback, positive or constructive, helps us improve. That’s what’s driven this journey from +90 to +94.”

With strong relationships already in place with organisations such as Bristol Airport, Turtle Bay, Boston Tea Party and a range of owner-managed businesses, he said FCC was determined to ensure that service quality scaled alongside its growth.



Better connected businesses

Mobile • Broadband • Phone System

Test Fest 2026 music festival drives life saving awareness of testicular cancer

Test Fest 2026 has once again proven that a music festival can be far more than a day of entertainment. Organised by It’s in the Bag, the South West’s leading testicular cancer charity, the event continues to play a vital role in raising awareness of a disease that is both highly treatable and often diagnosed too late.

Set against a backdrop of live music, family activities and community spirit, Test Fest creates an environment where conversations about men’s health happen naturally. This year’s festival goers described the event as



“friendly,” “welcoming,” and “brilliantly organised,” with many highlighting the charity’s presence as a meaningful part of their experience.

Survey results show that 86.9% of attendees felt the music lineup supported the festival’s positive atmosphere, while 60% rated the organisation a perfect 10/10.

Crucially, volunteers reported strong engagement from the public, with many visitors actively seeking information about testicular cancer, early detection and support services. In a relaxed, stigma free setting, these conversations can be life saving.

The festival’s impact extended far beyond the field. Over the last 90 days, Test Fest’s digital content reached 569.8K views across Facebook and Instagram, generating



23.5K interactions and 144.7K unique viewers — despite a combined follower base of just 1,870. On Facebook alone, content reached 490.8K views, while Instagram delivered 79K views and an impressive 20K interactions.

This digital footprint demonstrates Test Fest’s growing role as a regional awareness platform. Every view, share and interaction helps spread the message that early detection saves lives.

Test Fest 2026 shows that community events can be powerful vehicles for health education. By blending culture, connection and charity, the festival continues to reach men who might not otherwise engage with traditional awareness campaigns.

For It’s in the Bag, the mission is simple: get men talking, get men checking, and save lives. A charity spokesperson said Test Fest remained one of the most effective ways to do exactly that.



SWIG Finance allocated £17.5m to support SMEs across the South West

The British Business Bank has allocated £17.5m to SWIG Finance to support underserved smaller businesses across the South West of England, with loans from £25,001 to £250,000.

SWIG is the seventh Community Development Finance Institution (CDFI) lender accredited by the British Business Bank under its Community ENABLE Funding programme and the first with a dedicated focus on the South West.

As a CDFI, SWIG Finance is a regional, social impact lender that provides debt finance and support to underserved smaller businesses that may find it difficult to access finance from mainstream lenders.

CDFIs typically have strong, local knowledge of the businesses they support and the communities they reside in. As such, they are well placed to help remove barriers to accessing finance experienced by businesses, which can unlock the potential in those communities.

One of the key objectives of the British Business Bank's Community ENABLE Funding programme is to help develop the CDFI sector across the UK, and the programme will provide a significant boost to the sector, supporting up to £150m of lending over its first two years.



The Community ENABLE Funding programme works by increasing the availability of funding to social impact small business lenders, who in turn can provide that funding to the smaller businesses they serve in local communities.

SWIG Finance was established in 1992 to raise and provide gap finance for local businesses for the purpose of economic development. As a not-for-profit social enterprise, it is passionate about bringing social and economic benefits to people, places and the business community in the South and West Country.

Since April 2009, SWIG Finance has invested over £116m in 5,736 businesses, creating and safeguarding 10,484 jobs and contributing £448.1m to the South

and West Country economy.

Matt Wilde, Managing Director, SWIG Finance, said: "This is a major milestone for SWIG Finance and the small business communities we are here to support.

"This allocation gives us the scale and long-term confidence to expand our lending and increase our impact. It will enable us to support more viable businesses, create and protect jobs, and ensure finance reaches entrepreneurs with strong plans and potential - especially where mainstream funding is harder to access.

"The South West has huge economic potential, from rural and coastal communities to towns and cities. Our role is to help unlock that potential by providing finance that is practical, accessible, and tailored to the needs of the communities we serve.

"Having worked with the British Business Bank to deliver a range of funds over the years - including Start Up Loans, the South West Investment Fund and the Growth Guarantee Scheme - we are proud to continue our partnership through the Community ENABLE Funding programme and excited about the impact it will have on small businesses across the region."

Extraordinary Roman Gold Ring Acquired for Somerset Collections

The South West Heritage Trust has acquired an extraordinary Roman gold finger ring discovered near Ilminster, South Somerset. Following conservation work, it will join the Roman collections on display at The Museum of Somerset.

Dating to around AD 297, the Ilminster Ring weighs 48 grams, is unusually large and exquisitely crafted, set with a finely engraved gemstone depicting the goddess Victory driving a two-horse chariot. Rare both in scale and artistry, it is an unparalleled discovery for Britain and a unique find for South West England.

Amal Khreisheh, Senior Curator at South West Heritage Trust, said: "The Ilminster Ring is both large and heavy, with elaborate goldwork

and a beautifully executed intaglio. While other examples are known, these elements combine to create a spectacular ring that is only paralleled by continental discoveries.

"Its discovery sheds light on how South Somerset's Roman inhabitants navigated a period of unrest from 286-296. It is likely the ring was buried



shortly after, in 297, as part of a hoard including coins, lead and pottery objects."

South West Heritage Trust raised £78,010 to acquire the Ilminster Ring and Hoard, with support from the Arts Council England / V&A Purchase Grant Fund, Art Fund with a contribution from the Wolfson Foundation, and The Headley Trust, alongside generous local support from the Friends of The Museum of Somerset, Ilminster Town Council, Taunton U3A and Ilminster Education Foundation.



Help name Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance's new helicopter

Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance has today announced the launch of a competition to find a name for its new second helicopter which entered operational service in May.

Thousands of people and businesses in the local community helped make the arrival of the second helicopter a reality. In recognition of that support, the charity is now inviting the community who helped make this possible to choose a name that reflects the aircraft's life-saving role across Dorset and Somerset.

Supporters are being asked to submit their chosen name, along with the story behind it. This could be inspired by their local community, a personal experience of the service, or what Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance means to them.



Entries are now open and can be submitted via the charity's website, by post, or in person at selected events organised or attended by the charity during the competition entry period.

Tracy Bartram, Head of Communications at Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance said: "As a charity-funded service, we rely on our supporters every single day, and they are at the heart of everything we do. We know just how much this new helicopter already means to people, so we believe it's only fitting that the public help to name it and be part of its story in a really personal way."

"Every name entered will have a reason behind it and we're excited to see what people propose. We're proud to give everyone the opportunity to leave a lasting mark on our new helicopter, which will help our team save lives for many years to come."

People can enter online at www.dsairambulance.org.uk/heliname by post at Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance Naming Competition, Landacre House, Castle Road, Chelston Business Park, Wellington, TA21 9JQ or



**DORSET
& SOMERSET
AIR AMBULANCE**

in person at selected events organised or attended by DSAA during the competition period.

Terms and conditions apply and the closing date for entries is Tuesday, August 25.

The winning name will become part of DSAA history, carried on the aircraft as it serves patients across the region. All eligible entries will be shortlisted before a judging panel will decide on the final name.

The winner will receive a photograph opportunity with the helicopter, a behind-the-scenes airbase tour and an invitation to an unveiling event later in the year.

Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance receives no direct funding from the Government and rely on the generosity of the public to deliver their life-saving work. For more information, visit: www.dsairambulance.org.uk.

Somerset cleanroom specialist launches new division following 30% growth

Cleanroom specialist Total Clean Air (TCA) has launched Rent a Cleanroom after achieving approximately 30% year-on-year growth and expanding its team to 26 employees.

A company spokesperson said strong early demand for the new rental proposition is supporting further recruitment and investment plans throughout 2026.

Founded in 2018, Total Clean Air serves customers across the UK and internationally and continues to invest in people, products and facilities from its headquarters in Street, Somerset.

The business currently employs 26 people across sales, engineering, manufacturing, validation, project delivery and support functions and has recently strengthened its sales team as demand continues to grow.

Developed to support businesses that need speed, flexibility and affordability, Rent a Cleanroom provides access to validated cleanroom facilities without the significant upfront investment and lengthy implementation timescales traditionally associated with cleanroom projects.

The proposition has been created to help start-ups, innovators, growing manufacturers and project teams access

compliant cleanroom capacity quickly and cost-effectively.



Phillip Godden, CEO of Total

Clean Air, said: "Rent a Cleanroom has been developed to make compliant cleanroom facilities more accessible.

"By combining flexibility, speed and affordability with the expertise of Total Clean Air, we're helping organisations access the environments they need without the significant upfront investment traditionally associated with cleanroom projects.

"It's a practical solution for businesses looking to innovate, grow or respond quickly to changing operational requirements without compromising compliance or quality."

Godden added: "The response to Rent a Cleanroom has been extremely encouraging. We've already secured and delivered rental orders, generated strong levels of enquiry and are now building our first Series 2 rental system to meet customer demand."

The launch forms part of Total Clean Air's wider growth strategy as the company continues to invest in its Somerset operations and expand its presence across the UK cleanroom market.





Third generation joins Lanier South West as an apprentice

Lanier South West has announced that Gabriella Smith has joined the business as a Sales and Marketing Apprentice, marking a proud milestone as the third generation of the Smith family to become part of the company.

Founded in 1968 by Maurice Smith, the business has grown from a local family enterprise into one of the South West's leading providers of managed print, communications, and business technology solutions.

Gabriella is the granddaughter of Maurice and the daughter of Managing Director Calum Smith. Having grown up around the family business, she has seen first-hand the values, commitment to customer service, and strong community relationships that have helped Lanier South West thrive since 1968.



Her decision to join the company as a Sales and Marketing Apprentice marks the continuation of a proud family legacy, making her the third generation of the Smith family to work within the business.

Gabriella's appointment not only celebrates the company's heritage but also highlights its commitment to investing in the next generation and securing a strong future for the business.

Managing Director, Calum Smith, said: "This is a very proud moment for our family and our business. My father, Maurice Smith, would be incredibly proud to see Gabriella becoming the third generation to join Lanier South West. It is wonderful to see the next generation bringing fresh ideas, enthusiasm, and energy into the business."

He said everyone at Lanier South West was looking forward to supporting her development and watching her grow within the company for many years to come.

Highbridge business supports Co-op supplier gender pay gap analysis



Jane Finch, Chamber member and founder of Somerset business Time for Inclusion, spent the spring helping Co-op better understand gender equality across its supplier network.

An assessment, designed by Jane in her role as a Director for Weave Analytics and in collaboration with the Co-op's procurement team, examined supplier inclusion practices, workplace progression and organisational conditions that shape opportunities for women across many of Co-op's strategic suppliers.

Alongside this deep dive into key partners, Jane helped to examine the gender pay gap data from more than 200 Co-op suppliers.

The analysis shows gender pay gaps across Co-op's supplier base remain below the UK average, and also highlighted:

- Progress is being made, but remains gradual, with structural challenges still to address.
- Levels of inclusion maturity, action planning and reporting readiness vary significantly across suppliers.
- Many organisations are still developing their approach to collecting broader workforce



data ahead of future reporting requirements.

- Strong practice is emerging across the supplier network, particularly around demographic data collection, inclusive hiring and longer-term action planning.

While Jane is best known locally through her business, Time for Inclusion, supporting organisations to build more inclusive workplaces, she also serves as Director of EDI and Consultancy at Weave Analytics.

They created a bespoke supplier gender pay gap assessment, giving Co-op deeper insight into where progress is being made, where additional support may be needed, and how its supply chain can contribute to accelerating progress on gender equality.

Mulberry Fund passes £76,000 milestone for Somerset communities



More than £76,000 has been invested in Somerset communities through a charitable fund established by global fashion brand Mulberry and managed by Somerset Community Foundation (SCF).

Founded in Chilcompton in 1971, Mulberry created the Mulberry Somerset Community Fund in 2021 to give back to the county where the business began.

To date, the fund has awarded more than £61,000 in grants to local groups, alongside £15,000 to the Somerset Care Leavers Fund, which supports young people aged 18 to 25 as they transition to independence.

The latest boost came during Somerset Day month in May, when Mulberry selected SCF as its charity partner for customer donations across its stores nationwide.

Kristen Pye, Philanthropy and Marketing Director at SCF, said: "We were incredibly proud to be chosen as its charity partner during May, bringing Somerset communities to the attention of customers across the UK."

Bank of England summary – business confidence weakens as firms prioritise efficiency over growth

By Malindi Myers – Bank of England Agent South West



@BoESouthWest

Intelligence continues to suggest subdued growth in private sector real activity. Most intelligence was collected before the signing and subsequent breakdown of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Iran, Israel and the US and so does not reflect the volatility and uncertainty sustained by that sequence of events.

Business confidence had continued to weaken to that point. If the ceasefire resumes and holds, it is likely some optimism will return, but it is also likely this will only gradually translate into a substantive pickup in activity.

Employment intentions remain broadly flat, reflecting weak or uncertain demand, labour cost pressures and increased use of automation. Recruitment difficulties have eased to slightly below normal levels.

The weighted average 2026 pay settlement remains 3.5%, although uncertainty around 2027 settlements remains high, with some firms concerned that inflationary pressures could lead to higher pay awards.

Input cost pressures persist, particularly for energy-intensive materials such as chemicals, plastics, metals and steel. Manufacturers continue to face pressure on margins, with many reluctant to pass higher costs on to customers given subdued demand.

While own-price inflation expectations have moderated, especially among consumer-facing firms, businesses generally expect margin recovery to take longer than previously anticipated.

Consumer spending growth remains largely inflation-driven, with volumes weak and confidence fragile. Contacts expect only modest growth through the remainder of 2026, with risks still skewed to the downside.

Investment intentions remain uneven but broadly flat, pointing to another year of subdued spending. High borrowing costs, uncertainty over demand and inflation, rising construction costs and concerns about future government policy are all weighing on investment decisions. Businesses are increasingly prioritising automation, AI and operational efficiencies over capacity expansion.

Trade conditions remain challenging. Demand from the Middle East has softened, contributing to weaker services exports and lower goods export volumes. Contacts are also reporting signs of weaker demand from the US, China and parts of the EU.

However, aerospace, defence and precision manufacturing continue to perform strongly, while international legal, insurance and some professional services remain relatively resilient.



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Business services activity is being constrained by weak domestic demand and delayed client decision-making. Transactional activity, including mergers and acquisitions and commercial real estate deals, remains subdued.

Revenue growth continues to rely heavily on fee increases, although pricing power is weakening. Areas such as digital transformation, cyber security and specialist advisory services continue to perform relatively well.

Manufacturing output continues to contract modestly, with aerospace and defence remaining notable exceptions. Elsewhere, producers of consumer, automotive and construction-related goods report flat to declining volumes and continued caution about future demand.

Construction activity is also weakening, as geopolitical uncertainty and rising costs delay investment decisions and undermine project viability. Public sector, defence and infrastructure pipelines remain supportive but are expected to take time to convert into activity.

Credit conditions remain broadly unchanged. Banks are willing to lend but remain selective, particularly towards smaller firms and sectors such as construction and hospitality. Demand for borrowing remains weaker than supply as businesses remain cautious about taking on additional debt at current interest rates.

Employment expectations remain broadly unchanged over the next 12 months. Firms continue to focus on efficiency and productivity gains through automation and technology, including AI, while weak demand and higher labour costs continue to restrain hiring. Spare capacity remains evident across much of the economy, particularly in production, construction and consumer-facing sectors.

AI adoption continues to accelerate as firms seek productivity improvements and cost savings. Benefits are being reported across software development, professional services, finance, administration and customer services, while some businesses are reducing demand for junior and administrative roles.

At the same time, investment in AI-related technology, cloud services and infrastructure is creating new cost pressures and changing workforce requirements.

Most firms continue to report squeezed profit margins. While margins remain manageable, businesses are relying on tight cost control, operational efficiencies and restrained capital expenditure to protect cash flow.

Overall, contacts remain cautious on hiring, investment and pricing as they navigate persistent uncertainty and subdued demand.



Government must rethink plan for small businesses

The Business and Trade Committee has asked the Department for Business to reconsider its response to proposals to improve small business growth.

In February 2026, the Committee reported that small businesses were facing cost pressures comparable to the conditions of the pandemic, but without pandemic-style support.

The Government's response restated pre-existing schemes and only fully accepted 6 out of 36 of the Committee's recommendations.

The Committee has requested that the Government publish a new response, within two months, with better proposals on procurement, tax, energy costs, the cost of crime, 'bogus' self-employment and protections for franchisees.

Read more about the Committee's demands at:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/365/business-and-trade-committee/news/214714/government-must-think-again-on-plan-for-britains-small-businesses>

Report suggests better ways to fund local growth

The Industrial Communities Alliance has published a report outlining better ways to fund local growth. The Alliance believes that current funding could have been structured and delivered in a better way.

Recommendations include making funding available to whole towns or local economies rather than to small neighbourhoods within them and abolishing the distinction between capital and revenue spending.

Read more about the report at:

<https://industrialcommunitiesalliance.org.uk/latest-publications-and-events>

Timeline confirmed for changes to right to work checks

The Government has confirmed that new immigration law changes will take effect from 1 October, which widen employers' duties to check that staff have a right to work in the UK.

Under the changes, zero-hour, gig and agency workers will be subject to the checks.

Companies operating platforms to match freelancers to clients will also need to carry out right to work checks.

Read more about the changes at:

<https://www.pinsentmasons.com/out-law/news/timeline-confirmed-employer-checks-uk-right-to-work>

Scheme to support smaller exporters

A joint scheme between UK Export Finance and British Business Bank will help small and medium-sized businesses access the finance they need to expand their export potential and grow. Launching in spring 2027, the scheme will address the gap in finance for smaller business exporters, particularly those seeking lower-value working capital. The scheme will be open to businesses across all sectors and will support lending facilities, including term loans and working capital.

Read more about the scheme at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-export-finance-and-british-business-bank-to-launch-joint-scheme-to-support-thousands-of-smaller-exporters>

Majority of small businesses blocked by red tape

A survey by the Department for Business has revealed that 96% of businesses believe that regulations in their sector are disproportionately creating problems. Around 94% said there are regulations that limit their ability to grow and innovate, while 89% complain that rules are imposing unreasonable direct costs on their business. Some of the most common grievances were duplication and delays to approvals, licensing and authorisations.

Read more about the survey at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/unlocking-business-reform-driven-by-you>



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