

# Somerset Voice

The Official Magazine of  
Somerset Chamber of Commerce

**October /  
November  
2026**

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Front page: The Somerset Business Awards 2027 judges and sponsors.  
Photo: Darren Honeywill

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## FIRST WORD



As autumn gathers pace, Somerset businesses have plenty of reasons to be optimistic. This edition highlights three initiatives that reflect the strength, ambition and opportunity across our county.

From the launch of the Somerset Business Awards 2027 to the exceptional response to our inaugural Somerset Future 30 programme and the significant supply chain opportunities emerging through the Epic Campus development, we continue to see evidence of businesses investing, growing and planning for the future.

Entries are now open for the Somerset Business Awards 2027, offering businesses, charities and organisations of all sizes the chance to showcase their achievements and gain recognition among the wider business community. Every year the awards highlight the innovation, resilience and leadership that drive Somerset forward, and we look forward to celebrating another outstanding group of finalists and winners.

We have also been encouraged by the response to the first Somerset Future 30. The number and quality of nominations received demonstrate the depth of young talent across Somerset and underline the importance of recognising the next generation of business leaders who are already making a significant contribution to our economy and communities.

Meanwhile, work is continuing to create new opportunities for local firms through the Epic Campus development in Long Ashton. With a range of contracts becoming available across construction, engineering and specialist trades, the project represents a significant opportunity for businesses to strengthen their pipelines and secure work on one of the region's most important developments.

Together, these stories highlight what Somerset does best: developing talent, creating opportunity and celebrating business success.

Thank you for your continued support. Whether through our events, awards or partnerships, your involvement helps strengthen Somerset's business community, and I look forward to seeing many of you soon.

*David Crew*

MANAGING DIRECTOR  
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## Entries now open for the Somerset Business Awards 2027



Entries are now open for the Somerset Business Awards 2027, with businesses, charities and organisations from across the county invited to put themselves forward for recognition in Somerset's most prestigious business awards.

The awards were officially launched at a special event at Henlade House, near Taunton, which was attended by sponsors, judges and businesses keen to learn more about this year's categories and entry process.

Organised annually by Somerset Chamber of Commerce, the awards celebrate the very best of Somerset's business community and voluntary sector. Leading accountancy firm Albert Goodman is returning as headline sponsor for the 17th consecutive year.

Mike Cahill, Partner at Albert Goodman, said: "We're proud to be sponsoring the Somerset Business Awards again this year. It's something we look forward to, because it gives us a genuine chance to see the scale of talent and ambition across the county, from long established firms to newer businesses just finding their feet.

"Being with you, wherever you are on your journey, is at the heart of what we do, and these awards feel like a natural extension of that. It's not just about putting our name to an event. It's about standing alongside the businesses we work with day in, day out, and giving proper recognition to the hard work and risk taking that often goes unseen.

"Somerset has a business community that's honest, hardworking and full of ambition, and we're glad to help shine a light on it."

The awards are free to enter and businesses do not need to be members of Somerset Chamber of Commerce to take part.

David Crew, Managing Director of Somerset Chamber of Commerce, said: "Following another fantastic launch event, we are delighted to officially open entries for the Somerset Business Awards 2027.

"These awards provide a valuable opportunity for businesses, charities and leaders across Somerset to gain recognition for their achievements, celebrate success with their teams and raise their profile among customers, suppliers and the wider business community.

"Our new categories reflect the ambition, innovation and leadership that continue to drive Somerset forward, while our established awards ensure organisations of every size and sector have the opportunity to showcase what they do best.

"I would encourage any organisation considering entering to take a look at the categories and submit an application. Every year we are inspired by the quality of entries we receive and we look forward to celebrating Somerset's outstanding success stories once again."

Organisations have until November 20 to submit their entries via the Somerset Business Awards website at [www.somersetbusinessawards.org.uk](http://www.somersetbusinessawards.org.uk).



▲ Mike Cahill (left), Partner at headline sponsor Albert Goodman and David Crew, Somerset Chamber MD.



▲ Evelyn Adfield of Porter Dodson (left) and Emma Warren of Elite Staffing Solutions.



▲ Sophie Pickering (left) and Jasmine Strak of Leonardo with Mike Cahill of Albert Goodman.

## Awards this year are:

**Small Business of the Year**  
sponsored by CETSAT

**Medium Business of the Year**  
sponsored by Handelsbanken

**Large Business of the Year**  
sponsored by UCS College Group

**Albert Goodman Family Business  
of the Year Award**

**Innovation with Impact Award**  
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**Charity of the Year Award**  
sponsored by Clarke Willmott

**Employer of the Year Award**  
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**Investing in Somerset Award**  
sponsored by Hinkley Point C

**Business Leader of the Year Award**  
sponsored by Battens Solicitors

**Apprentice of the Year Award**  
sponsored by Weston College Group

**Sustainable Business of the Year Award**  
sponsored by Agratas

**Service Excellence Award**  
sponsored by Porter Dodson

**Manufacturing and Engineering Excellence Award**  
sponsored by Leonardo UK

**Scale Up of the Year Award**  
sponsored by Barclays



▲ Andrew Cockcroft of Hinkley Point C (centre) with Aaron Cummings (left) and Mike Morgan of MMES 2012 Ltd.



▲ From left: Laura Heatley of Battens Solicitors, Kara Weymouth of Weston College, Ceri Stephens of Battens Solicitors and Joe Smith of Weston College.



▲ From left: Matt Huggett of Stephens Scown, Lucy Hawkins of UCS College Group, Bethan Turner of Taunton Chamber of Commerce and Nigel Pearce of The Pearce Practice.



▲ Some of the sponsors and judges at the launch of the Somerset Business Awards 2027, held at Henlade House, near Taunton.

The awards are also supported by media sponsors Global and the Somerset County Gazette Series.

Photos: Darren Honeywill

## Somerset Future 30 hailed a success as judging gets underway

Somerset Chamber of Commerce has hailed the launch of its inaugural Somerset Future 30 programme a success after receiving a great response from businesses and young professionals across the county.

The initiative, which aims to recognise 30 outstanding professionals aged under 30 who are making a significant contribution to Somerset's economy and communities, attracted nominations from a wide range of sectors before entries closed last month.

An independent judging panel has now begun the task of selecting the final Somerset Future 30, with successful entrants due to be announced on September 23.

The Chamber has thanked businesses, organisations and individuals who submitted nominations, as well as the judging panel for their support and commitment to the process.

Sponsors Barclays, Elite Staffing Solutions, Yeovil College/NextGen, Hatched Agency and Stantec make up the judging panel and will assess nominees based on their achievements, impact and potential.

David Crew, Managing Director of Somerset Chamber of Commerce, said: "The response to the inaugural Somerset Future 30 has exceeded our expectations and demonstrates the depth of talent we have across Somerset.

"We have received nominations from a broad range of industries and backgrounds, highlighting the exceptional contribution young professionals are making in businesses, organisations and communities throughout the county.

"I would like to thank everyone who took the time to submit nominations and also our judging panel, including Stantec, for their support. Their expertise and commitment will help ensure we recognise a truly outstanding group of future leaders."

The programme was launched earlier this year to shine a spotlight on emerging talent across the county and celebrate individuals who are already making a positive impact in their workplace, industry or community.

The final Somerset Future 30 will be revealed on September 23 before being honoured at a celebratory lunch at Somerset County Cricket Club on November 27. The event will bring together winners, sponsors, judges and business leaders from across the county to recognise the achievements of Somerset's next generation of talent.

The Somerset Future 30 was launched by Somerset Chamber of Commerce with support from sponsors and partners committed to developing and celebrating future leaders across the region.



## Lifelong learning key to tackling Somerset's skills and youth employment challenges

Somerset Chamber of Commerce is backing calls for a more joined-up approach to skills and workforce development, with support for young people entering employment needing to go hand in hand with opportunities for adults to upskill and retrain throughout their careers.

The call comes as the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) publishes a new report, From Classroom to Career: Delivering Growth Through Lifelong Learning, highlighting the need for a more joined-up approach to careers, skills and employment support.

The report warns that investment in young people and adult skills should not be viewed as competing priorities, particularly as advances in artificial intelligence continue to reshape the workplace.

Recent BCC research, based on responses from more than 850 businesses across the UK, found that 58% are experiencing skills shortages, while 67% said improved access to skilled employees would help their business grow.

Somerset Chamber of Commerce, which leads the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for Somerset, said the findings mirrored many of the concerns raised by employers across the county.

David Crew, Managing Director of Somerset Chamber of Commerce, said: "The findings of this report strongly reflect what we hear from employers across Somerset through our Local Skills Improvement Plan work. Businesses are telling us they need access to skilled people in order to grow, but they are also increasingly concerned about future workforce pipelines.





## Epic Campus development announces new contract opportunities for North Somerset construction firms

North Somerset construction businesses are being encouraged to register their interest in a range of upcoming contract opportunities linked to the landmark Epic Campus development in Long Ashton.

The project, which is being delivered by Gilbert-Ash, represents one of the region's largest construction programmes and is set to create significant opportunities for local suppliers over the coming months and years.

A number of work packages are now being brought to market through Somerset Chamber of Commerce's Somerset Supply Chain, with opportunities spanning construction, fit-out, engineering and specialist trades.

Current and forthcoming opportunities include:

- Scaffolding (£500,000)
- Brickwork (£700,000 to £800,000)
- Drylining (£2 million)
- Electrical contractor LV (£1 million to £3 million)
- Pipework and ventilation (£2 million to £5 million)
- Soft flooring
- Painting and decorating
- Doors and joinery
- Fitted furniture
- Tiling
- Signage
- Builders' merchants and material supply

Several packages are expected to progress throughout 2026 and 2027, with further opportunities anticipated as the development advances through its phased construction programme.

Somerset Chamber of Commerce is working with North Somerset Council on the Epic Campus project and is urging businesses across North Somerset, particularly those operating in the construction sector, to register on the Somerset Supply Chain portal to ensure they don't miss out.

By registering they will receive information about relevant tenders, engagement events and supplier support opportunities associated with the Epic Campus project.

David Crew, Managing Director of Somerset Chamber of Commerce, said: "We're keen to hear from North Somerset businesses that want to be part of this transformational project. These opportunities cover a broad range of trades and services, from specialist contractors through to suppliers and merchants.

"By registering on the Somerset Supply Chain portal, businesses can make sure they are visible to contractors and are among the first to hear about opportunities as they become available."

Sam Orchard, Supply Chain Engagement Lead at Somerset Chamber of Commerce, added: "Our priority is ensuring that local firms are given every opportunity to compete for work on the Epic Campus project.

"We know there is considerable expertise within North Somerset's construction sector, and we want businesses of all sizes, from sole traders and microbusinesses to established contractors, to engage with us now."

"Registering on the portal is free and will help us understand local capability, connect businesses with upcoming opportunities and provide support where needed."

Councillor Mark Canniford, North Somerset Council's Cabinet Member for Sustainable Places, said: "Thanks to Section 106 funding negotiated between North Somerset Council and Epic Systems Corporation, we're pleased to welcome initiatives that help maximise the economic impact of this development and create long-term opportunities for local firms.

"These contract opportunities give North Somerset's construction sector a real chance to be part of one of the region's most significant developments, supporting local jobs, skills and supply chains while delivering lasting benefits for communities across North Somerset."

Businesses interested in becoming part of the Epic Campus supply chain can register free of charge at: [www.somersetsupplychain.co.uk](http://www.somersetsupplychain.co.uk)

For further information, contact Sam Orchard, Supply Chain Engagement Lead, at [supplychain@somerset-chamber.co.uk](mailto:supplychain@somerset-chamber.co.uk).

## Historic hydrogen flight to take-off from Bristol Airport

The UK Government has announced that Bristol Airport will be involved in three groundbreaking projects to decarbonise flight, including the first flight of an aircraft powered by liquid hydrogen from a UK commercial airport.

The three projects are funded by the £8million Zero Emissions Flight Demonstrator Programme, run by Innovate UK and supported by the Department for Transport.

The liquid hydrogen flight will be delivered by a consortium called Cryogenic Hydrogen Optimised Systems for AviationN (CHOSAN) to demonstrate liquid hydrogen as a viable fuel for the next generation of commercial aviation, as part of a £1.7million project.

The project will deliver a series of regional flights in a light aircraft powered by hydrogen, with the first flight taking off from Bristol Airport. The inaugural flight is expected to take place in the next couple of years.

Bristol Airport is also supporting



separate projects led by ZeroAvia and Equilibriion, which have received UK Government funding for a mobile hydrogen refuelling vehicle capable of supporting liquid hydrogen-powered aircraft and ground support equipment.

Equilibriion will be undertaking a 12-month feasibility study, with Bristol Airport as the live airport partner. This study aims to address a vital gap in aviation infrastructure planning by examining how liquid hydrogen can be supplied, stored, and managed at Bristol Airport to support future zero-emission aircraft operations.

Dave Lees, CEO of Bristol Airport, said:



“Bristol Airport has a strong record of supporting innovation – we hosted the UK’s first airside hydrogen refuelling trial and our ACT Programme has funded several pioneering projects to reduce emissions.

“The latest projects build on this work and will move the whole industry towards developing zero carbon flight.”

Hydrogen has the potential to play a crucial role in substantially reducing the climate impact of aviation in the long term and transforming air transport in a way comparable to the impact of electric vehicles in the automotive sector. Bristol Airport is already working in a unique partnership with aerospace companies, including Airbus, GKN Aerospace, and Rolls Royce, to accelerate the delivery of hydrogen-powered flight.

## Teapot helps local college prove the value of standing apart

# Teapot.

Somerset brand agency Teapot has highlighted the commercial impact of distinctive branding after its work with Queen’s College delivered significant increases in enquiries and admissions, challenging conventional approaches to marketing within the education sector.

Teapot said many school brands continued to follow established conventions despite seeking to appeal to prospective families in an increasingly competitive market, making it harder for schools to communicate what set them apart.

The agency’s work with Queen’s College, in Taunton, was driven by research that suggested the school’s existing brand was no longer connecting with key audiences. Insight gathered from students, parents, staff and the wider community generated more than 2,000 data points and revealed that only 30% of respondents felt the brand accurately represented the school, while 60% were neutral towards it.

Rather than approaching the project as a simple visual refresh, Teapot

focused on identifying the qualities that made the school distinctive before developing a new brand identity around those findings.

The resulting strategy retained Queen’s College’s historic Wyvern symbol but repositioned it within a more flexible and contemporary identity system. Teapot complemented the existing heritage assets with updated typography, colour palettes and photography designed to better reflect the character, energy and individuality of the school community.

Since the introduction of the new brand, Queen’s College has recorded a 39% year-on-year increase in enquiries and a 48% increase in admissions. The school estimates that growth represents more than £2.5 million in additional lifetime value.

A spokesperson for Teapot said the project demonstrated that successful brand growth came from understanding and expressing what made an organisation unique rather than simply updating visual assets.



Lizzie Tottle, of Teapot, said: “In increasingly competitive markets, organisations that look and sound like their competitors risk being overlooked, while those willing to embrace their differences are more likely to capture attention and drive growth.

“The Queen’s College project serves as evidence that authenticity and distinctiveness can deliver measurable commercial returns, even in sectors where fitting in has traditionally been regarded as the safer option.”

## Huish and WPA expand partnership with new student development initiatives

Richard Huish College, in Taunton, has expanded its long standing partnership with WPA Health Insurance Services, introducing two new initiatives designed to enhance student employability and strengthen the college's pastoral curriculum.

The collaboration, which has developed over many years, has seen WPA play an active role in supporting a wide range of college events, careers activities and employability programmes. Through its engagement with students, the Taunton-based health insurer has helped provide insights into the workplace and career opportunities available after education.

Building on that relationship, Huish and WPA are launching a bespoke career development programme that will give 15 students the opportunity to take part in a dedicated employability scheme.

Students who successfully secure places on the programme will attend four development days throughout the academic year. The sessions will provide first-hand experience of professional working environments while helping participants develop key workplace skills, including



▲ Photo caption: From left, Zoe Burne of WPA, Becky Flower of Huish, Chloe Marchant and Charlie MacEwan of WPA.

communication, teamwork, problem solving and professional networking.

The new initiative is intended to help students gain a deeper understanding of the skills and behaviours employers value while preparing them for future career opportunities.

Alongside the employability programme, WPA is also working with the college to review and enhance its pastoral curriculum. The partnership will focus on ensuring content remains relevant and aligned with the skills and knowledge required in today's evolving workplace.

A key element of the curriculum project will be the involvement of Huish alumni, who will share their career journeys and experiences with



current students. College leaders believe these real world examples will provide valuable inspiration and practical insight for young people as they consider their future pathways.

A Huish spokesperson said the partnership continued to deliver significant benefits for both organisations and, most importantly, for students. The spokesperson added that WPA's long term commitment to supporting learners has played an important role in helping young people develop confidence, skills and career aspirations.

The college said collaborations between education providers and employers demonstrate the value of working together to help prepare the workforce of the future. Huish representatives also expressed their appreciation for WPA's ongoing support and said they look forward to seeing the impact of the new initiatives during the coming year.

## WPA named the UK's only Which? Recommended Provider for private medical insurance

WPA has been announced as the UK's only Which? Recommended Provider for private medical insurance, achieving a leading score of 86%, 6% ahead of its nearest competitor where the average score for all was 77%.

The recognition marks WPA's return to the coveted Which? Recommended Provider title and follows four consecutive years where WPA has led the Which? scoring for private medical insurance.



Which? only endorses the best products and services. Recommended Provider status is reserved for companies rated highly by Which? members who have a medical insurance policy.

WPA's performance also reinforces its strong independent customer credentials, alongside recognition from Trustpilot and Fairer Finance.

Mark Southern, WPA's Distribution and Marketing Director, said:

"WPA is thrilled to yet again be named the Which?

Recommended Provider for Private Medical Insurance. This prestigious recognition by the UK's leading consumer champion underscores our unwavering commitment to delivering exceptional customer service - an honour that would not be possible without the team's hard work and dedication."

Matthew Jenkin, Senior Journalist, of Which? Money said, "WPA topped our private health insurance customer satisfaction table, with customers praising how easy it is to contact the provider and the speedy reply, so we've named WPA as the Which? Recommended Provider for health insurance for 2026."

WPA is the only Which? Recommended Provider of medical insurance alongside other companies Aviva, AXA, BUPA, SAGA, Vitality and Westfield Health, underlining its credentials and continued focus on customer outcomes.



## The Royal Bath & West Society launches South West Future Fair to inspire the region's next generation of talent

The Royal Bath & West of England Society is expanding its educational offering with the launch of the South West Future Fair, a new careers and skills event designed to help secondary school, sixth form and college students explore future opportunities and prepare for the world of work.

Taking place on Wednesday, November 18, in the Showering Pavilion at the Bath & West Showground, the event will run during the early evening to allow students and parents to attend outside of school hours.

The South West Future Fair will bring together around 50 employers, universities, colleges, apprenticeship providers and training organisations from across the region.

Attendees will have the opportunity to explore a wide range of career pathways, learn about further and higher education options, and gain valuable insights into skills that employers are seeking.

The event aims to support young people at a crucial stage in their development, helping them make informed decisions about their future careers.

Alongside the exhibition, a programme of practical workshops will provide students with essential employability skills. Sessions will include CV writing, mock interviews, and "Stay Hired, Not Fired", offering advice on workplace



expectations, professional behaviour and the personal skills needed to succeed in employment.

The event will also provide opportunities for students and parents to speak directly with employers and industry professionals, helping young people build confidence and gain a clearer understanding of the opportunities available to them in the South West and beyond.

A spokesperson for the Royal Bath & West of England Society said: "The South West Future Fair will connect young people with employers, educators and training providers, giving them practical advice, inspiration and real-world insights into the many routes available after school or college. We are delighted to create an event that supports students as they take their next steps towards rewarding careers."

Tickets are now available for schools, with registrations also open to individual students and parents. Exhibitor bookings are also open.

Find out more <https://www.bathandwestshowground.com/events/south-west-futures-fair>

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## Former apprentice becomes Channel Challenger for children's charity

A Yeovil manager who began his career as a Leonardo apprentice is preparing to swim the English Channel this September to raise money for a charity helping children gain lifesaving water skills.

Matt Read, Early Careers Training Manager at Leonardo in Yeovil, will take part in a Channel relay crossing in early September, in support of Swim Tayka, a charity dedicated to preventing drowning through swimming education and water safety programmes for children.

Born and raised in Yeovil, Matt attended Buckler's Mead School before studying engineering at Yeovil College as part of a Leonardo apprenticeship programme. He later completed a Mechanical Engineering degree at Plymouth University and now helps develop graduates,

apprentices and industrial placement students entering the business.

Matt said: "Swimming has given me so much over the years. Supporting Swim Tayka is an opportunity to help children develop skills that could one day save their lives while giving them confidence in their own abilities."

Preparing for the challenge has required months of training in Lyme Bay and at Vobster Quay. Matt trains up to five times a week and has just completed a demanding two hour



cold-water qualification before the crossing. The warmer waters have also brought another challenge.

Matt said: "We're not allowed to wear wetsuits during the Channel swim, so I've had plenty of encounters with jellyfish this summer. You learn to treat the stings like nettle stings – acknowledge them and keep going."

Matt hopes to raise £1,800 through the challenge to support swimming lessons and water-safety education for children. This sum will fund comprehensive community programmes that will prevent drowning and foster clean-water stewardship.

This will include survival swimming skills, teaching children from the ages of 4 to 14 how to float, tread water, and swim to safety in open-water regions like rivers, lakes, and oceans.

## Hatched Agency and SS&L partner to inspire the next generation of marketing talent

Somerset-based Hatched Agency has announced a new partnership with education and training provider SS&L to help deliver a Multi-Channel Marketer Level 3 Apprenticeship, giving learners direct access to industry professionals, live client projects and real-world agency experience.

The collaboration will see Hatched Agency become a specialist delivery partner for the programme, developing learning content and delivering a number of apprenticeship modules from its headquarters at the Firepool Centre for Digital Innovation in Taunton.

The partnership aims to bring education and industry closer together, giving apprentices the

opportunity to learn directly from experienced marketers, designers, developers and digital specialists working with businesses every day.

Learners will gain practical insight into areas including digital marketing, campaign planning, branding, content creation, analytics, customer engagement, websites, AI and emerging technologies.

Typically completed over 18 months, the Multi-Channel Marketer Level 3 Apprenticeship combines structured learning with practical workplace experience, helping learners develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours required by today's employers.

Gavin Sadler, Managing Director of Hatched Agency, said: "By opening our doors and delivering specialist modules from our agency, apprentices won't just learn what marketing is. They'll see how it works in practice, hear directly from industry experts and develop the confidence and skills employers are genuinely looking for."

"As a business, we've always believed in investing in people. Whether that's

apprentices, graduates or young creatives, we're committed to helping nurture the next generation of talent here in Somerset."

Every year, SS&L supports thousands of learners and hundreds of employers, with a focus on practical, inclusive learning that removes barriers and helps individuals, businesses and communities thrive.

Heidi Oliver, Business Development and Partnerships Director at SS&L, said: "Partnering with Hatched Agency gives our learners access to a thriving creative business where they can learn directly from professionals working at the forefront of marketing every day."

"This partnership brings learning to life, combining technical knowledge with real commercial experience and helping apprentices develop the confidence, creativity and practical skills they'll need for successful careers in the industry."



## Clarke Willmott achieves top rankings in latest Chambers High Net Worth Guide

Law firm Clarke Willmott has again been recognised at the highest level in the 2026 Chambers and Partners High Net Worth Guide.

The firm has been ranked in the top two bands in four areas in the latest edition of the guide, with the South West-based private wealth disputes team moving up to Band 2. The private wealth law team in Somerset keeps its Band 1 ranking while private wealth law in both Bristol and Manchester retain their Band 2 status.

Clarke Willmott's UK-wide family and matrimonial law team – ranked for the first time in last year's guide – also maintains its position in Band 5.

The prestigious guide named eight lawyers individually as leading practitioners in their field. Ranked in Band 1 are Taunton partner David Maddock and Bristol-based Bonita Walters.

One interviewed client said that David Maddock “has a true desire to collaborate with clients and other advisers so as to understand the issues and solutions.”

Regarding Bonita Walters, another commented that “from my initial conversation, Bonita was sympathetic,

clear-headed and obviously well-placed to assist. She quickly understood both the substance of my case and the personal difficulty of my situation.”

Philip Whitcomb receives a Band 2 ranking for the Southampton and surrounds region, as does Taunton partner Tom Chiffers, while Bristol partner Jacqui Lazare again receives a Band 3 ranking for private wealth law.

Emily Jenkins in the Bristol office is ranked for the first time, up from “associate to watch”, and Emma Ironside, a senior associate in the South West, is a new entry in the 2026 guide.

Anthony Fairweather, head of Clarke Willmott's private client team, said: “We are proud to be recognised once again in the latest Chambers and Partners High Net Worth Guide.

“This year it has been particularly pleasing to see our family and matrimonial finance practice maintain its ranking in the guide after last year's initial entry, with one of our teams and two individuals once again ranked in Band 1.

“These accolades reflect the continued trust our clients place in us and the



dedication of our team to delivering exceptional service in high-value and complex matters. Our strong and growing presence in all regions of the UK highlights Clarke Willmott's private client practice as one of the best and most diverse in the country.”

The Chambers and Partners High Net Worth Guide lists the best legal expertise in international private wealth. It ranks law firms and lawyers who are leading sector experts in understanding complex HNW issues. A market leading annual guide, it helps individuals find the best talent to provide specialist legal services.

The guide covers private wealth management work and related specialisms, features in-depth editorial about the leading lawyers and law firms for wealthy individuals and families.

## Summerfield completes Priory Bridge Road redevelopment in Taunton

Summerfield has completed the redevelopment of the former Volvo garage on Priory Bridge Road in Taunton, transforming the long-vacant site into a new 4,820 sq ft industrial facility for Formula One Autocentres.

The prominent site had remained vacant for several years and presented an opportunity for regeneration. It was acquired by Summerfield in 2024, with a pre-let agreed with Formula One Autocentres before redevelopment work began.

Demolition of the former garage began in November 2025, with construction of the new property commencing in January 2026. The development reached practical completion in July,

with Formula One Autocentres taking occupation under a new 15-year lease.

Formula One Autocentres opened its new centre this month, joining Enterprise Rent-A-Car at the Priory Bridge Road site and helping to bring the previously underused location back into productive commercial use. The redevelopment also creates potential for further development along the road.



**SUMMERFIELD**



James Holyday, Group Managing Director at Summerfield, said: “We are delighted to have completed the transformation of this prominent site and to welcome Formula One Autocentres to Priory Bridge Road.

“The project has successfully transformed a property that had been vacant for a considerable time into a modern, high-quality facility for a well-established national occupier. Securing a 15-year lease demonstrates confidence in both the quality of the development and Taunton as a strong business location.”





## Office services

### Summerfield

As working patterns continue to evolve, businesses are looking for office space that offers more than simply four walls. Location, flexibility, parking, meeting space and responsive property management can all play an important part in creating a workplace where people want to be.

Summerfield Commercial has developed more than four million sq ft of workspace across the South West and manages a diverse portfolio of commercial properties, supporting more than 160 tenants.

Two examples are Victoria House and adjacent Viney Court in Taunton, well-established office buildings just 0.6 miles from the town centre. Together, they offer a choice of office suites, with space at Victoria House ranging from around 300 sq ft to 2,000 sq ft, making them suitable for

businesses at different stages of growth.

For occupiers, choosing the right office is about looking beyond size alone. Easy access for staff and visitors, a convenient location and the ability to adapt as a business changes can make a real difference.

For landlords, well-managed buildings can also help create stronger, longer-term relationships with tenants. Keeping spaces well maintained, responding quickly to occupier needs and providing flexibility where possible all contribute to a better working environment.

Victoria House and Viney Court currently have office suites available, offering businesses the opportunity to join an established commercial location close to the heart of Taunton.

Find out more: [www.summerfield.co.uk](http://www.summerfield.co.uk) | 01823 257961

SUMMERFIELD 

## EDF announces leadership changes in its UK nuclear businesses

Mark Hartley has taken up his post as the new Chief Executive Officer of Hinkley Point C. His appointment comes as current CEO Stuart Crooks steps down from the role after 40 years of service in the nuclear industry.

Mark, who was previously Managing Director of EDF's Nuclear Operations, is returning to Hinkley Point C where he was Technical Director for five years until 2023. He holds a PhD in Mechanical Engineering from Bath University and has deep expertise in the nuclear industry.

His position in Nuclear Operations will be taken by John Munro, currently Director of Nuclear Operations, having previously held senior leadership roles at Torness and Heysham 2, where he was Station Director, before becoming Chief Nuclear Officer for Region 1.

Stuart will continue to be closely connected to the nuclear industry as a non-executive board member for Sizewell C and EDF's Nuclear Operations business and as an advisor to the Cottam Small Modular Reactor (SMRs) project in Nottinghamshire.

He has worked in the nuclear industry for 40 years. In 2018 he was awarded the Chevalier de L'Ordre National



du Mérite and in 2019 he was awarded a CBE for services to nuclear.

EDF CEO Simone Rossi said: "This carefully planned transition demonstrates the depth, resilience and maturity of our nuclear organisation and our ability to develop world class nuclear leadership. It will enable us to deliver our ambitious nuclear plans in Britain at our existing power stations and in nuclear new build.

"I want to thank Stuart for his outstanding service to the UK industry. He has driven the replication strategy that has seen significant performance improvements in the second unit at Hinkley Point C and enabled the start of Sizewell C, which will benefit from everything learned at Hinkley Point C.

"His contribution to the nuclear renaissance is profound and I am pleased that he will continue to offer his expertise in a non-executive capacity."

Hinkley Point C is a twin reactor nuclear power station in Somerset that will provide reliable, low carbon electricity for Britain for decades to come. EDF's Nuclear Operations runs Britain's operational nuclear power stations at Sizewell B, Heysham, Torness and Hartlepool and is responsible for defueling Hinkley Point B, Hunterston and Dungeness.



## HINKLEY UPDATE

## Stay ahead of the October Employment Rights Act 2025 changes and reduce risk

*As a member of Somerset Chamber, businesses automatically receive membership of Quest, a national British Chambers of Commerce scheme which offers Chamber members access to advice on HR, legal, health and safety, tax and VAT at no additional cost to their annual membership fee.*

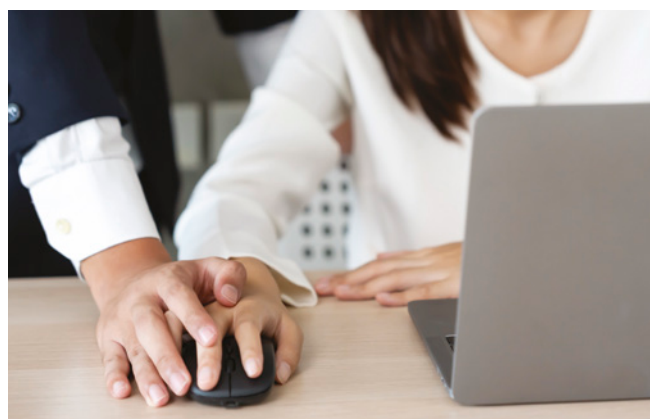
*Here, the Quest experts look at the implications for employers of upcoming changes to the Employment Rights Act 2025.*



The next phase of the Employment Rights Act 2025 (ERA) represents a significant shift in employer responsibilities, with further changes coming into force in October.

Unlike previous updates, the reforms place a greater emphasis on proactive compliance. For many businesses, this will require a review of existing policies, procedures and work practices to ensure they remain aligned with the evolving legal framework.

As expectations increase, so too does the level of risk. Employers who fail to prepare will face greater exposure to tribunal claims, financial costs and reputational damage.



### What's Changing in October?

- **Stronger Duty to Prevent Harassment at Work:** Employers will need to take all reasonable steps to prevent harassment — raising the standard from the current requirement and requiring proactive measures.
- **Liability for third-party harassment:** Employers may be held responsible for any harassment by customers, clients or other third parties unless they can prove they took all reasonable steps to prevent it.
- **Extended time limits for employment tribunal claims:** Workers will have more time to bring their claims, increasing the window of exposure and the importance of handling issues correctly.
- **Expanded trade union rights and protections:** Employers will have a new duty to inform staff of their right to join a trade union — alongside stronger protections for industrial action and greater union access.
- **Wider reforms impacting work practices:** Additional updates continue to raise expectations on work conduct, employee protections, and overall compliance.

With expectations increasing and the window for claims expanding, even small gaps in compliance could lead to more significant issues over time.

If you're unsure whether your current contracts, policies and processes are aligned — a complimentary ERA Compliance Review can help you assess your position and identify any areas that may need attention ahead of the changes.




Stay Ahead of the Changes With...

## ERA COMPLIANCE REVIEWS

Additional updates under the **Employment Rights Act 2025** are fast-approaching, and businesses that fail to prepare early could face legal and operational risks.

The **ERA Compliance Review** helps you identify gaps and ensure your business is prepared for what comes next — all at no additional cost through your Chamber membership.




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www.inspirebiz.co.uk

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www.lyonscorporatesolutions.co.uk

### **Ocean Automotive**

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www.yeovilaudi.co.uk/

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www.richardslandmanagement.co.uk

### **Sparks Transport**

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jonathan@sparkstransport.com

### **Statement Property Group Ltd**

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hello@statementproperty.co.uk

www.statementproperty.co.uk

### **The Somerset Toiletry Company**

Manufacture

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sayhello@tstcglobal.com

thesomersettoiletryco.co.uk

### **Thornfalcon Winery & Press**

Food and Drink

07966274398

hello@thornfalcon.com

www.thornfalcon.com

### **Vospers Motor House**

Transport

07974099960

rick.metcalfe@vospers.com

www.vospers.com

### **Yeovil Art Space**

Charity

07463920230

admin@yeovilartspace.uk

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## LATEST MEMBER-TO-MEMBER OFFERS

**As a member of Somerset Chamber why not take advantage  
of our great range of member-to-member offers?**

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Free skills audit and 10% discount  
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### **Bates Product Design**

10% off all new design projects

### **Injury Armour**

20% off first consultations

### **Lyons Corporate Solutions Ltd**

Free 90 min financial and operational audit

### **Somerset County Cricket Club**

20% off room hire for first meeting or  
conference booking

### **Emerald First Aid**

10% off all onsite or open courses

**If you have an offer you would like to add to our list,  
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# GET SHIT DONE

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## Marketing, media and PR

### 10 Years Ahead

It has never been easier to create content. AI can produce a month of social media posts before breakfast, draft newsletters in seconds and turn a few bullet points into a polished article.

If you have a LinkedIn account you're already living this, scrolling through endless 'AI slop'. Everyone's 'key take' looks remarkably similar in style, content and structure.



This creates an interesting problem: when everyone can create more content, producing it stops being an advantage. The scarce commodity becomes attention.

So, businesses should ask a different question. Instead of: What should we post this week? Ask: Which conversation do we need to

be part of?

It might be a customer choosing between suppliers. A journalist looking for an expert voice. A local authority considering a policy that affects your sector. Or an industry conversation that could create your next partnership.

The most valuable communications work increasingly happens before anything is written: identifying the right audience, understanding what matters to them and finding the moment when your expertise becomes relevant.

At 10 Years Ahead, we believe AI makes this kind of work more important, not less necessary. We use technology to monitor more information, identify opportunities and build deeper intelligence around the audiences our clients need to reach.

Because in an age of infinite content, the winners won't be the businesses saying the most. They'll be the ones saying the right thing, in the right conversation, at the right time.

**10 years ahead**

### Morledge & Co

As businesses grow, their marketing often grows with them, but not always strategically.

The website is looked after by an agency. Someone in the team manages LinkedIn. Adverts are placed ad hoc. Sales creates its own materials. PR is often an afterthought - something happens when there's a little time, a good idea or a story worth sharing. Plenty is happening, but nobody is necessarily joining it all together.

So how do you know when your business needs more strategic marketing leadership?

1. You're doing lots of marketing, but aren't sure what's working.

Activity is high, but the link to business objectives is unclear.

2. Different people and suppliers are working in silos.

Good work can lose impact if messaging, priorities and timings aren't aligned.

3. Marketing decisions keep landing with the MD or owner.

Senior leaders should shape direction, not have to manage every campaign or communication.

4. Good opportunities are being missed.

PR, awards, partnerships, thought leadership and customer stories often slip through the net simply because nobody owns them.

5. Marketing feels reactive rather than planned.

For many growing SMEs, the answer isn't necessarily a full-time Marketing Director. It may be senior, outsourced marketing leadership that can set the strategy, coordinate activity and make sure marketing supports wider commercial goals.

At Morledge & Co., that's increasingly where we add most value: helping businesses move from simply doing marketing making marketing work harder for the business. [www.morledgeandco.com](http://www.morledgeandco.com)

**Morledge & Co.**  
Marketing • PR • Communications



## Impact Design & Marketing

Strategically Cunning. Creatively Excellent. Delivering Impact. That's our mantra and what we've become known for.

Over three decades we have built up a wealth of experience and expertise, it's what we call our Impact 'KnowHow'... a combination of great strategy and creativity deployed across many marketing and communications services.

We work across many business sectors for clients close to home and internationally

and although we have a relatively small headcount, at Impact we are known for out-punching our weight against larger agencies as we are well-equipped to handle even the most complex marketing challenges.

Whilst creating industry-leading work, we pride ourselves on being affordable and delivering great business value and ROI to our clients. Whether it's entering a new market, driving brand awareness, increasing sales, or expanding market share, we have the all-important Impact KnowHow to deliver success, working closely with our clients to achieve their goals.

Our ability to create innovative and effective marketing campaigns has resulted in many long-term partnerships with our clients that have spanned decades. This is a true testimony to how we really make an impact in what we deliver.

If you seek a highly experienced, marketing led, creative consultancy for your business reach out to our Managing Director, Rich: richard@impactdm.co.uk



## Teapot Creative

Most businesses aren't short of marketing activity. There's a new website on the list, social posts going out, an SEO plan somewhere, paid campaigns running and somebody suggesting it might be time for a rebrand.

The problem isn't a lack of stuff. It's whether any of that stuff is working together.

When brand, design, development, SEO and marketing operate separately, it's easy to be busy without actually moving forward. A campaign drives people to a website that doesn't convert. SEO brings in the wrong audience. Great creative communicates a proposition nobody has properly defined. Everyone is doing their job, but the business isn't getting the full value from any of it.

Joined-up thinking starts somewhere else: with the business goal. What needs to change? Who are we trying to reach? What's stopping growth? Once that's clear, the individual disciplines stop competing for attention and start contributing to the same outcome.

That might mean discovering the website isn't the problem after all. It could be the positioning behind it. Or that increasing traffic is pointless until the customer journey improves. This is why Teapot brings strategy, creative, highly technical development, SEO and marketing together. Not because every client needs everything, but because every decision benefits from understanding the bigger picture. [www.teapot.agency](http://www.teapot.agency)

# Teapot.

## SuperFunkyPenguin Photo + Video

Every business has a story worth telling, but most struggle to see it clearly themselves. They know their work matters, they know their clients value them, yet somehow that gets lost between a stock-photo website and a rushed phone snap for LinkedIn. The result is often stiff headshots, generic office photos, or a scattergun approach to video that never quite lands the way it should.

As a brand photographer and videographer, I work above that noise, providing genuine, long-term solutions for businesses, capturing what they are fundamentally about,

not just what it looks like on the surface.

That craft only earns its keep if the content gets used well. Every shoot at SuperFunkyPenguin Photo + Video begins with a planning session. We talk through the business, the audience, and the story we're trying to tell, before a single frame is shot. It shapes everything: locations, props, pacing, even how a video is cut.

The output reflects that planning. Clients don't just receive a folder of images. Depending on the package, they leave with graphics ready to post, a tailored content planner, and video edited for the platforms they'll actually use. [SuperFunkyPenguin.co.uk](http://SuperFunkyPenguin.co.uk).



## Helen Williams takes on leadership role for Stephens Scown's Somerset team



Having returned to Stephens Scown as a partner in 2025, Helen Williams is passionate about supporting Somerset's business community, developing future talent and helping create opportunities for people and organisations across the county.

For Helen Williams, leading Stephens Scown's Somerset team is an opportunity to support a county she is passionate about and help shape its future.

Having started her legal career with the firm before returning as a partner in 2025, Helen brings a strong understanding of both the business and the region.

"Coming back felt like a natural decision," she says. "I've always valued the culture here and was excited by the opportunity to work with such a talented team while helping support the firm's growth in Somerset."

Helen believes Somerset is a county full of opportunity.

"There are fantastic businesses, a strong rural sector, ambitious entrepreneurs and a real sense of momentum. Somerset combines quality of life with a thriving economy, making it an exciting place for businesses and professionals alike."

Alongside supporting clients, developing people is one of Helen's biggest motivations. She has enjoyed mentoring colleagues throughout her career and is passionate about helping the next generation succeed.

"One of the most rewarding parts of my job is seeing people develop and progress. Creating opportunities for people to learn, grow and build successful careers is incredibly important."

She believes the strongest workplace cultures are built on trust, collaboration and a shared commitment to success.

It is fitting, then, that Stephens Scown is a proud sponsor of the Somerset Business Awards' Employer of the Year award, celebrating organisations that create environments where people can thrive.

"It's about supporting one another, celebrating achievements and creating an environment where people can do their best work while enjoying what they do."

Looking ahead, Helen is excited about the future for Stephens Scown in Somerset.

"We have fantastic people, great energy and a real opportunity to continue building strong relationships across the county."

"My focus is on supporting our clients, developing our people and playing an active role in the wider business community."

Away from work, Helen enjoys making the most of Somerset life, whether that's playing padel, a round of golf or exploring the coast and countryside.

"It's a wonderful place to live and work," she says. "That's one of the reasons I'm so optimistic about the future, both for Somerset and for our team here."



Helen Williams, Partner

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## Elevate summer networking at WPA, Blackbrook, Taunton



▲ From left: Mike Cahill of Albert Goodman, Jon Goss of WPA Healthcare Practice and Alex Garood of SolarSense.



▲ William Murray of William Murray Financial Planner (left), Heidi Oliver of SS&L and Charlie MacEwan of WPA.

▼ Julie Grant of Blueloop and Ian Colio, Somerset Chamber Membership Account Manager.



▲ Somerset Chamber's Vice Chairman Rosie Wicks of Blossom HR Consultancy (centre) with Taunton MP Gideon Amos (left) and Charlie MacEwan of WPA.

▼ Lizzie and Barry Tottle of Teapot Creative with Taunton MP Gideon Amos.



## County connections Taunton



▲ Shelly Mullen (left), Somerset Chamber's Somerset LSIP Business Engagement Manager and Chantelle Znidric of TopStylista Image Consultancy.



▲ Katie Thomson (left) and Polley Farey of event sponsor Katie Thomson Marketing.



▲ From left: Aaron Butters of Hooper Services (South West), Kyle Gasser of Epic and Sam Hooper of Hooper Services (South West).

## County Connections networking breakfast at Wincanton Racecourse



▲ Lyndsay Blackshaw of Albert Goodman (left) and Michelle Long of St Margaret's Somerset Hospice.



▲ From left: Laura Day of Laurel Finance, Sarah Gorman of Battens Solicitors and Lizzie Tottle of Teapot Creative.



▲ From left: John Harris of Aspire Commercial Finance, Ian Colio of Somerset Chamber and Neil McFarlane of Perrys Recycling.

## Somerset engineering and manufacturing forum at Haynes Motor Museum, Sparkford



▲ From left: Vinnie Maisey of event sponsor UCS College Group, Somerset Chamber's David Crew and Charlotte Redfearn-Ward of Yeovil College



▲ There was an optional tour of Sycamore Process Engineering after the forum.



▲ Kath Grant and Natasha Butcher of Roberts Group.

## Somerset HR professionals' forum at Numatic International, Chard



▲ The Somerset HR professionals' forum was chaired by Emma Warren of Elite Staffing Solutions and hosted by Becky Bevins of Numatic.

## Somerset international trade forum at the Somerset Toiletry Company, Clutton



▲ Zantore Buoy of the Somerset Toiletry Company hosted the Somerset international trade forum which was supported by international trade expert Linda Middleton-Jones of International Trade Matters.

## Somerset Chamber summer social at King's College, Taunton



▲ Tony Pizii of Halo Protection UK and Alison Powell of King's College.



▲ The Albert Goodman hot air balloon took centre stage on the college's sports field.



▲ Sade Matakotoga (left) and Jodi Webber (centre) of Nuffield Health with Jane Finch of Time for Inclusion.



▲ Joolz Lewis of Enlightened Business and David Crew of Somerset Chamber.



▲ Maria O'Sullivan of Costagard Ltd and Dudley Barnes of Simon Hall Will Writing Services.



▲ From left: Louise Newton of Style by Louise, Sally Maidment of Design Bean and Heidi Berry of King's College.



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| Website: | <a href="http://BBrown.com">BBrown.com</a>                                             |

## Elevate lunch at The Castle at Taunton

**B Brown & Brown**



▲ From left: Elaine Street and Alan Clarke of sponsor Brown & Brown, the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset and Somerset Chamber Patron Mohammed Saddiq, the High Sheriff of Somerset Peter Dixon and Somerset Chamber MD David Crew.



▲ Thomas Jepson-Lay of Thomas Jepson-Lay Leadership and Coaching Consultancy gave a thought-provoking talk on how leaders must adapt to an ever turbulent and changing external environment.



▲ Somerset Chamber Managing Director David Crew welcomed guests to the Elevate lunch.



▲ Jamie Monkhouse (right) of Somerset Wildlife Trust and Thomas Jepson-Lay of Thomas Jepson-Lay Leadership and Coaching Consultancy.



▲ From left: Barry Tottle of Teapot Creative, Mike Cahill of Albert Goodman and Somerset Chamber finance director and James Holyday of Summerfield.



▲ Alan Clarke, Regional Managing Director, of lunch sponsor Brown & Brown.

## Social Value Summit 2026

Tuesday  
**20 Oct**

Somerset Chamber is bringing together business leaders, charities and VCSE organisations for the Social Value Summit 2026, delivered in partnership with Spark Somerset and sponsored by SS&L. You'll hear from organisations already creating meaningful social impact through collaboration, community investment and purposeful partnerships.

Sponsored by:



**Time:** 9am – 11:30am at Yeovil Football Club, Lufton Way, Yeovil, BA22 8YF  
**Cost:** £24.99 plus VAT members and non-members

## Taunton business breakfast

Tuesday  
**3 Nov**

A good conversation can change the course of your business. Join us at our Taunton business breakfast and spend the morning catching up with familiar faces, meeting new contacts and building connections with businesses from across Somerset - it's a great opportunity to step away from your inbox!

Sponsored by:



**Time:** 8.30am – 10.30am at Taunton Rugby Club, Bathpool, TA2 8BU  
**Cost:** £24.99 plus VAT members £34.99 plus VAT non-members

## Yeovil Breakfast Circle

Thursday  
**22 Oct**

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

## Somerset engineering and manufacturing forum

Tuesday  
**10 Nov**

Senior decision-makers from across the region will come together at Branston Ltd near Ilminster for a forum focused on strengthening partnerships, sharing best practice and promoting Somerset's engineering and manufacturing sector. Delegates will also enjoy an exclusive behind-the-scenes tour of the facility.

Sponsored by:



**Time:** 9am – 12 noon at Branston Ltd, Seavington St Michael near Ilminster, TA19 0BT  
**Cost:** £24.99 plus VAT members £34.99 plus VAT non-members

## Somerset international trade forum

Tuesday  
**27 Oct**

Designed to support Somerset businesses that are already trading overseas or looking to expand into international markets, our international trade forum will give you the opportunity to discuss challenges and successes in a confidential setting.

Sponsored by:



**Time:** 9.30am – 11.30am at Numatic International, Millfield Road, Chard, TA20 2GB  
**Cost:** £24.99 plus VAT members £34.99 plus VAT non-members

## Somerset HR professionals' forum

Tuesday  
**10 Nov**

Expect open and confidential conversations, valuable peer insights and the opportunity to connect with HR professionals from across Somerset. More than networking, this is a chance to collaborate, problem solve and strengthen our local HR community, chaired by Emma Warren of Elite Staffing Solutions.

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**Time:** 9.30am – 11.30am at Somerset Larder, Sedgemoor Campus, Bath Road, Bridgwater, TA6 4DE  
**Cost:** £24.99 plus VAT members £34.99 plus VAT non-members

## Construction Connections

Thursday  
**12 Nov**

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.

**Time:** 8.30am – 10.30am at The Canalside, Bridgwater, TA6 6LQ

**Cost:** £25 plus VAT members  
£30 plus VAT non-members

## Somerset Entrepreneurs' Group

Thursday  
**3 Dec**

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.

**Time:** 9am – 11.30am at Battens Solicitors, Maltravers House, Petters Way, Yeovil, BA20 1SH

**Cost:** No charge for members  
£20 plus VAT non-members

## Yeovil breakfast circle

Thursday  
**19 Nov**

The breakfast circle brings together professionals from a wide range of sectors for informal conversation, fresh perspectives and meaningful business connections. With a diverse mix of attendees at every event, it offers an opportunity to share ideas, build relationships and learn from experiences beyond your own industry.

**Time:** 8.30am – 10am at Yeovil Town Football Club, Lufton Way, Yeovil, BA22 8YF

**Cost:** £10 plus VAT members  
£15 plus VAT non-members

## County Connections with Taunton Chamber

Tuesday  
**15 Dec**

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

**Time:** 9am – 11am at Taunton School, Staplegrove Road, Taunton, TA2 6AD

**Cost:** £24.99 plus VAT members  
£34.99 plus VAT non-members

## County Connections with Weston Chamber

Wednesday  
**2 Dec**

This networking business breakfast brings local organisations together to build relationships, share ideas and support economic growth across Weston-super-Mare. Alongside networking opportunities, attendees will hear from John Wheatley, Chair of Weston Bournville Pride in Place, and gain insights into local initiatives shaping the town's future.

**Time:** 8.30am – 10.30am at Hornets Rugby Club, Hutton Moor Road, Weston-super-Mare BS22 8LY

**Cost:** £24.99 plus VAT members  
£34.99 plus VAT non-members

## Somerset Chamber Christmas drinks and nibbles

Thursday  
**17 Dec**

Join the Somerset Chamber team for a festive morning of refreshments, conversation and business connections. Catch up with familiar faces, make new contacts and celebrate another year of business success. Stay for a coffee or enjoy the full event – festive jumpers almost compulsory!

**Time:** 10.30am – 12.30pm at Somerset Chamber HQ, Equity House, Blackbrook Business Park, Taunton, TA1 2PX

**Cost:** £12.50 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.

## Distinctive Communications expands visual content offering with specialist appointment



Bristol-based communications agency Distinctive Communications has expanded its services with the appointment of an experienced content creator to lead a new visual content offer.

Videographer, digital content creator and creative designer Emma Beavis has joined Distinctive to lead the agency's new visual content service.

Emma's experience spans digital media and visual content for charities, purpose-led businesses and the public sector, as well as working within a creative design agency. She holds a degree in Illustration and has expertise in animation and motion graphics.

"I'm really excited to be joining the team at Distinctive and can't wait to bring my skills and passion for storytelling to the role," Emma said.



"The power of visual content to connect people and bring stories to life is what fuels me, so I can't wait to get stuck into capturing our client's stories and projects with authenticity, creativity and impact."

The appointment comes as Distinctive moves into new offices at Society Building in Redcliffe, Bristol. The team has also recently won several new clients, including:

- Supporting communications and stakeholder engagement on a large new development delivered by Homes England and partners in Burgess Hill.
- PR and influencer engagement for Hotel Indigo in Gloucester.
- An engagement and media relations campaign for First Bus in the West of England.

Distinctive director and founder Ben Lowndes said: "Clients say to us they need creative content support and Emma's appointment is a natural extension of the services we already offer to them.

"This is a new hire for us, and I was struck by the quality and ambition of

the candidates who applied for the role. Emma's passion and talent for visual storytelling shone through, and her skills fit perfectly within our team.

"We're in an exciting period of growth and look forward to the opportunities this service will create, for our team and our clients."

Emma joins the team which comprises account director Arianne Smart, a Chartered PR Practitioner and PR account lead for property and built environment clients, and account director Ryan Devlin, responsible for stakeholder engagement and public consultation project delivery.

Account manager Katie Howick leads the firm's content division, supporting higher education, charity and public sector organisations. PR and content executive Heather McKay works across campaigns and communications activity in property and the built environment. Distinctive is supported by graphic designer Stacey Broadbear, who provides concept-driven graphic design services.

For more information, visit [www.distinctivecomms.co.uk](http://www.distinctivecomms.co.uk).

## Blueloop's Senserity risk platform wins innovation award at Ignite Somerset

Blueloop Limited's due diligence and risk intelligence tool, Senserity, has been named a winner in a competition run by Exeter University's Somerset Innovation Hub at the Ignite Somerset event, held at the Haynes Motor Museum, Sparkford.

Ignite Somerset brought together founders and innovators from across the region, including back-to-back founder stories from Rookwood Operations Ltd, Cardstream and Forceteck. The hub had a stand at the event and hosted a competition inviting entrants to capture their business's "onlyness" – what makes them genuinely distinctive. Julie Grant, representing Blueloop and Senserity, was named the worthy winner and received a new tablet as her prize.

Senserity takes serious risk and due diligence tools – the kind typically reserved for large enterprises with dedicated compliance teams and big

budgets – and makes them genuinely accessible and affordable for small and medium-sized businesses. For SMEs who need to check out suppliers, customers or partners but don't have the resources of a large corporate, Senserity offers a practical, cost-effective way to carry out that due diligence with confidence.

The university's innovation hub offers practical support for startups and SMEs who want to turn strong ideas into thriving businesses. Support is fully-funded by Somerset Council and



delivered by the university's business innovation team.

Judges praised the entry for showing exactly the kind of clear thinking about a business's "onlyness" that the competition set out to find: a sharp, well-articulated answer to the question of what makes Senserity different, and why that matters for the SMEs it serves.

Ignite Somerset was run in partnership with Somerset Chamber of Commerce, Somerset Council and NatWest and highlighted the breadth of innovation taking place across the county.

Blueloop said it was delighted to see Senserity recognised and thanked everyone for their support.

More information about Senserity can be found online at <https://senserity.co.uk>.

## Old Mill and Somerset Community Foundation partnership reaches £90,000

Over more than six years, Old Mill has partnered with Somerset Community Foundation (SCF), helping provide much-needed financial support to charities and community organisations across the South West. This year marks a significant milestone, with £90,000 distributed to local causes through the Foundation.

The funding has benefited a diverse range of organisations, including Crewkerne Community Kitchen, the Octagon Theatre and the Parochial Church Council in Henton, enabling them to continue delivering valuable services and opportunities for local people.

Old Mill is one of the South West's leading professional services firms, supporting individuals, businesses and rural enterprises from offices in Wells, Yeovil, Chippenham, Exeter and Ilminster. Now part of Kinbrook Group, Old Mill combines its long-standing regional relationships and understanding with access to the wider capabilities, investment and resources of a growing national professional services group.

That commitment to the region extends beyond the professional services Old Mill provides. Supporting the communities in which its people and clients live and work has long been an important part of the firm's approach.



Through its partnership with SCF, Old Mill has helped direct funding towards organisations supporting young people, promoting healthier and happier lives and creating thriving community spaces.

The funds raised by Old Mill's people have been further boosted through match funding awarded to charities supported by each of the firm's offices in Wells, Yeovil, Chippenham, Exeter and Ilminster, increasing the support available to charities and grassroots projects throughout the South West.

SCF works with businesses, philanthropists and charitable organisations to identify where financial support can make the greatest difference. By connecting donors with grassroots initiatives, the Foundation helps resources reach local organisations and communities where they can have the greatest impact.

**OLD M<sup>ILL</sup>**  
Financial experts, fuelling ambition



Reaching £90,000 comes during an important year for Old Mill, which recently celebrated its 20th anniversary and two decades of growth, relationships and commitment to the South West.

Mark Neath, CEO at Old Mill, said: "Supporting local causes has always been important to us because we see first-hand the difference these organisations make to people's lives. Through our partnership with SCF, we can help funding reach projects where it can make a real difference.

"As we enter our third decade as part of Kinbrook Group, our commitment to the South West remains as strong as ever. We retain the local relationships and understanding that have shaped Old Mill over the past 20 years, while benefiting from the investment, collaboration and wider capabilities of the Group.

## Somerset Wildlife Trust launches £2.15 million appeal to save one of the county's rarest habitats

Somerset Wildlife Trust has launched one of its biggest fundraising appeals to date: to raise £2.15 million to secure the future of Chancellor's Farm in the Mendip Hills - one of the UK's few remaining wildflower-rich hay meadows.

The trust said the appeal was about protecting more than just a farm - it was about a unique area where wildlife, farming and people had existed side by side for centuries.

Chancellor's Farm is a rare survivor of an ancient landscape that has almost disappeared across the UK, with 97% of wildflower meadows lost since the 1930s. In recognition of its



exceptional wildlife value, it was chosen as Somerset's Coronation Meadow - one of the county's finest remaining examples of wildflower-rich grassland.

Importantly, local volunteers already play a vital role in supporting the site. They help to monitor wildlife such as newts, bats and barn owls, and maintain its historic dry-stone walls. In



**Somerset**  
Wildlife Trust

the long run, there are plans to develop more opportunities for communities, land managers and volunteers to get involved in learning and nature recovery at the site.

Somerset Wildlife Trust has been working with the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation who have purchased the land on behalf of the Trust. We now have two years to fundraise enough to buy the land from them, so it can be protected for generations to come.

To find out more about supporting the appeal or to donate, visit: [www.somersetwildlife.org/chancellorsfarmappeal](http://www.somersetwildlife.org/chancellorsfarmappeal)





**Battens**  
SOLICITORS

## Battens Solicitors announces four new Associate Director promotions

Battens Solicitors has announced the promotion of four colleagues to Associate Director, recognising their outstanding contributions to the firm, their clients and their teams.

The promotions of Gemma Galvani, Cath Knapman, Samantha Pattle and Jacqui Swann reflect Battens' commitment to developing talent and recognising excellence across the business.

Gemma Galvani, Solicitor and Family Team Leader, joined Battens in 2016. A specialist children's law solicitor and member of the Law Society's Children Panel, Gemma has built a strong reputation for supporting children and families through complex legal proceedings. In 2025, she received the Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year award at the Devon and Somerset Law Society Awards in recognition of her exceptional work.

Cath Knapman joined Battens in 2008 and has developed her career through a variety of HR and management roles, progressing to Head of HR in 2025. Her promotion recognises her longstanding

commitment to the firm and the significant contribution she makes in supporting colleagues and working closely with the senior leadership team.

Samantha Pattle has been a key member of the Residential Property Team since joining Battens Solicitors as a solicitor just over five years ago. Promoted to Team Leader for the Sherborne and Castle Cary offices in 2024, Sam has played an important role in the continued success of both teams while also helping raise the firm's profile through local networking and relationship building.

Jacqui Swann began her career with Battens in 2007 and has progressed from Legal Secretary to CILEX Lawyer. Jacqui also leads the Dispute Resolution and Property Dispute Resolution teams, combining technical excellence with strong leadership and support for colleagues.

Ceri Stephens, Managing Director of Battens Solicitors, said: "We are incredibly proud to announce the promotions of Gemma, Cath, Sam and



Jacqui to Associate Director.

"Each has demonstrated exceptional dedication, expertise and leadership, making a significant contribution to the success of the firm. These promotions are thoroughly deserved, and we look forward to seeing them continue to flourish in their new roles."

The company said the promotions highlighted Battens Solicitors' commitment to investing in its people and supporting career progression across the firm.

## Young Somerset expands supported internship opportunities across Somerset

Young Somerset is expanding its Supported Internship programmes, with up to 25 young people set to take part across Bridgwater, Taunton and Exmoor this year.



Delivered in partnership with SS&L, the programmes support young people with SEND to gain meaningful workplace experience while developing the skills, confidence and independence they need to move towards paid employment.

Young Somerset has delivered its Bold & Brave Supported Internship programme since 2024, initially supporting 10 interns through placements at its Bold & Brave Café in Taunton Library and shop at Riverside Place.

The programme has since expanded into Bridgwater, supported by a Bold & Brave Café at Bridgwater Train Station and a shop in Angel Place. Last year, 12 interns were supported across the Taunton and Bridgwater venues.

This year, three Supported Internship programmes will operate across Bridgwater, Taunton and Exmoor.

Young Somerset has worked closely with SS&L and Somerset Council to develop the new Exmoor programme, extending access to young people in West Somerset. Local employers supporting the programme include Exmoor National Park, Good Vibe Veg, Horner Farm and With the Wild.



A key part of the Supported Internship model is support from dedicated Job Coaches, who work alongside interns in the workplace to help them develop skills, build confidence, overcome barriers and become increasingly independent.

Alongside placements within Bold & Brave, Young Somerset works with a growing network of employers across Somerset. These placements allow interns to experience different working environments, recognise how their skills transfer between roles and explore a wider range of potential careers.

Siobhan Gallagher, Supported Internship Programme Manager at Young Somerset, said: "It's been fantastic to see our Supported Internship programme grow and to create more opportunities for young people across Somerset."

Employers interested in providing meaningful workplace opportunities for interns can contact [siobhangallagher@youngsomerset.org.uk](mailto:siobhangallagher@youngsomerset.org.uk) or visit [youngsomerset.org.uk](http://youngsomerset.org.uk).





## BLACKDOWN FINANCIAL

Independent Financial Advisers

### Blackdown Financial recognised in two national award categories as team member earns industry shortlist

Blackdown Financial has been named a bronze winner in both the SME of the Year and Employer of the Year categories at the Great British Business & Community Awards 2026, marking a strong start to the firm's awards season.

The independent financial planning firm said the recognition was particularly significant given the level of competition, with more than 260 nominations submitted in the SME of the Year category and more than 175 nominations received for Employer of the Year.

By securing bronze winner status, Blackdown Financial has automatically progressed to the silver and gold stages of the awards programme. Final judging is scheduled to take place later this week, ahead of the awards ceremony on September 25.

A spokesperson for Blackdown Financial said the achievement reflected the



commitment and professionalism demonstrated by the firm's team: "This recognition is particularly meaningful given the strength of competition and is a testament to the passion, dedication and professionalism our team shows every day.

"As an independent financial planning firm, our people are at the heart of everything we do, and we are incredibly proud to see their efforts recognised on a national stage."

The company is also celebrating an individual achievement within its team,

with Gabrielle Arey shortlisted for Young Administrator of the Year at the Money Marketing Young Financial Planning Awards.

The Money Marketing Young Financial Planning Awards ceremony is due to take place in London on October 6.

"This is a well-deserved achievement for Gabrielle and the entire team will be cheering her on at the awards ceremony," the spokesperson said.

The firm thanked its employees, clients and professional connections for their continued support.

With further judging stages and award ceremonies still to come, Blackdown Financial said it was looking forward to the remainder of the awards season and the opportunity to celebrate future successes with its team and stakeholders.



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## S Roberts Group teams up with Somerset Road Safety to support Red Card 4 Drink Drive campaign



A leading waste management company is supporting Somerset Road Safety's Red Card 4 Drink Drive campaign by helping to promote safer roads across the county – particularly around sporting events.

Bridgwater-based S Roberts Group is working alongside Somerset Council's Road Safety Officers to raise awareness of the dangers of drink driving and to encourage motorists to plan their journeys responsibly.

Mike Smalley, Road Safety Coordinator at Somerset Road Safety, said: "We are very grateful to S Roberts Group for supporting our Red Card 4 Drink Drive campaign. By wearing our high-visibility vests on sites and across communities throughout Somerset, their teams are helping us reinforce an important road safety message to thousands of people.

"Drink driving remains one of the most dangerous decisions a driver can make, yet it is entirely preventable. If

you're watching football, rugby, cricket or other sporting events and planning to celebrate, make sure your journey home is part of your plans. Choose a designated driver, book a taxi, use public transport, or stay overnight.

"Together, we can give drink driving a red card and play our part in keeping Somerset's roads safe for everyone."

By supporting the initiative and displaying campaign messaging across its operations and community activities, S Roberts Group is reinforcing its commitment to road safety and helping spread a very important message across Somerset.

Natasha Butcher, Office Manager at S Roberts Group, said: "As a company with vehicles on the road every day, we understand how important road safety is, not just for our team but for everyone who uses Somerset's roads. We are proud to support this campaign and help raise awareness of the risks associated with drink driving.

"Our staff will be actively involved in promoting the initiative, wearing campaign high-visibility clothing and sharing the message with customers, suppliers and members of the public. If encouraging just one person to make a safer choice prevents an incident, then that is something worth supporting. Working together, we can help make our communities and roads safer for everyone."

S Roberts Group's wealth of experience spans nearly 100 years and it is one of the South West's leading waste management companies. The company provides specialist waste management, recycling, plant hire, demolition and asbestos services for domestic and commercial clients across the South West.

For more information about the campaign, visit [www.somersetroadsafety.org](http://www.somersetroadsafety.org) or call S Roberts Group on 01278 422521.

## Housing stock transfer creates Somerset's largest social landlord

Homes in Somerset has become the largest social housing provider in the county following a transfer of Somerset Council's housing stock.

The wholly owned Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) now manages 10,000 homes, after the 6,000-home transfer.

Peter Hatch, chief executive of Homes in Somerset, said: "This is a watershed moment for Homes in Somerset and we are hugely grateful to Somerset Council for their trust in us.

"Our tenants and colleagues remain at the heart of our organisation and we will continue to deliver the highest level of service while supporting the council with their priorities."

In May 2025, the council advised it would conduct an independent housing options appraisal, carried out by consultancy Savills, to identify how the directly managed and ALMO managed homes could be aligned.

Stakeholder and tenant engagement then followed in the form of in-person meetings at local venues, online sessions and surveys to gather views and understand what really matters to tenants and leaseholders.

In March this year, Somerset Council members approved the decision to transfer the homes to Homes in Somerset.

Responses to the consultation, which closed in April, showed support for the transfer and the ALMO confirmed this had taken place at the end of last month.



Paul Stephenson, chair at Homes in Somerset and chair of the National Federation of ALMOs, said: "The decision made to enlarge the ALMO model is clear recognition of the focused and high-performing services HiS have provided, as is the case for many other such providers.

"This decision represents and enhances the excellent partnership relationship between HiS and Somerset Council thanks to the dedication and commitment of representatives from both organisations.

"All colleagues involved should be incredibly proud of their achievement on behalf of the customers and communities they provide services to."



## Singer Instruments attains Disability Confident Level 3 Leader

Since 2023 West Somerset company Singer Instruments have been raising awareness around disabilities, making changes to their recruitment processes, and utilising schemes such as Access to Work to retain and develop their staff as part of the Government's Disability Confident Scheme.

The business, which designs, builds and sells lab automation solutions around the globe from their premises in Roadwater and Minehead has now achieved Level 3 Leader status meaning they are disability inclusion champions.

The three levels of the scheme encourage employers to be part of a movement of change by altering processes to enable anyone to apply for roles either as employees or on student placements, as well as making

adjustments to ensure everyone can work to the best of their ability and put their true skills into practice.

Pippa Penny, Employer Account Executive at SeetecPluss who validated Singer's Level 3 application, said: "As a Disability Confident Leader, our role isn't just to champion inclusion, but to help businesses unlock the competitive advantage of a truly diverse workforce.

"We've seen first-hand Singer Instruments' commitment to their Disability Confident journey and are proud to celebrate their achievement as partners in a more inclusive labour market."

Earlier this year Singer Instruments were announced as winners of the Somerset Business Awards Employer of the Year Category. Matthew Huggett, Lead Judge for the category, said: "Singer Instruments impressed the judging panel with its genuinely inclusive culture and its commitment to supporting people as individuals. Rather than treating inclusion as a standalone programme, it is woven into the fabric of the organisation.



"The business shows real flexibility, takes a thoughtful case-by-case approach to supporting employees, and has created an environment where people feel valued and able to succeed. Its Disability Confident Leader status is a well-deserved recognition of a culture that combines strong business leadership with a genuine commitment to people."

The Government is currently reshaping the future of Disability Confident to make it work better for small and medium-sized employers, and to encourage more businesses to participate.

Robbie Devlin, Managing Director at Singer Instruments, added: "Inclusion isn't a box-checking exercise for us, it's core to how we operate. Becoming a Level 3 Leader validates the work we've put into building a truly supportive workplace, and we hope to inspire other businesses across our region and industry to take the same journey."



## Porter Dodson strengthens partnership with a trio of new Partners

Porter Dodson has announced the appointment of three new Partners across its Private Client and Commercial Property teams, further strengthening the firm's expertise and continued growth across the Southwest.

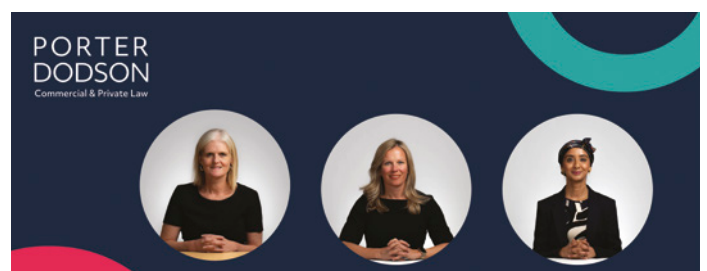
Victoria Emmett has joined the firm as a Partner in the Private Client team, based in the Taunton office. She brings with her over 15 years' experience advising clients across the region.

Victoria specialises in a broad range of private client matters, including estate planning, tax planning, trusts and wills, as well as estate administration. She works with a wide range of clients, including private individuals, farmers, business owners and high net worth individuals, providing support with both lifetime planning and post-death matters.

Salma Maqsood joins Porter Dodson as a Partner in the Commercial Property team, bringing extensive experience in commercial real estate.

Salma specialises in development finance, bridging, portfolio refinance, Islamic finance backed transactions and Commercial Landlord and Tenant matters.

She works with developers, investors, funders, landlords, tenants and business owners, supporting them through all stages of their real estate projects, from acquisition and funding through to development and leasing.



Joining as a Partner, Frances Griffiths also joins the firm, working primarily within Commercial Property as well as supporting Residential Property, focusing on purchase and sale of rural properties with commercial and agricultural ties, as well as advising farmers, landowners and landed estates on a range of rural property matters.

Frances also deals with secured lending on rural properties, the grant of Farm Business Tenancies and the sale and purchase of rural properties. She brings a wealth of experience in the sector and is well regarded for her expertise in rural and agricultural property matters.

A spokesperson for the company said the appointments reflected Porter Dodson's ongoing investment in talented legal professionals and its commitment to expanding expertise across key practice areas.

## Amicus Law records “best ever” Q1 as the firm continues to grow

Leading South West legal firm, Amicus Law, has announced the “best ever” first quarter in its 22-year history, with a 22.5% growth in turnover against the same period in 2025 and an increase of 65% in profits for the year so far.

With record financial results and a direct year-on-year growth, the results highlight the firm’s elevated position across the region and an ambition to match. It also recognises the firm’s development within its 113-strong team, ongoing technical investment, a huge increase in new business and strengthened financial planning – thanks to a renewed business strategy and long-term succession planning.

Compared directly against the same period in 2025, the growing firm has seen an average of nearly 60% increase across all case types, broken down by:

- 135% increase in commercial
- 116% increase in employment
- 39% increase in family matters
- 37% increase in litigation

- 19% increase in private client
- 5% increase in residential conveyancing

Claire Lovett, Managing Partner at Amicus Law, said: “The results speak for themselves. We finished 2025/26 in a strong position and the results from our first quarter have further amplified our strong regional position.

“Growth is a key area of our business plan and having secured five years of continuous growth, we know our strategy will support this ambition for the years ahead.

“We have a strong and passionate team at our core, and will continue to invest in their development and needs, ensuring we offer the most professional and personal service to our clients.”

In the last quarter alone, the firm saw its youngest-ever Equity Partner being appointed, its youngest Associate being promoted as Head of Office in Taunton, a strategic Head of



Disputes hire and the recruitment of a commercial sales support team.

Lovett added: “We have a strong investment programme within our strategy, which includes plans to create more local jobs, additional branches and improved IT systems. The next five years will be the biggest and most important to Amicus Law, and I am proud to be at the helm with an ambitious team surrounding me.”

The award-winning firm is led by a team of experienced solicitors and legal professionals who are committed to providing personalised service and achieving the best possible outcomes for their clients.

It has 10 offices across Devon, Somerset and Dorset. To find out more, visit [www.amicuslaw.co.uk](http://www.amicuslaw.co.uk).

## First Class Comms appoints James Marshall as Business Director to support continued growth

First Class Comms (FCC) has announced the appointment of James Marshall as its new Business Director, strengthening the leadership team as the company continues to expand its position as one of the South West’s leading telecoms and IT providers.

Marshall joins FCC at a significant stage in the company’s development, with the business focused on driving growth, improving operational efficiency and making it even easier for customers to work with the team.

In his new role, he will play a key part in supporting colleagues across the organisation, refining internal processes and helping position the business for sustainable long-term growth.

During the recruitment process, Marshall stood out for his passion for delivering exceptional customer experiences, his attention to detail and his commitment



to continuous improvement. Those qualities closely align with FCC’s values and customer-first approach.

Mark Burland, Managing Director of FCC, said: “We’re delighted to welcome James to the FCC family. As we continue to grow, it’s vital that we invest in great people who share our values and commitment to delivering outstanding service.

“James brings a wealth of experience, a strong customer-first mindset and a genuine passion for continuous improvement. I’m excited to see the positive impact he’ll have on our team, our customers and the next chapter of FCC’s journey.”

James added: “I’m delighted to be joining FCC at such an exciting time. The business has fantastic momentum, a strong culture and ambitious plans for the future. I’m looking forward to contributing to the next chapter of growth and success.”

Mark said the appointment reflected FCC’s ongoing investment in its people and leadership team as the business continues to evolve and build on its reputation for delivering high-quality telecoms and IT solutions across the region.



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## WPA partner completes mentor programme and launches next phase of business growth

A long-serving WPA adviser has completed the final stage of the organisation's Healthcare Partner programme, marking a significant milestone after nearly three decades with the health insurer.

Jon Goss recently completed his two-year mentor period and was formally signed off as a WPA Healthcare Partner.

The achievement came almost 30 years after he first joined WPA and followed the launch of his own business, Goss Health Ltd, as part of his move into the Healthcare Partner role.

During the past two years, Mr Goss had operated through the new company while developing relationships across the Somerset business community and advising organisations on healthcare provision for their employees.

Reflecting on the experience, Mr Goss



said the role had reinforced his belief that healthcare was ultimately about people rather than policies.

He said that behind every policy was an individual, a family or a business and that the true value of healthcare cover often became most apparent when it was needed.

Mr Goss added that his years with WPA had given him first-hand



experience of the difference private medical insurance could make to people facing health concerns and treatment needs.

"That's what made the role so rewarding for me," he said. "It's not simply about arranging healthcare cover. It's about understanding people, building relationships and being there when it matters."

Mr Goss said he was proud of what had been achieved during the past two years and looked forward to the next phase of growth for Goss Health Ltd.

He added: "I'm incredibly proud of what I've achieved over the past two years and excited about the next chapter for Goss Health Ltd, continuing to meet people, build relationships and help businesses look after one of their most important assets: their people."

## Local business advisors appoint Managing Director and announce new Associate Partners

South West-based consultancy firm, hgkc, which supports UK owner-managed businesses with leadership, growth, innovation and preparation for exit, has today announced the appointment of Sarah Chilcott as Managing Director.

After working as an Associate partner for 18 months, Sarah was appointed to the board in April 2025 and has since immersed herself in developing new markets for hgkc's unique brand of consultancy.

Commenting on the appointment as MD, hgkc Co-Founder Peter Quintana, said: "This is an important step in our exit planning. Kim Jones and I set out our plans for the future of hgkc before the pandemic and are excited that it is coming to fruition.



"We have every confidence in Sarah's ability to establish a vision and to lead hgkc in a way that is consistent with the values we hold to be important."

In addition to Sarah's appointment, hgkc has also appointed Jim James and Paul Stevenson as Associate Partners, strengthening their proposition with experience in the use of AI to streamline operations and build value in client businesses, and with strategic sales and marketing for growth.

Sarah Chilcott added: "I am very excited at the prospect of building on the foundations Peter and Kim have laid down. The addition of Jim and Paul extend and deepen our capacity to advise our clients in two areas that are critical to business growth."

hgkc is a business advisory firm founded in 2013, specialising in leadership, growth and preparation for exit.

They work locally and nationally with the owners of high growth-potential, innovative companies across all sectors, who are facing challenges they haven't faced before.

You can find out more at <https://www.hgkc.co.uk>



## Bank of England summary – tentative signs of more positive investment intentions

By Malindi Myers – Bank of England Agent South West



@BoESouthWest

Output growth has improved in some sectors, mostly in certain business services and in manufactured exports. Business confidence has risen in those sectors, as firms adapt to continuing uncertainty. And investment intentions have improved a little. But there remain significant pockets of weakness including a continuing fall in construction activity and further softening in residential and commercial property markets. There is little expectation of an imminent improvement in these sectors.

Investment intentions remain uneven but there are tentative signs they are becoming slightly positive for the year ahead, though from a low starting point.

The drivers holding back sentiment discussed in previous rounds persist: uncertainty around demand and cost inflation remain, and borrowing costs are still considered a constraint. But there are some accounts of essential investment recommencing that can no longer remain on pause.

Infrastructure spending is starting to increase though is picking up more slowly than some contacts expected. Ports and airports continue to invest. Manufacturers and warehouse operators are looking for opportunities to automate following recent labour cost inflation.

Persistent high energy costs are incentivising investment in renewable energy generation. Business services firms are increasing their technology spend, including on AI, but much of this is often an increase in operational rather than capital expenditure. Construction and property sector firms remain among those least likely to be investing.

Goods export growth has improved over recent months. There is little news on exports of services values where growth remains lower than normal.

After a year or so of flat to falling volumes, goods exports and turnover are now growing, though below normal rates. Contacts now report less disruption from the conflict in sales to the ME. Some sectors are booming, notably suppliers of components for data centres and energy, and defence. Smaller goods exports companies remain gloomy about the future and continue to cite concerns over US tariffs, carbon regulations, increased competition from China, and the lagged effects of Brexit.

Services exports revenue growth remains lower than normal at low single digits. There is reasonable growth in overseas demand for insurance, defence and AI related services, but merger and acquisition services remain quiet.

Contacts report growing revenues due to continued fee



## BANK OF ENGLAND

increases and some robust pockets of growth. With indirect impacts from the ME conflict less than feared and firms adapting to on-going uncertainty, contacts are slightly more upbeat.

Contacts report a modest improvement in annual volume growth even though it remains lower than normal. Sectors growing robustly include IT, tax, employment law, restructuring, and engineering consultancy, the latter due to increased demand for infrastructure and data centres. Elsewhere, elevated uncertainty continues to delay decisions and weigh on transactional activity across capital markets, mergers and acquisitions and commercial real estate.

Increased exports are supporting slight growth in manufacturing output, an improvement from the contraction reported in the last update. Construction remains weak, especially housebuilding.

Manufacturers report mixed conditions, but the overall picture is that output is up slightly compared to a year ago. Weakness in the automotive and consumer durables sectors is more than balanced by strength in export-oriented aerospace and defence sectors. Production of equipment for energy infrastructure and data centre projects is also growing.

Credit supply continues to outstrip demand, with the gap broadening modestly across all firm sizes. Distressed borrower levels remain low.

Banks are prepared to lend across all sizes of firm but prefer larger, existing clients. Competition across all sectors and firm sizes for viable borrowers has increased as maintaining or growing market share is challenging.

Labour market conditions are little changed from the previous update. Employment intentions remain broadly flat, recruitment difficulties remain a little below normal, and modest spare capacity persists.

Headcount is expected to remain broadly flat over the next 12 months. Automation and AI are influencing role design and replacement hiring, with some workflow efficiencies reported, although quantified productivity gains remain rare. There is limited evidence of broad AI-driven reductions in employment. Any recruitment is generally targeted at filling skills gaps or supporting specific growth or investment projects.



## Number of UK companies at record high

The latest New Startup Index from NatWest and Beauhurst has revealed that the total number of active companies in the UK reached a record high in the first half of 2026. Overall, there were 5.66 million active businesses in H1 2026, with 402,000 new businesses registering with Companies House over the same period. Nevertheless, the pace of new business registrations has slowed, falling by 5.7% year-on-year in the first half of 2026.

**Read more about the figures at:**

<https://ffnews.com/news/uk-active-business-population-hits-record-566-million-as-tech-startups-surge-40>

## Concerns raised over reforms to zero-hours contracts

Employers are warning that proposed reforms to zero- and low-hours contracts could increase employment costs, as well as threaten flexible jobs and roles for younger workers. Under changes in the Employment Rights Act, workers on zero- and low-hours contracts will gain the right to guaranteed hours based on the number of hours they regularly work. Research from CIPD has revealed that 65% of employers that use zero-hours contracts expect costs to increase, while 33% plan to increase their use of self-employed or other casual staff in response to the reforms.

**Read more about the reforms at:**

<https://www.cipd.org/uk/about/press-releases/zero-hours-contracts-era-changes/>

## Review to make business rates fairer for pubs and hotels

The Treasury has launched an independent review to make the business rates valuation system fairer for pubs and hotels. The review will explore how the valuation system can be made more transparent and help pub and hotel operators better plan for the future. The findings of the review will be reported back to the Treasury by the end of March 2027 so that recommendations can be implemented before the next revaluation.

**Read more about the review at:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/treasury-to-call-time-on-uncertainty-for-pubs-and-hotels>

## Smaller businesses facing underinsurance risk

Small and medium-sized businesses across the UK are at risk of being underinsured due to an increasingly complex commercial insurance market, according to an Association of British Insurers report.

**Read more about the report at:**

<https://londonlovesbusiness.com/britains-sme-underinsurance-challenge-is-exposing-a-growing-insurance-knowledge-gap>

Source: BAD News (Business Advisers News)

## Consultation on business reporting requirements

The Government has launched a consultation on how the UK corporate reporting framework can be modernised to better support economic growth. The consultation explores how reporting obligations could be simplified and made more proportionate by rationalising thresholds and exemptions and reducing unnecessary or duplicative requirements. It also includes reforms to support greater use of digital reporting and communications. The consultation closes on 30 November 2026.

**Read more about the consultation at:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/modernising-corporate-reporting>

## HMRC to sign up individuals to Making Tax Digital

From September 2026, HMRC will start signing up landlords and sole traders to Making Tax Digital for Income Tax if it believes they should already be registered. HMRC will use data from 2024/25 self-assessment tax returns to identify landlords and sole traders who should be using Making Tax Digital for Income Tax.

**Read more about the process at:**

<https://landlordknowledge.co.uk/hmrc-sign-up-overdue-landlords-mtd-september-2>



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