

Somerset County Council

County Council

– 20 July 2022

## **Requisitioned Items**

Cabinet Member: All

Division and Local Member: All

Lead Officer: Scott Wooldridge – Head of Governance & Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer

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### **A. To Declare and Ecological Emergency**

The following requisitioned item will be proposed by Cllr Sarah Dyke and seconded by Cllr Tessa Munt:

That this Council declares an Ecological Emergency.

#### **Full Council acknowledges and notes:**

1. That in February 2019, this council declared a climate emergency.
2. In May 2019, the UN Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) raised the alarm about the urgency of the ecological emergency the world faces.
3. That the Climate Emergency Strategy "Towards a Climate Resilient Somerset," adopted by this Council in 2020, recognises the impact on the environment and nature within the Natural Environment theme and has already set out a number of actions to tackle the impact of Climate Change on the Natural Environment.
4. That the sustainability of societies, economies and the environment are co-dependant and intrinsically linked and depend on preserving our natural environment and biodiversity. It follows therefore that the climate and ecological emergencies are also linked, both being the result of overexploitation of the earth's natural resources and poor land management. These practices have led to species extinction, loss of habitat and the connectivity of habitats, the decline of pollinators that are crucial to our food supply, and the loss of and decline in the health and quantity of soil. However, there are other causes of the ecological emergency beyond climate change, including other forms of pollution, urbanisation, hydrological change, the

proliferation of invasive species and poor practices in agriculture, woodland management and fishing.

5. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the significant relationship between people and nature and the important effect of access to nature on the health and wellbeing of our people.

**Full Council believes that:**

- All governments have a duty to limit the negative impacts of human behaviour on our ecology and recognises that Local Government cannot and should not wait for national government to act.
- It is important for the residents of Somerset that its Councils commit to tackling these negative impacts as quickly as possible.
- Taking positive action to reverse the damage on our natural habitats and protect and sustain the habitats of our precious flora and fauna can also deliver economic benefits by way of new jobs, economic savings, market opportunities and contribute significantly to an improved health and wellbeing of our communities.

Reference sources, links and highlights:

- The [State of Nature 2019 report](#) highlighted the critical decline in biodiversity in the UK stating that 15% of UK species are classified as threatened with extinction and 2% are already extinct;
- The [State of the World's Plants and Fungi 2020 report](#) from Royal Botanic Gardens Kew estimated that 39.4% of plants are now threatened with extinction. This is a jump from one in five plants thought to be at risk in Kew's 2016 report;
- The [Environment Act](#) will require the introduction of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Nature Recovery Networks leading to the setting of national targets, plans and policies for improving the natural environment. Of particular importance will be the requirement for a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG) from all new developments (from 2023);
- The recent [UN Biodiversity Conference](#) (COP 15) attempted to agree a new deal to stem damage to plants, animals and ecosystems, setting both long-term nature-protection goals for mid-century and shorter-term targets for 2030 and, crucially, push for those to be enshrined in national policies.

- The Letter from Natural England to Local Planning Authorities regarding advice on nutrients in the Somerset Moors and Levels RAMSAR site dated 17<sup>th</sup> August 2020  
<https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/media/3882/natural-england-advice-to-lpas-on-nutrients-in-the-somerset-levels-and-moors-catchment-170820.pdf>

**In support of this motion the Council therefore resolves that:**

1. In addition to the work already underway to address this in the Climate Emergency Strategy, it will take on the responsibility as Lead Partner in the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) (this has already been agreed with Natural England), with partners in the established Local Nature Partnership and deliver a Strategy with a set of clear actions to bring about a reversal of the negative impacts on the natural environment and biodiversity and to develop strategies to mitigate against the possibility of further decline or damage on the habitats, flora and fauna of Somerset.
2. It will incorporate the details of the Ecological Emergency, the desired outcomes and any identified actions, including those within the LNRS into the next iteration of the Climate Emergency Strategy.
3. The Council ensures “tackling the climate and nature emergencies” policies are at the heart of everything this council does and is embedded it into all Council decision making processes.
4. Ecological impact implications assessment alongside those for climate and sustainability will be added in committee and council reports.
5. In collaboration with the 4 District Councils, SCC will use existing and emerging planning policy and development management to ensure biodiversity is improved, environments enriched and the destruction of habitats is resisted when development occurs.
6. Working similarly with the 4 Districts Councils we will develop our response to the phosphates issue affecting the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar site catchment area.
7. Encourage residents, businesses and landowners to reduce pesticide use, and seek to become a pesticide-free council.
8. Encourage residents, businesses and landowners to eliminate peat use, and seek to become a peat-free council.

9. Working with emerging government guidance and across the Planning System with the Planning Authorities we will develop our approach and policies around the Ecological Emergency and will implement, measure and monitor the Biodiversity net gain approach in order to maximise the benefits from development

## **B. Cost of Living**

The following requisitioned item will be proposed by Cllr Federica Smith Roberts and seconded by Cllr Nicola Clark:

### **This Council notes that:**

- On 1 April 2022, Ofgem increased the energy price cap by 54 per cent. Considering the increased energy price cap, the average standard tariff energy bill will increase by £693 per year. The average pre-pay meter energy bill will increase by £708 per year (Ofgem, 2022).
- On 6 April 2022, the Government increased National Insurance by 1.25 percentage points, which is projected to cost the average family in Somerset an additional £600 a year.
- The Government has suspended the pensions 'triple lock' for 2022/3, meaning Somerset's 156,000 pensioners will see a rise of 3.1 in their pension income each year instead of the promised 8.3 per cent under the triple lock formula. This year, this will cost pensioners in Somerset hundreds of pounds.
- In 2021/22 the South West's Foodbanks distributed nearly 175,000 food parcels (Trussell Trust, 2022)
- On 1<sup>st</sup> July Somerset County Council is proud to have announced its 2022 Household support fund, which includes the provision of Free School Meal vouchers in each school holiday period through schools and Colleges, and a payment to every Somerset resident in receipt of pension credit
- Council notes the decision taken in June 2022 to impose a 'Windfall Tax' on the super-profits of oil and gas companies and to redistribute this as a one-off payment of £400 to households later this year. Though the Windfall Tax is welcome, Council believes it does not go nearly far enough and the Government should be doing much more to support local people through the Cost of Living crisis.
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**This Council therefore declares a 'Cost of Living Emergency' and calls on the Government to:**

- Immediately reduce the standard rate of VAT from 20 per cent to 17.5 per cent for one year, saving the average household in Somerset a further £600 this year.
- Immediately re-introduce the pensions triple lock to support Somerset's pensioners.
- Immediately restore the Universal Credit supplement of £20, which was cancelled by the Government in September 2021.
- Council instructs the Chief Executive to write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to express the Council's demands for VAT to be cut to 17.5%, for the re-introduction of the pensions triple-lock and for the £20 Universal Credit supplement to be restored.

Finally, Council joins other local councils in calling for a local Cost-of-Living Emergency Summit, with stakeholders, including Citizens Advice, Food Banks, Local Trades Unions, and Chambers of Commerce and will invite local MPs to attend this hybrid meeting.

**C. Cost of Living Crisis**

The following requisitioned item will be proposed by Cllr Leigh Redman and seconded by Cllr Kathy Pearce:

The ongoing cost-of-living crisis has seen household fuel bills soar to the highest levels in history.

The government's planned rebate will do little to help those living with meters in their rooms in HMOs or anyone who relies on pre payment meters who already pay more.

The rebate is being paid via household electricity bills and there is no decision on whether prepayments will be credited or vouchers issued.

Furthermore, there is no obligation on landlords who include the cost of gas and electricity in tenants' bills to pass the rebate on.

Those excluded from the rebate are often from the most economically disadvantaged sectors of our community.

Alongside this, the impact of the cost of living crisis on sick and disabled people has been grossly underestimated. According to Disability Rights UK spending on

this group of people has been cut by £5 billion over the last decade and they are the hardest hit by Austerity. Since April 2017 new claimants have £30 per week less and Universal Credit has excluded the severe disability premium worth around £65 per week to those formerly entitled to it.

Disabled people have higher household fuel costs because they often need additional heating or to have to run life saving equipment such as oxygen ventilators or dialysis machines.

**To address these inequalities the Council resolves to:**

Write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer condemning the decision to exclude vulnerable people from meaningful support with the cost of living crisis and demanding that they immediately act to address this inequality and ensure that arrangements for paying the rebate to the excluded groups are put into place.

Write to Somerset MPs asking them to lobby the government to increase cost of living help payments available to sick and disabled people with immediate effect.

Building on LGR and working with District partners to produce and publicise an information leaflet for private sector landlords in Somerset who charge for household fuel as part of rent urging them to pass on the rebate to their tenants especially those in shared houses or HMOs.

#### **D. Local Community Networks**

The following requisitioned item will be proposed by Cllr David Fothergill and seconded by Cllr Faye Purbrick:

**This Council recognises the vitally important role of Town, Parish and City Councils and will work with them to develop and deliver fully-funded Local Community Networks to support our Communities.**

The Council looks forward to comprehensive and consulted-on plans for establishing LCN's being brought forward to the November Full Council for approval.