

Motion regarding the Cost of Living

To consider a Motion proposed by Councillor Chris Booth, seconded by Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts

Somerset West and Taunton and its residents are suffering due to a cost of living crisis:

- On 1 April 2022, Ofgem increased the energy price cap by 54% with more to come in October. In the light of 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).
- The escalating cost of fuel is putting huge strain on local people simply trying to go about their everyday lives. As of 16th June, petrol is at an average of 187.01p per litre, while diesel is 193.30p per litre. It is expected they will be more than £2 per litre by the end of the summer and already are in some petrol stations. Filling up a typical family car's 55-litre fuel tank with petrol now costs £102.86 on average, while it costs £106.32 to do so with diesel. This has a particularly acute affect on those in rural areas paying £114 in transport costs a week in the year to March 2020, almost £40 more than those in urban areas.
- On 18 May 2022, inflation was confirmed at 9%.
- The Government has suspended the pensions "triple lock" for 2022/3, meaning that Somerset West and Taunton's pensioners will see a below inflation increase – for some this is their only income. Further, they have removed the relied on £20 Universal Credit uplift.
- More than a quarter of the UK's electricity is from renewables resources which have been largely unaffected by rising energy prices yet our power bills are led by natural gas prices.
- Council also notes figures provided by the Trussell Trust recording show that 6,815 food parcels were distributed to Somerset West and Taunton residents between April 2021 and April 2022 – with 3,068 being distributed to children.

Council believes:

Under this government, people are seeing tax hikes, energy bills soaring and fuel and food prices rising drastically.

The Government has failed to tackle the cost of living crisis sufficiently. Therefore, this council declares a "Cost of Living Emergency"

Council resolves:

- To declare a "Cost of Living Emergency"

- Council instructs the leader of this council 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 12 months, for the re-introduction of the pension triple-lock and for the £20 Universal Credit supplement to be restored.
- Council instructs the leader of this council to write to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to express Council's view that the Government commit to further fuel duty reductions in rural areas (Somerset is currently not eligible). The leader is to also urge the Government to move faster on cross-party desires to uncouple power prices from gas prices in an effort to cut household bills with prices to increase further in October.
- Endorse a local Cost of Living Emergency Summit to be led by the leader of this council, with stakeholders including Citizens Advice, Food Banks, Local Trades Unions, Somerset Community Foundation, Spark Somerset, MIND, Chambers of Commerce and invite both local MPs to attend this hybrid meeting
- Somerset West and Taunton Council will continue working on a £50,000 support fund for residents suffering from energy and food price increases in conjunction with Citizens Advice to be ready by the end of the summer. This will be funded from an underspend in the previous financial year.