

# Public Agenda Pack



Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton TA1 4DY, on Wednesday, 6 September 2023 at 10.00 am

## **Present:**

Cllr Bill Revans (Chair)  
Cllr Liz Leyshon (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Theo Butt Philip  
Cllr Tessa Munt  
Cllr Dean Ruddle  
Cllr Ros Wyke

Cllr Adam Dance  
Cllr Mike Rigby  
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts

## **In attendance:**

Cllr Mandy Chilcott  
Cllr Ross Henley  
Cllr Faye Purbrick  
Cllr Heather Shearer  
Cllr Sarah Wakefield

Cllr Tom Deakin  
Cllr Frances Nicholson  
Cllr Leigh Redman  
Cllr Fran Smith  
Cllr Richard Wilkins

## **Other Members present remotely:**

Cllr Tony Lock  
Cllr Nicola Clark  
Cllr Bob Filmer  
Cllr Dawn Johnson  
Cllr Martin Lovell  
Cllr Oliver Patrick  
Cllr Peter Seib  
Cllr Lucy Trimnell  
Cllr David Woan

Cllr Norman Cavill  
Cllr Andy Dingwall  
Cllr Andrew Govier  
Cllr Helen Kay  
Cllr Sue Osborne  
Cllr Jo Roundell Greene  
Cllr Gill Slocombe  
Cllr Martin Wale

## **32 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1**

Apologies were received from Cllr Dixie Darch.

### **33 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2**

The minutes of the Executive meeting held on 2 August 2023 were agreed upon and signed by the Chair.

### **34 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3**

COUNCILLORS WHO ARE ALSO CITY, TOWN AND/OR PARISH COUNCILLORS  
SOMERSET COUNCILLOR CITY, TOWN AND/OR PARISH COUNCIL

Theo Butt Philip -Wells City Council

Adam Dance - South Petherton Parish Council

Mike Rigby - Bishop's Lydeard and Cothelstone Parish Council

Dean Ruddle - Somerton Town Council

Federica Smith-Roberts - Taunton Town Council

Ros Wyke - Westbury-sub-Mendip Parish Council

### **35 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4**

Public Questions were received from:

Mr Alan Debenham – Local Authority finance, budget and funding position  
(considered as part of the relevant Agenda item - 2023/24 Budget Monitoring  
Report – Month 3 – End of June 2023 & Month 4 update - Agenda Item 7.

Cllr Leigh Redman – Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC).

The questions and responses provided are attached to the minutes in Appendix A.

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, thanked Council Officers, Academy Trust staff members, teachers, parents, and students for their patience and understanding while the issues are resolved. The Leader further recognised the emotional impact on all involved and acknowledged the urgent action required regarding Haygrove School, advising of the current Member engagement and support for all affected at Haygrove School.

The Lead Member for Children, Families and Education, Cllr Tessa Munt, further advised of the planned continued communication of the dynamic and evolving situation.

### **36 Annual Approval as Sole Shareholder of Homes in Sedgemoor - Agenda Item 5**

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, to introduce the report.

The Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, introduced the report, highlighting: that the Council is the sole member (equivalent to the shareholder in a company limited by shares) of Homes in Sedgemoor (HIS); and that as a corporate body the Council is required to approve the Annual Accounts of HIS and endorse the appointment of external auditors.

The Service Director – Housing, Community Services, Chris Brown, further added to the above points advising of: the number of properties and the duties as a shareholder, including the appointment of representatives to the Board; approval of the accounts and auditors; and that the Executive decision would be taken to the HIS Annual General Meeting September 2023.

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, there were no questions or points raised.

The Executive proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed unanimously.

The Executive agreed:

- a. The approval of the Homes in Sedgemoor annual company accounts as set out in the report.
- b. That the appointment of external auditors – Bishop Fleming – is endorsed further to the procurement exercise undertaken by Homes in Sedgemoor.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

### **37 Somerset Council - Consolidated 2022/23 Outturn Report - Agenda Item 6**

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications,

Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon, to introduce the report.

The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon, introduced the report, highlighting: that the five legacy Councils and the Pension Fund Statement of Accounts had been published; that the report outlines the overall impact of the outturn position for each legacy Council, including the opening reserves position, capital programme and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA - former South Somerset District Council and Somerset West and Taunton Council); that the position of each legacy Council was outlined in the large number of appendices, noting and apologising that Appendix One – Somerset County Council Outturn Report 2022/23 had been published as a late supplementary report, and that the report had been available to view via the Scrutiny Committee – Corporate and Resources agenda for 7 September meeting; the observation of the different styles of reporting and presentation across the legacy Councils and the opportunity to review and agree a reporting and presentation style for Somerset Council; the revenue budget overspend and the significant draw on reserves for 2022/23; the transfer of funds and the opening position for Somerset Council general fund reserve; that an amalgamated earmarked reserves position report to be received at the 4 October 2023 Executive meeting; the challenges and the need to rationalise the capital programme, including increased inflation, interest rates, project funding; the useable capital receipts of legacy Councils and current commitments; and the thanks and appreciation to Officers for their work to deliver through the many challenges presented.

The Executive Director - Resources and Corporate Services, Jason Vaughan, further added to the above points, highlighting: that the report is a key document bringing together vital information of the five legacy Councils; clarified the audit position including: the published and outstanding audits and the national audit delays; the reserves position, including general fund reserves, remaining earmarked reserves and reserves held for other bodies.

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: the progression following the reported positions of the five legacy Councils; the Capital programme and potential cost increase; the work to improve the budget reporting and achieve a better understanding of risks, funding and clear context; and the transfer of useable and non-useable reserves and the effect on the resilience of the Council and the inclusion of clarity of the useable and non-useable reserves to be included in the amalgamated earmarked reserves report scheduled to be considered at the October Executive meeting.

In response, the Executive Director – Resources and Corporate Services, Jason Vaughan, advised of the review of the capital receipts and commitments of the capital programme to identify and recommend the most effective use within the Medium Term Financial Programme.

The Executive proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed unanimously.

The Executive:

- a. Agreed to note the final overall overspend for Somerset of £18.7m funded from reserves.
- b. Agreed the requested carry forwards of £0.5m.
- c. Noted the opening position of £26.8m General Fund Reserves as at the 1 April 2023.
- d. Approved that £23m of Earmarked reserves are transferred in General Fund Reserves to ensure they are maintained at the appropriate level and to receive a report detailing the amalgamated earmarked reserves position at the October Executive meeting.
- e. Noted the opening position of £156.8m of Somerset Council earmarked reserves as set out in Table 4 of the report and the current commitments against those reserves.
- f. Agreed the additions and amendments to the Capital Programme in the last quarter.
- g. Noted the completed capital projects.
- h. Noted the position on capital receipts and commitments.
- i. Noted the outturn positions of Sedgemoor District Councils Housing Revenue Account (an underspend of £0.446m) and Somerset West and Taunton (an overspend of £0.227m).
- j. Approved the capital carry forwards of £4.6m relating to Sedgemoor District Councils HRA.
- k. Approved the reduction of £8.8m for capital schemes no longer required within the previous Somerset West and Taunton HRA

The Executive recommended to Council:

- l. To note the year end position of the legacy Councils' General Fund Capital Programmes and approve the carry forward requests of £99.5m and revised Capital Programme.
- m. To note the year end position of the legacy Councils' HRA Capital Programmes and approve the carry forward requests of £90.4m and revised Capital Programme.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

**38 2023/24 Budget Monitoring Report - Month 3 - End of June 2023 & Month 4 update - Agenda Item 7**

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited Mr Alan Debenham to address the Executive.

Mr Alan Debenham addressed the Executive with questions regarding the Somerset Council's financial position, responses from the Executive Lead Members are provided in Appendix A to the minutes.

The Lead Member for Economic Development, Assets and Planning, Cllr Ros Wyke, added an update on the nutrient neutrality scheme and that once clarity on this scheme is received, the information will be communicated.

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon, to introduce the report.

The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon, introduced the report, highlighting: that the report sets out the very stark and challenging situation that is faced both locally and nationally, including recent Government announcements; the forecast overspend and draw and use of reserves, the budget monitoring position and the addition of month four budget monitoring report; the opportunity as one Council to identify risks, improvements and opportunities; and the Directorate Management Team work on actions to mitigate the position and financial recovery plans, including the five Scrutiny Committees to review the budget monitoring position of their area, risk reporting, monthly all Member Budget Monitoring Briefings and a monthly update on the financial position and actions being taken to address it.

The Executive Director - Resources and Corporate Services, Jason Vaughan, further added to the above points, highlighting: the upcoming use of the solver budget monitoring tool; Section 114 notices; the recommendations presented to inform Council of the financial pressures; the increase in expenditure and income, with the Government National funding received by Councils not matching responsibility and expenditure; the transformation, savings and income generation proposals; treasury management activities.

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited Executive Lead Members to provide an update on projected overspends, mitigations and opportunities within their area of responsibility. In reference to Strategy & Performance and Governance, the Leader advised of an overspend due to the continued need to place legal cases, principally in respect of childcare, with legal experts with actions including reviewing practice and developing the capacity of the legal team and reducing the need to externalise this work.

The Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Cllr Dean Ruddle, highlighted: the increased pressure on services and costs resulting in a projected £3.8m overspend; and the work to achieve £10m savings over two years, including monitoring and reviewing the budget to achieve efficiencies and the five key areas of planned mitigation to deliver efficient savings.

The Lead Member for Children, Families and Education, Cllr Tessa Munt, highlighted: the work on rationalisation of cost centres and the work to clearly present information and figures; the external placements budget overspend; and the use of Microsoft Dynamics and solver budget planning tool and the work with the finance team to provide information and delivery of savings timescales.

The Executive Director – Children, Families and Education, Claire Winter, further added to the above points, highlighting: the increasing complexity of need post pandemic; the key areas of overspend in relation to external placements for children in care, the sharp rise in providers costs and the national market; the mitigations to manage escalating costs including Homes & Horizons, 16+ market development, reducing unregistered placements; the work with Impower consultancy to increase the number of internal foster cares and step across options for children and young people and the work with local providers to develop the local market for value for money and quality, the work to manage the private equity market to benefit children and manage costs; and the work to effectively manage SEND school transport routes effectively.

The Lead Member for Public Health, Equalities and Diversity, Cllr Adam Dance, highlighted the budget monitoring challenges faced due to significant inflationary increases and the limited Public Health funding.

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, added to the above points highlighting: that the shortage of funding is a risk and that prevention through public health is important to the sustainability of the Council; and the important joint work with the NHS for the sustainability of the Council.

The Lead Member of Communities, Housing and Culture, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, highlighted: that there is no projected variance within Communities; the risks in projecting while not knowing the complete expenditure and the work with the finance team; the volatility in housing and homelessness, including the increase in numbers presenting due to the cost of living crisis; and the extended use of temporary accommodation due the economic climate and local demand pressures, with the received grants not covering costs.

The Lead Member for Transport and Digital Cllr Mike Rigby, highlighted: the £1.1m overspend in the highways area due greater amount of safety defect work across the network, following a harsh winter; the maintenance of the asset and repair report; the predicted IPG overspend; the actions in MTFs and the work with the finance team to ensure budget pressures highlighted and managed; that additional costs have been incurred in the ICT area in respect of the Office 365 backup costs and that the work in respect of consolidating into a single electronic payments system will be more than anticipated; and that work on the data centre consolidation is not achievable in this financial year, meaning the budget will be exceeded.

In the absence of the Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, the Executive Director – Climate and Place, Mickey Green, provided an update, highlighting: the £800k overspend for the end of month 4, due to waste services, including an increase in residual waste: the additional bank holiday for the King's Coronation impact on waste collections; and the negotiation of an improved pay award shared with Suez and the anticipated change of legislation due in January 2024.

The Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke, highlighted: the one-off pressure in economy, employment and planning, of £0.4m, due to a change in how funding from DWP can be applied; the exploration of other funding streams to mitigate this action; the property services budget and strategic assets budget, including the unbudgeted expenses, including the structural services, particularly the RAAC issue and shortfall in the Saltlands solar park; the vacant property running costs due to the ongoing phosphates issues delaying planning; additional pressures in year due to the additional security costs of the old Bridgwater hospital sites; anticipated savings from staff budgets due to vacancies; pressure of utility costs and consolidated Unitary accurate forecasts; the Commercial investments budget and the current vacancies, with the overall portfolio holding up in terms of income; and high streets transition and associated impacts.

The Lead Member for Transformations and Human Resources, Cllr Theo Butt-Philip,



highlighted: that Partnership & Localities and Workforce & Transformation predict no overspends for this financial year; ongoing work including, a review of third sector grants, workforce and transformation work; how LCNs would be key to networking and developing partnerships; and that the transformation and change programme was ongoing with a review of the transition programme, focusing on developing, consulting and implementing management staff structures and securing management staff capacity for the Council.

The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon, highlighted: the overspend in finance and procurement areas due to human resources pressure; the cross directorate transformational work and improved reporting; the favourable variance of £0.5m for special grants due to receiving confirmation that the Rural Services Delivery Grant and the 2023/24 Services Grant will be higher than budgeted; and that the national bargaining non-service pay award has not yet been agreed upon, with the corporate contingency showing as being fully committed to cover the additional cost of the national pay award over and above the 5% budgeted for.

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: the budget gap; budget monitoring and work to mitigate the financial pressure, demonstrate fiscal responsibility and the opportunities available to avoid issuing a Section 114 notice; that doing nothing to address the financial pressures was not an option; thanks to the Officers for their work through transformation, delivering business as usual and working through changes in employment; the cut in Government National funding; demonstrating, communicating and educating the complex Council budgets to the general public; that Council Tax increases cover a large proportion of spend but do not cover the increase in costs and demand in services; the welcome monthly budget update and the responsibility of all Councillors to understand budget monitoring in preparation for budget setting; the tracking and monitoring of the 17 key areas; budget setting for Adult Social and Children Social Care; the percentage of useable reserves used and the review of the complete reserves position; budget setting including new ways of supporting children placements outside of the private equity market; the risk to cutting services and repairs; the work of the MTFP Board including mitigations and actions being taken; the significant reduction in school maintenance and associated Government funding issues preventing work being actioned; the clarity of the expectation of the Scrutiny Committee to review budgets; the decline in Local Authority funding and the need for urgent action from the Government to address the wider system; the my life, my future programme, including the delayed and guaranteed savings and the challenges and risks faced; and the clear governance process to monitor the progress and achievements of the programme.

The Chief Executive, Duncan Sharkey, highlighted the Local Authority wider system funding issue, and that if the current situation continued more Councils, as a result of not being able to balance budgets, could be issuing section 114 notices; and further explained the importance of highlighting the actions needed now to lay quality plans to protect local services.

The Executive proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed unanimously.

The Executive:

- a. Noted the forecast overspend of £26.1m (as at month 4) for the year and the key risks, future issues and opportunities.
- b. Requested that each Scrutiny Committees urgently reviews the budget monitoring position for their areas of responsibility and that the relevant Executive members set out the reasons behind the current forecasts and the actions being taken to address the position.
- c. Approved that member briefings are set to ensure every councillor has the opportunity to fully understand the current financial situation and the challenges facing the council going forward.
- d. Received a monthly update on the financial position and actions being taken to address it.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

### **39 Quarter 1 - Performance report - Agenda Item 8**

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, welcomed Sara Cretney as the new Service Director – Strategy and Performance, and invited the Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon, to introduce the report.

The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon, introduced the report, highlighting: the diligent and creative work of the Strategy and Performance team.

The Service Director - Strategy and Performance, Sara Cretney, further added to the above points, highlighting: the importance of the information in the understanding of how key services are performing in order to understand the Councils impact, and enable the Council to prioritise investment, identify, learn and address areas of

concern and to celebrate success; the interim position and approach; and the work in progress to develop a comprehensive corporate performance framework aligned with the Business Plan.

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: the local and national backlog of Care Act assessments and the rigorous process in place locally, to reduce backlog.

The Executive proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed unanimously.

**The Executive considered and commented on the information contained within the report, and endorsed the first Quarter 1 2023/2024 Performance Management Report for Somerset Council.**

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

**40 Executive Forward Plan - Agenda Item 9**

The Executive noted the Forward Plan.

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, advised that Executive meetings are to be held around the County at North, South, East and West area office venues, with the 4 October Executive meeting to be held in the John Meikle Room, Deane House, Taunton, TA1 1HE

**(The meeting ended at 12.40pm)**

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**CHAIR**

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## Appendix A

### Public and Members Questions – Executive 6 September 2023

Question submitted from	Question
Mr Alan Debenham	<p>Current level of Care spending could put Council viability at risk within 2 years warns Somerset Council” so heads-up this week’s Council press release followed by an explanatory statement from Financial Executive Councillor, Liz Leyshon, all somewhat in line with 28 Aug. Guardian article about up to some 26 councils at such risk. Last April Government announcement said:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building on the People at the Heart of Care white paper, the government has set out plans to further digitise the social care sector and bolster the workforce ( issuing 55,000 visas for people to take up care-worker roles, and increasing uptake of digital social care records by 10%, plus launching new improved data collections ).</li> <li>• Alongside the plan, the Better Care Fund framework, published today, will ensure at least £16.8 billion is spent to make sure people receive the right care in the right place at the right time ( this fund joins health, social care and housing to help older people and those with complex needs live at home for longer, increasing from £7.7 billion in 2022 to £8.1 billion in 2023 and £8.7 billion in 2024. The total fund includes £1.6 billion to improve hospital discharge arrangements - £600 million next year and £1 billion the following year.</li> </ul> <p>This follows the Autumn Statement 2022, in which the Government previously allocated up to £2.8 billion in 2023/24 and £4.7 billion in 2024/25 to help support Adult Social Care and hospital discharge, creating Social Care – so it sounds - awash with new funding</p> <p><b>Question 1</b> How much of this seemingly generous new money and support has found, or is finding, its way to this Council’s funds and/or staffing and how much of this is direct grant, as opposed to the Council being</p>

allowed to raise hypothecated Adult Care funds from the up to 2% Council Tax levy previously established?

Last February the Government pledged to transform Children's Social Care, with ambitious plans to put families at the heart of Children's Social Care whereby vulnerable children will be better supported with families in safe and loving homes:-

- Backed by £200 million over the next 2 years for a new, ambitious and wide - ranging Children's Social Care implementation strategy to transform the current care system to focus on more early support for families, reducing the need for crisis response at a later stage.
- Families will receive local early help and intervention with challenges such as addiction, domestic abuse or mental health, to help families to stay together where possible and overcome adversity. This will start in 12 local authorities and is backed by £45 million to embed a best practice model that will then be shared more widely.
- Kinship care, where a child is placed with a relative or close family friend, will be prioritised by simplifying the process and providing more support to extended families, such as grandparents, aunties, uncles and others : recognising the transition within a family can be challenging for all involved, the government will also provide training and support to kinship carers.
- Foster carers will also see an above-inflation increase in their allowance to help cover the increasing costs of caring for a child in their home, in recognition of the brilliant care they provide to children, this running alongside £25 million over the next 2 years on a recruitment and retention programme, which is the largest investment in recent history, helping to attract more people to offer a loving home for children in need. Depending on local need, foster care recruitment will focus on areas where there is a particular shortage of placements for children such as sibling groups, teenagers, unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC), those that have suffered complex trauma or parent and child foster homes.

**Question 2** (repeat of question 1 but for Childrens Social Care)

How much of this seemingly generous new money and support has found, or is finding, its way to this Council's funds and/or staffing and

how much of this is direct grant, as opposed to the Council being allowed to raise hypothecated Children's Social Care funds from the up to 2% Council Tax levy previously established?

### **Question 3**

When is this Council, in loyal Liberal Democrat historical tradition, going to take-up again it's old fight for financially independent, non-Westminster dominated 'real' Local Government – along the lines of the 1979 Layfield Royal Commission Report's proposals for new Local Income and Local Sales Taxes etc.?

### **Question 4**

Where does this Council stand on this important environmental issue, also with its current bid in mind for over £10m of government funding to finance its own special 'nutrients mitigation' project to help release present delays in Somerset house building?

“Rather than weakening regulations, we need firmer controls on private water companies and the hugely profitable large-scale housebuilders, who have seen a massive increase in their share value as a result of this government's latest announcement to ditch 'nutrient neutrality'”, so commented a Green Party leader.

### **Question 5**

On what basis does Finance Executive Councillor, Liz Leyshon, say in her latest press released statement (29 Aug) :“Somerset looks poised to become Britain's green energy powerhouse with Hinkley Point C coming on stream and the proposed new gigafactory, but the next two years will be very, very difficult. The Council's challenge will be to make sure we are in a the right place to make the most of these opportunities, while taking care of those most in need” when all green environmentalists I've ever known, viewing nuclear power from uranium mining to 60-year decommissioning and 25,000 year geological subterranean disposal of radioactive waste, would vehemently demand withdrawal of this latest Tory nuclear-obsessed greenwash fraud?

Also viewing the hopeless budget overruns and reactor failures of what's happened at EDF's similarly designed twin EPR reactors at Flamanville and Olkiluoto – now seriously the same for Hinkley C with more long delays to 2028's 'one reactor only' operation and hopeless escalating construction costs from original £17bn to latest £36bn plus –

	<p>currently there's little real expectation of an actual date for electricity production and, if there was, the cost of the 'nuclear levy' to be added to all electricity bills will be unaffordably massive and the first ever high-level radioactive waste on-site storage, next to the sea wall, an untenable threat in the light of likely global sea-level chaos from 3 degree temperature rise.</p> <p>Lastly, everyone knows that so-called 'renewable energy' in the form of solar panels, wind and wave turbines, electric vehicles etc.- all needing lithium battery storage capacity - is not in reality truly renewable because overall, considering the thousands of new lithium and other metals mines and the manufacturing/ retailing industry needed in support, it has a very negative impact on global emissions, albeit much less than coal, oil, or gas. Lesser impact or not, the proposed gigafactory is still indirectly an increased emissions 'killer'</p>
Response	<p><b>Question 1 – Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Cllr Dean Ruddle</b> Somerset Council received the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discharge Fund - £3.3m in current year and will receive a further £5.3m in 2024/25</li> <li>• Market Sustainability - £5.8m in the current year and a further £8.8m in 2024/25</li> <li>• Workforce Fund - £3.8m in the current and a further £2.1m in 2024/25</li> </ul> <p>There is also the Social Care Fund that is split between Adults and Childrens Social Care of £39.2m in the current year and rising to £45m for 204/25</p> <p><b>Question 2 – Lead Member for Children, Families and Education, Cllr Tessa Munt</b> The Social Care Grant from Government for the year from April 2023 to March 2024 is £14.6m more than the previous year. This funding is shared between Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care.</p> <p>Children's Social Care is not able to benefit from a Council Tax levy under the Government's current legislative arrangements.</p> <p><b>Question 3 – Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans</b> I don't believe the Liberal Democrats have ever stopped!</p>



People in Somerset clearly value our approach to running local government which is why we have the largest elected Liberal Democrat group in the country here and we have made stellar gains in the 2023 council elections, from Windsor and Maidenhead to Hull.

We will continue to campaign for political and economic power to be devolved and decentralised to the lowest level and the empowerment of communities and remain committed to local government financed through a local income tax and site value rating for business.

After the 2024 LibDem Landslide election our majority government will undoubtedly put this into effect.

Local Government has a whole has consistency campaigned for the capping limits on council tax imposed by the government to be removed and for local government to be properly funded with multi-year financial settlements.

As a History teacher I do need to point out that Frank Layfield's Committee reported in 1976 and not 1979.

**Q4 - Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke**

We are currently reviewing the Government's proposed changes to the approach to nutrient neutrality and their plans to unblock development. However, until the proposed amendments are made to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill the current legal framework has not changed and mitigation to ensure that developments are nutrient neutral are therefore still required. The Council will continue to work with partners to deliver live projects in advance of any changes coming into effect.

The Council has been campaigning for change in the nutrient neutrality regulations for some time. We've long felt that the restrictions on new housing were disproportionate in Somerset where new housing has a limited impact in comparison to other sources of pollution and that other measures are required. We currently have approximately 16,000 new homes held up by these regulations.

In addition to the proposed amendments to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, the Government now plans to tackle the underlying sources of nutrient pollution by announcing an environmental package of further investment in nutrient reduction measures. The Council has been advised that this has shifted the focus from the proposed Nutrient

	<p>Mitigation Fund and will now provide this additional funding to Natural England to take a more strategic approach to site restoration on a catchment wide basis. We understand that Natural England will seek to partner with local planning authorities to deliver nutrient reductions and associated environmental co-benefits and we expect to receive further details on this new approach in the next few weeks including the engagement with local leaders.</p> <p><b>Q5 -Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon (answer given by Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke)</b></p> <p>Regarding HPC, the siting and funding model for new nuclear is prescribed by central government and whilst I understand why you have raised this, the Council's role focusses on the delivery of the requirements contained in the agreed Development Consent Order and associated documents. You are indeed correct that there have been formal delays to the commissioning of Units 1 and 2 of the station. EDF have a number of community fora where you would be able to air the concerns you have raised in the correspondence.</p> <p>We are aware of the negative environmental impacts of mining lithium and other scarce materials for the use in batteries and other renewable energy solutions, but almost all alternative energy options have a negative environmental impact to some degree. The imperative to reduce carbon emissions and move away from fossil fuels means that the least-worst options must be our considered preference. We are also aware that renewable energy is not a net-zero panacea and reducing energy consumption is also crucial to attaining our carbon reduction ambitions. Like so many aspects of addressing the climate emergency, there is no one solution and there are many nuances to be considered.</p>
<p>Cllr Leigh Redman</p>	<p><b>Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC)</b></p> <p>It has become apparent over the past week that this Government may have failed to issue sufficient guidance or funding to local authorities with regard to the School estate around RAAC and its potential impact on the safety of our young people when learning, along with the poor</p>

	<p>oversight during the building and handover process for Haygrove school.</p> <p>The uncertainty and concern around this accumulated failure has meant that some of our young peoples education is being impacted again, while parents are rightly concerned about their child's education and more importantly in some cases their safety while learning.</p> <p>I understand that non Local authority school properties will be the responsibility of the MAT or trust they sit under, I am aware that our amazing officers have been reaching out to help where they can, despite no responsibility to do so.</p> <p><b>Question 1</b> Can the Executive Members provide an urgent update on the position for LA and where known Academy schools in Somerset?</p> <p><b>Question 2</b> Can the Executive Members provide an indication of current plan of action where we have a responsibility and for those where we do not?</p> <p><b>Question 3</b> Can we understand any financial impact on the council that this may have?</p> <p><b>Question 4</b> The wider Council property estate, can the exec member for property please provide an indication of where in our wider estate RAAC may be present?</p>
Response	<p><b>Question 1 – Lead Member for Children, Families and Education, Cllr Tessa Munt</b></p> <p>As a local authority we have responsibility for the condition of local authority-maintained school buildings. Academy Trusts and the DfE have responsibility for many schools in the county, and the Diocese of Bath and Wells has responsibility for a small number of ‘Voluntary Aided’ school buildings.</p> <p>When the risk of RAAC became clear at the end of the last decade, the then county council reviewed our school building records in line with Department for Education guidance at that time. This review concluded that there was low probability of RAAC being present in Somerset’s local authority-maintained schools.</p>

In the light of new guidance that came from the Department for Education last academic year, a new programme of on-site investigation began across LA maintained schools to test this earlier study with the intentions of demonstrating conclusively that no RAAC is present. This programme covers 108 of the schools that we are responsible for and has not yet concluded, but to date all the on-site surveys, where they have been required, have found no evidence of RAAC in local authority maintained schools. This latest programme was initiated in early 2023, with the first surveys on site in June. We are fully confident at this stage that there is no RAAC present in 40 of the 108 schools, and survey work is well underway across a number of other sites. No RAAC has been identified at any of our 108 schools to date.

However one academy school, Selway School, run by the Oak Trust, has identified RAAC in one site since the letter was initially sent. We expect that school to open tomorrow to all but one class.

In the past few days we have speculation about RAAC in local schools - with suggestions that it could be present in the buildings of Milford Infants School and Bridgwater College Academy and Brymore schools. This is incorrect and I'd like to discourage such speculation. It really doesn't help teachers to teach or help students to learn. BCA for instance have reassured us that their buildings have been surveyed in the last 15 months and they are confident that RAAC is not present in their estate.

**Question 2 - Lead Member for Children, Families and Education, Cllr Tessa Munt**

Following the change in the Department for Education's risk assessment last week, officers in the Strategic Asset Management department have worked with our structural engineer contractor to accelerate the survey programme. We are targeting the completion of initial surveys at all 108 sites over the next two weeks. Some further investigations will be necessary following the initial survey programme where structural components are more difficult to access; these follow up surveys will take longer to complete.

No RAAC has been identified at any of our school sites to date and we hope that the survey programme will enable us to conclusively rule out the presence of RAAC in our schools. If any RAAC is identified through

the remainder of the programme, we will follow DfE advice and the recommendations of our structural engineers to mitigate any risk to students and staff.

**Question 3 - Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke & Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts**

The latest survey programme is currently forecast to cost a total of £80,000, but this figure is likely to increase depending on the amount of detailed follow-up investigatory work required. If any RAAC is identified the financial impact would increase further, though at this stage we clearly hope this will not be the case. This cost is an in-year pressure on the Strategic Asset Management departmental budget – no funding for investigative work on RAAC has been provided by the government.

**Question 4 - Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke & Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts**

The Council owns and manages 10,000 homes through its housing services. The majority of these homes are traditionally built houses, flats and bungalows using well established techniques and materials; concrete slab construction methods are present in our housing estate, but with relatively few large blocks we believe that the risk of RAAC being present is likely to be low. Additional verification work is being undertaken by the housing services to provide assurance in this area.

Somerset Council also has a significant operational and leased estate. Officers in the Strategic Asset Management department have undertaken an initial data review of over 1000 buildings, and commissioned some follow up surveys as a result. Again, no RAAC has been identified to date, however we have been prioritising work on schools and it will be some time before we have a comprehensive view on the risk posed by RAAC in this part of the estate. We will continue to review Health and Safety Executive and any other relevant sector guidance as the national response develops in this very challenging area.

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