

# Public Agenda Pack



Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton TA1 4DY, on Wednesday, 26 February 2025 at 10.00 am

## **Present:**

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

Cllr Theo Butt Philip  
Cllr Heather Shearer  
Cllr Richard Wilkins

Cllr Mike Rigby  
Cllr Sarah Wakefield

## **In attendance:**

Cllr Mandy Chilcott  
Cllr Andy Dingwall  
Cllr Frances Nicholson  
Cllr Fran Smith  
Cllr Lucy Trimmell

Cllr Tom Deakin  
Cllr Henry Hobhouse  
Cllr Faye Purbrick  
Cllr Mike Stanton

## **Other Members present remotely:**

Cllr Graham Oakes  
Cllr Suria Aujla  
Cllr Dawn Denton  
Cllr Andy Hadley  
Cllr Dawn Johnson  
Cllr Val Keitch  
Cllr Marcus Kravis  
Cllr Sue Osborne  
Cllr Leigh Redman  
Cllr Jo Roundell Greene  
Cllr David Woan

Cllr Steve Ashton  
Cllr John Cook-Woodman  
Cllr Bob Filmer  
Cllr John Hunt  
Cllr Helen Kay  
Cllr Andy Kendall  
Cllr Tony Lock  
Cllr Tom Power  
Cllr Diogo Rodrigues  
Cllr Brian Smedley  
Cllr Ros Wyke

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

Apologies were received from Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts. Cllr Mandy Chilcott was late due to traffic.

## **14 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2**

The following declarations of interest were automatically recorded:

Cllr Theo Butt Philip – Wells City Council

Cllr Graham Oakes – Yeovil Town Council / Yeovil Without Parish Council  
Cllr Mike Rigby – Bishops Lydeard and Cothelstone Parish Council  
Cllr Heather Shearer – Street Parish Council  
Cllr Richard Wilkins – Curry Rivel Parish Council

**15 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 3**

Public questions were received from Mr Ray Moore, Mr David Orr, Mr Nigel Behan, and Mr David Preece.

Questions and responses are detailed in Annexe A to the minutes.

**16 Executive Forward Plan - Agenda Item 4**

The Executive noted the Forward Plan.

**17 Local Government Ombudsman Complaints - Agenda Item 5**

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Lead Member for Children, Families and Education, Cllr Heather Shearer, to introduce the item. Cllr Shearer extended apologies to the two families affected and highlighted the need to ensure we are providing resources effectively and efficiently, and that the report contained detail on work towards improving things.

Cllr Shearer proceeded to hand over to the Executive Director Children Families and Education, Claire Winter, and Service Director - Education, Amelia Walker, who also offered sincere apologies to the families affected. They proceeded to detail the plans in place to address issues in the SEND system; that there is an ongoing national crisis around SEND provision; that they would welcome any challenge from Scrutiny on these mitigations to ensure they are appropriate and well directed to learning from the complaints; the responsibilities as a council and the responsibilities for schools, the voluntary sector and the Department for Education; the restructure within education to provide a dedicated disputes team to provide capacity to focus on challenges; the importance of improving information systems; the relationship with the ombudsman and the understanding that these are complex issues not easily resolved; the direct payments policy and the need to learn from good practice in Adults services; and the challenges with Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) and that a new contract has been drafted, agreed and is now in place with the health service.

The Leader of the Council invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present, with officers providing responses as appropriate. Questions and points raised included: the timescales of the mitigations put in place; how to assure members of the public and communicate well with them regarding ongoing assessments; setting clear expectations for parents with regard to timelines; the need for appropriate support at specific developmental stages and the long-term implications of not providing it; that there has been a national increase in children in distress; the governance route for the review of implementation of the plan and the role of Scrutiny in that process; the need for assessment of impact of the actions in

the action plan; whether there is adequate staffing for the increase in SEND requirements; whether there is any learning from the transformation in Adults Services that can be applied to Children's Services; whether there are more complaints expected and the cost of complaints and legal proceedings; whether actions to address these complaints will support other existing complaints; the importance of communication with members of the public; details of the agile approach to analysis.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussion and proposed an addition to the recommendations that progress on the action plan comes back to the Executive Committee quarterly. The Committee proceeded to a vote on the recommendations, which were agreed unanimously.

**Following consideration of the officer report, appendices and discussion, the Executive resolved to:**

- 1. Accept the findings of the LGSCO reports and agrees to implement the recommendations set out in those reports;**
- 2. Note and approve implementation of the improvement actions set out in paragraph 8 of this report;**
- 3. Add a quarterly review of the SEND Action Plan to future agendas of Executive Committee.**

**18 2024/25 General Fund Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report - Month 9 (Qtr3) - Agenda Item 6**

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon, to introduce the item. Cllr Leyshon highlighted that this was the Q3 report following the month 7 report, as month 8 was not reported on due to budget setting; that the report shows a reduced draw on reserves and that reserves are one-off funding to allow us to close the budget gap; the difference between one-off pressures vs ongoing pressures and where a pressure becomes a growth.

Cllr Leyshon proceeded to hand over to the Service Director – Finance and Procurement, Nicola Hix, who detailed: that this is not a 'true' underspend due to the use of reserves; that there was a decrease in the forecast overspend in Children, Families and Education and the reasons behind that; that non-service directorate has an increased underspend and the reasons behind that including the impact of asset sales; the ongoing and one-off pressures; the movements in each service; the improvement in the Dedicated Schools Grant forecast; ongoing monitoring of savings and comparison with the previous report; the collection funds that are above target for business rates and council tax; that the spend boards are still in place; and that there is no big swing of projections for the capital spend.

The Leader of the Council invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present, with officers providing responses as appropriate. Questions and points raised included: the detail of the adults' services budget including the savings made as part of transformation, the winter pressures, the need for a realistic budget and the importance of prevention; the positive changes in Children's including

savings relating to Home to School transport and SEND transport and the importance of forecasting and modelling and the need for more foster carers; the causes behind the underspend in Adults Services and if that is linked with preventative work; the large amount of work in delivering My Life, My Future; that the headlines of the budget monitoring were positive but it was dependent on capitalisation and use of reserves; how the budget was set based on no asset sales; the pressure on agendas and the number of papers, including late papers creating pressure for officers and councillors; the reserves position and whether there is enough in reserves for transformation; whether earmarked reserves for insurance and PFI are sufficient; whether reducing drawdown on reserves should be prioritised in the case of an underspend; the increased overspend in Resource and Corporate Services as a result of loss of income from asset sales; and the outstanding debt in Adult Social Care.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussion and proposed a drafting amendment to recommendation e. The Committee proceeded to a vote and the recommendations were agreed unanimously.

**Following consideration of the officer report, appendices and discussion, the Executive resolved to:**

- a) Note Council is now forecasting a balanced revenue position (on-budget).**
- b) Note the total Council revenue forecast underspend of £20.065m for the year. There is a forecast underspend of £14.005m within Service Directorates for 2024/25 and the Corporate Contingency of £6.000m, whilst remains unallocated it has been released into the forecast outturn within budget lines Table 1.**
- c) Note that the planned use of reserves of £36.800m for Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Support towards the budget is forecast to reduce by £20.065m to £16.735m, due to the forecast underspend within budget lines (paragraph 18).**
- d) Agree that mitigating actions are to be identified in order to reduce any overspends, to take action and to contribute to the long-term financial sustainability of the authority.**
- e) Agree that the Council continues with the aim of avoiding a Section 114 notice by taking all of the necessary actions and continues to operate in a similar way to one being issued.**
- f) Note the progress and delivered savings of £32.217m of the approved savings programme as set out in Table 2 and Appendix J.**
- g) Note that work will continue to find mitigating or substitute savings for the £3.909m of Red unachievable savings, deliver the £0.727m Amber at risk savings and the £3.379m Green on track savings.**
- h) Note the in-year forecast overspend on the Dedicated Schools Grant of £31.300m, a decrease of £1.467m from Month 7 (paragraph 11).**
- i) Note the total forecast Dedicated Schools Grant year-end deficit of £65.211m as set out in Appendix C.**
- j) Note the collection rates for Council Tax and Business Rates as set out in paragraph 16.**
- k) Note the quarterly update from the Spend Control Board detailed in Appendix K.**
- l) Note the quarterly update on the prudential indicators detailed in Appendix**

**L.**

**m) Note the outstanding debt position as detailed in Chart 3 and Appendix M.**

**n) Note the level of General Reserves is £60.000m (risk-based assessment – minimum £30m, maximum £60m) and repurpose of some specified earmarked reserves following a review of the Council’s balance sheet (see section 19).**

**o) Note the Capital Programme forecast outturn at Quarter 3 is £150.573m.**

**p) Approve the additional Quarter 2 capital slippage of £0.631m into future years**

**q) Approve £247.062m of additions to the capital programme, as detailed in Section 35 of this report.**

## **19 2024/25 Housing Revenue Account Revenue & Capital Budget Monitoring Report - Qtr3 - Agenda Item 7**

The Leader of the Council invited the Executive Director Community, Place and Economy, Chris Hall, to introduce the item. Chris Hall highlighted that there was a positive change since Quarter 2 with a reduction in the overspend and the reasons behind that, the need to not put customers at risk by reducing standards of service in order to reduce the overspend, and that the HRA does have a healthy reserve.

The Leader of the Council invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present, with officers providing responses as appropriate. Questions and points raised included: that this budget report included both the in house service and the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO); the importance of the Decent Homes Standard; the increase in the Capital Programme slippage and the effect on the value of the current stock and capital costs overall; the difference in level of write-offs between the in house and the ALMO service; and the importance of the different models of management learning from each other.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussion and proceeded to a vote on the recommendations, which were agreed unanimously.

**Following consideration of the officer report, appendices and discussion, the Executive resolved to:**

**a) Note the Housing Revenue Account forecast overspend of £1.327m for 2024/25, the mitigations actions in the report and the impact on the HRA General Fund Reserve of this overspend.**

**b) Agree to take further mitigating actions to pull back the forecast overspend to a balanced outturn.**

**c) Note the forecast outturn position of the Capital Programme of £51.387m for 2024/25.**

**d) Note the budget additions of £2.894m approved through Key Decisions as in paragraph 24.**

**e) Note the Capital virements in Appendix C.**

**f) Approve updated slippage of £39.665m into future years.**

## **20 Q3 Corporate Performance Management Report - Agenda Item 8**

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon, to introduce the item. Cllr Leyshon highlighted that this report was a work in progress.

Cllr Leyshon proceeded to hand over to the Executive Director Resource, Strategy and Transformation, Alyn Jones, who thanked Members for their input, including from Scrutiny, and highlighted that the key issues identified in the covering report were included in Appendix A.

The Leader of the Council invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present, with officers providing responses as appropriate. Questions and points raised included: there would be reporting on Housing and Homelessness as part of the Adults Services portfolio in future reports; concerns around the planning service and whether the situation is improving; whether there could be more realistic or local indicators; the improvement in foster carers and whether that is sufficient; the time extended for planning applications and whether removing that would have an impact on figures; how phosphate mitigation impacts planning applications; the rate of staff sickness and whether it is a concern that needs to be addressed; the level of vacancies and how that has been impacted by the restructure; the monitoring undertaken by the Strategic Planning Committee; the causes of the reduction in resolved calls in Adult Social Care; the increase in overdue Care Act Assessments; that there are no indicators relating to Planning Enforcement; the percentage of homes that don't meet the Decent Home Standard; the increase in the number of families in BnBs for more than a week; the number of complaints answered within 10 working days; whether there is any feedback from Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board (SSAB) on the overdue Care Act Assessments; the downward trend relating to food hygiene and environmental health.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussion and the Committee noted the report.

## **21 My Life, My Future - Agenda Item 9**

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Lead Member for Adults Services, Housing and Homelessness, Cllr Sarah Wakefield to introduce the report. Cllr Wakefield highlighted that this was a positive story of transformation and the report was coming to close out the programme after all of the work has been completed, and that the £10m of ongoing savings had been achieved and would be sustainable for the long-term.

Cllr Wakefield proceeded to hand over to Executive Director Adult Services and Housing, Mel Lock, and Emily Faldon (Newton Europe), who explained: that the transformation had saved money and changed lives, improved things for staff and outcomes for people, which resulted in savings and improved quality of life; that the transformation had involved work with reablement, more care act assessments, fewer people admitted to long-term residential care, supporting people to learn new skills and stay independent, assessing people to prepare for adulthood earlier. They provided case studies and examples, the lessons learned and how the learning can be shared with the rest of the organisation.

The Leader of the Council invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present, with officers providing responses as appropriate. Questions and points raised included: the work of the late Cllr Dean Ruddle on this transformation; the assurance that staff are prepared to continue with improvements when Newton withdraw; the importance of preparing for adulthood; whether savings are cumulative or each year; whether transformation is encouraged with our partner organisations; and the importance of being a learning organisation.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussion and the Committee noted the report.

## **22 Corporate Peer Challenge Report - Agenda Item 10**

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Executive Director Resources, Strategy and Transformation, Alyn Jones, to introduce the item. Alyn Jones highlighted that as part of the continuous programme of review and improvement, the Council sought external feedback and guidance from LGA peers. He explained: the process followed by the peer review team; that the report was a standard report to be comparable with other councils; that the full report has been published and Members will have several opportunities to review and debate; and an action plan from the Peer Review would be considered at the April meeting of the Executive.

The Leader of the Council invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present, with officers providing responses as appropriate. Questions and points raised included: that this was the first of any unitary council following Local Government Reorganisation; the current progress of the action plan; the learning from the peers regarding finance and setting a budget; the importance of Scrutiny; sustainability of the Local Community Networks (LCNs) and the impact they are having; and the need for further development of LCNs based on where they are working well.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussion and proceeded to a vote on the recommendations, which were agreed unanimously.

**Following consideration of the officer report, appendices and discussion, the Executive resolved to recommend that Somerset's final Corporate Peer Challenge report is considered by Scrutiny Corporate & Resources in March 2025 to ensure they have the opportunity to influence and contribute to the development of the subsequent Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan.**

## **23 Contract Award for Substance Use Services in Somerset - Agenda Item 11**

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Lead Member for Public Health, the Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Graham Oakes to introduce the report. Cllr Oakes explained that this was a renewal of the contract with the current provider, which is a specialist all-age service, and that in a challenging situation keeping the contract and consistency is important the vulnerable people being served.

Cllr Oakes proceeded to hand over to Consultant in Public Health, Matthew Hibbert, and Service Manager – Substance Use, Jodie Reading, who detailed: the wider context including the national policy environment; the impact of substance abuse problems across Somerset including on housing and vulnerable children; that there is a new model of service which provides an opportunity; the link between addiction and substance use and wider issues such as offending behaviour, health, housing and crime; the prevalence data on those in Somerset struggling with substance use; what the service offers and that it is an all age, all substance service; that for the first time the numbers for alcohol treatment were higher than opiate treatment; that the provider operate three hubs across the county and uses community venues to outreach into vulnerable groups who might struggle to access; that the provider has expertise in harm reduction such as needle exchange, naloxone, and opiate substitution therapy; that there are peer-led and co-led initiatives in Somerset; the commissioning process and the new provider selection regime; and that the ask of Executive is a direct award of the contract to Turning Point branded as Somerset Drug and Alcohol Service (SDAS).

The Leader of the Council invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present, with officers providing responses as appropriate. Questions and points raised included: that this reaches across many areas of Council work; the ongoing work to improve the numbers of people the service reaches; the risk as the funding comes to an end at the end of 2025/26; the importance of evidencing good work to get further funding; the complexity of need of service users; the Equality Impact Assessment in relation to care leavers; clarification on the different risk scores; the importance of coordinated working around this; the strong track record of Turning Point in Bristol and Somerset; and the impact of contract length on the service and provider.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussion and proceeded to a vote on the recommendations, which were agreed unanimously.

**The Executive resolved to direct award the delivery of the specialist drug and alcohol treatment service to the current provider (SDAS) in line with the Provider Selection Regime (PSR) regulations for 2 years, with effect from April 2026 and with the option to extend for a further year.**

**24 Executive Decision to confirm Somerset Council as Host Authority and Accountable Body to the Somerset Rivers Authority partnership. - Agenda Item 12**

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Lead Member for Public Health, the Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Graham Oakes to introduce the report. Cllr Oakes highlighted that the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) is the only body of its kind in the country and it was set up after floods in 2014 and that the ask of Executive was that we continue to host them and act as their accountable body.

Cllr Oakes proceeded to hand over to the Chair of the Somerset Rivers Authority Board, Cllr Mike Stanton, and Service Manager – Somerset Rivers Authority, David Mitchell. They explained: the work done by SRA over the last ten years; the updated flood action plan; the changing nature of flooding in Somerset; and how the SRA is funded.



The Leader of the Council invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present, with officers providing responses as appropriate. Questions and points raised included: whether Members had had a briefing from the SRA; the early warning system trial involving 8 radar systems connected by an app; whether the funding agreement for the SRA was a permanent solution or if an alternative such as setting its own precept could be found; the different challenges of flooding across Somerset; that funding for the SRA has reduced in real terms over the last ten years; that flooding is on the agenda of future meetings with MPs; the inclusion of EU requirements in the report; and the differing tolerance numbers within the report.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussion and proceeded to a vote on the recommendations, which were agreed unanimously.

**Following consideration of the officer report, appendices and discussion, the Executive resolved to agree:**

- a. To Somerset Council continuing in the role of Host Authority and Accountable Body for the Somerset Rivers Authority for financial year 2025/26.**
- b. To review the revised 2025-26 Local Memorandum of Understanding and Constitution set out in Appendix 1 and authorise the Lead Member for Public Health, Climate Change and Environment to sign this on behalf of Somerset Council.**
- c. To review the proposed SRA Budget and SRA Enhanced Programme for 2025-26, (Appendix 2) in accordance with the recommendations to be considered by the SRA Board at its meeting on 7th March 2025.**
- d. Subject to Full Council confirming the raising of the SRA's 2025-26 shadow precept on 5 March 2025, to the release of funding committed from all sources in 2025-26 for the purposes of the SRA as set out in Appendix 2.**
- e. That the detailed management of the 2025-26 SRA Budget and Enhanced Programme within the control total allocated to the SRA is undertaken in accordance with the constitutional, financial regulations and decision-making arrangements of Somerset Council as Accountable Body.**

**(The meeting ended at 2.28 pm)**

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**CHAIR**

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## Executive Committee 26<sup>th</sup> February 2025 – Public Questions

Annexe A – Public Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question
Ray Moore	<p><b>PETITION – 5000+ signatures</b></p> <p>Eastwick Road Through the Chicanes</p> <p>This is a petition to reduce speed to 20mph with pedestrian crossings, speed platforms. For the children, parents, and elderly and disabled who don't stand a chance at present it is a rat race between drivers plus all the heavy goods vehicles also speeding with three bollards placed outside 201 footpath.</p>
<p><b>Written response</b></p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 11</p>	<p><b>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Waste</b></p> <p>Somerset Council commends the effort of the organiser to obtain the volume of signatures that clearly demonstrates the feeling within the community on the issues raised.</p> <p>We are always happy to investigate concerns raised by the community and have already discussed this location with local Council Members. Our team will work alongside the Town Council if they wish to fund investigations and provision of crossings, traffic calming measures and 20mph speed limits, as we have done in many communities across Somerset.</p> <p>In specific reference to the footpath outside of no 201, we will be installing an additional barrier to address vehicles mounting the footway at this location.</p>
Mr David Orr	<p>It usually pays to listen to one's peers. The recent LGA Peer Review report has stated:</p> <p>“Ensuring that there is a clear plan and appropriate corporate capacity in place to support transformation delivery will be key. However, for these technology opportunities to be fully realised, the council must ensure legacy system integration and harmonisation is equally prioritised – there are examples of services unable to produce statutory reports because they are working on multiple IT systems and relying on poor quality data. Significant investment will be needed to address these issues and at pace given the reduction in workforce capacity.</p>

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Ensuring this work is completed at the earliest opportunity will give the council the best chance to deliver their ambitions. Design skills are an important capability for any Council and their value has already been proven in the council's approach to service and process redesign with Adult's Social Care. Consideration should be given to securing design and continuous improvement skills for broader corporate benefit."

The year before vesting day should have been used to assess line of business applications, particularly in Districts, as duplication was inevitable. On vesting day, you should have had a list of applications where you would either transfer to one existing system as best-of-breed, or plan to go to market to commission a new application. Two years in on Day 665, this not-so-new council is still implementing one line of business application in Revs and Bens only, which is not an "at pace" plan. This work isn't "transformation" but is typical business-as-usual work post a merger of multiple organisations into one.

IT is an enabling service and is vital to delivering unitary line-of-business systems, with just one set of processes for efficient service delivery and management control, using reliable and consistent data. Efficiency savings through "transformation" also requires IT to enable it. Adult Social Care got this Invest to Save treatment, so why not IT?

IT needs to be given, on an Invest to Save basis (with 2-year payback business cases as with funding post reductions), additional capacity and capability, so they can do the "day job" but also consolidate inherited IT systems and enable "transformation" for efficiency savings. There should be sufficient business and process analysis resources within IT and change management resources within the business to create "intelligent clients" for every system consolidation. Commissioned IT system suppliers should do the bulk of the consolidation work including legacy data cleansing and loading.

Has the consolidation of Executive Directors, ahead of posts being lost and enabling systems being in place, created a leadership capacity issue at the top?

Should you consider an Interim Director for Transformation (with a delivery track record) for 1-2 years to drive transformation efficiency savings "at pace and scale"?

Every year of delay means more distressed sales of investment assets and/or increased borrowing of at least £40m a year

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<p>Written response</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 10</p>	<p><b>Response from Lead Member for Transformation, Human Resources and Localities</b></p> <p>Somerset Council requested the LGA Peer Review precisely because we wish to hear from and listen to our peers. It is very important that we take advice from the right people and I believe the Peers the LGA sent were very well positioned to advise us.</p> <p>As I have previously stated, the IT element of the transformation programme has been designed to deliver application consolidation. Our programme of IT systems and application consolidation is ongoing ranging from moving to a single Revenues and Benefits application, improving the functionality of MS Dynamics and developing our SAP HR system.</p> <p>Our financial position has meant that the Council has had to work at pace to redesign its structure to support its financial sustainability and continue to deliver service to the residents of Somerset. We have deployed, enabling projects utilising IT system improvements and AI have been running alongside the workforce transformation programme. We are not able to comment on specific investments in services at this stage, however, as we develop the Council Transformation Programme we will consider where best to deploy our resources to ensure that we deliver the objectives of the Council, this includes ensuring that the Council is financially sustainable.</p> <p>In response to your question regarding appointing an interim Director for Transformation, I do not believe we should be looking to increase the number of Executive Directors, however ensuring sufficient capacity to deliver transformation is a key focus.</p>
<p><b>Mr David Preece</b></p>	<p>Mr Preece made a statement at the meeting, raising a number of points including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unitary and Transformation was supposed to cost £19m and pay for itself within three years</li> <li>• The proposals of 555 redundancies out of 4555 staff, half of those should have gone before 2023, but there is still no agreement with unions</li> <li>• The jobs rather than the people need to be made redundant</li> <li>• IT transformation has a poor track record in Somerset with South West One creating no savings</li> <li>• The proposal to link us to a Super Wessex Unitary has been deferred and this is a positive.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Response</b></p>	<p>The Leader of the Council thanked Mr Preece.</p>

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<p>Mr Nigel Behan</p> <p>Page 14</p>	<p>Q1 relates to Item 6 <a href="#">2024-25 GF Revenue Capital Budget Monitoring Executive Report - Quarter 3 Final.pdf</a> and Item 10 <a href="#">LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Final Report</a></p> <p>In a recent response to the government consultation on local government funding CIPFA commented:</p> <p>“CIPFA is deeply concerned by the ongoing reliance on exceptional financial support (EFS) within the sector. Its prevalence within the sector (19 councils approved to receive EFS, with that number likely to rise dramatically in 2025/26 and 2026/27) means that it can no longer be considered exceptional. Covering recurring day-to-day revenue expenditure through capitalisation directions is unsustainable and represents poor financial management and most significantly poor value for money to the taxpayer. Our experience with the sector shows that this is leading to increased borrowing and consequently greater instability within the sector, and the government must urgently rethink its current position.”</p> <p>“Local authorities are also facing significant financial pressures relating to delivery of services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including provision of home-to-school transport. Research has identified a nationwide SEND deficit currently exceeding £3bn across English councils and this is projected to rise to £8bn in 2026/27. These deficits are not accounted for in the government’s £22bn budget gap due to the use of a statutory override. This is further complicated as it results in local authorities experiencing cash flow difficulties, putting them in the position where they are having to borrow to cover day-to-day spending.”</p> <p>The Peer Challenge report noted: “The work on values and behaviours carried out prior to the financial emergency being declared was well received by staff, however, there is now a sense that these have been undermined by actions subsequently taken especially in relation to the workforce reduction programme. As a priority, the council should focus effort on rebuilding trust with staff and demonstrating and recognising their value in order to secure their commitment and good will moving forward.”</p> <p>As Somerset Council is now entering a second financial year requiring EFS, putting up Council Tax by 7.5%, cutting hundreds of jobs and cutting services, do you accept that the forecast underspend should be used to minimise compulsory redundancies and service reductions?</p>
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<b>Written response</b>	<b>Response from Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance or Lead Member for Transformation, Human Resources and Localities</b>  The forecast underspend for 2024/25 is reducing the amount of budget that has to be taken from Council reserves, which were allocated to set a balanced budget for the current financial year. It is essential that we reduce our call on reserves to protect our financial position, as any use of them is one off funding that cannot be replaced.
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