

Minutes of a Meeting of the Full Council held in the Hollinsworth Hall, Canalside Conference Centre, Marsh Lane, Huntworth, Bridgwater, TA6 6LQ, on Wednesday, 20 December 2023 at 2.00 pm

Present:

Cllr Lee Baker (Chair)

Cllr Steve Ashton

Cllr Jason Baker

Cllr Brian Bolt

Cllr Hilary Bruce

Cllr Mike Caswell

Cllr Nicola Clark

Cllr Barry Clarke

Cllr Simon Coles

Cllr Nick Cottle

Cllr Dixie Darch

Cllr Tom Deakin

Cllr Martin Dimery

Cllr Michael Dunk

Cllr Habib Farbahi

Cllr Bob Filmer

Cllr Tony Grimes

Cllr Pauline Ham

Cllr Mark Healey

Cllr Ross Henley

Cllr Edric Hobbs

Cllr John Hunt

Cllr Helen Kay

Cllr Marcus Kravis

Cllr Tony Lock

Cllr Dave Mansell

Cllr Kevin Messenger

Cllr Tessa Munt

Cllr Frances Nicholson

Cllr Sue Osborne

Cllr John Bailey

Cllr Marcus Barr

Cllr Alan Bradford

Cllr Theo Butt Philip

Cllr Norman Cavill

Cllr Mandy Chilcott

Cllr Peter Clayton

Cllr John Cook-Woodman

Cllr Adam Dance

Cllr Hugh Davies

Cllr Dawn Denton

Cllr Andy Dingwall

Cllr Caroline Ellis

Cllr Ben Ferguson

Cllr David Fothergill

Cllr Andy Hadley

Cllr Philip Ham

Cllr Alistair Hendry

Cllr Mike Hewitson

Cllr Henry Hobhouse

Cllr Dawn Johnson

Cllr Jenny Kenton

Cllr Liz Leyshon

Cllr Martin Lovell

Cllr Matthew Martin

Cllr Harry Munt

Cllr Mike Murphy

Cllr Graham Oakes

Cllr Connor Payne

Cllr Kathy Pearce
Cllr Evie Potts-Jones
Cllr Faye Purbrick
Cllr Leigh Redman
Cllr Mike Rigby
Cllr Jo Roundell Greene
Cllr Peter Seib
Cllr Brian Smedley
Cllr Andy Soughton
Cllr Claire Sully
Cllr Sarah Wakefield
Cllr Richard Wilkins
Cllr Rosemary Woods
Cllr Ros Wyke

Cllr Derek Perry
Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey
Cllr Wes Read
Cllr Bill Revans
Cllr Diogo Rodrigues
Cllr Dean Ruddle
Cllr Heather Shearer
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts
Cllr Mike Stanton
Cllr Andy Sully
Cllr Martin Wale
Cllr David Woan
Cllr Gwil Wren

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Mike Best
Cllr Andy Kendall
Cllr Tony Robbins

Cllr Adam Boyden
Cllr Christine Lawrence
Cllr Lucy Trimnell

45 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Councillors Suria Aujla, Mike Best, Simon Carswell, Shane Collins, Lance Duddridge, Sarah Dyke, Andrew Govier, Susannah Hart, Bente Height, Val Keitch, Andy Kendall, Tim Kerley, Christine Lawrence, Oliver Patrick, Emily Pearlstone, Tom Power, Steven Pugsley, Tony Robbins, Gill Slocombe, Fran Smith, Jeny Snell, Lucy Trimnell and Alex Wiltshire.

46 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2

During the discussion, the following point was raised:-

- Councillors highlighted that the proposer and seconder needed to be updated on the Corporate Parenting Board item from the previous meeting, as it stated Jane Lock proposed and she was not able to do so as a non-councillor.

RESOLVED that the minutes of Full Council held on 27 September 2023, with the amendment, be confirmed as a correct record.

47 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

Councillors present at the meeting declared the following other registerable interests in their capacity as a Councillor of a Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

UNITARY COUNCILLOR	TOWN AND/OR PARISH COUNCIL
Steve Ashton	Crewkerne Town Council / Hinton St George Parish Council / West and Middle Chinnock Parish Council
Jason Baker	Chard Town Council
Lee Baker	Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council
Marcus Barr	Wellington Town Council
Alan Bradford	North Petherton Town Council
Theo Butt Philip	Wells City Council
Norman Cavill	West Monkton Parish Council
Peter Clayton	Burnham Highbridge Town Council
Nick Cottle	Glastonbury Town Council / St Edmunds Parish Council
Adam Dance	South Petherton Parish Council
Tom Deakin	Taunton Town Council
Andy Dingwall	Westonzoyland Parish Council
Caroline Ellis	Taunton Town Council
Ben Ferguson	Axbridge Town Council
Bob Filmer	Brent Knoll Parish Council
Pauline Ham	Axbridge Town Council
Philip Ham	Coleford Parish Council
Alastair Hendry	Burnham on Sea and Highbridge Town Council
Ross Henley	Wellington Town Council
Edric Hobbs	Shepton Mallet Town Council
John Hunt	Bishop's Hull Parish Council
Jenny Kenton	Chard Town Council
Marcus Kravis	Minehead Town Council
Tony Lock	Yeovil Town Council
Martin Lovell	Shepton Mallet Town Council
Mike Murphy	Burnham Highbridge Town Council
Graham Oakes	Yeovil Town Council / Yeovil Without Parish Council
Sue Osborne	Ilminster Town Council
Kathy Pearce	Bridgwater Town Council
Evie Potts-Jones	Yeovil Town Council
Wes Read	Yeovil Town Council
Leigh Redman	Bridgwater Town Council

Mike Rigby	Bishop's Lydeard and Cothelstone Parish Council
Diogo Rodrigues	Bridgwater Town Council
Dean Ruddle	Somerton Town Council
Peter Seib	Brympton Parish Council / Chilthorne Domer Parish Council
Heather Shearer	Street Parish Council
Brian Smedley	Bridgwater Town Council
Federica Smith-Roberts	Taunton Town Council
Andy Soughton	Yeovil Town Council
Richard Wilkins	Curry Rivel Parish Council
Dave Woan	Yeovil Town Council
Ros Wyke	Westbury-sub-Mendip Parish Council

Councillor Marcus Kravis further declared a non-registrable interest on agenda item 10, as he holds a gambling license.

A debate was had on whether councillors were required to declare an interest on agenda item 7 as second homeowners. Advice was given by the Monitoring Officer on what should be declared. The following councillors declared a disclosable pecuniary interest and would leave the room during the debate: Councillors Jason Baker, Brian Bolt, Mandy Chilcott, John Cook-Woodman, Habib Farbahi, Mark Healey, Alastair Hendry, Helen Kay, Jenny Kenton, Marcus Kravis, Dean Ruddle, Mike Stanton, Andy Sully and Ros Wyke.

48 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

Public Questions were received from:-

- Ray Rose – Vivary Park
- Rosa Fell – Transport
- David Redgewell – Transport
- Peter Travis – Transport
- David Orr – Phosphates
- Valda Dagnell/Elspeth Waldie – Green Project
- Nigel Behan – Budget and Council Services
- Eva Bryczkowski – Section 114
- Colin Nash – Budget and Council Services
- Beth Poole – Budget and Council Services
- Alison Hann – Budget and Council Services
- Ian Glover – Budget and Council Services
- Richard Brown – Budget and Council Services

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

49 Chair's Announcements - Agenda Item 5

The Vice Chair of the Council (in the Chair), Councillor Lee Baker, referred to the events detailed on the Chair's Information Sheet, circulated and published with the agenda.

50 Report of the Leader and Executive - Agenda Item 6

PAPER A

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Councillor Liz Leyshon, introduced the report on the 2024/25 General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Programme update, which the Executive considered and endorsed at its meeting on 6 December 2023.

The purpose of the report was to set out the challenging financial position faced by the Council.

Councillor Liz Leyshon proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Bill Revans.

The Council discussed the report and the following points were raised:-

- Some councillors highlighted the 74 sites that had been declared surplus and asked when they would find out more about any sites in their divisions so they could work with the City, Town and Parish Councils as part of the Council's devolution programme and partnership work with local councils.
- Councillors requested that Paper A's appendix one be considered further at the next available meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Corporate and Resources.

The Lead Member for Resources and Performance apologised for the lateness of the papers that had gone to Executive and advised that work was still ongoing on the report and involved collating a lot of data.

- Councillors felt that Central Government had failed Somerset Council with the level of funding being granted.
- Concern was raised on the lack of detail contained within the report which was hampering the discussions held with the City, Town and Parish Councils on the devolution project.

The Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets advised that the Asset Strategy had made the details transparent, and the Disposal Policy had been through Full Council for decision, both documents had been clear on the process to be followed and had involved the local councillors.

- Councillors supported the proposal that Somerset Council needed a vision for the future to create a sustainable council.
- Concern was raised on behalf of the officers and residents regarding the scale of challenge and change for Somerset Council over the forthcoming year and future years.

The Lead Member for Resources and Performance acknowledged that they were aware of officer welfare and that the Executive had not taken the decision easily to declare a financial emergency.

- Councillors queried how much research had been carried out on what other councils had done both before and after issuing a Section 114 notice.
- Some councillors highlighted that more scrutiny of the financial emergency and budget proposals would help provide further options and ideas to the Executive and Full Council when recommending and approving the Annual Budget in February. Councillors further highlighted that the process also needed to further involve local councillors in the ethos of the 'Tell Local Councillor' manner.

The Lead Member for Resources and Performance referenced the various budget briefings for councillors and the scheduled scrutiny committee meeting on the budget proposals on 1 February 2024. They also advised that they had attended the Local Community Network meetings to update them on the financial position and were happy to continue to attend.

- Councillors reflected that they understood the significant challenges facing the Council and that there were difficult decisions to be made.
- Some concern was raised about the capitalisation request which formed part of the recommendations and an explanation was provided for how that request formed part of the Council being able to set a balanced budget.
- Reference was made to a democratic deficit as a result of the reduction in councillors through creating the new Somerset Council and the added pressure on councillors working with their local communities during this challenging time and over the next few years.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to:

Note that the Council had declared a financial emergency and accordingly endorsed the range of actions and mitigations being taken forward. Furthermore, the Council fully supported the Executive and Senior Officers to continue its discussions with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and formally requests a capitalisation direction in order to set the 2024/25 budget.

The meeting adjourned at 4.00pm

The meeting restarted at 4.15pm

PAPER B

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Councillor Liz Leyshon, introduced the report on the Council Tax Reduction and Exceptional Hardship Scheme for 2024/25, which the Executive considered and endorsed at its meeting in 6 December 2023.

The purpose of the report was to formally agree a Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the year for working aged people.

Councillor Liz Leyshon proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor David Fothergill.

The Council discussed the report and the following points were raised:-

- Councillors welcomed the report.
- Councillors agreed it was important to look at the facts and figures.
- Councillors agreed that they needed to ensure they supported the local residents.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to approve:

- i. The Council Tax Reduction and Exceptional Hardship schemes set out in Appendices 4 and 5 to this report;
- ii. Option 3 in relation to the income band thresholds used within Schedule 1 of the proposed Council Tax Reduction scheme i.e. uprating in line with the 6.7% rise in state benefits announced by Government in the November 2023 Autumn Statement; and
- iii. A full review of the Council Tax Reduction scheme during the 2024/25 financial year to identify options for a revised scheme in the 2025/26 financial year. (NB. the review and consultation exercise would require funding which was anticipated to be in the region of £60k).

PAPER C

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Councillor Liz Leyshon, introduced the report on the Annual Treasury Management Outturn Report 2022-23 / Annual Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2023/24, which the Executive considered and endorsed at its meetings on 4 October 2023 and 6 December 2023.

The purpose of the report was to cover the Treasury Management activity for 2022-23 and the first 6 months of the 2023-24 financial year.

Councillor Liz Leyshon proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Bill Revans.

The Council discussed the report and the following point was raised:-

- Councillors queried the calculations stated within the report on the percentage drop in investments.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to approve the reports as being compliant with the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management.

PAPER D

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bill Revans, introduced the report on the Harbour Management Advisory Committee, which the Executive considered and endorsed at its meeting on 6 December 2023.

The purpose of the report was to propose the formation of a committee of the council which would enable broader membership and locally elected members to be part of the Harbour Management Advisory Committee.

Councillor Bill Revans proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Leigh Redman.

The Council discussed the report and the following points were raised:-

- Councillors thanked the Leader for the report.
- Councillors agreed it was a positive move to involve local councillors on the Sub-Committee.
- Councillors were pleased to see cross party involvement on the Sub-Committee.
- Councillor David Fothergill proposed an amendment to recommendation iv: that the appointment of the members be delegated to the Monitoring Officer, as nominated by the Group leaders, which was seconded by Councillor Bill Revans. The vote was taken on the amendment and was carried and became part of the substantive motion.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to approve:

- i. that a Harbour Management Advisory Committee was established as an advisory committee to the Executive under s102(4) of the Local Government Act 1972;
- ii. the Terms of Reference of the Harbour Management Advisory Committee attached at Appendix 1;
- iii. the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Executive and the Harbour Management Advisory Committee attached as Appendix 2;
- iv. the appointment of 6 elected members be delegated to the Monitoring Officer, as nominated by relevant political group leaders, to the Harbour

Management Advisory Committee in accordance with the political balance requirements in section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

- v. delegated authority be granted to the Service Director Regulatory and Operational in consultation with the Service Director Governance, Democratic and Legal Services to conduct a skills audit for the Harbour Management Advisory Committee and to conduct the process for the recruitment of appropriately skilled co-opted members to the Committee and make recommendations to Full Council for appointment of the co-opted members.

PAPER E

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bill Revans, introduced the report on the proposed withdrawal and dissolution of the Heart of the South West Joint Committee, which the Executive considered and endorsed at its meeting on 6 December 2023.

The purpose of the report was to specifically recommend that the Council agree to serve notice of its withdrawal and that the Heart of the South West Joint Committee be dissolved on 31 December 2023.

Councillor Bill Revans proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor David Fothergill.

The Council discussed the report and the following point was raised:-

- Councillors highlighted that the Heart of the South West had been an important vehicle used to approach Central Government on certain issues. However, it had now outlived its purpose and naturally had come to an end.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to agree to serve notice of its withdrawal and that the Heart of the South West Joint Committee be dissolved on 31 December 2023.

PAPER F

The Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture, Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts, introduced the report on the 2023/24 Housing Revenue Account Q1, which the Executive considered and endorsed at its meeting on 4 October 2023.

The purpose of the report was to provide an update on the projected outturn financial position of the Council's Housing Revenue Account for the year 2023-24.

Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Liz Leyshon.

The Council discussed the report and the following point was raised:-

- Councillors were pleased to support the report.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to approve a supplementary capital budget of £3,313,829 for the in-house service to spend on Fire Safety.

51 Report of the Executive Director for Corporate and Resources - Additional Council Tax Premiums - Agenda Item 7

Councillors Jason Baker, Brian Bolt, Mandy Chilcott, John Cook-Woodman, Habib Farbahi, Mark Healey, Alastair Hendry, Helen Kay, Jenny Kenton, Marcus Kravis, Dean Ruddle, Mike Stanton, Andy Sully and Ros Wyke left the room for the debate.

The Executive Director for Corporate and resources, Jason Vaughan, introduced the report which set out the intention to provide for statutory exemptions from the premiums and to reaffirm the decision to implement both premiums.

The Council discussed the report and the following points were raised:-

- Councillors requested clarification on the impact having furnishings in the property might make on which exemption they could be eligible for.
The Interim Revenues and Benefits Manager gave advice on the different classes of exemptions that could be used.
- Councillors queried the delegation to the Section 151 Officer and what level of change would require Full Council approval.
The Interim Revenues and Benefits Manager advised that they were still waiting for statutory information from Central Government and that the Section 151 Officer would only implement that information.

Councillor Liz Leyshon proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Bill Revans.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to:

Reaffirm the decision taken on 23 November 2022 to:

- i. Reduce the qualifying period for the long-term empty property premium to one year effective from 1st April 2024; and
- ii. Implement a 100% premium for second homes (dwellings which were furnished, but unoccupied) effective from 1st April 2025.

Council was also recommended to delegate powers to the Council's Section 151 Officer to enable them to amend the policy and / or any associated procedures to ensure alignment with the regulations or statutory guidance relating to the exemptions from the premiums, when these were issued or subsequently amended

by Government.

Councillor David Fothergill called for a recorded vote to ensure transparency, which was seconded by Councillor?

The results were **71 FOR** the recommendations and **1 ABSTAINED**.

Councillors Jason Baker, Brian Bolt, Mandy Chilcott, John Cook-Woodman, Habib Farbahi, Mark Healey, Alastair Hendry, Helen Kay, Jenny Kenton, Marcus Kravis, Dean Ruddle, Mike Stanton, Andy Sully and Ros Wyke returned to the room.

52 Report of the Chief Executive - Somerset Council Redundancies Requiring Full Council Approval - Agenda Item 8

The Chief Executive, Duncan Sharkey, introduced the report which set out the proposed dismissals on account of redundancy in relation to the creation of Somerset Council and the appointments to senior management posts in the Climate and Place, Community Services and Resources and Corporate Services Directorates.

The Council discussed the report and the following points were raised:-

- Councillors agreed it was unfortunate timing for officers especially with the consultation period just before Christmas.
The Chief Executive understood their concern, however, it was part of the process and the officers involved had known for some time.
- Councillors thanked the officers involved for their service to the Council.

Councillor Theo Butt-Philip proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Faye Purbrick.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to:

1. Approve the severance costs for 5 posts as set out in Appendix A, where Full Council approval was required for costs that exceeded £100,000.
2. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to agree the final date of dismissal and the final redundancy packages, noting that such settlements would not exceed contractual redundancy pay, the payment required under statute to the Local Government Pension Scheme, or the requirement for Full Council approval for any severance payment that exceeded £100,000.

53 Report of the Standards Committee - Agenda Item 9

The Chair of the Standards Committee, Councillor John Bailey, introduced the report, which set out the proposed reduction in the level at which gifts and

hospitality needed to be declared by elected members.

The Council discussed the report and the following points were raised:-

- Concern was raised that the proposed limit of £10 was too low.
- Councillors requested that the report be taken back to the Standards Committee for further debate.
- Councillors from the Standards Committee gave feedback on the debate and advised that the co-opted members of the Committee had supported the change from a public point of view.
- Concern was raised on the public perception on whether they had accepted or declined the gift/hospitality.
- Concern was raised on the civic members because they would be making daily declarations.
- Councillors wanted to be transparent with their gifts and hospitality declarations, however, they needed to be set at a realistic figure.
- Councillor Bill Revans proposed that the report be taken back to the Standards Committee for further investigation, which was seconded by Councillor David Fothergill. The vote was taken and carried and became the substantive motion.

Councillor John Bailey proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Brian Smedley.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to send the report back to the Standards Committee to reconsider Section 9 (Gifts and Hospitality) of the Members Code of Conduct.

54 Report of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee - Agenda Item 10

The Vice Chair of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee, Councillor Marcus Kravis, introduced the report which set out the new Statement of Principles – Gambling Policy for Somerset Council.

The Council discussed the report and the following point was raised:-

- Councillors thanked the Licensing Officers for all their hard work on the report.

Councillor Marcus Kravis proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to approve the Statement of Principles – Gambling Policy.

55 **Motions on Notice** - Agenda Item 13

Motion on the immediate bilateral ceasefire in Israel-Gaza conflict

Councillor Helen Kay introduced the Motion and gave some background information on her Jewish heritage, the reasons why she had brought the Motion to Full Council and how she felt some connection to Israel and was very shocked by the attacks on innocent civilians on 7 October 2023. She also noted the following:-

- The Hamas ideology and the representation of the Palestinian cause for land rights and freedom and the political vacuum re: other political parties representing the cause.
- The Motion called for Central Government to facilitate an immediate ceasefire to release hostages and get humanitarian aid to Gaza.
- To work for a long-term political settlement that gave the people of both Israel and Palestine the hope of a peaceful future.
- The concern that the conflict could spill over into the wider region and beyond.
- The likelihood of the increased refugee pressure on Europe and the UK.
- Concern on personal safety and the increase in antisemitism behaviour and hate crime.
- She believed all councillors had a role as community leaders in speaking across racial and religious divides and attempting to reduce tensions wherever possible.
- It felt very relevant to bring this Motion to Full Council at this time of year when we wished for peace and goodwill to all men.
- She urged all councillors to support the Motion with those sentiments in mind.

The Council discussed the motion and the following points were raised:-

- Councillors agreed it was a difficult situation and agreed with the sentiment of the Motion.
- Some Councillors stated that it was not for Somerset Council to agree foreign policy and that they did not feel qualified to support the Motion.
- Councillor Mandy Chilcott proposed that a vote was called, which was seconded by Councillor Bill Revans. The vote was taken and carried.

Councillor Habib Farbahi closed the discussion and noted the following points:-

- Life was precious no matter what religion you practice.
- The attacks needed to be condemned.
- He urged councillors to work with their parliamentary members to bring in the ceasefire.

Councillor Helen Kay proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Habib Farbahi.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to write to the UK Government to call for an immediate bilateral ceasefire. Council also noted with deep concern the severe reverberations of this crisis in the UK, with Jewish, Muslim and Palestinian communities all fearing and grieving, and condemned the rise in antisemitism and Islamophobia since 7 October 2023.

56 Report of the Leader and Executive - For Information - Agenda Item 11

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bill Revans, introduced the report which included a summary of the key decisions taken by the Leader and Executive.

Member Questions were received from:-

- Councillor Leigh Redman – Uncollected Council Tax

The questions and responses are attached to the minutes in Annex B.

The Council discussed the report and the following points were addressed to Lead Members:-

Leader of the Council

- Concern was raised on the conflicting information given to the City, Town and Parish Councils for the devolution project.

Deputy Leader of the Council

- Concern was raised that the funding for Spark had not been mentioned for next year.

The Lead Member advised that the finer details of the breakdown of funding would be included in the report going to the January meeting of Executive.

- Councillors requested that the data on council tax collection rates be taken through Scrutiny.

The Lead Member agreed as there was a lot of data to process and would feed into a piece of work to monitor collection rates.

- Councillors queried why City, Town and Parish Councils had been told to put their precepts up by a certain amount.

The Lead Member stated that City, Town and Parish Councils were sovereign councils and so therefore Somerset Council would not instruct on how much to raise the precept by.

Lead Member for Adult Services

- Councillors queried the costs associated with Europe Newton and whether they were related to transformation and within the budget calculations.

The Lead Member advised that transformation was part of the scrutiny function, the costs were part of the budget and so far they were on track to make savings.

Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture

- Concern was raised on the Octagon Theatre and the process followed for its closure.

The Lead Member advised that work was being carried out to investigate if the theatre could be reopened, the closure process was based on the business case.

- Councillors requested that the Lead Member talked to Yeovil Town Council to give them an update on the work.
- Councillors highlighted that Community Scrutiny had received an update on homelessness and prevention and concern was raised that if there was a reduction in funding, it would impact on the service.

The Lead Member agreed that there was a housing crisis in Somerset, with figures increasing and lack of support from Central Government. She urged councillors to keep using the scrutiny function to raise the topic.

The Chair called for a vote to extend the meeting by 30 minutes. The vote was taken and carried.

The Council discussed the report and the following points were addressed to Lead Members:-

Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources

- Councillors queried how many officers worked a reduced week, as they had received an out of office email advising them the officer only worked 4 days.
The Lead Member advised that the Council was not proposing a 4-day work week, this would have been due to the officer working a part time contract.

The Council noted the report.

56a **Annual Report of the Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change**

The Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, Councillor Dixie Darch, introduced her annual report.

The Council discussed the report and the following points were raised:-

- Concern was raised on the removal of the sandbag provisions and that it had been implied that there would be no impact on local communities.
The Lead Member advised that Somerset Council did not have a Sandbag Policy, however, officers were carrying out a community resilience review.
- Councillors were pleased to see the continued funding on areas within the

Tree Strategy.

- Concern was raised on urban tree cutting sites and whether there were plans to replant.

The Lead Member advised that the district councils had replacement strategies and that they were looking at a different approach for the urban planting within Somerset Council.

- Concern was raised that the Tree Strategy lacked detail on protecting woodland areas.
- Councillors requested training on biodiversity net gain.

The Lead Member advised that there was some training scheduled for January 2024.

- Councillors highlighted that village tree planting was important as well as urban tree planting.
- Councillors mentioned the target area for woodland areas and whether that had been achieved.

The Lead Member advised that it was difficult to calculate as different organisations carried out planting, but they were trying to collate the information.

- Councillors thanked the team in the black bag trial.
- Councillors thanked officers for their impressive response to the recent flooding.

The Council noted the report.

57 Report of the five Scrutiny Committees - Agenda Item 12

The Chair referred councillors to the report which set out the activity of each of the five Scrutiny Committees since April 2023.

The Council discussed the report and the following points were raised:-

- Councillors urged officers to include comments made at Scrutiny within the reports taken to Executive.
- Councillors highlighted that there was currently no forward plan document for the Scrutiny Committee for Climate and Place.
- Councillors chased the response to the letter sent with regards to the Stroke Service.

The Chair advised that the response had only just been received and would forward on to the Committee Members.

- Concern was raised that the report did not reflect the true workload of the committees.
- Councillors highlighted the importance of the Scrutiny function.

The Council noted the report.

(The meeting ended at 6.30 pm)

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CHAIR