

# Public Agenda Pack



Minutes of a Meeting of the Full Council held in the Hollinsworth Hall, Canalside Conference Centre, Marsh Lane, Huntworth, Bridgwater TA6 6LQ, on Wednesday, 18 December 2024 at 1.00 pm

## Present:

Cllr Mike Best (Chair)  
Cllr Lee Baker (Vice-Chair)

Cllr John Bailey	Cllr Jason Baker
Cllr Marcus Barr	Cllr Brian Bolt
Cllr Adam Boyden	Cllr Alan Bradford
Cllr Hilary Bruce	Cllr Theo Butt Philip
Cllr Simon Carswell	Cllr Mike Caswell
Cllr Norman Cavill	Cllr Mandy Chilcott
Cllr Barry Clarke	Cllr Peter Clayton
Cllr Simon Coles	Cllr John Cook-Woodman
Cllr Adam Dance	Cllr Tom Deakin
Cllr Dawn Denton	Cllr Andy Dingwall
Cllr Lance Duddridge	Cllr Michael Dunk
Cllr Caroline Ellis	Cllr Habib Farbahi
Cllr Ben Ferguson	Cllr Bob Filmer
Cllr David Fothergill	Cllr Tony Grimes
Cllr Andy Hadley	Cllr Pauline Ham
Cllr Philip Ham	Cllr Susannah Hart
Cllr Mark Healey	Cllr Bente Height
Cllr Alistair Hendry	Cllr Mike Hewitson
Cllr Edric Hobbs	Cllr Henry Hobhouse
Cllr Dawn Johnson	Cllr Helen Kay
Cllr Jenny Kenton	Cllr Tim Kerley
Cllr Marcus Kravis	Cllr Christine Lawrence
Cllr Liz Leyshon	Cllr Tony Lock
Cllr Martin Lovell	Cllr Dave Mansell
Cllr Matthew Martin	Cllr Kevin Messenger
Cllr Mike Murphy	Cllr Frances Nicholson
Cllr O'Donnell	Cllr Sue Osborne
Cllr Stephen Page	Cllr Connor Payne
Cllr Oliver Patrick	Cllr Kathy Pearce
Cllr Emily Pearlstone	Cllr Derek Perry
Cllr Evie Potts-Jones	Cllr Tom Power
Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey	Cllr Steven Pugsley
Cllr Faye Purbrick	Cllr Wes Read
Cllr Leigh Redman	Cllr Rob Reed
Cllr Bill Revans	Cllr Mike Rigby
Cllr Tony Robbins	Cllr Diogo Rodrigues
Cllr Jo Roundell Greene	Cllr Heather Shearer

Cllr Brian Smedley  
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts  
Cllr Andy Soughton  
Cllr Claire Sully  
Cllr Sarah Wakefield  
Cllr Richard Wilkins  
Cllr Rosemary Woods

Cllr Fran Smith  
Cllr Jeny Snell  
Cllr Mike Stanton  
Cllr Lucy Trimnell  
Cllr Martin Wale  
Cllr David Woan

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

Apologies were received from Councillors Steve Ashton, Suria Aujla, Hayward Burt, Nicola Clark, Shane Collins, Nick Cottle, Martin Dimery, Andrew Govier, Ross Henley, John Hunt, Val Keitch, Andy Kendall, Harry Munt, Tessa Munt, Graham Oakes, Peter Seib, Gill Slocombe, Andy Sully and Gwil Wren.

Although apologies had been received, Councillors Steve Ashton, Suria Aujla, Nick Cottle, John Hunt, Tessa Munt, Graham Oakes and Gwil Wren attended the meeting online.

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

Councillor Fothergill requested that the names were added to the recorded vote taken at the previous meeting. The details would be added and the minutes updated.

**Resolved** that the minutes of Full Council held on 26 September 2024, with amendment, be confirmed as a correct record.

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

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

<b>SOMERSET COUNCILLOR</b>	<b>CITY, TOWN AND/OR PARISH COUNCIL</b>
Jason Baker	Chard Town Council
Lee Baker	Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council
Marcus Barr	Wellington Town Council
Mike Best	Crewkerne Town Council
Alan Bradford	North Petherton Town Council
Theo Butt Philip	Wells City Council
Simon Carswell	Street Parish Council
Norman Cavill	West Monkton Parish Council
Peter Clayton	Burnham Highbridge Town 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
Edric Hobbs	Shepton Mallet Town Council
Jenny Kenton	Chard Town Council
Tim Kerley	Somerton Town Council
Marcus Kravis	Minehead Town Council
Tony Lock	Yeovil Town Council
Martin Lovell	Shepton Mallet Town Council
Mike Murphy	Burnham Highbridge Town Council
Sue Osborne	Iminster Town Council
Kathy Pearce	Bridgwater Town Council
Evie Potts-Jones	Yeovil Town Council
Tom Power	Wincanton Town Council
Wes Read	Yeovil Town Council
Leigh Redman	Bridgwater Town Council
Mike Rigby	Bishops Lydeard and Cothelstone Parish Council
Tony Robbins	Wells City Council
Diogo Rodrigues	Bridgwater Town Council
Heather Shearer	Street Parish Council
Brian Smedley	Bridgwater Town Council
Federica Smith-Roberts	Taunton Town Council
Jeny Snell	Yeovil Town Council / Brympton Parish Council
Andy Soughton	Yeovil Town Council
Richard Wilkins	Curry Rivel Parish Council
Dave Woan	Yeovil Town Council
Ros Wyke	Westbury-sub-Mendip Parish Council

The following councillors declared additional interests on Agenda Item 7 – Non-Domestic Rating Discretionary Rate Relief and Hardship Policy 2025-26: Councillors Mike Best, Mike Caswell, Mark Healey, Marcus Kravis, Nick O'Donnell, Steven Pugsley, Tony Robbins and Diogo Rodrigues.

The following councillors declared additional interests on Agenda Item 14 – Motions on Notice: Councillors Alan Bradford, Norman Cavill and Philip Ham.

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

Public questions were received from:-

- Pierre Fox – Misuse of Highways by hunting groups
- Pip Sheard and Marian Nieuwenhuizen – Petition – Cycling
- Seth Dellow – CTR Scheme and Celebration Mile
- Paul Partington – Rights of Way
- Trevor Challenger – Petition – Bus Services
- Andrew Lee – Public Participation
- Sue Isherwood – Highways
- Nigel Behan – Budget

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

## **53 Chair's Announcements - Agenda Item 5**

The Chair of Council, Councillor Mike Best, referred to the events detailed on the Chair's Information Sheet, circulated and published with the agenda.

The Chair of Council highlighted that Agenda Item 19 – Report of the Chief Executive would be moved to be debated after Agenda Item 7 and that Agenda Item 10 – Local Housing Authority Housing Fund had been withdrawn from the agenda.

Council observed a minute's silence in memory of former Taunton Deane Borough Councillor Janet Reed. Councillors paid tribute to her at the meeting, including Councillors David Fothergill and Gwil Wren.

Council observed a minute's silence in memory of former Somerset County Councillor John Sharpe. Councillors paid tribute to him at the meeting.

The Chair of Council welcomed the newly elected Councillors, Hayward Burt and Nick O'Donnell.

## **54 Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Exceptional Hardship Policy 2025-26 - Agenda Item 6**

The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance, Councillor Liz Leyshon, introduced the report which the Executive considered and endorsed at its meeting on 2 December 2024.

The report detailed the consultation exercise carried out on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTR) for the financial year 2025-26 and explained why the changes had been proposed for the new criteria for the scheme. It also highlighted that the Council was required by law to set a CTR scheme in advance of each financial year.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors thanked officers for their work on the report.
- Councillors raised concern for those claimants who lived in the deprived areas of the county and requested that officers investigated mitigation

measures for those most impacted by the changes.

- Councillors requested that a communications plan be put in place to ensure that mitigation measures were highlighted to all those who would need additional support.

*The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance agreed and advised that she was looking into the mitigation measures and would look to bolster the Exceptional Hardship Fund with the Household Support Fund. The Lead Member was also happy for councillors to approach her with any ideas to improve the mitigation measures in place.*

- Councillor Tom Deakin proposed an amendment which would replace recommendation 4, which was seconded by Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts:-

4) Conditional upon the Local Government Financial Settlement, and associated Household Support Fund announcement, this Council commit itself to:

1. Further increased support to the Exceptional Hardship fund to target help at those impacted by those changes - with particular attention given to households identified as disproportionately affected.
2. Include details regarding information and signposting to additional support through both council tax billing documents and through making additional contact with every impacted household.

The Council further agreed that, should additional funding capacity become available and the budget balanced in a sustainable way, the impact of those changes would be addressed to minimise or if possible remove them through the provision of a one-off grant or similar.

*The amendment was approved by Councillor Liz Leyshon, as proposer of the report and Councillor Bill Revans, as the seconder, so became part of the substantive motion.*

- Councillors raised concern that the CTR Scheme was being set prior to the Council Tax Rates for 2025-26.

*The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance advised that the CTR Scheme had to be approved prior to the end of December 2024 to enable the relief to be added to claimants' accounts.*

- Councillors raised further concern that other support funds were being used as a temporary fix for the CTR Scheme mitigations and that they were expecting too much from those extra support funds and that they were not confident they would deliver.

*The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance agreed that we had to be careful when using the Household Support Fund, as the money could only be used once. She also advised that officers were working with other agencies to investigate what other support was available.*

- Councillors raised concern on those claimants with disabilities and that they would feel the impacts of the scheme the most.

*The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance explained that she needed to understand the disproportionate numbers for those households.*

- Councillors queried why the backdating period had been reduced from one year to three months, especially as there was no direct saving proposed by

the reduction.

*The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance advised that the demand and cost of supporting those in need was ever increasing and that work was being carried out with other agencies to mitigate the impact. There was also an opportunity to include additional information in the council tax bills highlighting the changes and support available to all residents of Somerset Council.*

- Councillors queried what the requested increase in council tax would be as part of recommendation 2.

*The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance spoke on the referendum process and that they were designed to fail as councils were not permitted to campaign. Further details were given on how referendums operated, and that Central Government welcomed submissions from councils to increase their council tax.*

- Councillors highlighted that Local Government funding worked in a counterproductive manner.
- Councillors expressed their unease at supporting the recommendations, however, they would work to improve the mitigation measures available.
- Councillors raised concern on the potential impact on council tax debt and non-collection rates as a result of the changes to the CTR Scheme.

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

Councillor David Fothergill called for a recorded vote to ensure transparency, which was supported by at 15% of members.

A vote followed and the recommendations were agreed with fifty-six for, thirty-two against and 1 abstaining, votes cast:

Those voting FOR: Councillors John Bailey, Jason Baker, Lee Baker, Mike Best, Adam Boyden, Hilary Bruce, Theo Butt Philip, Simon Carswell, Simon Coles, Adam Dance, Tom Deakin, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, Ben Ferguson, Pauline Ham, Mike Hewitson, Edric Hobbs, Henry Hobhouse, Dawn Johnson, Helen Kay, Jenny Kenton, Tim Kerley, Marcus Kravis, Liz Leyshon, Tony Lock, Martin Lovell, David Mansell, Matt Martin, Kevin Messenger, Mike Murphy, Nick O'Donnell, Stephen Page, Oliver Patrick, Kathy Pearce, Emily Pearlstone, Derek Perry, Evie Potts-Jones, Hazel Prior-Sankey, Wes Read, Leigh Redman, Bill Revans, Mike Rigby, Tony Robbins, Jo Roundell Greene, Heather Shearer, Brian Smedley, Fran Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Jeny Snell, Andy Soughton, Mike Stanton, Claire Sully, Sarah Wakefield, Richard Wilkins, David Woan and Ros Wyke.

Those voting AGAINST: Councillors Marcus Barr, Brian Bolt, Alan Bradford, Mike Caswell, Norman Cavill, Mandy Chilcott, Barry Clarke, Peter Clayton, John Cook-Woodman, Dawn Denton, Andy Dingwall, Lance Duddridge, Bob Filmer, David Fothergill, Tony Grimes, Andy Hadley, Philip Ham, Susannah Hart, Mark Healey, Bente Height, Alastair Hendry, Christine Lawrence, Frances Nicholson, Sue Osborne, Connor Payne, Tom Power, Steven Pugsley, Faye Purbrick, Diogo Rodrigues, Lucy Trimnell, Martin Wale and Rosemary Woods.

Those ABSTAINING from voting: Councillor Michael Dunk.

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

- 1) Agree and approve the increase to income band thresholds by the September 2024 CPI rate of 1.7% in line with the percentage increase to state benefits as implemented by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
- 2) Agree for the Leader to write to the Minister for Local Government to explore the case for Somerset Council's Council Tax to be raised by more than the referendum limit, due to Exceptional Financial Support, low Council Tax base and rate, increasing demand, and taking into account Government's requirement that plans be in place to protect vulnerable people.
- 3) Agree and approve the CTR and associated EH scheme for 2025/26 as set out in this paper.
- 4) Conditional upon the Local Government Financial Settlement, and associated Household Support Fund announcement, this Council commit itself to:
  1. Further increase support to the Exceptional Hardship fund to target help at those impacted by those changes - with particular attention given to households identified as disproportionately affected.
  2. Include details regarding information and signposting to additional support through both council tax billing documents and through making additional contact with every impacted household.

The Council further agreed that, should additional funding capacity become available and the budget balanced in a sustainable way, the impact of those changes would be addressed to minimise or if possible remove them through the provision of a one-off grant or similar.

## **55 Non-Domestic Rating Discretionary Rate Relief and Hardship Policy 2025-26 - Agenda Item 7**

The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance, Councillor Liz Leyshon, introduced the report which the Executive considered and endorsed at its meeting on 2 December 2024.

The report detailed the review carried out on the Non-Domestic Rating Discretionary Rate Relief and Hardship Policy (NDRDRR) for 2025-26. The review was required due to legislative changes proposed by Central Government and to ensure that the aims and objectives of the scheme were not adversely affected by the proposed changes in legislation.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors Mike Best, Mike Caswell, Mark Healey, Marcus Kravis, Nick O'Donnell, Steven Pugsley, Tony Robbins and Diogo Rodrigues left the room for the debate.
- Councillors raised concerns on the negative impacts that the scheme would have on local public schools.  
*The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance understood their concerns and had spoken to a local head teacher, who advised that they had prepared for the changes in the rates but not the changes to the national insurance.*
- Councillors proposed a letter be written to Central Government expressing the concerns raised by councillors and rate payers.

- Councillors queried what would happen if the recommendations were not approved.  
*The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance advised that if the Council did not approve the recommendations now, then the changes would be put in place once Central Government implemented the scheme which would mean that the Council would be forced to re-bill all the impacted rate payers.*
- Councillors raised concerns for those rate payers in the leisure and retail sector who were already struggling to keep premises open and viable for business.

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

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

- 1) Approve that the Non-Domestic Rating Discretionary Rate Relief and Hardship policy is amended to prevent Private Schools from applying for assistance in anticipation of the changes to the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The recommended wording was to be found in Appendix D of the policy and stated: 'The ratepayer must not fall within the definition of a Private School. For business rates purposes, 'Private Schools' were defined by HM Treasury as schools at which full time education was provided for pupils of compulsory school age where fees were payable.'
- 2) Delegate authority to the Council's Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Monitoring Officer to make any additional amendments as necessary to ensure the wording aligned with that Act once such amendments came into force.
- 3) Approve to reduce the relief percentage within the policy for Retail, Hospitality and Leisure sector for 2025/26 from 75% to 40% as a result of changes to Central Government policy.
- 4) Approve to end Local Newspaper Relief in line with Central Government policy.

*Meeting adjourned at 3.40pm  
Meeting restarted at 4.05pm*

## **56 Report of the Chief Executive - Agenda Item 19**

The Chief Executive, Duncan Sharkey, introduced the report which detailed a settlement sum that required approval as part of the implementation stage of the Council's organisation restructure. The report required Full Council approval as stated in the Localism Act 2011, due to the proposed financial settlement for an officer leaving the council exceeded £100,000.

Councillors thanked the post holder for all their hard work and were happy to support the recommendations.

Councillor Bill Revans proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Mandy Chilcott.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **Resolved**:-



- i. The case for applying exemption information provisions as set out in the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A and therefore treat the attached confidential Appendix A (the main report) in confidence, as it contained information relating to any individual, information which was likely to reveal the identity of any individual and information relating to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information), and as the case for the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing that information.
- ii. To pass a resolution to exclude the press and public from the meeting where there was any debate or discussion regarding exempt information in Appendix A
- iii. The recommendations as set out in Appendix A.

#### **57 HRA sewage treatment tank replacements using MHCLG Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund Grant - Agenda Item 8**

The Lead Member for Communities, Housing Revenue Account, Culture and Equalities and Diversity, Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts, introduced the report which detailed that a significant proportion of the package sewage treatment plants no longer functioned effectively and were putting the council at risk of breaching environmental laws and regulations. The report sought to use Local Nutrient Mitigation Funds to carry out the replacement works to reduce the risks of causing pollution events, inconvenience to households and number of related complaints.

Councillors spoke in support of the report and were happy to support the recommendations.

Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Mandy Chilcott.

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

- Agree to the program of PSTP replacements where costs for the program were equal to or below the value of the LNMF funding received.
- Approve a supplementary budget of £1m to the HRA Capital Programme, that would be fully funded by the MHCLG Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund.

#### **58 Annual Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2024-25 - Agenda Item 9**

The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance, Councillor Liz Leyshon, introduced the report which provided a mid-year review of the Council's treasury activities and noted that all borrowing and investment activities had been undertaken in accordance with the approved strategy.

Councillors spoke in support of the report, thanked officers for their work and were happy to support the recommendations.

Councillor Liz Leyshon proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Diogo Rodrigues.

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

- a) Approve the mid-year borrowing and investment position and that all treasury

activities had been carried out in accordance with the approved Treasury Management Strategy, within the Prudential Limits, and in line with the full delegations to the Section 151 officer.

- b) Approve the report as being in compliance with the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management.
- c) Approve the revised Flexible Capital Receipts Policy for 2023/24 and 2024/25 as set out as Appendix B.

**59 Report of the Leader of the Council - Local Authority Housing Fund - Agenda Item 10**

The item was withdrawn from the agenda.

**60 Chief Executive's Pay Award 2024/25 - Agenda Item 11**

The Lead Member for Transformation, Human Resources and Localities and the Chair of the Human Resources Committee, Councillor Theo Butt Philip, introduced the report, which sought approval for the Chief Executive's pay award for 2024-25.

Councillors spoke in support of the report and were happy to support the recommendations.

Councillor Theo Butt Philip proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Bill Revans.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **Resolved** to approve the award of a 2.5% pay increase to the Chief Executive for 2024/25.

**61 Report of the Monitoring Officer - Agenda Item 12**

The Monitoring Officer, Alyn Jones, introduced the report which detailed an appointment to the Scrutiny Committee for Corporate and Resources, a delegated decision for a member dispensation and the changes to the political proportionality following two by-elections.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The following additional changes were also highlighted, that Councillor Diogo Rodrigues be removed from the Scrutiny Committee for Corporate and Resources and that Councillor Bob Filmer be added to the committee.
- The Leader of the Council thanked Councillor Filmer for his hard work as the previous Chair of the Scrutiny Committee for Corporate and Resources. He also welcomed the new councillors and passed on his best wishes to Councillor Slocombe.

Councillor Bill Revans proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Mandy Chilcott.

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

- Paper A  
Approve the appointment of Councillor Steven Pugsley to the vacancy on the Scrutiny Committee - Corporate and Resources and to appoint Councillor

Pugsley as the Chair of the committee. To also approve the removal of Councillor Diogo Rodrigues from the committee and be replaced by Councillor Bob Filmer.

- Paper B  
Note the decision taken by the Chief Executive on 30 October 2024 to grant a leave of absence for Councillor Slocombe.
- Paper C  
Note the recent by-election results and the changes to the political balance of the Council.

## **62 Review of Part B of the Council's Constitution - Retention of Committee Meeting Recordings - Agenda Item 13**

The Lead Member for Transformation, Human Resources and Localities, Councillor Theo Butt Philip, introduced the report which detailed the introduction of a policy for the retention of committee meeting recordings.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors queried whether the minutes would be kept if the recording was being deleted.  
*The Lead Member for Transformation, Human Resources and Localities confirmed that the minutes would remain the legal record of the meeting and be kept in line with the legal retention periods.*
- Councillors supported the recommendations.

Councillor Theo Butt Philip proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Emily Pearlstone.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **Resolved** to consider the review of Part B and approve the proposed amendments set out in Appendices 2 and 3.

## **63 Motions - Agenda Item 14**

Motion A

Councillor David Woan introduced the Motion to Council, which was seconded by Councillor Oliver Patrick.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors highlighted the plea to help support local farmers.
- Councillors fully supported the Motion, as farming was a diminishing sector and farmers quite often did not reach out for support.
- Councillors were pleased to see interest raised in such an integral sector.
- Councillors queried whether the new Economic Development Policy would include the food and farming sector.  
*The Leader of the Council spoke on the Somerset Growth Board and advised that they were looking for wider engagement and would pass on the comments made.*
- Councillors highlighted several concerns that faced farmers, including low income, land sales, 'outsiders' driving up land values and increasing cost of

food.

Councillor David Woan proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Oliver Patrick.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **Resolved** to write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs expressing concern about the impact of the Government's tax changes on the future of farming in Somerset.

The Chair proposed a 30-minute time extension which was carried.

#### Motion B

Councillor Faye Purbrick introduced the Motion to Council, which was seconded by Councillor Lucy Trimnell.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors thanked the Proposer and Seconder for bringing the Motion to Full Council and that they were aware of the impact on local farmers.
- Councillors spoke on the challenges faced by local farmers.
- Councillor Sarah Wakefield proposed some amendments to the wording of the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Oliver Patrick.
- The meeting was adjourned at 5.20pm to allow for the Proposer, Seconder and the Monitoring Officer to decide on whether the amendments were classed as a substantial change.
- The meeting restarted at 5.30pm. The Chair of Council advised that the decision was made that the amendments were deemed as a substantial change and that they had not been submitted ahead of the meeting and therefore would not be permitted.

Councillor Faye Purbrick proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Lucy Trimnell.

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

- Declare opposition to the Labour Government's changes to inheritance tax affecting family farms.
- Write to the Prime Minister, Chancellor and the DEFRA Secretary, along with all Somerset MPs, outlining our opposition to this tax change and the scale of the impact to Somerset and our rural economy.
- Advocate through all available means for the continued APR exemption of family farms to preserve the UK's food security, our rural communities, and environmental initiatives.

#### Motion C

Councillor Lucy Trimnell introduced the Motion to Council, which was seconded by Councillor Faye Purbrick.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillor Bill Revans proposed the addition of the words 'where possible' to

- paragraph 3, which was accepted by the Proposer and Seconder.
- Councillors were happy to support the recommendations.

Councillor Lucy Trimnell proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Faye Purbrick.

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

- 1) Recognise and note the significant contribution made to our local economy and food supplies by our hard-working farmers, particularly our meat and dairy producers who account for the majority of Somerset farming produce.
- 2) Strengthen our partnerships with arable, livestock, and dairy farmers to support and enhance Somerset's iconic countryside and would seek to oppose unnecessary additional pressures such as the hike in employers National Insurance contributions and Inheritance Tax on farmers.
- 3) Make a commitment to support local farmers, growers, and the food and drink sector by ensuring, where possible, that food and beverages served at council-organised events were sourced from local suppliers. This would include meat and dairy, alongside fruit, vegetable and cereal products, reflecting the full diversity of Somerset's agricultural output.
- 4) As part of Somerset Council's efforts to address environmental priorities, the Council would explore ways to encourage residents to shop locally whenever possible. This would include promoting home-grown, affordable, and nutritious produce to reduce food miles, boost the local economy, and support our farming community.

#### **64 Report of the five Scrutiny Committees - Agenda Item 15**

The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee for Children and Families, Councillor Leigh Redman, introduced the recommendations contained within the report which proposed that each of the Scrutiny Committees report annually to Full Council.

Councillors highlighted the value of the scrutiny work carried out.

Councillor Leigh Redman proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Henry Hobhouse.

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

- a) Note the report; and
- b) That the Constitution Part 6 – Scrutiny Terms of Reference be amended as follows: 1.17 REPORTING: A Scrutiny Committee could report and make recommendations to the Leader, the Executive or the Council, as appropriate, and to partner public bodies involved with Community Safety or the NHS. Each Committee report annually to Full Council on its work, its future work programme and recommendations for improving the way it carries out its functions, if appropriate.

#### **65 Summary of key decisions taken since the last Full Council meeting - Agenda Item 16**

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

between 13 September 2024 and 6 December 2024.

Councillors sought clarification on how the decisions were being recorded which would be made clearer in the next report..

The Council noted the report.

**66 Annual Report of the Lead Member for Transport and Waste Services - Agenda Item 17**

The Lead Member for Transport and Waste, Councillor Richard Wilkins, introduced his annual report.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors raised concern on the stroke services and the connectivity between the mobile services and also the signal strength between the hospitals.
- Councillors suggested that the Lead Member reports should be taken to the relevant Scrutiny Committee rather than Full Council.
- Councillors highlighted the feedback provided from the waste surveys and the areas of improvements.
- Councillors requested whether the impacts of road closures on local businesses could be included in the report.
- Councillors highlighted the Placemaking Policies and concerns raised by the report.
- Councillors gave an update on the work carried out after the recent storms and flooding.

The Council noted the report.

**67 Questions from Councillors to the Executive - Agenda Item 18**

The Chair of Council, Councillor Mike Best, invited questions from the councillor for the Leader and Executive.

Member questions were received form:-

- Councillor Leigh Redman – Equality Impact Assessment from the Peer Review.

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

**(The meeting ended at 6.05 pm)**

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**CHAIR**

## Full Council – 18 December 2024 – Public and Member Questions

Annexe A – Public Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question
Pierre Fox	<p><b>Question 2a - Misuse of highways and lanes in Somerset by organised hunting groups.</b></p> <p>The full fox hunting season has not fully begun but there have already been a number of reported incidents in Somerset where hunts have created considerable nuisance by actively hunting on the road or by losing control of hounds. This has resulted in vehicles colliding with hounds causing injury as well as hounds running out of control through communities. Since 2004, hunts should only be participating in trail hunting, where a trail is laid along a pre-determined route. Within Somerset, no hunts have ever adopted trail hunting. Instead, they continue to hunt and kill wild animals illegally. Consequently, the hunts do not comply with scrutiny or safety planning. Why is Somerset County Council Highways department not taking action to ensure that hunts in the county comply with measures that exist to ensure public safety?</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Waste Services, Councillor Richard Wilkins</b></p>
Full written response	<p>Thank you for your question. The Council takes its traffic management responsibilities seriously and attempts to contact any hunts which are brought to its attention as likely to hold meets over the Christmas period where this could cause traffic disruption. However, the carrying out of illegal hunting activities or failure to control hounds adequately are matters for the police to investigate and take appropriate action. We understand that the local constabulary are aware of the matters you raise. From a public highway perspective, horses and dogs can pass and repass along the public highway and do not need our permission to do so. Any incidents of the nature you have referred to need to be reported to the police.</p>
Mike Ginger	<p><b>Taunton Area Cycling Campaign - Petition on cyclist safety - less than 5000 signatories Pip Sheard and Marian Nieuwenhuizen presenting Statement 3a -</b></p> <p>Market House roundabout Taunton petition Dec 2024</p> <p>Our paper and on line petition asks the Council to carry out essential maintenance to the cobbled roundabout in front of the Market House to make it safer and less slippery. It is in need of urgent repairs.</p> <p>Many cyclists have told us that they find this junction scary, and some people avoid the area with their bikes and tell us they have fallen off their bikes. This is due to a slippery and very uneven surface making it difficult to properly steer a cycle and</p>

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<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 16</p>	<p>hand signal. This is especially so when vehicles are in conflict with cyclist's movements. Motor cyclists and even drivers have told us that the poor surface is a problem.</p> <p>Here are just two examples of people coming to grief , from two experienced female cyclists, Su Mo and Jenny Wood:</p> <p>“On December 19, 2023, on a wet day in Taunton, I was taking the right turn from Corporation Street onto East Reach and was especially cautious given the wet surface. I was riding my cyclocross bike, designed for tougher conditions. Despite taking every precaution, as I rounded the turn, my front wheel suddenly slipped on the wet cobblestones, and I lost control. Thankfully, there were no vehicles directly behind me, and two drivers on the other side kindly stopped to check if I was okay. The experience was a reminder of just how hazardous this roundabout’s surface can be for cyclists. “</p> <p>The second example</p> <p>“ Whilst riding around the Market House roundabout I was knocked off my bike by someone in a car entering the roundabout. Normally when I cycle, I am alert to vehicles approaching from side roads etc and try to make eye contact to make sure that they have seen me and are stopping. Unfortunately, the unevenness and hazardousness of the cobbles on the roundabout meant that I was looking down and slightly forward rather than looking out for cars, especially those coming on to the roundabout from my left. I was wearing a quite bright pink coat and travelling slowly, but the driver still didn't appear to spot me and drove straight out. I'm certain that if the surface on the roundabout had been smooth, I would have been looking up and watching for cars entering the roundabout, as usual, perhaps avoiding being knocked off.”</p> <p>The Council previously asked Taunton Area Cycling Campaign to support their bid to Government for Future High Street Fund to replace the cobbles by a safer surface to make the junction safer, which we did. After the money was awarded, the Council decided to spend the money elsewhere.</p> <p>The junction is a key location for Taunton cycle journeys. Our survey of cyclists identified it as one of the top problem ‘hot spots’ in the Taunton area. No proper repairs have been carried out in the 30 or so years since the cobbles were installed and now the surface is pitted and broken.</p> <p>So please Somerset Council. Take this issue of cyclists safety seriously, live up to your duty of care and do the essential work needed to repair the surface.</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Waste Services, Councillor Richard Wilkins</b></p>
<p><b>Full written response</b></p>	<p>I would like to thank Taunton Area Cycling Campaign for submitting this petition to the Council for consideration. The council is aware of concerns about this junction, and it is unfortunate that cost increases in the delivery of infrastructure projects has meant that the Future High Streets Fund wasn't able to stretch to some improvement at this junction. Somerset is a large county and you will be aware of the Council's financial situation, the funding we have has to stretch a long way and we have to</p>



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	<p>rely on external funding for significant improvements. We will continue to look for appropriate funding opportunities to deliver an improvement at this junction. In the mean-time please report any safety defects via our 'report a problem on the road' web page, and these will be assessed and repaired by our maintenance teams.</p> <p>The roads and footways within Taunton Town Centre are inspected on a monthly basis. Defects that are identified as likely to create a danger to the users of the network are programmed for repair as a priority - usually within 24 hours. This includes for the roundabout on North Street referenced in the question. All inspections are undertaken in accordance with the policies and protocols detailed in the Highway Safety Inspection Manual (2018).</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 17</p>	<p><b>Seth Dellow</b></p> <p><b>Reporter – Somerset County Gazette</b></p> <p><b>Question 4a</b> - Council Tax Reduction Scheme and councillors' salaries</p> <p>Somerset Council is proposing to take several unprecedented measures to maintain its financial sustainability for 2025/26. This has been widely documented in the local media, and I am grateful to Cllr Bill Revans for his continued dialogue on this matter. The changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme are one measure which could see the most vulnerable in Somerset pay an average of £415 extra per year.</p> <p>If the most vulnerable in Somerset are expected to pay extra, isn't it only fair that councillors of all persuasions, as representatives of their communities, also commit to contribute the same amount through a pay cut to their basic salary of £16,135 to help balance the books?</p> <p><b>Question 4b</b> - Roadworks and compensation associated with the Celebration Mile</p> <p>The roadworks associated with the Celebration Mile in Bridgwater have been strongly criticised by local businesses and residents. A petition to stop the roadworks has secured nearly 200 signatures. Some local businesses believe they are entitled to compensation for the disruption caused by the roadworks, with an impact on footfall.</p> <p>Will Somerset Council commit to compensate those affected by the disruption from the Celebration Mile roadworks?</p> <p><b>Response from Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Resources, Councillor Liz Leyshon (question 4a) and Lead Member for Transport and Waste Services, Councillor Richard Wilkins (question 4b)</b></p>

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<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>Full written response</b></p>	<p>4a: Council agreed in February 2024 to align Members’ Allowances with Staff pay inflation rates for 2024/25. Every elected Member is able to take a reduction on their Basic Allowance or on any Special Responsibility Allowance, and that is an individual decision. We appreciate that elected Members spend significant amounts of time on their Council duties, in their Division and in Council meetings. If we wish to have greater diversity of Councillors, then we must make sure that people who are of working age are able to commit sufficient time within their working lives.</p> <p>4b: We are extremely grateful for the patience of local businesses and communities whilst the Celebration Mile improvements are being constructed. The works are part of an ongoing programme to regenerate and improve the economy in Bridgwater and will have long-lasting benefits to business once completed. We are not able to provide compensation to businesses during the construction of the improvements.</p> <p>Relating specifically to road works, where a highway authority (as opposed to a utility) carries out works under a statutory power or duty and performs these properly, there will not at law be any liability on the authority for any loss of business. Owners of businesses have no right in law to a maintained level of passing trade. Temporary or permanent reductions in traffic flow are considered to be part of the risks of running a business. The then Conservative Government looked at the case for a general right to compensation when the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 was passed and opted not to make any changes to that effect. Successive governments have taken the view that businesses should not have the right in law to any given level of passing trade, and that traders must take the risk of loss due to a temporary disruption of traffic flows along with all the other risks of running a business. This position was set out by the then Transport Minister, Keith Hill, in July 2000: “Highway works ultimately benefit the whole community. Occupies of premises may be entitled to compensation if something is done improperly (for example, the blocking of access without authority) but not otherwise. Businesses have no right in law to any given level of passing trade, and may suffer temporary loss owing to disruption of traffic flows. Trade may fluctuate for a variety of reasons, and accurately assessing the losses directly attributable to works in the highway can be difficult. There is, too, an element of 'windfall' profit and loss: often when one trader suffers a rival business in the neighbourhood stands to gain custom as a direct result of the same works. There are therefore no plans to introduce legislation to create legal liability to compensate anyone for loss of trade when a highway authority properly executes road works under its statutory powers.”</p>
<p><b>Paul Partington</b></p>	<p>Rights of Way 75 years ago, the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act received Royal Assent on 16 December. In 1947, two Committee reports, “Footpaths and Access to the Countryside” and “National Parks” were published under the chairmanship of Sir Arthur Hobhouse. The Committee recommended the creation of twelve National Parks these being: the Lake District, North Wales, the Peak District, Dartmoor, the Yorkshire Dales, the Pembrokeshire Coast, Exmoor, the South</p>

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Downs, the Roman Wall, the North Yorkshire Moors, the Brecon Beacons and the Black Mountains. For footpaths and access to the countryside, the Committee recommended a survey of all rights of way, a tribunal to settle disputes, a mechanism for the closure, diversion and creation of new rights of way and long distance footpaths. All these recommendations were incorporated into “The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949”.

Sir Arthur Hobhouse was a Somerset County Councillor from 1925 to 1947 and was the chairman of the council from 1940 to 1947.

Somerset should be proud of Sir Arthur Hobhouse that his Reports contributed to Parliament passing the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

### Public Rights of Way

The use of wheelchairs, mobility scooters and prams are allowed on public footpaths, bridleways and restrictive byways.

A dog is seen as a normal accompaniment for someone walking a public right of way

27 September 2005 section 147 of the Highways Act 1980 was amended so that local authorities when authorising the erecting of stiles, gates or other works on footpaths or bridleways must have regard to the needs of people with mobility problems.

Permissive paths are where a landowner has granted permission to use a path. At any time, the permission can be withdrawn by a landowner. A permissive path is not a public right of way and cannot be protected by the Highway Authority.

Somerset Council as the Highway Authority has a statutory responsibility for protecting and asserting rights of people to use the public rights of way network.

There is a download available on the ‘Public Rights of Way Section’ of Somerset Council’s website, ‘A guide for dog owners and walkers’. In the guide it is stated “Walking keeps you and your dog happy and healthy. Did you know that walking only 30 minutes every day makes you feel good, gives you more energy, helps to reduce stress, can lower blood pressure and helps keep your heart in good working order”.

There is a footpath T 2/8 very close to Neroche Hall Car Park. The footpath was subject to Diversion Order 16 March 2005, confirmed 4 December 2006 by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Diversion came into force 1 January 2007. The diversion of the footpath started at the carriageway at Bickenhall Bridge and is a headland path in a field and entered a field where it was cross field path (now enclosed) to a boundary fence (where a stile was erected and since has been replaced by a metal pedestrian gate). There were no limitations between the starting point and finishing point of the diversion listed in the Order.

Footpath T 2/8 takes walkers from Bickenhall Bridge to Abbey Hill Drove, bridleway T 2/9; the width of the diverted footpath is 1.5 metres. Walking Abbey Hill Drove takes walkers to footpath T 2/7 which leads to near Neroche Hall Car Park. Footpath T 2/8 also gives access to a wider public right of way network associated with Abbey Hill Drove.

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Since circa September 2021 there have been issues with footpath T 2/8, a wide metal field gate at the entrance from the carriageway has been replaced with locked wooden gates, wooden fencing and combined with a metal pedestrian gate (resulting in a gap of 1.1 metres width and immediately adjacent a metal pedestrian gate, the width path is meant to be 1.5 metres and it is questionable whether the path is fully on the Definitive route at this location), it seems possible by altering the wooden fencing and repositioning the metal pedestrian gate the issue could be resolved making a single limitation compliant with the performance requirements of BS 5709 (British Standard 5709 specifies field-measurable performance requirements for new gaps, gates and stiles for footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and other routes used by the public). A fallen oak tree circa November 2023 remains and is 100% blocking the width of the path, a stile (since modified) remains of the three installed circa September 2021 and there is a wooden pedestrian gate installed circa 2005 or later.

A sign 'No dogs' has been in place at Bickenhall Bridge since circa September 2021.

Footpath T 2/8 has been subject numerous complaints logged with Somerset rights of way since September 2021 and Neroche Parish Council meeting 13th January 2022 had complaints concerning footpath T2/8 from parishioners regarding the installation of stiles (one stile since modified remains) and a 'No Dogs' notice which remains.

A circular walk (approximately 200 metres of unclassified road, footpath T 2/8, bridleway T 2/9, footpath T 2/7 and approximately 10 metres of unclassified road) from Neroche Hall Car Park has been made difficult to walk due to the combined gap and metal pedestrian gate, fallen oak tree and stile, it is impossible to use for many people with mobility problems.

Footpath T 2/8 also gives access to a wider public footpath bridleway network associated with Abbey Hill Drove.

Bridleway T 2/11, September 2023 a notice was served on Somerset Council, section 130 Highways Act 1980 because of the obstruction of the bridleway. Records show that from at least 2007 the bridleway has been obstructed. Part of the public bridleway remains obstructed.

An email regarding footpath T 2/8 and bridleway T 2/11 was sent by me 6 November 2024 to Somerset rights of way, as of 10 December although delivered I haven't received a reply or acknowledgement that it has been read.

Questions:

**Question 5a.** Does Somerset Council accept that if obstructions to a public right of way that are not resolved using its statutory duties to protect a public right of way it is then open for someone to use section 130 of the Highways Act 1980 to have the obstruction removed?

**Question 5b.** Does Somerset Council accept that an 'Explanatory Note' by Taunton Deane Borough Council circa 2005 regarding footpath T 2/8 is not a legal document and as such does not form part of a Diversion Order under Section 119 of the Highways Act 1980?

**Question 5c.** Does Somerset Council accept that misleading signs & notices are unlawful under the Highways Act 1980 Section 132 and National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 Section 57 and the Council has the power to remove

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<p>Page 21</p>	<p>any misleading or unlawful signs on public rights of way that deter people from exercising their legal right, and if so what action is being taken by the Council to remove the ‘No dogs’ sign at footpath T 2/8?</p> <p><b>Question 5d.</b> Does Somerset Council accept if limitations have been added to a footpath that these must either be authorised under section 147 Highways Act 1980 (if capable of being so authorised) or removed?</p> <p><b>Question 5e.</b> Footpath T 2/8, how many man hours has been spent by the rights of way department of Somerset County Council and Somerset Council trying to resolve the issue of footpath T 2/8 and what has been the financial costs including any works/supply of material?</p> <p><b>Question 5f.</b> If Somerset Council allows an unauthorised stile not listed as a limitation on a Diversion Order to remain, is it failing to comply with the Equality Act 2010?</p> <p><b>Question 5g.</b> Bridleway T 2/12, was there any financial costs to Somerset Council in the issue of any legal notices regarding section 130 Highways Act 1980 and if so, what were these costs?</p> <p><b>Question 5h.</b> Bridleway T 2/12, has there been any financial cost to Somerset Council due to any enforcement action and if so, what were the costs?</p> <p><b>Question 5i.</b> Bridleway T 2/12 a section of this bridleway remains obstructed. What steps are being taken by the rights of way of Somerset Council to have a continuous bridleway which is a public right of way unobstructed between Forest Drove and Curry Mallet Drove?</p> <p><b>Question 5j.</b> The Definitive Map is a legal document and what is shown on it is correct until shown otherwise. If the Definitive Map shows a public right of way, even if an application has been made to downgrade or delete it, does Somerset Council accept it must assert and protect the right of the public to use and enjoy the highway at the status shown?</p> <p><b>Question 5k.</b> How many unresolved issues/faults remain on the Somerset rights of way network?</p> <p><b>Question 5l.</b> How many applications for Definitive Map Modification Orders are waiting to be assessed by Somerset rights of way department and at what rate are these being dealt with per year?</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Waste Services, Councillor Richard Wilkins</b></p>
<p><b>Full written response</b></p>	<p>Please find responses to your questions in the order that they were raised as follows:</p> <p>5a) With regard to section 130A Highways Act 1980, the Council accepts that it is open to someone to use this section to seek the removal of those types of obstructions to which the section applies.</p> <p>5b) The Council does accept that the explanatory note referred to is not a legal document, however, it is considered to be supportive evidence accompanying the legal documents.</p>

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- 5c) Yes, the Council acknowledges the powers referred to. The Council is aware of the 'no dogs' sign. The landowner has been made aware of the need to remove the sign. Follow-up action and resolution will be subject to prioritisation amongst a considerable workload.
- 5d) No. It is difficult to provide a blanket answer to this question as each individual context may vary. However, there are other provisions to add limitations to a footpath other than section 147 Highways Act 1980, and in some cases the limitation may already be referenced in the Definitive Statement.
- 5e) A record hasn't been kept of man hours. The estimated cost of resolving the issues on the path in 2023/24 was c.£865. In addition, seasonal vegetation clearance has taken place on the path last year and this, costing £125 and £279 respectively.
- 5f) If a stile on a diverted path is unauthorised and not listed as a limitation then the compliance failure is more appropriately going to be with regard to the Highways Act 1980, as it is an unauthorised obstruction to the public right. When including a limitation in a diversion order or authorising a limitation then Equality Duty 2010 considerations will be applicable. More often than not there will be a reason for an unauthorised limitation existing and not being listed in a diversion order, and under our Highways Act duties we will discuss with landowners the options available to them with regard to removal or potential authorisation.
- 5g) Assuming this is with reference to T 2/11, the cost to the Council was in officer time. A record has not been kept of the officer time.
- 5h) Assuming this is with reference to T 2/11, the cost to the Council of enforcement action was in officer time. A record has not been kept of the officer time.
- 5i) Assuming this is with reference to T 2/11, there are no steps being taken at this time, albeit we reserve the right to do so. There is a permissive bridleway in place which combined with part of T 2/11 provides for an equivalent continuous bridleway between Forest Drove and Curry Mallet Drove. The situation will be reviewed as and when an application to delete the bridleway from the Definitive Map has been investigated and determined beyond challenge. The section of permissive path connected to T 2/11 provides an improved alternative route for members of the public as there are less potential limitations and the surface is better drained.
- 5j) Yes. We also accept that we must keep the Definitive Map and Statement under continuous review and determine applications to modify the Definitive Map and Statement as soon as reasonably practicable. However, with limited resources, the Council is not able to execute such duties as quickly as we would like, and where there is a crossover of such duties a proportionate and pragmatic approach can often be more expedient and result in a better outcome for the public, in practical terms.
- 5k) On 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024 there were 4491 live issues. A proportion of these issues may be invalid and thus will be closed without any action or works being undertaken.

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	<p>51) 382 applications to modify the Definitive Map &amp; Statement are awaiting investigation. The rate varies from year to year and 'dealt with' can involve a number of different processes as follows: appeals against non-determination, determination, appeals against refusal, making and confirming of orders, referral of opposed orders, defending of orders at public inquiries. Whilst these are the core processes of the Definitive Map team, there are many other functions and enquiries that the team handle in addition to the core work.</p>
<p><b>Trevor Challenger</b></p>	<p><b>Submission 8a - Wiveliscombe/Wellington Bus Routes - Petition - less than 5000 signatories</b></p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Waste Services, Councillor Richard Wilkins</b></p>
<p><b>Full written response</b></p> <p>Page 23</p>	<p>I would like to thank Mr Challenger for submitting this petition to the Council for consideration. Council officers have been in dialogue for some months with community representatives, local councillors and the bus operator to look at improvements to services in the area. The service that used to connect Wiveliscombe to Wellington and the villages in-between was discontinued in around 2015 because it was no longer commercially viable and carried only a small number of passengers. Currently the communities around Wiveliscombe are served by the scheduled bus service into Taunton, the Wivey Link community transport and the Council's Slinky service. The financial position of the Council means that unless funding comes from external sources, we can't increase the number of bus services that operate in the county. Following our submission to the Department for Transport of a revised Bus Service Improvement Plan in June we have been awarded a one-year grant of about £6.3m. We are currently waiting for the detailed terms and conditions of the funding from the DfT before we work with partners and stakeholders to set out how the money can be best used. Somerset is a large county and unfortunately I can't make promises about funding anything specific until we have undertaken further analysis and discussion regarding potential uses of the funds.</p>
<p><b>Andrew Lee</b></p>	<p><b>Public Participation</b></p> <p>Back in July 2022 following the election of a new council I asked Cllr Bill Revans about the difficulty that members of the public had in accessing these meetings and asking questions.</p> <p>In response he told me: <i>"the Council will be reviewing its public question time procedures and its meeting arrangements, including timings, as part of the transition to the new Somerset Council when the new Constitution and democratic arrangements are considered at the County Council meeting in February 2023. Our Constitution and Governance Committee will be considering these issues with a view to maximising the opportunity for the public to ask questions of their elected representatives and allow democratic procedures to take place in the new unitary council."</i></p> <p><b>Question 9a</b></p>

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The council initially tried different venues around the county to maximise access. After a few months it settled on Bridgwater and I think I'm right in saying that all full council meetings have been in Bridgwater for the past 12 months. Meetings are usually held at 10am on a Wednesday. This effectively prevents the working population of Somerset (aside from those who work nights) from attending council meetings to ask questions.

Why are the council not attempting to be closer to their electorate by holding meetings in Taunton, Yeovil or Frome?

Would the council consider holding evening meetings or at least holding public question time in the evening?

### **Question 9b**

The current rules for asking questions are given in writing for each full council meeting. They are broadly unchanged and have been unchanged for a dozen years or more. That is questions must be submitted by 5pm on the Thursday before a meeting on the Wednesday following.

In other words giving 3 clear working days notice.

The agenda is usually published 5 clear days before a meeting. The agenda for this month's meeting was published on the morning of 11 December.

That means that in order to ask a question of the meeting, bearing in mind questions should always relate to items on the agenda, at most 48 hours to digest the content of the meeting and prepare and submit a question to the meeting.

Somerset Council is not the same as Somerset County Council whose public questions rules it has, by and large, inherited. It does far more and its meetings cover a much larger remit.

As a result, for instance, the September agenda contained 449 pages. This agenda runs to 400 pages.

Is it really giving the public a fair and reasonable chance of asking questions of their elected representatives, when they have 48 hours to read 400+ pages, often written, inevitably (I mean no criticism by this) in technical language, digest it and write a question down?

Bearing in mind that the majority of people you represent also have day time jobs to go to, I suggest the system as it stands does not *"maximise the opportunity for the public to ask questions of their elected representatives."*

### **Question 9c**

The number of people asking questions of the council does seem to be small and usually involves members of the public who have representative, or quasi representative roles.

Do you believe that the number of questions the council receives from the public for full council meetings is indicative of a population that believes their Council: *"welcomes public involvement and participation in its public committee meetings."*

**Response from the Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Councillor Bill Revans**



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<p>Full written response</p> <p>Page 25</p>	<p>Thank you for your questions Mr Lee.</p> <p>Question 9a</p> <p>Somerset Council welcome's public participation at all of its committee meetings. Unlike other councils, Somerset Council has a specific part of its Constitution dedicated to Public Participation and this can be found on the Council's website at Part B. We also provide guidance and offer advice on public statements, petitions and statements for our meetings with the agendas for our meetings.</p> <p>In line with legislation, our Full Council is held in person. To accommodate 110 councillors, our Aldermen, members of the public, press and officers we need a venue with at least a capacity of 140 people, is located as accessible as possible for Somerset's residents and the venue needs to support live webcasting of the meeting. The Council's office accommodation does not have a meeting room that can meet this requirement which means that we must use external venues. Our review of available venues has identified Canalside conference centre near Bridgwater, Westlands in Yeovil and the Somerset Cricket ground as suitable venues. Since vesting day the Council has been able to use Canalside and Somerset Cricket ground due to their availability.</p> <p>The Council has reviewed the start time of its Full Council meetings and these start at 1pm. Several of the Full Council meetings have taken longer than the scheduled four hours and consequently this has affected any options involving them being held in the evening.</p> <p>In terms of committees, meetings generally either commence at 10am or 2pm and are held in venues across Somerset.</p> <p>The Council agrees the calendar of meetings, venues and start times at its Annual General Meeting in May.</p> <p>Question 9b</p> <p>The Council has operated for some time a requirement that any public statements or questions need to be submitted 3 clear working days ahead of a committee meeting. This deadline was designed with the aim that a response can be provided at committee meetings.</p>
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<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 26</p>	<p>There are many opportunities for how residents and other interested parties can engage and communicate with the Council and these are not solely through our committee meetings. Experience has shown that some public submissions contain complex questions which can require a lot of work and co-ordination across several services in order to prepare a response in time for a committee meeting. In addition, the preparation of a committee report is generally at the end of any service consultation or engagement with local communities so there would already have been other opportunities for questions and inter-action ahead of a committee meeting with officers or elected members. I note your comments about the size of the agenda papers and the deadline dates but I would highlight that the majority of the matters in the Full Council agenda pack are being recommended from committee meetings that have been held in advance and therefore have already had opportunities for public submissions. Our research confirms that other councils operate with different deadline dates but ultimately this is a matter for local choice.</p> <p>Thank you for your suggestions regarding public question time, deadline dates, meeting locations and times. These will be considered as part of the annual review of the Council’s Constitution and the 2025/26 meeting calendar.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 26 Sherwood</p>	<p><b>Westbury sub Mendip Parish Council</b>  <b>Question 10a –</b>  On behalf of the Westbury sub-Mendip Parish Council I would like to express our grave concern at the lack of engagement of Highways Officers with the parish concerning the danger posed to pedestrians by the A371. Highways’ comments often just give standard advice and make insufficient attempt to address issues of importance to the community.</p> <p>The planners have engaged with us and have understood the need to ensure any development on this site meets a specific local plan policy to make it safe for pedestrians to cross. The Highways teams are not engaging.</p> <p>We want to pull Highways and Planning together to get the best result possible for our community. Other local parish councils have similar issues. We are not alone.</p> <p>For those who don’t know the village, the road effectively cuts the village in half. For much of the route through the village there is no pavement and there is no safe place to cross. This has been major concern of the Parish for many years with increasing heavy vehicle use, restricted width and many bends with poor visibility. We now have the prospect of a planning</p>

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<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 2</p>	<p>application which seeks to develop some 60 houses on the opposite side of the road from most facilities - the school, pub, shop and post office.</p> <p>The local plan spells out that any development on this site is required to provide safe pedestrian links to the village core on the opposite side. We have commissioned a professional scoping report that asks Highways to fully assess a range of options to fulfil this requirement. This report and request has been ignored, officers seem to take the view that “nothing can be done” when not all options have been considered. This is not acceptable, lives of young children are in serious danger and Highways have stayed silent on a recent request to meet their senior team.</p> <p>It is very regrettable that they seem willing to raise no objection to a development which will both increase traffic on the road and pedestrians seeking to cross it without any attempt to require the land owner and developer to meaningfully solve pedestrian safety.</p> <p>Communities are important and should not be ignored.</p> <p>We have previously asked to see how Highways have made their assessment so far as this appears to lack proper scrutiny and for a meeting with a senior team. We have not had a response.</p> <p>Can we please have a meeting within the first 2 weeks of January or sooner with a senior manager from both Highways and Planning to discuss our request in full and find best safe crossing solution which can then be implemented?</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Waste Services, Councillor Richard Wilkins</b></p>
<p><b>Full written response</b></p>	<p>Thank you for your question. The Highway Authority is aware of the Parish Council's concerns over the A371 and in particular the connectivity to the centre of the village. Through the pre-application process we have looked at several different scenarios for how this connection can be provided. We will continue to work with the applicant through the planning process to explore all options to see if a suitable connection can be provided to allow pedestrian access from Roughmoor Lane. It is noted that the Parish Council has expressed that they wish to meet with both Planning and Highways to discuss this matter in more detail. We are happy to meet with the Parish Council but we believe it would be prudent to wait until we see what has been submitted as part of the planning application.</p>
<p><b>Nigel Behan</b></p>	<p><b>Question 11a</b> - Relates to <a href="#">Appendix A - New Savings Proposals 2025.26 to 2029.30.pdf</a></p> <p>Will you clarify the reasoning, purpose and consequential impact of this accounting manoeuvre?</p> <p>“25-26SCS01 Workforce Programme Substitution of Saving of £9.000m currently included within the MTFP will be substituted as part of the Workforce Programme Savings in 2025/26.”</p>

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<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 28</p>	<p><b>Question 11b</b> - The LGA and other organisations that “comment”/“complain”/“bleat” etc (examples: <a href="#">CCN: Government should rethink local government funding in Budget</a> &amp; <a href="#">East London council could issue S114</a> ) on Local Authority funding point out how the lack of funding for local government services (the bottom tier of the public sector food chain but more democratic than say, the NHS-which, as an aside, does not have to balance budgets annually) will lead to more councils having to issue S114 reports (“effective bankruptcy”).</p> <p>SC formally claim they are acting as if a S114 report has been issued.( “Agree that the Council continues with the aim of avoiding a Section 114 notice by taking all of the necessary actions and continuing to operate as if one had been issued. “)</p> <p>Does SC believe this is the most effective method to set a needs-based budget for service users, residents, electors, council taxpayers etc or just another continuing form of rationing expectations and aspirations?</p> <p><b>Response from Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance, Councillor Liz Leyshon and Lead Member for Transformation, Human Resources and Localities, Councillor Theo Butt Philip</b></p>
<p><b>All written response</b></p>	<p>11a: Thank you for the question, Nigel. Previously a workforce saving of £9m was included as part of the Council’s Medium Term Financial Plan. This administration has been clear that the workforce savings that were identified as part of the LGR business case did not go far enough or deliver fast enough to address the financial situation this Council is in. The revised increased savings from the Workforce Programme of £34m in 2025/26 replaces the previously identified saving on £9m. The Executive agreed the Savings and substitution on 2 December and is recommending them to Council in February 2025.</p> <p>11b: In November 2023 the Executive took the decision to declare a Financial Emergency. As Lead Member for Resources, Procurement &amp; Performance I do not regret the timing of that declaration, and my Executive colleagues and I have continued with our clear political direction to act as if a S114 notice had been issued. Clearly our current modus operandi does not include paying the significant amounts that Government Commissioners would be paid, plus expenses. We continue to believe that our local knowledge is very important in finding the best way through to a sustainable budget and Council, but we acknowledge that the next budget setting in February 2025 will also be very challenging. We do not wish to have to add a line to the expenditure for Commissioners fees as some councils have already done, and will do as a pressure for a number of years.</p>

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	<p>We will also continue to work in a way that is as transparent and open as possible, so that residents and businesses can understand the financial challenges in Somerset and the reasons for those challenges. We have commenced our budget consultation and will again be undertaking in person consultation for businesses in each part of Somerset.</p>
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<b>Annexe B – Member Questions</b>	
<b>Name of person submitting</b>	<b>Question</b>
<p><b>Cllr Leigh Redman</b></p> <p>Page 10</p>	<p><b>Question 1a - Local Government Association Equality Framework for Local Government Peer Challenge.</b> I would like to ask for equalities for an update on the recommendations made please?</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Communities, Housing Revenue Account, Culture and Equalities and Diversity, Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts</b></p>
<p><b>Full written response</b></p>	<p>Thank you for the question Leigh. Our approach is to ensure that equality is not just a concept, but a lens through which we view and shape all our initiatives and how we deliver our services. I have asked officer to provide an update to all members on progress and the forward plan for next year. As part of this we will be rolling out further advice, guidance and training for members on this topic.</p>

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