



## Somerset Liberal Democrats Chard South January 2024



### Unprecedented actions proposed to bridge £100m budget gap

Papers published ahead of Somerset Council’s Executive meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> January give further details of plans and options to bridge a £100m funding gap for the next financial year.

Council Leader, Councillor Bill Revan’s, said the Council has been left with no option but to consider “unprecedented” and “heart-breaking” steps including reductions to services and a 10% increase in Council Tax.

The Council declared a financial emergency last year, one of many councils facing significant pressures on its finances driven by inflation, spiralling costs - notably in social care - and a “broken” system for funding local government.

The authority’s ability to respond has been hampered by a historically low Council Tax rate – 49th lowest out of 63 for unitary councils.

The papers set out a plan to use reserves, significant savings, a Council Tax increase of 10%, and the sale of council assets to set a balanced budget.

Where options are to stop services or greatly reduce funding, discussions will continue with parish, town and city councils, and community groups around options for services to be picked up by others rather than stop completely. Cllr Revan’s said: “The funding model of local government is broken and our pleas for assistance have not yet been answered. Councils up and down the country are in a similar position and in Somerset we have been hit extra hard by cost inflation in care.

“Officers have done as we asked and left no stone unturned. The result is a set of options, many of which are very unpalatable – some heart-breaking - that no-one would want to take forward.

“Our Council Tax is one of the lowest among the unitary councils which have responsibility for care, and we find ourselves having to consider putting it up by 10%. That equates to an extra £3.15 per week for the average household to limit the impact on core services, many of which support the most vulnerable.”

The papers set out £35m of proposals. Of these, £24m are new and will be referred to the Council’s Resources Scrutiny Committee before any decisions are taken. Further consultations will be carried out on specific proposals where necessary.

At the meeting on 15 January, the Executive will ask Government for flexibility to increase Council Tax by more than the referendum limit to 10% (including the 2% social care precept). This would generate an extra £17.1m and raise the average band D Council Tax bill to £1,810 – still below the unitary average of £1,815.

Cllr Revan’s said: “We understand the pressure on everyone’s household budgets and have recently taken steps to ensure that we have a Council Tax Reduction and Hardship scheme in place to protect the most vulnerable in our community from any increase”.

To balance the 2024/25 budget the Council also plans to use £36.8m of reserves (a council’s equivalent of savings – money for emergencies which can only be used once).

The remaining gap of around £20m would need to be covered by asking Government for a ‘capitalisation direction’. This would allow the council to borrow money or sell assets to fund day-to-day running costs.

As reserves and capital funds can only be used once, for future years the Council will need to significantly reduce its budget. This will include a transformation programme to reduce the size of the organisation and its staffing so it can live within its means.



## Volunteer this New Year

People in Somerset are being encouraged to think about volunteering and make it their New Year resolution.

Volunteering is a great way to give back to the local community or support a meaningful cause. Somerset Council has around 1,600 volunteers who have found that giving up their time to help others is a way to meet new people, gain new skills and expand their horizons.

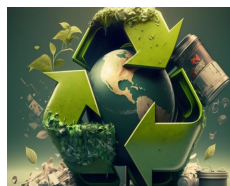
The Council can offer a wide range of ways of getting involved. Volunteers can support children and young people with the School Appeals Panel, Route1 and Youth Justice Team; get outdoors with the Rights of Way, National Landscapes and Countryside Teams and even roles supporting the management of Somerset's harbours and getting people to and from appointments. There's plenty of information about roles with Somerset Council at

[www.volunteering.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.volunteering.somerset.gov.uk)

Not only are there opportunities with Somerset Council, but there are also many organisations looking for support across Somerset. There is information about the roles at [www.sparkachange.org.uk](http://www.sparkachange.org.uk)



## End to recycling site charges for some DIY waste



Following a recent change of legislation, from 1 January 2024, charges for disposing of construction and demolition materials including asbestos, plasterboard, hardcore and rubble from household DIY projects have been removed.

Each calendar month every household will be able to bring up to eight, 50 litre sacks (or equivalent 2m sheets of asbestos or plasterboard) free of charge to a recycling site over a maximum of four visits in a month. For example, two visits bringing four bags each time, or a single visit bringing eight bags.

Households will need to pre-book trips to dispose of this DIY waste, telling the council:

- the amount of material they are disposing (up to 8x50 litre sacks per month)
- the number of times they will need to visit (up to four visits per month)

If residents need to dispose of asbestos, plasterboard, or hardcore/rubble in excess of their free allowance they can pay for this online through the Somerset Council website.

Should residents need to dispose of asbestos and/or plasterboard before 31 December 2023, they can still do so by paying online using the 'Do it online' section. Disposal of hardcore/rubble can be paid for on site until 31 December.

Bookings can be made online from 2 January (through the waste and recycling section of the council's website). Anyone who cannot access the online form can call Customer Services on 0300 123 2224.

Not all sites accept asbestos and/or plasterboard, residents should check online to find what is accepted at each site.

Free disposal is only available to the Somerset householders. Construction and demolition waste from trade is classified as industrial waste and this is not entitled to any free disposal.

Biffa can accept trade construction and demolition waste (excluding trade asbestos) and a charge is payable to Biffa at the site. Please note not all sites accept plasterboard.

## Keeping in Contact

**COME AND TALK WITH US  
AT A LIB DEM SURGERY**

**FIRST SATURDAY IN THE MONTH**

**With your Town and Unitary Councillors**

AT THE GUILDHALL, CHARD

Liberal  
Democrats

10am to 12pm

You can meet with me to discuss any concerns or for help by dropping into our monthly surgery or I can arrange an appointment on a day and time that suits you or feel free to give me a call on 07736 310805 or email [Jason.baker@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:Jason.baker@somerset.gov.uk)