

County Councillor Update – Cllr Connor Payn

County News

As you will have been made aware by the Leader of Somerset County Council, Bill Revans, the County Council holds a projected overspend of £22m. Making the basic budget gap for the next financial year £75m. Somerset County Council and the District Councils have identified savings of £20m, taking the projected budget gap to £55m. More savings will need to be identified.

The consultation on Local Community Networks closed on the 26th October, the results of that consultation will be fed back to the executive on the 16th November.

Salt barns are fully stocked for this winter and the 23 Somerset Gritters have carried out a trial run across the County network. The team is now on standby to treat over 900 miles of road. Farmers across Somerset have been called to support the Council's winter services with snow ploughing duties should conditions become challenging.

In total, 1561 Ukrainians have been matched and either arrived in Somerset or issued visas. Which can be broken down as:

- 1263 Ukrainians have arrived in Somerset.
- 298 Visas have been issued and 125 visa applications are being processed.

Local News

Firstly, I'd like to thank everyone who helped in last night's torrential downpours. Lots of areas flooded badly again, and so it is important we recognise the volunteers in our area that help those in need at times like this.

I've been across the County in my role as Opposition Spokesman for the Environment, speaking to landowners and farmers, talking to agricultural businesses across the region and visiting events regarding climate change and its effects on Somerset.

I've also made some strong progress with Chard Parkway, recently meeting with Council Officers to discuss ways forward, writing to MPs requesting support from the Department for Transport and meeting with a consultancy firm that may be willing to take on the business case.

I also wrote recently for the Chard & Ilminster that local businesses need our support now more than ever. With the card factory coming to Chard, and putting the local business Best Wishes at risk, I've made it clear that we need to support our local businesses and community centres – or risk losing them to commercial businesses. I'm all for competition, but not when it risks damaging the heart of our communities. I would urge Councillors to encourage the use of local shops when making purchases.

To use a metaphor, you can replace oak with veneer, but it will never give you the same feel. Essentially, when you replace our local businesses with commercial brands, you remove the heart of the High Street. We can't allow that to happen.

Finally, I have written to local primary schools, asking teachers to encourage students to enter my Christmas Card competition for 2022. The winning student will have their design used on the card and be awarded a £25 voucher.