**Public consultation on budget setting - launches today**

A public consultation on the Council’s budget will launch later this afternoon.

It will offer a chance for people to have their say in light of the financial emergency, which was called in November.

It’s open to all, and we are encouraging our Somerset communities, residents, businesses, stakeholders, and partners to take part.

The consultation highlights several discretionary services which could be redesigned, reduced, or even stopped.

It goes live from today (11 December) and will close on 22 January.

The link can be found at: [https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/comms/budget-consultation-2024-2025/](https://emea01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsomersetcouncil.citizenspace.com%2Fcomms%2Fbudget-consultation-2024-2025%2F&data=05%7C02%7C%7Cfe49ec2d726746074c6108dbfbd55d1f%7C84df9e7fe9f640afb435aaaaaaaaaaaa%7C1%7C0%7C638380666057746924%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=dwEGheI%2BvO4XWR95WbyaIi3gEiNhKy9NcShX4CUa%2B2s%3D&reserved=0)

It can also be completed in libraries and council offices across Somerset.

**Financial Emergency**

The in-year overspend for 2023/24 is £27m.

The projected budget gap for 2024/25 is £100m.

To close the gap and balance the budget next year a series of service reductions, efficiency savings, and increases to fees and charges, including Council Tax, will need to be considered.

It is clear that this alone will not close the budget gap.

Plans to fundamentally change the council's systems and processes to streamline its operations will need to speed up to reduce the size of the council in future.

**Press and publicity**

A press release will be issued later, with associated social media messaging.

The PR quotes Leader of Somerset Council, Cllr Bill Revans.

“I urge everyone to take part in our consultation, read through the information, understand our challenges, and have your say.

“We are facing very difficult decisions – this is not where we want to be. But we must face the reality of what is, fundamentally, a broken system of local government funding nationally.

“The cost of delivering our services, particularly social care, is increasing at a much faster rate than our income.

“This means we have to consider every available option to plug our budget gap, including increasing fees, reducing operating costs and finding savings across all areas. Before we make any decisions, it’s important we listen to our residents, especially when those decisions will affect people across Somerset.”

**Lobbying for fairer funding for Local Government**

Cllr Revans says: “We are continuing to lobby Government to address the financial crisis facing local councils. Just last week the County Councils Network published a letter sent to Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove and signed by myself and 32 other Council Leaders from all over the country.

“The letter highlighted the growing concern nationally with 7 out of 10 councils no longer confident they can balance their budget next year.

“We are asking Somerset’s MPs to join our call for fairer funding, and I would encourage anyone who cares about local council services to write to your local MP to ask them to raise this at the highest level.”

Go to: [https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/comms/budget-consultation-2024-2025/](https://emea01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsomersetcouncil.citizenspace.com%2Fcomms%2Fbudget-consultation-2024-2025%2F&data=05%7C02%7C%7Cfe49ec2d726746074c6108dbfbd55d1f%7C84df9e7fe9f640afb435aaaaaaaaaaaa%7C1%7C0%7C638380666057746924%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=dwEGheI%2BvO4XWR95WbyaIi3gEiNhKy9NcShX4CUa%2B2s%3D&reserved=0)

And please share with your communities and networks, as appropriate – thanks all.

**Ally**

**Ally Laing**

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