

**Committee: FULL COUNCIL**

**Date: 19 December 2023**

**Title: Draft Budget 2024/2025**

**Purpose of Report**

To consider the Budget for 2024/25 in light of recent communication from Somerset Council

**Recommendation:**

- a. Members to **RESOLVE** the increased staffing requirement as outlined in the report taken to Full Council on the 21 November 2023 and at this meeting on the 19 December 2023. This is to include funding for up to 1.5 Highways Wardens and a part time Admin support member of staff. The appointment of the Highways Warden to be agreed by Full Council once more information has been made available surrounding the devolution of assets and services by Somerset Council.
- b. Members of the Resources Committee at their meeting on the 7 November 2023 resolved unanimously to **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that an additional member of the Open Spaces Team should be recruited, pending the outcome of any Somerset Council's Medium Term Financial Plans being confirmed. Members are asked to **RESOLVE** that an additional Warden be recruited and appointed to the outdoor team.
- c. Members are asked to **RESOLVE** that a Precept of **£506,910.79** be approved for the Financial Year 2024-25 in accord with the spreadsheet Appendix 8A submitted to the meeting. The figures being agreed in the Column "Proposed Budget 2024-25".
- d. Members are asked to **RESOLVE** estimated Earmarked reserves totalling £361,984.

**Background:**

1. Following the Budget meeting in November there have been no further representations from Members for anything that they wished to be included or excluded from the Proposed Budget for 2024-25.
2. Members have received various emails from officers outlining the financial difficulties that Somerset Council are facing, there are decisions still to be made over exactly what assets and services the Town Council may wish to provide in the next financial year as a result of them not being delivered by Somerset Council.
3. Members have been provided with information on what assets and services Somerset Council are asking City/Town/Parish Councils to consider either

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taking over in their entirety or assisting with financially. At the recent Members Day various possibilities were considered by councillors as it has been clear that action would need to be taken.

4. Members were made aware in the report to Full Council in November 2023, that local authorities are unable to declare themselves bankrupt in the way that individuals and companies may. Instead, they are required to issue a Section 114 notice that reports that the council's finance officer believes the authority is about to incur unlawful expenditure. In Somerset Council's current situation this would be because they believe that expenditure will be greater than income in a particular year. This is not permitted under the Local Government Finance Act of 1988.
5. It was reported to Members in November that the financial difficulties of Somerset Council are severe. The documents submitted and comments made at both the December Scrutiny and Executive meetings for Somerset Council that unless they are able to use reserves and recapitalisation then there will be every likelihood a Section 114 Notice will be issued by the Section 151 Officer.
6. Members were provided with a summary of key points in which it was made clear what problems are currently facing Somerset Council.
7. In May 2018, the predecessor to the current authority, Somerset County Council, announced that it would have to issue a Section 114 notice unless it met "ambitious financial savings targets". Ultimately it did not have to issue a Section 114 notice, but the actions that it took then may well impact upon any actions that it now chooses to implement.
8. A Section 114 notice will prevent them from engaging in any new expenditure save that of safeguarding of vulnerable people and the provision of all statutory services. Somerset Council will also be required to meet within 21 days in order to address the situation and two Commissioners will be appointed to oversee the administration of the council.
9. It is worth noting that Somerset Council are not alone in facing this predicament most recently Nottingham City Council have declared a Section 114 Notice had been issued. In addition, Members have already been made aware that Coventry, Guildford, Kirklees and Southampton councils have all warned that they are in danger of having to issue a Section 114 notice. There have also been a number of high-profile Section 114 notices issued in recent years including Birmingham, Croydon and Northampton.
10. In recent weeks, a statement has been issued that says 1 in 5 council leaders and chief executives believes that their Chief Financial Officers will have to issue a 114 Notice this year or next. The full statement was emailed to Members on the 6 December.

11. In an effort to try to find ways to achieve this Somerset Council is looking to mimic as closely as they can Section 114 provisions voluntarily. This means that they will drastically cut back and even cease delivering a number of services. Whilst communities may consider these to be essential, very few in fact are statutory.
12. In the discussions that the clerk has participated in and the meetings in which he has been present there is a slightly clearer picture emerging in some areas, but this will not become clear until February 2024 and even then it may well be unknown for certain aspects. Members who have read the summary notes that have been sent to them of the Scrutiny and Executive will have seen that budget plans will not be agreed until March if at all.
13. It is now looking increasingly likely that waste collection will almost certainly be restricted to household collection services, whilst most public waste bin and dog bin emptying will be subjected to a charge. Where Street Scene will feature in the changed service provision is not clear yet.
14. The letter that was sent on the 8th November 2023 by Somerset Council details the areas which it is considering devolving partially or wholly to the local City, Town and Parish councils. The information that was contained in this letter was put into a survey for members of the community to participate in and which all Members have now partaken in. More information on this is provided in the main body of the report.

**Report:**

15. Those councillors who recently attended the Member's Day on the 21 October 2023, will have heard that there is a need to recognise that allowance would need to be made in the 2024/25 budget for an additional member of staff. It was at that time anticipated that they would be required at the beginning of October 2024.
16. This was revised at the Resources meeting on the 7th November 2023 to probably having to employ someone from the beginning of the new Financial Year in order to cover additional verge and hedgerow cutting. This was agreed by Resources pending announcement from Somerset Council. The resolution from the Meeting was that:  
  
*"Members resolved unanimously to **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that an additional member of the Open Spaces Team should be recruited, pending the outcome of any Somerset Council's Medium Term Financial Plans being confirmed."*
17. It is clear that there will be a need to take on an additional grounds member to assist with the additional tasks that are coming the way of Ilminster Town Council and as such Members of the Full Council are being asked to agree this recruitment of an additional Open Spaces Warden.

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18. As a result of talking with Members of this council and clerks in other town and parish council's, there is a real need to consider that Somerset Council will cease to deliver anything other than the statutory duties.
19. In order to eliminate the Budget Deficit currently predicted at £100mn for 2024 to 2025 Somerset Council will need to use reserves, permission to recapitalise on top of service savings. Recapitalisation is dependent upon permission being obtained from Central Government and there is no certainty that this permission will be granted.
20. As already stated, failure by Somerset Council to do this will almost certainly result in a Section 114 Notice. As already pointed out, the fact that in 2018 Somerset County Council looked to make stringent savings in service delivery will inevitably mean that many of these services will already have been parred to the bone. This has been apparent to members of the Ilminster community for a number of years.
21. Members will recall from the briefing that was provided to them for the Somerset Council Executive meeting in November, that effectively there is a moratorium on employing any staff unless it is to maintain minimum statutory service delivery staffing levels. The increases in the costs for providing Adult Social Care is one of the main areas causing concern to Somerset Council.
22. Concerns have already been raised over the level of service delivery in Ilminster over the past year. Comments relating to the cleaning of gullies, the cutting of verges and roundabouts, the emptying of dog bins and the failure to clear other rubbish have all been posted on Facebook and emailed to the council offices. If there are any further decreases in these areas then Ilminster residents will become increasingly vocal in their commentary and this inevitably gets directed at the Town Council regardless of the fact that Somerset Council are responsible for these services.
23. Charges will no longer be able to be avoided when additional services are required. In the past toilets have been opened and extra cleans arranged courtesy of Somerset Council Member involvement. That will no longer happen and event organisers will be required to pay for them. Clean ups will be charged for all events and the street trader permits will be required to be paid by the organisers.
24. If Ilminster is to be kept looking neat and tidy and a town that residents and Members of the council are proud of, then the Town Council will need to be pro-active in taking steps to take on additional responsibilities. This will only be able to be done through a significant increase in the Town Council's Precept and the employment of additional staff members.
25. It is also vital that as a non-political council that Members do not get drawn into debates about who is to blame for the current position in which Ilminster Town Council finds itself in. It will serve no purpose to look back at the

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causes for this council. Members need to look at delivering as pro-active a response to this matter as soon as possible.

26. A picture is emerging that many of the Town Councils are actively looking at increasing their budgets in anticipation of the need to take over delivery or to pay for some of the services that are currently free.

### Asset and services areas

27. The areas that Somerset Council have identified are broadly covered by the following titles below. They have also been at the centre of a survey that is currently in progress to try to get a picture of what it is that most residents feel the town needs cover of the most. The results up until Wednesday 13 December are detailed in the following table. More up to date figures will be brought to the attention of Members at the meeting.

28.

	24th Nov 2023	Members	Online 13/12/23	Total	%
Bus shelter cleaning and maintenance.	5	0	3	8	1%
Street Cleaning but can include highway channels and litter removal from verges, within the town centre.	71	5	24	95	14%
Winter Service - filling grit bins.	13	1	6	19	3%
Roadside verges maintenance including grass cutting.	39	4	20	59	9%
Hedge trimming.	38	0	14	52	8%
Non-illuminated sign cleaning and maintenance.	15	0	4	19	3%
Signage for new or changed speed limits.	7	0	4	11	2%
Weed treatment.	6	0	5	11	2%
Minor Highway functions such as footway and footpath repairs.	45	1	11	56	8%
Public toilets, opposite Tesco's, provision, and opening hours.	19	1	10	29	4%
Provision and collection of litter bins and dog waste bins.	72	7	30	102	15%
Memorial Maintenance.	5	0	0	5	1%
Management and maintenance of open spaces assets. E.g. benches and signs.	12	0	6	18	3%
Grass cutting and maintenance in open space owned by Somerset Council.	31	2	20	51	8%

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Local play parks – Greenfylde and Blackdown View.	40	1	12	52	8%
Local town economic development.	29	2	8	37	6%
Additional support for libraries.	32	0	6	38	6%
	479	24	183	662	1.00

29. The difficulty with many of these areas is that the scope and cost of what they are currently asking from Town and Parish Councils is not clear. What is clear is that additional staffing to carry out the tasks will be needed from both a “hands on” and an administrative aspect. There will also be a need to acquire new equipment and possibly source additional storage facilities.
30. **Transport:** - whilst there may be some opportunities to support Community and volunteer schemes through the provision of grants, organising volunteers and running a bus service are both costly and labour-intensive options. Bus shelter cleaning and maintenance is however something that we could consider if options outlined in the report are pursued.
31. **Highways:** - Most of the elements that have been identified in this area are within this Town Council’s capabilities to facilitate provided the right person is employed along with suitable equipment. As discussed at the November budget meeting it is felt that Ilminster should look to work with Crewkerne and possibly South Petherton and employ two or three Stewards between us and then offer to assist a Parish “Buy in scheme” where they could purchase a ‘Highways Steward day’ on a regular basis as detailed above. What the actual title for the Steward is can be decided at a later date.
32. One of the questions is that as a reasonably sized town, Ilminster’s requirements will fall under two service areas. Those of Street Scene and of Highways. Whilst they are saying that the tasks will be dictated by the town or the parish signing up, there is still no definitive list of what this might entail. Attached to this report are details that have been provided to the clerk in relation to the Highways Steward scheme as trialled in the Exmoor LCN. The presentations include photographs of the type of work that they have been involved in doing. There is also a presentation that was provided to Clerks as part of their current thinking **Appendices 8B, 8C and 8D.**
33. Currently Somerset Council are putting forward a “Highways Steward Scheme” with Keir. This would be available from April 2024. The initial indications are that this will cost £50,000 per steward and would include a man with a fully equipped van. There are however a number of unanswered questions around this provision.
34. Based upon the Keir model, there would be an approximate hourly rate of **£26.00** per hour. Now there may well be some hidden costs involved in this that we are yet to uncover and the clerk is hoping that these will be made more known in the early part of 2025.

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35. What follows is very much a guestimate at this point in time if the work was to be carried out by an Ilminster Town Council employee. If we consider that the basic salary cost is likely to be in the region of **£30,000** including employer's contributions, then it would approximate out at just under **£16.00 per hour** or around **£120 per day**. We would then need to factor in equipment costs dependent on what jobs they were being asked to tackle. In some instances the parishes may have their own equipment. The cost is thus likely to come out at **£150 and £200 per day**.
36. For a parish therefore to have access to say 12 days a year it might be that it would cost them around **£2,400 per year**. For some parishes this is a very large proportion of their current precept. As a consequence, they will therefore need to rethink their precepts.
37. Major hedge cutting tasks would not be something that I envisage could be tackled by a "Steward" but many of the local Parishes have good connections with farmers and this may well be something that they can sub-contract to them to do.
38. It is clear as well that the council would need to purchase and run an additional vehicle. It would make sense for this to be a pickup style vehicle with a lockbox in the back and a tow bar on it. This could be done through a lease/HP scheme or outright purchase scheme. This would need to be investigated further.
39. In addition, additional tools may in fact be required. The information that I am currently getting would indicate that acquiring tools from Somerset Council such as lawn mowers, chainsaws and similar equipment would not be advisable. The equipment is apparently not in good condition on the whole having not been treated sympathetically.
40. One item of equipment that would be helpful is a water bowser with jetting equipment. If the council purchases a water bowser with pressure washer and drain clearance equipment, then it would be able to tackle one of the more frequently reported issues, that of blocked drains and gulleys. It can also be used to assist with the cleaning of pavements and the removal of graffiti, the cleaning of bus shelters and signage.
41. Both the purchase of a pickup and a bowser could potentially be shared with other councils. Examples of a bowser can be found here – [Jetting equipment](#)
42. Members have been provided with a map of Somerset Council assets that details a lot of the areas, although there may be some that have not been identified. This would be covered in more detailed meeting with an officer from Somerset Council. There are some areas that are currently maintained in Ilminster that without specialised equipment would be difficult to manage.
43. One aspect that the Town may wish not to do is take over the actual ownership of some of the pieces of land as then they will be liable for any problems that may occur underneath. It would be far better to take on the

maintenance on the assumption that if something might go wrong, at some point it will.

44. A relationship has been established with the Community Resilience Manager for Somerset Council and he is taking on the role of looking at the devolution of assets and services with the clerk. A Teams meeting was held between them and various aspects that are in this report were discussed and specific additional information has been asked for.
45. Currently there does not appear to be any indication what Somerset Council will do to assist Councils who take over the ownership and maintenance of areas that they currently maintain. One area that might assist this Town Council would be if they transfer the income for the advertising on the roundabouts to Ilminster.
46. Whilst the Town Council voted against planning for this to happen it has been approved. The income from these roundabouts could amount to around **£7,500 to £10,000**. They are also one of the main things that people comment upon in social media. They believe that they could be made to look more appealing and there is no doubt that the income from this could be used towards this as well as to potentially assist with other areas.
47. **Waste services:** - More information is required on this, but it would seem to be suggesting that they want lower tier councils to fund the recycling centres or their hours will be cut back or they may even be closed completely.
48. The concern with this will be that if they do cut back the hours the instances of “flytipping” is likely to increase. At this point who will be responsible for collecting “fly tipped” waste? Also once collected where will it then have to go and who will pick up the cost?
49. If the council was to be involved in the collection of the flytipping there are issues surrounding the prosecution of those people who are doing it. Currently the investigation of this activity is carried out by Environmental Health. Somerset Council will be the only people who will be in a position to do this investigative and enforcement process and as such they have yet to work out how that would be processed if towns collect the flytipping themselves.
50. We have now had an indication from Somerset Council that there will be a charge of between **£8 and £10 per bin waste collection**. The Open Spaces Manager has carried out a survey and has calculated that there 26 bins (20 litter 6 dog bins) currently emptied by Somerset Council and we have 50 all together (28 litter and 22 dog bins) on Town Council land. Just the emptying of the Somerset Council bins would cost in excess of **£13,520** per year.
51. **Schools:** - At present the local school arranges their own crossing patrols. It may be better to wait for Herne View CofE Primary School to approach the council for a contribution towards it. It will be worth ascertaining with the



Head at Herne View what her plans are for crossing patrols. It is believed that she has already made approaches to various people for assistance in resolving this.

52. **Public Toilets:** - Aside from the toilets on the recreation ground the only other public toilets are opposite Tesco. It has been reported in the past that these toilets are operated by Somerset Council in buildings that are actually owned by Tesco.
53. There may be a clause that would allow the toilets to be handed back to Tesco, but that is information not currently available. These toilets are frequently required for events that are held in town and as such closing them down would potentially create concerns amongst a vocal sector of the community. The costs of taking on and maintaining these however would be high. Toilets, as Members are aware, require opening and closing, cleaning and maintaining.
54. It is looking increasingly likely that the toilets across Somerset will be shut down in April unless Town Councils are willing to take them on. I have asked for the operating costs for these toilets over the past 5 years to be made available but when this information will become available is yet to be made known to us. There has been a figure provided that says the average cost of operating toilet blocks is between **£30,000 and £40,000**.
55. **Street Scene:** - If Somerset Council were to mirror or even have a Section 114 Notice implemented then this is an area that would come under close consideration for cutbacks. The frequency of cleaning which is currently two days a week would be reduced and restricted to the main part of Ilminster town centre. This is an area where there would be no problems with the Town Council carrying out some of the functions but there will be need to be sufficient funds and staffing to be allocated to do so.
56. It will be incumbent on all organisations that organise events to pay for their own waste clearance and disposal going forward. Many do this for waste at the event sites but currently not for all the public waste bins elsewhere. Where additional waste is deposited due to an event, is there going to be an expectation that they will also be required to pay for this?
57. **Open spaces:** - This is an area that has been discussed between myself and officers at Somerset. I have made them aware that I know the commuted sums that were transferred over and that there is an expectation that if Greenfylde play park was taken over, that we would expect the transfer of those funds as per the S106 agreement, and it's an area in which we already have a great deal of expertise.
58. Currently the two playparks at Blackdown and Greenfylde would be on the radar, one suspects, for Ilminster to take over and maintain. As a precursor to any such requests the Recreation Manager has been asked to produce for me a report on each of the playparks current condition.

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59. The handing over of the two play areas currently managed by Somerset Council would not cause any new skills to be acquired. However, there will need to be discussions taking place as to what can be done to assist the council with making additional funds available to help with the refurbishment of Blackdown play park.
60. Clearly a lot of the grass cutting and maintenance is something that could be considered by this council. But this can only be achieved through the employment of additional staff and equipment which will come at a cost in terms of both personnel (outdoor and administrative), equipment and potentially storage.
61. **Economic Development/Tourism:** - Ilminster has benefited in recent years from the Market Town Investment Group funding but this came to an end with the creation of the new unitary authority.
62. The local Chamber of Commerce would appear to be struggling to attract members, however very little information has been brought to the council on how they intend to work to try to reverse the decline in business fortunes in Ilminster.
63. The one-off events attract people to the town, but there is a need to try and create the repeat business opportunities that will bring people back to the centre of town. This is something that the council can assist with but it will take administration time and potentially a greater hands-on input from members.
64. The Town Council is strengthening the attendance at the market, but this is slow and steady progress. We are endeavouring to get a wider variety of stallholders through initiatives such as the Young Market Traders competitions and also getting a wider range of opportunities for them to use the Market House in order to operate from. Allowing businesses and traders to use the Market House on alternative days to the traditional market day has created more interest and business opportunities.
65. There is the potential to look at other schemes to try and attract opportunities for organisations to showcase what they do in Ilminster. These need to be explored more at a later date, but it could assist with promoting what groups have to offer in Ilminster for both residents and visitors.
66. One idea is to find a landlord that would support setting up a "Pop up" information centre three days a week. This would then possibly be manned through agreements with organisations that would be given an opportunity to showcase their activities whilst manning an information point.
67. **Leisure/Arts/Culture:** - Both the Theatre and the Arts Centre are running as independent organisations in Ilminster. The only Somerset Council run facility that falls under this heading is the library.

68. Library provision is a statutory requirement and there are a number of libraries in the area. It is being mentioned that this is an area which will be up for reassessment on a cost basis. It is possible that a number of those libraries which are already running on reduced hours could be closed down and that users would be directed to major libraries in Taunton, Yeovil and Bridgewater. This will then satisfy the statutory obligations on Somerset Council.
69. Currently the Town Council has allocated £5,000 in its budget towards Ilminster Library should they apply for it. This should be looked at in the future to ascertain exactly how it is included in the budget.
70. Over the past few years' money has been allocated in various ways to support the leisure centres at Yeovil and Chard as well as the Octagon Theatre. These are all facilities that residents of Ilminster use. Much of the funding has been allocated through the Section 106 allocations from new housing developments.
71. Part of the work that has been done over the past few months has been to try to ensure that any S106 funds for the new Persimmon Development are to be used in Ilminster. This would appear to have paid off, with the last S106 agreement to be seen by officers having phrases that refer to funds being used "offsite and in the boundary of Ilminster".
72. Whilst helpful in the future, this does not help in the immediate timeframe since these funds may not be available for another 5 years. What may however still be available is the funding that has been set aside for maintenance, i.e. the commuted sums such as would appear to have allocated for the maintenance of the Greenfield play park.
73. The Ile Centre is also an unknown quantity at present. There is a lease on this building and it would appear that the income from the car park is allocated to it. Is this going to continue in the future?
74. **Community Wellbeing and Resilience:** - Whilst the Town Council does not currently run any Community Services directly, there may be some venues that get grants from Somerset Council and there is no doubt that funding will dry up on this front for them. This may well see us approached by more organisations that do receive grants from Somerset Council currently. It will therefore be even more important that we ensure that financially they do not pose a risk to this council and that due diligence is carried out on any organisations that we provide funds to and who are responsible for Town Council owned property.
75. The council has endeavoured to put resilience plans into place that will support the residents of Ilminster, however these are reliant upon people volunteering to help. It is noticeable that in the smaller parish councils their Members are often the main facilitators of the distribution of equipment to help at the time of emergencies. We do not have the staff to be able to

provide a 24-hour emergency cover and that will not change even if we do employ additional staff.

76. There may be opportunities to use the LCN networks that are in the process of being created. However, should a Section 114 Notice be raised then it is questionable that staff will be available from Somerset Council for the LCN's as it is highly likely that funding will not be made available. What is clear is that there will not be any funding for the LCN's to initiate any projects or activities. This will have to come from the town and parish councils.
77. All of these areas can be supported and promoted by the Town Council to a greater or lesser extent, but not having any indication just how much funding Somerset Council puts into Ilminster for them, makes it very difficult to say how much should be allocated in the budget.

**Car parks:-**

78. There is a possibility that there may be a way open to discuss the Orchard Vale car park. If the Town Council was minded to taking over part of this, then there could be a possibility that it could be used as an area to place a resilience store and also to set up a storage compound for vehicles. Figures are being sought to discuss what the implications of doing this might be.
79. There might be further benefits if Herne View CofE Primary School is to be concentrated on one site in the future and the IEF seeks to dispose of its assets in the area of the car park.
80. Other car parks in Ilminster are not thought to be on a list for discussions to take place.

**2024/25 budget**

81. We have now been notified of the **Tax Base** for **2024-25**. This has been set at **2123.77**. This has increased from **2090.86** for this current year. The precept for this year is **£379,231**, this means that a Band D property is being asked to pay **£181.38 per year, £15.11 per month or £3.49 per week**. Because of the change to the Tax Base if the Council was to leave the Precept request unchanged, then each Band D property would see their contribution to the total fall to **£178.57 per year, £14.88 per month or £3.43 per week**. This represents a **1.55%** fall in the precept.
82. Officers have endeavoured to provide as accurate an assessment of the financial outturn for the financial year 2023-24 as possible, taking into account the projects currently being undertaken and the likely financial commitments through to 31 March 2024. This budget is appended to this report as **Appendix 8A Ilminster Town Council Budget Proposal 2024-25**.
83. The budget for 2024-25 being put before Members also includes identified projects that have been raised in past years, that arose from the Members

Day and were put before Members at the meeting on the 21 November 2023.

<b>Project</b>	<b>EMR</b>	<b>2024-25 Budgeted</b>
CCTV & low level lighting on recreation ground	5,000	0
Recreation ground path/gym	104,289	0
Tuckshop/Toilet refurb	10,000	0
Tennis courts	12,849	10,000
Grass cutting equipment replacement	12,775	10,000
Website Replacement	15,000	0
Canal Maintenance	19,000	5,000
Refurbish West Crescent Play area surface	40,000	5,000
Skate park refurb/maintenance	1,600	800
Speed Indicator Device (SID)	2,885	0
Youth Worker	25,738	0
Play Equipment Maintenance	21,230	0
Drainage		20,000
Archie Gooch Pavilion		5,000

- 84. The projects have been listed separately with any Ear Marked Reserves (EMR) listed from this year as well as proposed amounts being suggested for the year 2024-25 above and on the separate budget sheet.
- 85. Members were asked during the November meeting to inform officers of any projects that they wished to add or subtract from the project list. This was so that the impact on the proposed November budget could be assessed and alternative budgets brought to Members in **December's meeting**. No alterations have been requested or put forward for the other Members of the council to consider.
- 86. All of the projects and identified amounts have been before Members three times now and these can be amended if required at this meeting. There have also been considerations given to comments and thoughts voiced by Members to officers during this process.
- 87. At this point it is important to plan for the worst-case scenario where Somerset Council issue a Section 114 Notice within the next financial year if not earlier. To give ITC a chance to provide just some of the services this will require the council to increase its precept by a significant amount. **This has been sent out**

**to you in advance. If you have any questions, please email the clerk before Tuesday.**

88. In the current financial year, the Town Council has received a Precept of **£379,231**, which for a **Band D** property means they would pay **£181.38** per year, In the following table you will see what affect changes to the precept will have on a band D property.
89. Members have been provided already with the comparative band D rates charged in other Somerset Towns for 2023/24. Some are listed below with an indication of what their precepts would look like if they were to be increased by 10, 20 or 30 percent.

	Band D	Monthly	Plus 10%	Monthly	Plus 20%	Monthly	Plus 30%	Monthly
<b>Bridgewater</b>	£112.06	£9.34	£123.27	£10.27	£134.47	£11.21	£145.68	£12.14
<b>Yeovil Town</b>	£145.13	£12.09	£159.64	£13.30	£174.16	£14.51	£188.67	£15.72
<b>Chard</b>	£173.09	£14.42	£190.40	£15.87	£207.71	£17.31	£225.02	£18.75
<b>Iminster</b>	<b>£181.38</b>	<b>£15.12</b>	<b>£199.52</b>	<b>£16.63</b>	<b>£217.66</b>	<b>£18.14</b>	<b>£235.79</b>	<b>£19.65</b>
<b>Glastonbury</b>	£200.00	£16.67	£220.00	£18.33	£240.00	£20.00	£260.00	£21.67
<b>Shepton Mallett</b>	£208.70	£17.39	£229.57	£19.13	£250.44	£20.87	£271.31	£22.61
<b>Crewkerne</b>	£209.52	£17.46	£230.47	£19.21	£251.42	£20.95	£272.38	£22.70
<b>Frome</b>	£218.92	£18.24	£240.81	£20.07	£262.70	£21.89	£284.60	£23.72
<b>Martock</b>	£248.41	£20.70	£273.25	£22.77	£298.09	£24.84	£322.93	£26.91
<b>Somerton</b>	£260.68	£21.72	£286.75	£23.90	£312.82	£26.07	£338.88	£28.24

90. In the following table you will see what effect financial changes will have on the precept on a band D property both financially and as a percentage. Each of the changes represents a £10,000 increase in the precept.

<b>Increases in Precept for 2024/25. (Based on this years Tax Base)</b>							
Precept for 2023/24	£379,231	Band D Annually	Total increase	Monthly increase	Weekly increase	Percentage increase	
<b>Increase</b>	<b>£10,000</b>	£389,231	£186.16	£4.78	£0.40	£0.09	2.64%
	<b>£20,000</b>	£399,231	£190.94	£9.57	£0.80	£0.18	5.27%
	<b>£30,000</b>	£409,231	£195.72	£14.35	£1.20	£0.28	7.91%
	<b>£40,000</b>	£419,231	£200.51	£19.13	£1.59	£0.37	10.55%
	<b>£50,000</b>	£429,231	£205.29	£23.91	£1.99	£0.46	13.18%
	<b>£60,000</b>	£439,231	£210.07	£28.70	£2.39	£0.55	15.82%
	<b>£70,000</b>	£449,231	£214.85	£33.48	£2.79	£0.64	18.46%
	<b>£80,000</b>	£459,231	£219.64	£38.26	£3.19	£0.74	21.10%
	<b>£90,000</b>	£469,231	£224.42	£43.04	£3.59	£0.83	23.73%
	<b>£100,000</b>	£479,231	£229.20	£47.83	£3.99	£0.92	26.37%
	<b>£110,000</b>	£489,231	£233.99	£52.61	£4.38	£1.01	29.01%
	<b>£120,000</b>	£499,231	£238.77	£57.39	£4.78	£1.10	31.64%
	<b>£130,000</b>	£509,231	£243.55	£62.18	£5.18	£1.20	34.28%
<b>£140,000</b>	£519,231	£248.33	£66.96	£5.58	£1.29	36.92%	

91. **So why the need to look at such large potential changes?** It is very simple; Somerset will not be providing services to Ilminster to the level of expectation of the residents going forward. Whether they like it or not Ilminster residents will be faced with a much-slimmed down Somerset Council in the future. Whether it is at their own hands or at the hands of the commissioners appointed by Westminster, there will be a smaller Somerset Council delivering only the most basic of non-statutory services.
92. It is up to you as councillors to decide what it is that ITC does to try and cover the shortfall in services. You have an opportunity to see in the Table earlier on in the report that all services are considered to a greater or lesser extent important.
93. We also know for example through looking at social media that there is a strong opinion over how the verges, green areas and roundabouts should be kept. They want them tidy and a credit to the community they live in. They want wildflower areas, but in the right places. Residents have made frequent representations about the state of the drains and culverts, hedgerows and open spaces. Even the members of the scouts recently commented adversely about them.

### **Staffing proposal**

94. In line with the considerations agreed at Resources on the 7 November it is proposed that when the Countryside Manager vacancy is advertised, that the additional warden vacancy detailed above is advertised.
95. It is also now being suggested that the council consider the employment for an additional one and a half members of staff be budgeted for in order to act as a Steward. This could be either a direct employee or potentially through the Somerset Council agreement for Highways Stewards that is believed to be introduced from April 2024. There would however need to be an additional **£30,000** put into the budget before you if the Keir option was to be followed.
96. By budgeting an extra **£15,000** for half a Steward we can look to sharing them between another town council and ourselves. This would then enable both councils to be able to offer additional coverage to parish councils around their local area who will be struggling to find ways to resolve a way forward. I would suggest that they could sign up to buying in for 1 day a month or even 1 day every 2 months.
97. I would also propose that with the level of extra administration involved that there should be an extra admin person employed for 4 hours a day, five days a week. This will enable us to be able to assist with what we believe will be additional enquiries from residents as well as additional administrative tasks.
98. Estimated increases in staffing costs have been included in **Appendix 8E**

99. On top of this, there would potentially be a need for additional equipment to be obtained for all new staff and it would be advisable to budget an additional £20,000 in the first year for this equipment.

**Additional income**

100. It is looking extremely unlikely that we will get any additional income from Somerset Council in respect of assets. The fact that they are cancelling the Free Christmas Shoppers Parking scheme is a clear indication that they will be intent on holding on to their capital.
101. However, I would advise at this point that without firm discussions with officers from Somerset Council exactly what these will be, that nothing should be factored into the budget for this at this time.
102. A number Parish Councils have already expressed an interest in buying into the Highways Steward role and this is increasing on a weekly basis.
103. **Resolutions:**
- a. **Members resolve the increased staffing requirement as outlined in the report taken to Full Council on the 21 November 2023 and at this meeting on the 19 December 2023. This is to include funding for up to 1.5 Highways Wardens and a part time Admin support member of staff. The appointment of the Highways Warden to be agreed by Full council once more information has been made available surrounding the devolution of assets and services by Somerset Council.**
  - b. **Members of the Resources Committee at their meeting on the 7 November 2023 resolved unanimously to RECOMMEND to Full Council that an additional member of the Open Spaces Team should be recruited, pending the outcome of any Somerset Council's Medium Term Financial Plans being confirmed. Members are asked to RESOLVE that an additional Warden be recruited and appointed to the outdoor team.**
  - c. **Members are asked to Resolve that a Precept of £506,910.79 be approved for the Financial Year 2024-25 in accordance with the spreadsheet Appendix 8A submitted to the meeting. The figures being agreed in the Column "Proposed Budget 2024-25".**
  - d. **Members are asked to resolve estimated Earmarked Reserves totalling £361,984.**

**Mark Tredwin  
Town Clerk  
December 2023**