**SOMERSET COUNCIL**

**February - March 2024**

**2024/5 Council Budget:** Somerset Council has voted through plans to set a budget for the coming financial year but received a stark warning of significant challenges in the years ahead. LibDem Council Members unanimously agreed a range of measures to bridge a funding gap of £100m for 2024/25, including cost cuttings, increasing Council Tax by 5%, and using £36.8 millions of reserves (a council’s equivalent of savings).  The proposals also include a ‘capitalisation direction’ request of £36.9m – seeking permission from Government to borrow money or sell assets to pay for day-to-day running costs. Amid specific plans to cut costs and increase fees, around 1,200 jobs are expected to go at Somerset Council over the next three years equivalent to about a quarter of the workforce. As a result of the cuts some Town Councils have stepped in to save services (CCTV, public toilets etc) but this has resulted in a 179% council tax increase in Taunton, 90% in Yeovil and 164% in Bridgwater.

Council papers are still predicting a further £103 million budget gap in 2025/26.

**Gigafactory plans for Puriton site:** Agratas, a new business within the Tata Group, has confirmed its plans to build a gigafactory producing EV batteries at the Gravity Smart Campus site in Puriton, near Bridgwater. A £4 billion investment, the factory will create up to 4,000 jobs and many more as part of the supply chain.It is envisioned that the plant will be operational in the second half of the decade, eventually producing 40GWh of battery cells annually, enough to supply approximately 500,000 passenger vehicles. Once fully operational, the factory is set to be Britain’s biggest battery factory, and one of the largest in Europe. Over the next five years, Somerset Council plans to invest in the infrastructure, skills, site access and connectivity which will be paid for by the Business Rates generated by the factory once it is operational.

**Healthy Somerset:** A new website has been launched by Public Health to help people in Somerset lead a healthier life. The new site – [**www.healthysomerset.co.uk**](https://bit.ly/healthy-somerset) –fvisit: [**https://bit.ly/healthy-somerset**](https://bit.ly/healthy-somerset).

**Chard Enterprise Centre:** The new Chard Enterprise centre, offers flexible office and light industrial workspace to support small and medium enterprises there is a centre in Williton.

**Take the Pressure Off:**  with the aim of testing thousands of residents to increase awareness and early detection of high blood pressure. The “Take the Pressure Off” campaign is designed**.**

**His Majesty The King:**  The government is offering a free framed portrait of His Majesty The King to all town, parish and community councils in the United Kingdom from 12 February. The closing date for applications is 28 March.

Applications can be made via: <https://tpc-portraitscheme.cubiquityonline.com/login> to encourage residents, particularly those aged 40+, to regularly check their blood pressur**Portrait**