

- 1.2. The five largest towns in Somerset were allocated a Service Director from Somerset Council to advance discussions on non-statutory service and asset devolution from Somerset Council with the aim to transfer as opposed to cut service delivery in these areas. BTC was assigned the Service Director of Regulatory and Operational. This work has been at pace and a package of transfer has been agreed by officers.
- 1.3. Regular updates have been provided to councillors at Full Council; Finance and Policy Executive Committee; and Environment Committee Meetings.
- 1.4. Both the ruling Labour group and the opposition Conservative group have received briefings on the budget and devolution.
- 1.5. Councillors have been clear with their intentions of the need to protect services in Bridgwater and to take on additional responsibilities to ensure that services and assets are protected for the community, and to improve service delivery. Failure not to will result in Somerset Council reducing and ceasing service delivery of discretionary services.

2. Package of Devolution

- 2.1. The Council agreed in December 2022 with Somerset Council/Sedgemoor District Council to takeover:

- Mansfield Park
- St Matthew's Field and Fair
- Blake Gardens
- Victoria Park
- Eastover Park/Cranleigh Gardens
- King Square
- Market Rights and on-street trading concessions
- West Market (part of the fair)
- Roller-coaster
- South Bridgwater Pantry
- The Docks and associated public realm (transfer in 2025/26)

- 2.2. The following service areas have been agreed between the Town Clerk and Somerset Council's Director of Regulatory and Operational:

- Street Cleaning across Bridgwater including highway channels and litter removal from verges
- Fly tipping
- Provision and collection of litter bins and dog waste bins
- Carnival clean-up
- Bedding planting
- Management and maintenance of open spaces assets – including both green spaces as well as "hard" open spaces
- Grass cutting and open spaces management

- Grass cutting in Wembdon Road Cemetery and St Mary's Church, however responsibility and maintenance of paths and walls will rest with Somerset Council
- Local parks
- Winter Service – filling grit bins
- Roadside verges maintenance including grass cutting
- Vegetation clearance and cutting on the Rights of Way network
- Road Sweeping across Drain jetting/Gully cleansing
- Non-illuminated sign cleaning and maintenance
- Weed treatment
- Minor Highways functions such as footway and footpath repairs
- Planned path safety inspections
- School crossing patrols funding contribution (Westover Green, Hamp Nursery and Infants' School, and St John & St Francis Church School)
- Blake Gardens' toilets
- Local tourism
- Local economic development.

2.3. A full list of grass areas that the council will be responsible for can be [viewed in this file](#).

2.4. The following play areas to be transferred:

1	Appledore Drive	14	Hazeley Close
2	Bower Ponds	15	Holford Road
3	Castle Green Walk	16	Linham Road
4	Chamberlin Ave	17	Mansfield Park
5	Coronation Park	18	Marsa Way
6	Countess Avenue	19	Meadowlands Avenue
7	Crowpill lane	20	Northgate Yard
8	Danesboro Road	21	Pollard Road
9	Duke Street	22	Stafford Road
10	Eastover Park	23	The Green
11	Edinburgh Road	24	Union Street
12	Gloucester Road	25	Victoria Park
13	Haywater Avenue	26	Viscount Square

2.5. Within all land holding the Council will be responsible for a total number of 1,802 trees.

2.6. Equipment (Plant) required to deliver, maintain and improve assets and services outlined above has been budgeted for in 2024/25 budget (note: equipment may be paid for in this financial year, and the budgeted amount for next year will transfer to general reserve fund to replace):

Vehicles					
Ordered	Not ordered	Existing with BTC	Existing with SC	Electric	Diesel
Plant and Go Vans x3					Yes

		Peugeot Export – Ranger Van		Yes	
		Ford Transit drop side (move from Cemeteries to open spaces as spare / moving plant around			Yes
Maxus caged tipper vans x2				Yes	
			DFSK Van x1 – awaiting cost, may not need.		Yes
Ford Transit tipper double cab x1					Yes
	Large road sweeper / drain and gully sucker				Yes
			1x small road sweeper		Yes
Equipment					
Ordered	Not ordered	Existing with BTC	Existing with SC	Electric	Diesel/Unleaded
1x Ransomes bat wing mower fully road legal					Yes
2x toro 6000 ride on mowers					Yes
2x walk behind mowers					Yes
			1x John Deere flail mower		Yes
		4x Stihl kombi engines			Yes
		4x strimmer attachments-kombi			Yes
		2x long reach hedge trimmer attachment-kombi			Yes

		2x short reach Stihl hedge trimmer			Yes
		2x Stihl backpack blower			Yes
		2x Stihl handheld blower			Yes
		2x Stihl reciprocating head attachments (can be shared between teams)			Yes
		2x Stihl pole pruner attachment			Yes
2x Stihl kombi engines					Yes
2x strimmer attachments-kombi					Yes
1x long reach hedge trimmer attachment-kombi					Yes
1x short reach Stihl hedge trimmer					Yes
1x Stihl backpack blower					Yes
1x Stihl hand held blower					Yes
		4x Stihl AR3000 Batteries		Yes (used by Rangers)	
		2x Stihl electric kombi 135R		Yes (used by Rangers)	
		2x Stihl strimmer attachments		Yes (used by Rangers)	
		1x Stihl electric hedge trimmer 130R		Yes (used by Rangers)	
		1x Stihl long reach hedge trimmer attachment		Yes (used by Rangers)	

		1x Stihl reciprocating head attachment		Yes (used by Rangers)	
		4x Stihl battery chargers		Yes (used by Rangers)	
		1x Stihl pole pruner attachment		Yes (used by Rangers)	
		1x Stihl RMA mower		Yes (used by Rangers)	
		2x Stihl harness for batteries		Yes (used by Rangers)	
		2x Stihl BGA blowers		Yes (used by Rangers)	
	various hand tools - shovels, spades, rakes, hoes, handsaws				
	trimmer cord ,2 stroke fuel oils, fuel cans, fuel storage container. All relevant PPE				
1x chipper/shredder to be shared by all teams					
	litter picks, bag holders/rings				
	First aid kits for each vehicle				
	sharps boxes				
	charging point needs to be installed in new unit				
	Tools for play equipment repairs/maintenance				
1x electric walk behind city street sweeper				Yes	
3x push barrow for litter picking					

2.7. Extensive planning has been underway for some time to ensure the Council is ready to take over the package of devolution outlined in 2.1 to 2.5 of this report. The Council has started procuring equipment and vehicles by way of committee/council decision or officer delegation. A unit has been

secured for which the teams can operate from. The Council will be ready to take on services and assets from mid-April.

- 2.8. Current planning is focused on preparation for waste and recycling disposal with accounts being set-up and ensuring relevant licences in place.
- 2.9. Training has been organised to ensure that staff being TUPEd and new staff have a level benchmark with their knowledge in regards to COSHH, PPE, Manual Handling and Health and Safety Awareness.
- 2.10. Work is underway to review existing work schedules / patterns and see what improvements and changes are needed.
- 2.11. Changes will be made to the street cleaning routine to ensure more efficiency with a wider coverage and increased recycling.
- 2.12. A dedicated BTC 20ton road sweeper will ensure all roads in Bridgwater will be regularly swept and gullies and drains cleaned.

3. Proposed Budget for 2024/25

- 3.1. The budget proposals have been carefully drafted based on current responsibilities and take account for asset and service devolution figures received from Somerset Council. Both Councils are working at pace with a view that transfer of responsibility will take place mid-April. Legal title transfer will take place during 2024 possibly 2025.
- 3.2. Proposed budget key points:

Other information:

General

- Insurance will increase from £25,670 to approx. £40,000
- Office Phones, internet and I.T costs will rise by a considerable amount over several budget headings due to increase of staff
- Mobile Phones will rise by a considerable amount over several budget headings due to increase of staff
- Training costs will rise by a considerable amount over several budget headings due to increase of staff
- Professional Fees budget increase from £10,000 to £30,000 to take account of extensive legal work and buffer for professional advice that isn't available internally or from existing external advisors
- Audit fees will be higher due to turnover.

Civic Costs:

- Members Allowance if approved £1,240 per councillor – total £19,840

Community:

- General Grants budget £18,000. Total requests this year: £30,000
- Defib project funding £10,000
- BTC Events £15,000 – increase from £5,000
- £2,500 budget for more warm spaces and community drop-ins

- Higher Publicity budget now £5,000 due to increase of responsibility and effort to improve external communications.

Art Centre

- This is new a new budget requirement – taking over 1 April 2024

Town Hall

- No major changes other than new staffing in the draft budget from 2023/24 financial year.

Muesum

- This has increased largely due to cost-of-living pressures.

Mill

- Using Earmarked reserves for feasibility reports.

Cemeteries

- No major changes – cost of living and new van lease.

Facilities Support

- Higher income to changes with tenanted properties
- Blake Gardens' Toilets are due to be transferred (by way of lease) extra funding required to refurbishment
- Lodge – exterior paint, windows and soffits required, hence the request for £15,000
- Footfall counters – increase due to purchasing additional units
- Christmas Lights – an extra £12,000 requested to replace Fore Street lights and new lights for Northgate Yard.

Town Team

- Slight increase of £900 to expand shop front improvement grants for targeted area of Eastover.

ReCreation

- Direct funding for Youth Activities requested of £15,160.

Parks, Open Spaces and Street cleaning

- Parks and Open Spaces and Street Cleaning is the biggest budget area of just over £1.4m. This is a higher cost compared to SC due to the need to purchase new machines and vehicles and to make improvements such as new litter and recycle bins. £90,000 is requested to install more play equipment and a MUGA at Mansfield Park.

Rollercoaster

- No changes in overall budget.

3.3. Key data Precept (council tax) data from town and parish councils in Somerset

Parish Name	Band D council tax (£) 2022-23	Amount precepted on billing authority (£) 2023-24	Tax base for precept purposes 2023.24	Band D council tax (£) 2023-24	Band D for 2024.25	
Langport	£277.83	£107,285.00	330.06	£325.05	£340.54	Agreed
Shepton Mallet	£198.76	£715,750.00	3,429.64	£208.70	£305.57	Agreed
Taunton	[z]	£2,114,000.00	19,276.13	£109.67	£299.30	30/01/2024
Glastonbury	£133.28	£650,924.00	3,254.62	£200.00	£298.13	Agreed
Bridgwater	£91.31	£1,153,746.00	10,296.83	£112.05	£295.33	01/02/2024
Somerton	£222.63	£549,902.00	2,109.53	£260.68	£292.33	Agreed
Yeovil	£142.59	£1,335,693.00	9,203.55	£145.13	£276.08	30/01/2024
Frome	£208.69	£1,983,504.00	9,060.52	£218.92	£270.97	Agreed
Wells	£212.29	£1,149,307.00	4,352.77	£264.04	£269.05	Agreed

3.4. Key data across England. It should be noted that the parishes below provide extensive service delivery like Bridgwater Town Council and in some cases not to the extent of Bridgwater Town Council (e.g. Langport).

5,610 councils have precepts exceeding £10,000, down from 5,638 in 2022-23

846 councils have precepts exceeding £200,000, up from 781 in 2022-23

308 councils have precepts exceeding £500,000, up from 281 in 2022-23

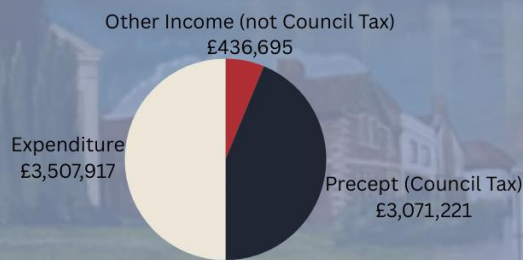
104 councils have precepts exceeding £1M, up from 83 in 2022-23

Top 50 highest Council Tax at Band D

	Parish Name	Band D council tax (£) 2023-24 [note j]
1	Falmouth	423.06
2	Horden	366.76
3	Peterlee	336.82
4	Salisbury City Council	335.00
5	Bodmin	327.81
6	Langport	325.05
7	Truro	320.38
8	Filton	312.84
9	Shirebrook	312.76
10	Sildon	301.24
11	Penzance	299.86
12	Chippenham	298.64
13	Easington Colliery	294.88
14	Camelford	287.94



DRAFT BUDGET BREAKDOWN



Value for money

Our aim is to provide value for money. In these difficult times for cost of living, we are aware of how important it is to use public money as effectively and efficiently as possible. This table below shows a breakdown of the Council Tax from Bands A - D.

Band	Yearly	Monthly	Weekly
A	£196.89	£16.41	£3.79
B	£229.70	£19.14	£4.42
C	£262.52	£21.88	£5.04
D	£295.33	£24.61	£5.68

- 3.6. Council tax band data for Bridgwater (Somerset Council, 2023). Please note that nationally the base figure used for council tax figures is for band D properties. In Bridgwater there are a low number of properties charged at this rate (4.56%). The majority of council taxpayers (77.60%) are in Band A and B, with a total of 92.85% in Bands A to C) with a significant number entitled to single occupancy discount and council tax support.

Banding	Percentage of Bridgwater properties	Current annual Band charge for BTC	Proposed annual Band charge for BTC from 1 April 2024	Proposed Band Charge per week
Band A	50.70%	£74.70	£196.89	£3.79
Band B	26.90%	£87.15	£229.70	£4.42
Band C	15.25%	£99.60	£262.52	£5.04
Band D	4.56%	£112.05	£295.33	£5.68
Band E	1.77%	£136.95	£360.96	£6.94
Band F	0.58%	£161.85	£426.59	£8.20
Band G	0.20%	£186.75	£492.22	£9.46
Band H	0.04%	£224.10	£590.67	£11.36

4. Legal Considerations

- 4.1. The Council will need to ensure operations conform with strict legislation such as, the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 are the key pieces of primary legislation. Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 and its amendment in 2014) is also applicable regarding the taking over of service delivery.
- 4.2. The Council has the General Power Competence so does not need to concern itself with other powers available to local councils to talk on the services outlined in section 2.
- 4.3. For the control and enforcement of dogs these are known as public spaces protection orders under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. Please note that public spaces protection orders are made and enforced by principal councils in England and Wales - not by parish, town or community councils.
- 4.4. Regarding Business Rates, a park provided for free and unrestricted use by members of the public is exempt from local nondomestic rating, Local Government Finance Act 1988, Schedule 5, para 15(1).

5. Financial and Risk Considerations

- 5.1. The Council cannot take over the package of devolution without setting an adequate budget and increasing staffing levels. The Council also needs to maintain a minimum level of reserves of 25% of annual expenditure. There are various large capital items built into the proposed budget that will assist

with building the required reserves to reduce the need to increase the budget by such a large percentage in the short to medium term.

6. Climate Change and Sustainability Considerations

6.1. Biodiversity (England) under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 there is a duty on public authorities in England including town and parish councils to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of their policy or decision making. Conserving biodiversity can include restoring or enhancing a population or habitat. English public authorities should be able to show their duty to have regard for conserving biodiversity if they have identified ways to integrate biodiversity when they:

- Develop policies and strategies and put them into practice
- Manage:
 - their land and buildings
 - woodlands and nature reserves
 - gardens, parks and public open space
 - community amenities e.g. sports grounds and cemeteries
 - waste and pollution
 - energy and water
 - wood and plant products
- Develop infrastructure, such as roads, buildings or flood defences
- Make decisions about procurement
- Implement economic, environmental and social programme.

6.2. Within the budget there is provision for improving recycling, planting and an increase in litter picking across Bridgwater and to sweep roads and clear drains and gullies, which is currently more reactive or inactive.

End of report.