

From: Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, Leader, Somerset West and Taunton Council.

Dear Resident,

Thank you for playing your part in making Somerset West and Taunton a great place to live.

We have an ambitious vision for Somerset West and Taunton. We are investing in our communities, building quality homes that people can afford and making the most of commercial opportunities to provide better services. At the same time we have committed to tackling the climate crisis - helping to ensure the future of our planet for generations to come.

Our plans for the coming year include ongoing investment in park and ride to reduce congestion, improvements to Watchet East Quay harbour and money to improve health and well-being in Wellington. More than a million pounds will be spent helping people with disabilities to stay living in their own homes and more than seven million will be used to update our council houses. We will also build new social housing to help ease the homelessness crisis. We will invest in better cycling and walking routes while working to rejuvenate our town centres as the retail sector faces a huge challenge. Building work will start on Firepool in Taunton this year after 15 years of inactivity.

Of course, we will continue to do everything else you expect of us. When we took control of the new council last year we had to focus on delivering stability following a long period of expensive and disruptive change. We've done this without cutting services.

It's important to remember how ten years of austerity has affected us all. Since 2010 our central Government funding has been cut by more than 60% in real terms. For every £1 we got in 2010 we now get less than 40p. However, we have presented a balanced budget for this year.

We propose a council tax increase of 3.17% a year, making the annual Band D charge £164.63 - or £3.16 per week. The increase provides an additional £282,000 in income, which covers less than half of the increase in the ongoing costs of the services we provide.

Somerset West and Taunton's share of the overall Council tax bill is about nine per cent of the total with the remainder going to fund Somerset County Council, Police and Fire services, and Town and Parish councils.

From the climate crisis, to regenerating our town centres and rejuvenating communities, this budget is focused on our people, our communities and all our futures. I look forward to working with you all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Federica Smith-Roberts'. The signature is stylized, with a large, looped initial 'F' and 'S'.

Federica Smith-Roberts