



# **Yeovil Town Council**

## **Annual Report 2024/25**

**Amanda Card**  
**Chief Executive / Town Clerk**

6<sup>th</sup> May 2025

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# **1 Members of Yeovil Town Council – 2024/25**

Andy Kendall –Mayor of Yeovil Town

Tony Lock – Deputy Mayor of Yeovil Town

Barry Boyton

Jade Cabell

Tareth Casey

Kayleigh Fieldsend

Karl Gill

Emma-Jayne Hopkins

Kaysar Hussain

Justice Jimba (from 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2024)

Jamie Lock

Jane Lowery

Sarah Lowery (until 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024)

Graham Oakes

Evie Potts-Jones

Wes Read

Ashley Richards

Jeny Snell

Andy Soughton

Roy Spinner

Rob Stickland

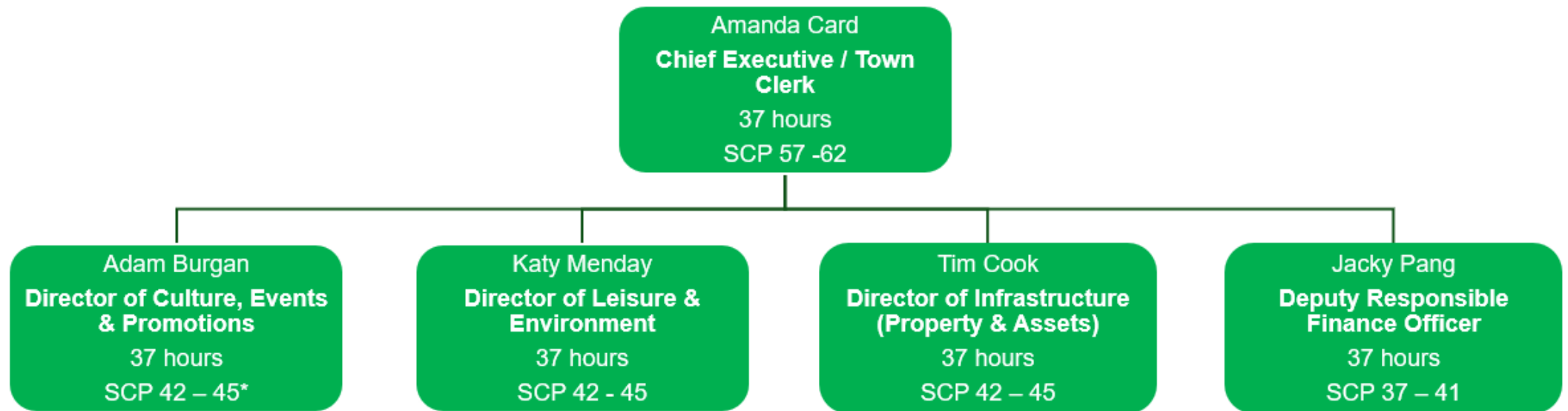
Helen Stonier

Ruth White

Adrain Wilkes

Dave Woan

## 2 Leadership Team



### 3 Yeovil Town Council

**Chair:** Cllr Andy Kendall

**Key Officer:** Amanda Card, Chief Executive/Town Clerk

The Council met on seven occasions during the year. These were in person meetings with the ability to join virtually.

- In May, Yeovil Town Council held its Annual Town Council meeting to elect the Mayor (Cllr Andy Kendall) and Deputy Mayor (Cllr Tony Lock). The meeting was reconvened later that month, where members were appointed to serve on the various Committees to the Town Council as well as the outside bodies on which the Council is represented. The Chairs and Vice Chairs were elected for each Committee.
- At the July meeting, the Council approved the Annual Governance Statement and the Accounting Statements for the financial year 2023/24. The Town Council did not meet its statutory approval deadline of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 as it was dependent on figures provided by Somerset Council, which were late.

Yeovil Town Council officially accepted the devolvement of the operation of services and staff relating to the following assets: Yeovil Recreation Centre (and Café); Yeovil Country Park (and Nine Springs Café); Westlands Entertainment Venue; and South Somerset Heritage Collection from Somerset Council from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024. Council also approved the signing of all the legal documents required for the devolvement.

- At the September meeting, the Chief Executive/Town Clerk provided Council with an update to devolution which successfully transferred on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024, as planned with no major issues and only a few minor matters which were speedily resolved. She gave an update on the work to date and work which still needed to happen. Council agreed the new Committee Structure which reflected the new services.
- In November, the Council were informed of the conclusion of the external auditor regarding the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) 2023/24. It was their opinion that the AGAR had been completed in accordance with Proper Practices. However, the Council had not been able to make proper provision during the year 2024/25 for the exercising of public rights due to the statutory approval date not being met.

- In December the draft budget for 2025/26 was noted and further consideration would be given to the setting of the 2025/26 precept pending final notification from Somerset Council of the tax base and the Crematorium and Cemetery Committee final budget.
- At the January meeting, Council received a presentation from Yeovil Street Pastors. It focused on the work they did to help people keep safe on a night out, working closely with Radio Link and Bridgwater Cameras.

Council considered the setting of the 2025/26 budget. The Town Council's precept of £3,296,939 was approved, which resulted in an increase on a Band D charge of £71.51 per year (or £1.37 per week) an increase from £275.82 to £347.33.

- In March, the Risk Strategy and Risk Assessment for 2024/25; and the Financial Regulations for Yeovil Town Council were both approved and adopted.

***Cllr Andy Kendall, Chair of Yeovil Town Council***

## **4 Planning Committee**

**Chair:** Cllr Grahams Oakes

**Key Officers:** Helen Ferdinand, Deputy Town Clerk  
Lucy Ryder, Assistant Town Clerk

### **Role of Yeovil Town Council**

The Town Council is a consultee in the planning application process. Somerset Council is the Local Planning Authority, and as such, is responsible for the processing of applications and takes the final decision on each application. The Town Council's Planning Committee met on 7 occasions during the 2023/24 year to consider applications referred for comment, but some meetings were cancelled as a result of a reduced number of applications being received.

There continues to be a wide variety of proposed development to be considered by the Committee including advertisements, works to listed buildings, works to protected trees, and proposed changes of use to land and buildings. Many minor domestic extensions have been considered (which need to be considered carefully in terms of their potential impact on the occupiers of neighbouring properties and the street scene), as well as a few larger scale residential and commercial developments which can have a significant impact on the Town as a whole. The final decisions taken by Somerset Council are also reported back to the Committee.

### **Community Planning Applications**

The Town Council is always keen to support proposals for new and improved facilities to serve the community. For instance, the Committee supported proposed alterations to the Swan Theatre and the refurbishment of the old Police Station building and site. Support was also given to the new Milford School proposal, as well as various proposals at Yeovil District Hospital and Summerlands Hospital.

### **Carbon Management Planning Applications**

The Council actively seeks to reduce the need to rely on fossil fuels, and as such has welcomed and supported several proposals put forward during the year for vehicle electric charging stations. Both McDonalds Restaurants in Yeovil, Morrisons, as well as the Manor Hotel, have proposed and implemented these facilities to assist with the charging of electric cars.

## **Other Planning Applications**

There has been a notable number of applications and 'prior approval' applications submitted in Yeovil for the conversion of commercial properties into residential units. Many of these are one and two bedroomed apartments. Each application is considered on its own merits by the Committee and concerns are raised when appropriate and necessary.

## **Objection to Planning Applications**

Whilst the vast majority of planning applications are approved, a small number are refused each year, and by raising concerns the Town Council plays a role in supporting the Local Planning Authority in providing a case to resist inappropriate and unacceptable development when necessary.

***Cllr Graham Oakes, Chair of Planning Committee***



## 5 Leisure & Environment

**Chair:** Cllr Roy Spinner

**Key Officers:** Katy Menday, Director of Leisure & Environment

Sally Freemantle, Deputy Town Clerk

Lucy Ryder, Assistant Town Clerk

The Committee met on six occasions during the year.

### Allotments

The Council's pro-active and flexible approach to allotment management continues to help achieve a thriving allotment community. The active promotion of vacant allotments, including a targeted publicity drive has improved the level of allotment lettings across the Town's 11 allotment sites with over 90% of allotments let throughout the year. The varied benefits of allotment gardening are explained in the publicity of the vacancies which includes advertising on social media, in the press and posters in the community. Residents outside as well as within the parish of Yeovil are currently eligible to have the opportunity to take a tenancy of a Yeovil Town Council allotment.

Each allotment site is encouraged to have a nominated Tenants' Representative. These representatives feedback allotment issues to the Town Council which have been raised by their fellow tenants and where necessary they are forwarded to the Committee for their consideration.

The income raised from allotment rents meets the costs of maintaining the Town's allotment sites. Rents are reviewed annually and any annual rent increase covers the overall costs, whilst also continuing to ensure a fair and sustainable approach to their future provision by reducing the level of shortfall covered by council taxpayers. Mains water charges are recharged to each allotment site and collected from tenants on an annual basis. This approach is both equitable (since tenants on each site only pay for mains water they have used) and encourages tenants to adopt alternative more environmentally friendly ways of collecting and recycling rainwater (thereby reducing their dependency on mains water and saving money). This supports the Council's values of raising awareness of environmental issues, improving the quality of the environment and encouraging an environmentally friendly ethos.

A member of the Leisure and Environment Committee has been appointed as a representative on the Yeovil Allotment Association which aids communication between

the association members and the Town Council.

An Allotment Maintenance Working Party continues to review the Allotment Tenancy agreements in accordance with Town Council policies and legislation and assists in addressing relevant issues.

A large section of leylandii hedge was removed from Monksdale Allotment site, in response to requests from neighbouring residents. Its removal will reduce ongoing maintenance costs for the site which were increasing due to the scale of the hedge and the speed of the growth.

The Best Kept Allotment Competition is judged every year and the winner and runner up of each of the eight categories were awarded prizes at a presentation evening in October. The judges all agreed that the general standard of the allotment plots continues to improve and the vibrant community spirit is apparent on the allotment sites.

### **Greenspace Areas**

At the beginning of the municipal year the Council continued to provide funding to Somerset Council for the maintenance of an extensive number of areas of amenity and open spaces in the Town, ensuring that communities have ongoing access to public areas of green space close to where they live.

A number of outdoor spaces were identified as being at risk following the declaration of a financial emergency by Somerset Council. These included Yeovil Country Park and Yeovil Recreation Ground and the cafes in each location. The community responded with overwhelming support to keep the facilities running and Yeovil Town Council started the process of taking ownership of them. From the beginning of August, Yeovil Country Park and Yeovil Recreation Centre became the responsibility of the Town Council, saving these community assets along with jobs and opportunities.

The teams at both locations, including volunteers, reach out to a wide variety of community groups and their work has been vital, especially as the significance of greenspace has become so precious for wellbeing and continues to provide a place where people can socialise in the fresh air. The Ninesprings Café, Education and Information Centre (which the Town Council originally helped to fund), is an invaluable resource. Both cafés provide excellent facilities for communication and marketing, and a lovely meeting point for social and educational purposes.

### **Yeovil Recreation Centre**

Since August 2024, Yeovil Recreation Centre, in addition to the routine running of the service has:

- reconfigured both the storage (for equipment) and office space (to accommodate the new Estates team);
- been runners up in the national Grounds Management Awards in the community and artificial surfaces categories;
- cleaned and repaired the athletics track in advance of the spring season starting;
- progressed organisation of a new Festival of Sport planned for June 2025 in partnership with Yeovil College sports students;
- secured a Football Foundation Grant for new goals and nets at £3,000;
- arranged for inspection of the Athletics Arena and successfully attained its Track Mark accreditation for a further 4 years; and
- updated Yeovil Recreation Centre website.

### **Yeovil Country Park**

Since August 2024, Yeovil Country Park, in addition to the day to day running of the service has:

- secured five-star (highest rating) RHS Pride In Parks Award for 2025;
- retained the Green Flag Award;
- secured Country Park accreditation for a further three years, inspected and issued by Natural England;
- received over 500 volunteer days donated to practical conservation work – across twice weekly sessions;
- supported regular weekly work experience placement from College plus other school placements;
- completed winter habitat management works including coppicing, tree management, scrub clearance and path repairs;
- delivered 10 events including Halloween trail, Spring trail, heritage walks and community litter picks;
- instructed and commenced re-design of country park web pages;
- hosted a ten-year anniversary party for the café and Ninesprings Centre in November 2024; and
- managed clear up and tree works after repeated winter storms.

### **Yeovil in Bloom**

Yeovil in Bloom has always been a Town Council initiative; funded by Yeovil Town Council and delivered by Somerset Council.

The town and St John's Churchyard looked lovely with all the floral displays and Yeovil Town Council was delighted to be able to celebrate Gold and winner of the category (St Bridget's Cup) in 2023 which meant that the 2024 entry was part of the National

Competition “Champion of Champions”. Not only was the town awarded Gold in this category, the Quedam won the award for the Best Business Floral Display.

All IYNs (It’s Your Neighbourhood Awards) were awarded 4 stars or 5 stars.

The Yeovil in Bloom gardening competition had been judged, including front and back gardens; and shop fronts. An awards ceremony was held at Westlands Entertainment Venue in October which was very well attended.

From April 2025, Yeovil in Bloom will be managed and delivered by Yeovil Town Council and preparations have been put in place to accommodate this transition including the completion of a planning application for the old Ski Centre to create a growing hub; and the hosting of an In Bloom “It’s Your Neighborhood” Event to inform the community about the changes in the forthcoming year.

### **Devolution**

A significant amount of work has been carried out by the Director and her team to enable the successful transfer of services. This has included establishing procedures and systems such as the new Fleet Management System and Health and Safety monitoring and training management system.

There have been new uniforms and rebrands across the Recreation Centre, Country Park and In Bloom.

The next stage of devolution will include the play areas and other open spaces (currently still in Somerset Council ownership), and the team are working hard to make the transition in the new municipal year. Preparation has included the recruitment of an Estates Team comprising of an Estates Manager, a team of three Estate Officers, and a managed TUPE (in accordance with Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006) of the gardener across for Yeovil In Bloom program; research and procurement of new tools and equipment for Estates team including ride on mowers and the procurement of vehicles.

***Cllr Roy Spinner, Chair of Leisure & Environment***

## 6 Culture, Events & Promotions

**Chair:** Cllr Dave Woan

**Key Officers:** Adam Burgan, Director of Culture, Events & Promotions

Sally Freemantle, Deputy Town Clerk

Amanda Card, Chief Executive / Town Clerk

The Committee met on six occasions during the year.

### **Super Saturday**

The Town Council held two Super Saturdays.

A mini–Super Saturday was held in July. It included a variety of community stalls, circus skills, dance performances, activities by Yeovil Art Space, stilt walkers, walkabout acts and Buskfest.

The main Super Saturday event was held in September and was another very busy and successful event. Feedback about the day was positive with footfall being over 13,000.

The event included community performances by local dance groups and two performances of Parade – The Giant Wheel by Autin Dance Theatre (in collaboration with Octagon Theatre/Somerset Council). Entertainment also included four stunt bike performances, circus skills, stilt walker, walkabout acts, buskfest and traditional fair stalls. Over 100 local food stalls were in the town centre as arranged by eat:festivals. The community stalls located in St John’s Churchyard provided a hub of activity and information sharing.

Due to Yeovil Refresh restrictions on the areas of the town available for use, the focus of the event was St John’s Churchyard and The Quedam. The eat:festival was able to use Middle Street and Wine Street and received positive feedback from stallholders and local traders about the event.

### **Eat: Festival**

During this municipal year, three events had been commissioned to eat:festivals:

- Spring Event
- Supporting Super Saturday
- Christmas eat:festival

In response to the positive feedback following each of the eat:festival events, the Town Council has agreed dates for 2025 and 2026. Comments included that the events were well organised, the atmosphere and food was good and those who attended had an

enjoyable time. Footfall figures for the town centre were excellent on each of the dates that eat:festivals were in Yeovil, and it was lovely to see the traders being able to use the streets throughout the town centre as the town started to open up following Yeovil Refresh.

## **Christmas Lights**

Yeovil Town Council commissioned a new Christmas Lights scheme for 2024 which included colourful lights crossing the street in Princes Street, High Street and Middle Street; festoon lighting in King George Street and St John's Churchyard; and ribbons of light hanging in the trees in The Borough and King George Street. South Western Terrace was illuminated by motifs designed by local children who had won the Christmas Light Design competition in previous years.

Yeovil Refresh was not quite complete when the lights were installed, and switched on, so a second installation date was arranged for some lighting structures in The Triangle which were put in place closer to Christmas. This included a reindeer and balls of lights in the new flowerbeds and a cube of light which created a great photo opportunity.

The Light Switch on was organised and managed by Love Yeovil in The Quedam and included performances by local choirs, musicians, and performers providing a lovely festive atmosphere and a brilliant start to Christmas shopping in the town. There were also special guest characters from the Westlands pantomime and a very welcome celebrity visit by Luke Evans. The event was very well attended and received.

## **Town Crier**

The Town Crier hosted his second Town Crier's competition in April.

The Town Crier's competition invites Town Criers from all over the country. They are judged on their volume, clarity, diction and inflection. The competition commenced with an opening cry from Yeovil's Town Crier and then each Town Crier competed in two heats with the first shout being about their home town, and the second shout about a given topic – this year it was gardens. Prizes were awarded for the overall winner, runners-up, best dressed crier, best dressed consort and best dressed couple.

## **Yeovil Together**

The Council financially supported the Yeovil Together Event at Westlands Entertainment Venue through a Service Level Agreement. It was a successful day, with the public taking part in activities that the various communities provided including culturally diverse food, live music, performances and dance, family friendly culturally creative workshops and well-being activities.

## **Yeovil Art Space**

The Committee agreed a Service Level Agreement with Yeovil Art Space with the aim of achieving the following aspects:

- creativity as a social tool for making impact;
- connecting the public/community through creativity and development of change;
- outreach to audiences with hard hitting messages; and
- adding value to existing events.

The core funding provides more than just resource to achieve these aspects but also serves as accreditation by the Town Council to support Yeovil Art Space in applications and funding bids for valuable projects such as the extremely successful three-part initiative, “The Story of Yeovil” and the newest project “Our Town”.

‘Our Town’ is a partnership project between Yeovil Town Council, Yeovil Refresh, Connect Somerset, Love Yeovil, Yeovil College and a number of community organisations and groups which will offer a programme of art and cultural events running from October 2024 to March 2026 and will cater for the town’s communities, working creatively with local arts and community groups.

The aspiration of Yeovil Art Space is to bring Arts, Culture and Heritage awareness to the town and make it accessible to the wider community in dynamic and unusual formats. Collaboration with the community is hugely important in the process and Yeovil Art Space had been working extremely hard to connect with as many agencies and community groups as possible to ensure that the projects delivered meet the correct needs and fit in with the wider strategy for Yeovil. The strong relationships created will be developed alongside the projects which will take advantage of the opportunities presented during the transition of the town centre and services provided by the Town Council.

## **Westlands Entertainment Venue**

As a response to the financial emergency declared by Somerset Council, the Town Council agreed to manage Westlands Entertainment Venue and took the responsibility for it in August 2024. A huge amount of work was involved to accommodate the transition and the Town Council is proud to be able to support this essential and much-loved community resource. Yeovil Town Council initially invested in Westlands Entertainment in 2014, when it again was at risk of closing. At that time and an extensive resident petition was received which initiated prompt reaction by Yeovil Town Council and the then South Somerset District Council (which then became Somerset Council) to ensure the provision continued.

## **South Somerset Heritage Collection**

As a response to the financial emergency declared by Somerset Council, the Town Council agreed to manage South Somerset Heritage Collection. This is a unique and varied collection of historical artefacts and objects of local importance and interest which is located at Lufton, Artillery Road, Yeovil. Sometimes called “a Secret Museum” the collection can be viewed by appointment. It was important to Yeovil Town Council to keep the collection in Yeovil. A partnership now exists between Yeovil Town Council which manages the curation of the collection, Somerset Council as they remain the owners of the artefacts, and the South West Heritage Trust who provide professional support and advice.

The Heritage Co-ordinator arranges outreach work including heritage talks about specific topics and brings relevant artefacts for attendees to view. The community work has reached over 1,200 people this year.

***Cllr David Woan, Chair of Culture, Events & Promotions***



## **7 Infrastructure (Property & Assets)**

**Chair:** Cllr Rob Stickland

**Key Officers:** Amanda Card, Chief Executive / Town Clerk

Helen Ferdinand, Deputy Town Clerk

Tim Cook, Director of Infrastructure (Property & Assets)

The Committee met on five occasions during the year.

### **Property and Facilities Management**

Taking over the management of several buildings from Somerset Council has required the negotiation and agreement of numerous new servicing and maintenance contracts, including fire and security, heating systems, waste collection, water hygiene, door maintenance, shutters, electrics, floodlighting, etc. With the nature, variety and complexity of the property portfolio, many of these contracts required lengthy and quite complex negotiations. Whilst the Town Council has always sought best value when awarding new contracts, it also seeks to use local companies when possible.

Once the new contracts became operational, other health and safety issues arose, such as the safety of the lift at Westlands and the inadequacy of emergency lighting, which required urgent attention to both address and rectify these problems.

With the transfer of the new properties, numerous projects emerged that have needed swift attention. For example, the asbestos guttering at the Westlands Entertainment Venue became unstable and needed urgent replacement; and most of the internal and external security shutters required urgent works to allow them to be properly serviced and maintained.

Naturally, numerous day to day issues such as equipment breaking down and general repairs needing immediate attention have arisen during the year. A list of 'preferred suppliers' has been swiftly created to deal with these issues as they arise including plumbers, electricians, locksmiths, roofers, drainage, etc. Where possible, opportunities have been grasped to improve the efficiency of the buildings and in doing so, reduce their carbon footprint.

Devolution has resulted in an increase in staff and, in turn, the requirement for new workstations at various locations. The new Finance Team has been accommodated at the Town House in the first-floor rooms where desks and IT connection points have been installed. Rooms at both Ninesprings Café and Yeovil Recreation Centre have also been

cleared, re-floored, decorated and new electrical and IT points installed for the new operational staff that have joined the Town Council.

With the change in management of the buildings, new Legionella Risk Assessments had to be commissioned, and new action plans drawn up. Staff have been trained to action the weekly and monthly tasks such as temperature checks and the servicing of thermostatic mixing valves. More complex tasks such as water sampling have been outsourced.

The Town Council is now responsible for four sets of public toilets in the town: Peter Street, Petters Way, Ninesprings and Yeovil Recreation Centre. Managing public toilets brings a difficult set of challenges, and in particular anti-social behaviour. This has been the case at Peter Street Toilets where people have been locking themselves in the cubicles for the night. The closure of these toilets has recently been brought forward to 5.00pm to address this specific problem which is proving to be successful. The transfer of toilets required a new cleaning contract which was put out to tender. A local company was awarded the contract and they visit and clean each set of toilets three times a day, as well as being responsible for both unlocking and locking them morning and evening.

The management of numerous additional utility meters arose with the transfer of new buildings and a significant and challenging project has been undertaken to transfer them to the Town Council and to obtain the best prices. With the Town Council's Climate Change Action Plan in mind, most of the electricity meters are now with Ecotricity which supplies 100% green energy from a wind farm in Somerset. The gas and water supplies to the Westlands Entertainment Venue are not separate from the whole Westlands site. Therefore, sub-meters have been installed at the venue to allow accurate readings of the consumption of the Venue alone.

Facilities Management has focussed mainly this year on the transfer of the Somerset Council buildings and organising the contracts and resolving issues that have arose with those transfers. Once that process is complete, attention will need to be turned to more planned projects such as the refurbishment of buildings, the installation of solar panels and other green initiatives, and the development of vacant sites, all of which will need to be programmed over future years. Future reports will be brought to the Infrastructure (Property and Assets) Committee to consider this further.

The Town Council will be updating all signage around the sites so that it is represented as the provider of the services.

### **Defibrillators and Bleed Kits**

The Council is now the guardian of sixteen defibrillators in the parish of Yeovil:

1. Nationwide Yeovil Branch, Middle Street (available 24/7)

2. The Acorn Café, Church Street (available 24/7)
3. Ninesprings Café, Brunswick Street (Yeovil Country Park) (available 24/7)
4. St Andrew's Scout Group, Preston Grove (available 24/7)
5. St Peter's Community Centre, Westfield (available 24/7)
6. Dunelm, Quedam Shopping Centre (available 24/7)
7. Birchfield Community Centre, Birchfield (available 24/7)
8. The Quicksilver Mail, Hendford Hill (available 24/7)
9. Milford Hall, Milford Park (available 24/7)
10. Town House, Union Street (limited availability – office hours).
11. Holy Trinity Community Centre, Lysander Road (available 24/7)
12. Southville Elim Church, Southville (available 24/7)
13. Maltravers House, Petters Way (available 24/7)
14. Progress Gym, Lynx Trading Estate (available 24/7)
15. Yeovil Recreation Centre, Chilton Grove (available 24/7)
16. The Bell Inn, Preston Road (available 24/7)

The Town Council register the defibrillators with the Circuit: <https://www.thecircuit.uk> (which indicates when the defibrillator has been used or when it needs attention) and HeartSafe: <https://www.heartsafe.org.uk/aed-locations/> (which indicates where registered defibrillators are located).

The defibrillators have been accessed a total of eighty-seven times since September 2021.

The Committee agreed to purchase and install bleed kits next to all existing and future defibrillators.

## **Police**

Avon and Somerset Police were represented three times by the Neighbourhood team: Neighbourhood Inspector Rose Green and Neighbourhood Sergeant Josh Rutter. They explained the issues in Yeovil and the steps they were taking to mitigate these issues. They were working hard to ensure that there was police visibility within the Town Centre. A QR code had been distributed to businesses to report shop lifting and anti-social behaviours. All issues should be reported (if it is an emergency then use 999 and non-emergency 101 or online), as the data highlights the priorities and where to direct resources. The Neighbourhood team are committed to building relationships and enhance communication with Yeovil Town Council.

## **CCTV in Yeovil**

The CCTV system in Yeovil and other towns in Somerset was under threat with Somerset Council's financial emergency. This Committee agreed to fund the CCTV in Yeovil, in

conjunction with the other participating Town Councils in Somerset. After prolonged negotiations, a Service Level Agreement for a 3-year period (commencing on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024) was finally agreed in September 2024 with an annual contribution of £49,669 to the collective CCTV system.

### **Notice Boards**

The notice board at Town House has been replaced, which Leonardo have sponsored. The notice board was relocated as the previous location created safety issues both in terms of obstructing views on exit of the car park and concealing some anti-social activities.

### **Remembrance Sunday**

The Remembrance Sunday parade and service in 2024 was successful. The Town Council was responsible for applying for a Road Obstruction Order for a Special Event. Marshalls and stewards were contracted to assist in the event. Positive feedback was received from the public stating that the event felt safer. The Town Council worked with a local sound company to provide sound equipment and technical assistance.

***Cllr Rob Stickland, Chair of Buildings and Civic Matters Committee***

## 8 Finance & Policy Executive

**Chair:** Cllr Andy Soughton

**Key Officers:** Amanda Card, Chief Executive / Town Clerk

Jacky Pang, Deputy Responsible Finance Officer

The Committee met on six occasions during the year.

### Grants and Service Level Agreements

The Policy, Resources and Finance Committee considered four grant applications in accordance with our Small Grant Assistance to Local Organisation policy and made awards for £3,703 to 2 local organisations/individuals.

| Organisation             | Purpose of Grant Application                          | Amount awarded |
|--------------------------|---|----------------|
| Youth Adventure Trust    | To fund an Overnight Resilience Expedition            | £1,377.55      |
| Citizens Advice Somerset | A contribution towards the cost of the advice service | £2,325.00      |

The Committee agreed a Service Level Agreement with Yeovil Twinning Association for £1,500 for 3 years for transportation costs; and a Service Level Agreement with Yeovil Community Church for £25,500 for 3 years for the Yeovil4Families provision. The Service Level Agreement with The Octagon Theatre towards the provision of the annual Octagon Theatre School that caters for young people between the ages of 7 and 16 years old continues with the value of £1,000.

The Committee also agree to contribute £5,000 to Somerset Council's Arts and Engagements Outreach Service to support arts and culture in Somerset.

### Policies

The Finance and Policy Executive have agreed that unless a change was required due to legal requirements, recommended changes in practices or change in internal operations, that policies would not need to be reviewed every year. They agreed that those policies that were either new or had a major policy revision would be reviewed one year after its effective date, and thereafter no less that every five years.

The following policies were approved and adopted:

| <b>Policy</b>                       | <b>New</b> | <b>Reviewed</b> |
|-------------------------------------|------------|-----------------|
| Risk Strategy and Risk Assessment   |            | ✓               |
| Scheme of Delegation* <sup>1</sup>  |            | ✓               |
| Financial Regulations* <sup>2</sup> |            | ✓               |
| Whistleblowing Policy               | ✓          |                 |
| Procurement Card Policy             | ✓          |                 |
| Social Media Policy                 |            | ✓               |

\*<sup>1</sup> The Scheme of Delegation was given an overhaul to reflect the new Committee Structure

\*<sup>2</sup> The Financial Regulations were modified to reflect the structure of Senior Officers so that the Council business can be managed as efficiently and effectively as possible.

### **Statement of Accounts and Revenue Budget Outturn Report for 2023/24**

The Statement of Accounts and Revenue Budget Outturn Report for 2023/24 were approved. There was an underspend of £159,028 for 2023/24 (£66,903 for 2022/23). As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, the earmarked reserves (reserves set aside for specific purposes) totalled £520,959 (compared to £410,482 as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023) and the unallocated general fund balance was £897,657 (compared to £849,106 as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023).

### **Human Resources**

The Council employ 51 permanent employees and manage 115 casual employees on the casual register. This figure will increase during 2025/26 due to the devolvement of playparks and open spaces; and Yeovil in Bloom from Somerset Council.

The increase in employees has meant that there are more employees that require HR insight. This involves the regular recruitment of new staff, dealing with leavers, creating and managing HR files, monitoring sickness and leave as well as the more complicated issues.

### **Finance Team**

A dedicated Finance Team has been established, with the recruitment of the Deputy Responsible Finance Officer, two Finance Assistants and a Payroll Assistant. The number of transactions has substantially increased

It has been necessary to upgrade the Financial System to accommodate the increased number of employees.

A sizeable amount of work has gone into restructuring the accounting structure so that reporting can be provided for each Committee, in line with the recently agreed Scheme of Delegation.

## **Internal Audit**

The Internal Auditor has highlighted several issues where the controls were not operating effectively. This has come as no surprise to the Council and the Finance Team are actively addressing the issues so that the adverse impact on the financial controls is limited to the 2024/25 financial year.

## **IT and Phone System**

The Council has undertaken a very complex and technical project so that all sites can communicate with each other. This has involved installing new circuits.

The phone system now runs through the Teams application. There is a clever filter in place which instructs the caller to press one if they are calling about Housing, Waste, Council Tax, Planning, which will automatically direct the caller to Somerset Council. This has significantly reduced the number of calls coming to Town House. Calls can also be transferred across every site.

## **Devolution of Assets and Services**

The Team has undertaken a significant amount of work to transfer services from Somerset Council to Yeovil Town Council as a response to Somerset Council declaring a financial emergency.

There are three tranches of devolution.

Tranche 1: On 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024, Yeovil Town Council will be responsible for the following services: Yeovil Country Park and cafe; Yeovil Recreation Centre and café; Westlands Entertainment Venue; and the South Somerset Heritage Collection.

The Town Council appointed Porter Dodson to act on behalf of Yeovil Town Council and provide advice regarding the transfer of assets and the Transfer of Undertaking (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE).

Tranche 2: On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025, Yeovil in Bloom was transferred to Yeovil Town Council; and on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2025, Play Parks and Open Spaces will be transferred.

Tranche 3: Yeovil Town Council are working in partnership with Somerset Council on the Octagon Theatre project. This involves formulating a Business Case to the Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) for £10 million. The Town Council have agreed in principle to allocate £3.75 million to this project. The Town Council would have to borrow this money from the Public Works Loan Board. The electorate of the parish of Yeovil will be consulted as to whether they support this borrowing.

***Cllr Andy Soughton, Chair of Finance & Policy Executive***

## **9 Chief Executive/Town Clerk Reflection**

The last year has been an extremely challenging yet exciting time, which has been full of opportunity for Yeovil Town Council. There has been an exponential and unprecedented amount of change for existing employees, new employees, transferred employees and Councillors alike. The Council, as a whole has risen to the challenge and for the most part have been very successful. There has been perfect opportunity to learn from those things that have not gone as expected.

The amount of work that has been achieved to put the Council into a strong position to accommodate the transfer of services from Somerset Council has been astronomical. This has been testament to the commitment of all staff whether existing, new or transferred. Yeovil Town Council are very fortunate to have employees who are skilled, highly knowledgeable, qualified and dedicated to providing excellent outcomes for the people of Yeovil. The hard work continues as processes and procedures are refined and work will continue to ensure that all services are adequately resourced.

Yeovil Town Council is a learning organisation and will endeavour to develop employees for retention, succession planning and to ensure that the Council have the benefit of skills to work effectively and efficiently. The Chief Executive/Town Clerk supports development and providing opportunities to do so.

Yeovil Town Council strives to demonstrate best practice and to be exemplary in all that they do. The Chief Executive/Town Clerk will work with the Leadership team to work towards this objective.

***Amanda Card, Chief Executive/Town Clerk***