

Note to minutes of Council meeting 16 September 2025

**North Somerset Council
Council Meeting 16 September 2025
Public Participation (Agenda Item 2)**

Public Participation One

Jo Gower-Crane, resident.

Devolution and its potential effect on rural communities and food security.

The speaker shared concern about how land use policies would be decided at WECA level and the centralization of strategic decision-making powers, including the potential for insufficient local consultation and diminished local influence regardless of a meaningful consultation. The Council had not yet declared a food security emergency as requested by a resident in July 2024. The speaker felt that the Local Plan land use policies sacrificed growing food locally, making it challenging to influence those decisions regionally should they not be protected by the Local Plan.

The speaker raised that should the current government policies be fully implemented, 24% of farmland was at risk and food production could decrease by 39% in one generation. The speaker asked that the Council take policy action that matched the government's recognition that food security was a matter of national security. Additionally, she asked that food security was added to the environmental and climate change implications and considerations for decisions and reports.

**Response from Cllr Annemieke Waite,
Cabinet Member for Planning & Environment**

Issue date: Friday 24 October 2025

The decision taken at Council on 16 September was to start the process of seeking to become a member of WECA. The points made about land use policies are helpful and will be included as part of a wide range of discussion points with the Combined Authority, local residents and national government about what any North Somerset membership of WECA could look like and what benefits it should deliver. It is not yet clear what governance arrangements will exist around where and how decision making will take place and this will be actively debated over the coming months at Council and a range of partnership forums but there is no suggestion in any government proposals or precedents elsewhere that WECA would unilaterally determine land use policies or that policies at regional level would not also require significant local consultation.

National security risks, like food security, are managed through government policy rather than at local authority level. However, as set out in a reply shared with you following your question at the Health and Wellbeing Board, there are a range of ways that we work to improve outcomes connected to food and we will continue to focus on what benefits we can bring to our local communities.

Sue Bullock

PA to Leader of the Council & Cabinet Members