

Meeting of Somerset County Council held in the Council Chamber, Shire Hall, Taunton on  
Wednesday 29 November 2017 at 10.00am

**Agenda Item 5 - Public Question Time**

Details of the questions / statements and petitions referred to in Minute 29 and responses given at the meeting are given below.

**Public Questions / Statements / Public Petitions (under 5000 signatures)**

**1. Tax Avoidance**

From Andrew Lee

Recent events have only served to highlight the prominent role of all of the Big Four accountancy firms (including KPMG) in tax avoidance.  
As Somerset County Council now finds itself starved of funds from central government as a direct consequence of tax avoidance, can the Leader of the council explain why it is appropriate for The Heart of the South West LEP to have a former KPMG partner as its chief executive? I would like a written answer please.

*Response from Cllr David Fothergill, Leader of the Council*

*Thank you for this question. The employment of the LEP Chief Executive is matter for that organisation rather than SCC. We have shared your question with the LEP and asked that a response is given as appropriate to this.*

**2. Corporation Tax**

From Andrew Lee

Securing taxation is essential to the funding resources of central government, that ultimately impact on what it can afford to give to fund county councils, Therefore it is central to the interests of Somerset County Council.  
At the end of the last administration I asked why the County Council does not insist that as a condition of tendering for County Council contracts, a company should be able to demonstrate that it has paid corporation tax at the full ruling rate and without using tax avoidance schemes.  
At the time Leader John Osman said he would look into what could be done.  
Could the current leader advise what has been done?

*Response from Cllr David Fothergill, Leader of the Council*

*There is a limited amount we as a County Council can do in regard to this, although we do support the principle that organisations and individuals should pay their fair share of tax.*

*I can say however that in our supplier questionnaire for open tenders for our work we already require bidders to declare whether they have been in breach of obligations regarding tax and social security contributions. If they cannot confirm that these obligations have been discharged, we do have discretion to exclude.*

*If we took unilateral action to exclude specific companies beyond this – on the basis of say media reports about their tax status – we would lay ourselves open to legal challenge for not complying with procurement rules on open and fair competition.*

### **3. Train service from Taunton to Minehead**

From Nigel Bray, Secretary, Railfuture Severnside

I write as Secretary of Railfuture Severnside Branch, which covers Somerset, Northern Wiltshire, Greater Bristol and Gloucestershire. Railfuture is a not-for-profit Company campaigning for the maximum use of Britain's railways.

My question to Councillor John Woodman is as follows:

"When will Somerset County Council fund feasibility studies for the opening of new railway stations in the county? All existing stations in Somerset have experienced very substantial increases in usage over the past 20 years, which gives every reason to believe that additional stations at Chard Junction, Langport and Wellington would be well supported.

Most of the stations which have reopened, such as Templecombe, have exceeded expectations in terms of passenger numbers.

If the outcome of feasibility studies were positive, it should be possible for the Council to apply for funding from the DfT's New Stations Fund towards the cost of construction.

*Response from Cllr John Woodman, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport*

*Somerset County Council recognises that rail has great potential as part of the wider transport mix and we are working with the rail industry and neighbouring local authorities to improve Somerset rail services where possible. We have contributed funds towards the first stage of assessing passenger demand for a station at Wellington and have worked closely with community groups and Members of Parliament to lobby for stations to be reopened at Wellington and Langport. We also recognise that there is local support for the reopening of Chard Junction Station. To fully understand whether reopening any of these stations could be viable in terms of construction and in terms of passenger demand would require investment of hundreds of thousands of pounds. To reinstate the stations would cost several million pounds. The Government's New Stations Fund is a highly competitive fund which if successful still requires substantial local contributions towards construction costs. Some of our neighbouring authorities who do have well worked-up business cases for new stations serving large urban areas, have recently been unsuccessful in their bids for New Stations Fund. The Council continues to experience substantial reductions in its overall financial settlement from Government and is currently unable to commit the revenue funds necessary to undertake rail station feasibility studies given the wide range of services that we have a statutory duty to provide. We continue to dedicate officer time to working with the rail industry and communities to help them move proposals forward.*

### **4. Community Train Service from Taunton to Minehead**

From David Latimer, Minehead Rail Link Group

At the County Council Meeting on Wednesday 19 July, The Minehead Rail Link Group put a question concerning the County Council's attitude towards our proposal for a community

rail service between Taunton and Minehead. In reply Councillor Woodman stated that that Somerset County Council was always happy to support organisations seeking to improve public transport choices and that he would keep the situation under review and was happy to talk to us about it. We were encouraged by his words and were pleased that it seemed that Somerset County Council was beginning to move towards the more pro-active approach to rail development taken by our neighbouring authority in Devon. Unfortunately our written requests for a meeting between our group and the said councillor have yet to come to fruition and we would like to know if his offer of a meeting still applies.

Might I also ask if it might be helpful if the appropriate officers of Somerset County Council might visit their counterparts in the Devon authority, who have been so actively involved in planning and funding new stations as well as looking at promoting the reopening of routes in their county. This may be a valuable training exercise for Somerset officers as their Devon counterparts could give them professional experience-based tuition on the procedures involved in rail regeneration and investment, which they could bring back to Somerset and use to help our county's rail system catch up with Devon's.

*Response from Cllr John Woodman, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport*

*I can confirm that I am still very happy to meet to discuss the Minehead Rail Link Group's aspirations as I have indicated previously. Somerset's officers regularly meet their counterparts across the region and are already well versed in the requirements for new rail investment and do not require training in this respect.*

## **5. Insourcing services**

From Nigel Behan, Unite

- a) Does Somerset County Council agree with and support the contents and arguments contained in this recent letter to Councillors being circulated by the We Own It Campaign (see below) about the benefits of direct, democratic, accountable and transparent Public Services?

"Insourcing services will save us money - how do we do it?

I'm a big fan of local public services and I use them every day. I wanted to write to you today to thank you for the work you do in our community. But I wanted to ask what you think about running services in house?

Insourcing local services has had amazing effects around the country, and there is evidence that it leads to lower costs, better quality of services, more flexibility for councils, and is less risky than outsourcing!

Plus, public ownership is really popular, and means that services are much more accountable to the people who use them.

If you currently outsource a lot of our local services, and you're still not convinced, We Own It has put together some resources explaining the benefits of insourcing, and I would love for you to have a read and see for yourself.

5 reasons why your council should insource services

Local Public Ownership Awards

Privatisation Fails – the danger of outsourcing

Could you tell me what the council's position is regarding insourcing? Are you running many services in house already? Do you think it would be possible to bring more services in house here? And if so, what would the first steps look like?

If you support local public ownership, I'm with you every step of the way.”

The links in the document mention Southwest One and this Question is relevant because of the issues raised at Scrutiny Adults & Health) Committee about the “performance” of the recently outsourced LDPS to Dimensions UK Ltd (Discovery Contract).

b) Can these matters be incorporated into the newly emerging County Vision?

*Response from Cllr David Fothergill, Leader of the Council*

*I would like to start by pointing out that Somerset County Council is not wedded to either in-sourcing or out-sourcing – we are committed to what I would call “best-sourcing”.*

*We are a Commissioning authority and as such we source service provision from a range of internal and external suppliers. We are focussed on commissioning from providers who are best placed to deliver high quality and affordable services. We have some great examples of in-house provision (including services we have in-sourced). We also have numerous examples of great services that we commission from the private and not for profit sector.*

## **6. Learning Disability Provider Service**

From Nigel Behan, Unite

At the Scrutiny Committee (Policies, Adults & Health) on the 8th November (Update on the Learning Disability Service Contract – Agenda Item 4) there were over 20 questions/statements made in Public Question Time.

A presentation was provided on the day but after the deadline for Public Questions.

The Scrutiny Committee outcomes were:

“The Committee received a report and presentation updating members on the first 6 months since the transfer of Learning Disability Service to Discovery.

Following a lengthy discussion it was agreed that a monthly report showing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the contract should be brought to the next four scrutiny meetings.

The Committee also agreed:

- it was not satisfied with the report and information provided.
- to request that a survey with customers, families and staff of the service be conducted as soon as possible
- to establish a Task and Finish group to look at the contract performance in more detail
- to refer the contract matter to the Audit Committee for its consideration.”

Will the County Council also be provided with the above information and also (as well as Scrutiny) review the “performance” of the contract which should include:

- Why have some of the KPIs reporting been suspended?
- Why have the Care Quality Commission (CQC) not inspected the service since outsourcing (8th November 2017)?
- Why has Discovery been blaming current issues on the service before transfer even though the Original Business Case noted the In House Service was a good service?
- The views of Service Users, Parents, Families, Carers and Staff
- Revisiting the Options Appraisal, earlier Business Cases and Service Delivery Model prior to the creation of the Social Enterprise?
- Consideration of the complete set of the 12 Key Performance Indicators and the 24 Performance Indicators (see attachment) and analyse the completed monthly data?
- Continuing assessment of staff turnover, retention and recruitment?
- Whether projected “savings” can be realised?
- Whether the contract monitoring also includes assessing whether the risks and issues logs are sufficiently adequate?
- The ability (because of continuing contract failure) to insource the service with an In House Service Improvement and Innovation Plan?

When will the Audit Committee (or this County Council) consider the contractual matters referred to above?

*Response from Cllr David Huxtable, Cabinet member for Adult Social Care*

Thank you Nigel for your question which continues your dialogue with the council about this contract. It is really important that we do not forget the motive behind the changes that are happening within the learning disability service. We all want a transformed sustainable, locally focused, learning disability service and whilst we are going through a challenging period, the changes are absolutely necessary.

As you'll be aware Adults and Health scrutiny have establish a clearly defined task and finish group to focus on some of the issues raised at scrutiny in November. A full suite of key performance indicators and broader performance indicators has been shared with scrutiny and this will continue to be the case at each scrutiny meeting. The performance of the contract is measured against a clearly set of defined metrics ensuring the delivery of a well-run and sustainable service for the future.

## **7. Library Service Redesign**

From Nigel Behan, Unite

A recent decision made by the Cabinet member on 23 November – where the Decision status – Recommendation Approved (subject to call in by 30 November 2017) endorsed the strategy outlined in the attached decision.

We support the assessment that the best option is retaining an in-house model for the future of the Library Service in Somerset.

It is stated in the report:

“The Library Service is highly integrated with a wide range of SCC departments and external partners, and this is an area of rapid, ongoing development. The growth in joint

work between the Library Service and other SCC services is likely to be more productive and un-constrained whilst the service remains in-house.”

“A full consultation will be undertaken on all proposals for specific libraries and workforce changes, and feedback from staff and public consultation will be considered fully before final decisions are made.”

Will all those adversely affected, as noted in the Equalities Impact Assessment, be fully consulted prior to any proposed changes to the existing service (library locations, access, transport etc..)?

*Response from Cllr David Hall, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Resources*

*Thank you Nigel: Yes, I can confirm those who are identified as being adversely affected, as noted in the Equalities Impact Assessment will be fully consulted prior to any changes being made, through the public consultation process which will take place early in the New Year.*

## **8. Family Support Services**

From Nigel Behan, Unite

There is a live consultation on the **Future of Family Support Services and Children’s Centres in Somerset** – (which has made reference to Libraries as potential locations for alternative Children’s Centre services?) - closing date 30 November 2017.

We recently asked at the Scrutiny (Children and Families) Committee:

In the consultation document it is stated that:

“Our proposal is to move from our current 24 Sure Start Children’s Centres to a network of eight Family Centres, with more support in community venues, people’s homes and online.”

Q1 Is this another proposal to limit and ration services rather than meet identified needs? What data sets, statistics and other information has been analysed to determine “places where it is most needed”?

Q2 a) How will access to services be considered (e.g. rurality and public transport)?  
b) “By concentrating support in the places where it is most needed” how will it be possible to make it available in more places?

Q3 Has current provision (and planned) been properly baselined (with appropriate resources included) and will the options appraisal consider existing and future needs and how will quality and cost be taken into account?

We believe these concerns are still relevant. How will Elected Members be able to influence any proposals to close/downgrade/de-designate Children’s Centres and consult the community?

In the (rushed through) Key Decision on Health Visitors skills mix it is stated:

“Evidence for Skill Mixing The saving is proposed to be achieved through the skill mixing of the Health Visiting workforce. The evidence for the proposal is discussed below. Professor Sarah Cowley’s submission to Hounslow scrutiny enquiry<sup>1</sup> on health visiting stated that at least 70% of the workforce should be qualified Health Visitors with the remainder being a mixed skill set. In a report commissioned by the Department of Health ‘Why Health Visiting’<sup>2</sup> looking at a review of the literature around health visitor interventions, they noted the challenge of providing an adequate and cost-effective combination of skills and abilities within the workforce. The review goes on to explore the benefits and challenges of skills mix.”

- a) What other reports and evidence has been assessed and considered other than a report for a London Borough in 2010 and a literature review?
- b) Was the premise really only about saving money – what staff retention, recruitment and turnover rates have been analysed?
- c) Are the risk registers and issues log updated regularly and available for inspection (and include costs, benefits and risks/“challenges” of “skills mix”)?
- d) Why was it considered as urgent and the General Exception Procedure used (and the recommendation was approval subject to call in by 28 November)

*Response from Cllr Frances Nicholson, Cabinet Member for Children and Families and Cllr Christine Lawrence, Cabinet member for Health and Wellbeing*

*Q1. To help us draft the Family Support Service proposal, we analysed a number of data sources including populations of children now and into the future, deprivation, and public health outcome indicators. This data is publicly available on our website.*

*Q2. Staff bases are proposed to be in places of highest need, however, teams will continue to hold clinics, participatory programmes and drop in sessions wherever is the best place in any given community, it may be in a village hall or other community building, it may be in a children’s centre building whether designated Sure Start or not, it may be on a school site and so on. Staff will also undertake individual work with families in their own.*

*A strength of the consultation is that parents and carers have been telling us what works for them and how they prefer to access service, we plan to use this feedback to help design the new service model.*

*Q3. There is detailed performance data available for these services, this has informed the baselining. We aim to consider existing and future needs, an example of this is looking at future population projections as part of the additional information – see above.*

*Much of the activity within the scope of these services is regulated and inspected and so this helps inform judgements regarding quality.*

*I can confirm that I am fully involved in the process to improve the outcomes for the children of Somerset through this consideration on family support services. All members have been invited to discuss proposals in their areas with senior children and public health staff. All members have been invited to make comments and provide feedback, at those meetings, and also take part in the public consultation that has been going on for some weeks, by attending public meetings, online or on paper. The consultation documents have been available on line and in children’s centres. Any new model of services going forward will therefore be subject to a review and analysis of all responses from the public and from members. We will also be mindful of and compliant with any statutory process*

*and best practices that apply to the implementation of our future plans, whatever they may be.*

*Q3 (a) The process of skill mixing health professionals is not unique to the Health Visiting service. We have drawn on several reports, including the NHS Five Year Forward View, looking at the future and sustainability of health services and the need for new models of care. Many health services face the challenge of sustainability and recruitment and are transforming to ensure qualified professionals are 'working at the top of their licence'. In midwifery for example, the assistant practitioner role is being developed to support particular midwifery roles, in General Practice, emergency care practitioners and paramedics are being used to support GPs with their urgent care workload, and nurse practitioners are being used to support management of long term conditions. Many of our health visitors have worked in skill mix teams previously and are used to working in multidisciplinary teams. We have drawn on the learning from other areas that have different models in place.*

*Q3 (b) Part of this decision is relating to the need to make the necessary savings due to the cut in the national public health grant. The proposals are however about ensuring we have the right workforce in the future to improve the health and wellbeing of our children.*

*We have involved Somerset Partnership in discussing the proposals for a skill mixed workforce, as such, staff retention, recruitment and turnover rates have been considered as part of the consideration. In developing a greater skill mix within the workforce we are also seeking to develop more opportunities for people entering into, and wishing to develop their career in children services.*

*Q3 (c) Yes, these are maintained by the current provider and are reviewed regularly at the contract management meetings.*

*Q3 (d) This decision was considered under the General Exception Procedure as it was considered in the best interests of the Council to do so. Following a long period of negotiation with the provider, it was important to sign off the contractual agreement in a timely manner to give the provider clarity on the contract for next year.*

## **9. Chairman's Schedule**

From Campbell Main

Please could the Chairman's Schedule, prepared for full Council, be made available online, by close of play, on the day prior to the meeting to allow time for papers to be properly read and considered before debate? I am happy to amend the question to ask if Annex A, public questions to Council, could be made available online by 5pm on the day before the council meeting.

*Response from Cllr William Wallace, Chairman of the Council*

*Thank you Mr Main for your amended question. As you say there was a general acceptance at the meeting and including from the relevant officers that your revised request could be accommodated. I will now discuss with the officers the most practical way forward to implement this suggestion and in time for the next meeting of the Council in February.*



## 10. Learning Disability Service

a) From Ewa Marcinkowska

Firstly a thank you to the scrutiny committee for recognising there are many concerns in the LD service.

At the debate in the full council meeting back in July, when we handled the petition of the 5500 Somerset citizens, the Councillors were proposing to establish working group to look into the transfer LD services before planned Scrutiny in November – can you confirm if this has happened ?

Agency costs have risen significantly - How is the council confident that this contract provides Budgetary Vale for Somerset constituents?

We are requesting that a survey of customers and staff be carried out to enable you to have a holistic view of the current situation and engagement with your constituency.

Transformation consists of “changes to terms and conditions, restructure changes, and day services transformation”. The first two of these have been halted after UNISON’s consultative ballot showed staff overwhelmingly rejected them. Would you say this shows evidence of success of contract from you the elected?

Given Discovery have failed to report on 8 of their 12 KPIs and yet still judge their management of the LDS to be a success, how few KPIs do you think they could have reported on and still received a clean bill of health?

‘Discovery’ has put a plan in place to improve performance against this KPI over the coming months – In the spirit of partnership collaborative working are you willing to share these as we would like to help to support our high level of membership.

*Response from Cllr David Huxtable, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care*

*Ewa, thank you for your question. The reason and background to the necessary changes with our learning disability services have been well set out and no change was not an option if we were to ensure both the sustainability and the delivery of the high quality services that we all aspire to.*

*The recent scrutiny meeting provided a good opportunity for people to express their views and to hear from both the council and discovery on the plans and operation of the contract. The scrutiny committee has established a task and finish group which will allow it to have a more balanced picture of the service and consider within its remit some of the issues raised in your question. A broader suite of information including KPIs will be provided on an ongoing basis to scrutiny.*

b) Sean Cox

Somerset County Councils Learning Disability Service costs prior to transfer were only slightly above the national average. Does the Committee not feel that meaningful consultation and sensible dialogue involving customers, families and staff could have provided an easier and more effective route to high quality, financially sustainable services? Instead of this we appear to have suffered an attempt by a few individuals in high places to bludgeon in a cost cutting exercise with no thought whatsoever about the harm and upset this would cause to vulnerable people in Somerset, their families, carers and staff. The projected costs for this appear to be nearly seven million pounds more than SCC for the first year, how can this be justifiable or in the interests of the tax paying public?

*Response from Cllr David Huxtable, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care*

*Paul thank you for your question on behalf of Sean. The points made in your question have been raised many times and indeed responded to in detail. The reasons, rationale and background have been well set out and no change was not and is not an option if we are to ensure both the financial sustainability and the delivery of the high quality services that we all aspire to. The work to develop the business case for change and select a provider involved stakeholders and are not a cost cutting bludgeoning exercise as you describe. I do accept that during this period of acute changes that anxiety levels are increased and it is all our interests to implementation of the transformation which is so necessary. I do hope you can work with both SCC and Discovery to make the changes that people deserve.*

c) Cheryl Freeman

My stepson, Jason, lives at The Brambles residential home in Taunton. He has severe learning difficulties and is a wheelchair user. Jason attends the gym twice a week, basketball on a Monday and swimming on a Friday. The gym is essential for his physical wellbeing and upper body strength. He relies on staff to take him.

Some years ago the then Chairman of Council, John Osman assured us the exercise was not one of cost cutting but to see how best the service could be run for the next 20 years. Christine Lawrence backed John on these assurances.

Along with all families, we were invited to a series of meetings to explore the 'options'. We had been told that if the service was run as a social enterprise, this could attract funding the council could not.

Around the time of transition, we went to a meeting at the Roller Coaster, Bridgwater.

Many families were in tears due to their fears for the future of the service their loved ones rely on. Severe cuts to staff salaries was a massive concern.

We were invited to another meeting with Luke Joy-Smith to discuss the way forward. This was poorly attended but those there spoke very highly of the staff who looked after their loved ones.

A few weeks ago we noticed Jason had a large gash on his hand where he had bitten himself. The manager of his home spoke to us about her serious concern for Jason. He had begun head banging the walls and rocking his wheelchair from side to side. We have never known him do this before.

Since Dimensions took over, most of the staff at the Brambles have left. One Saturday there were only 2 members of staff when there should have been 4.

Alan and I met with Luke Joy-Smith to express our concerns for Jason. During this meeting Luke apologised for the changes he had made to the service which were affecting Jason. He offered us no hope for the future. He told us if he hadn't taken over the service it would be much worse.

In talking to staff we know they feel they cannot provide the care they wish to and they are not listened to.

We have grave concerns for our step-son's well-being and the future of the learning disability service.

Dimensions have destroyed this service.

*Response from Cllr David Huxtable, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care*

*Thank you for your question, which we have liaised with Discovery in preparing a joint response to.*

*We welcome all the points raised and understand the concerns relating to current resource levels and impact on the community activities that can be provided to customers such as you and your stepson, which Discovery is working hard to address.*

*Change is never easy. However, to sustain and enhance our services going forward we have to approach care in a different way and we wish to reassure you that Discovery has an excellent track record, through their parent organisation, Dimensions, for enhancing the care experience through their personalised approach. However, where change is called for, it is important to do it right and that takes time.*

*Thank you for your continued support as we transform and support the necessary changes to these services.*

d) Paul Kitto

Thank you to Scrutiny for supporting the need to evidence our people are being supported correctly.

At Council meeting on the 19th July 2017 Councillor Huxtable recognised that Discovery had an ambitious transformation plan – is he satisfied that this is being met and all key performance indicators are being met.

Also in councillor Huxtable's reply the service historically had high satisfaction rates and low level of complaints – after the recent scrutiny meeting where carers and family voiced their concerns can the councillor assure this is still the case – as raised at scrutiny a feedback form for all would be beneficial.

New business has been temporarily suspended because of the problems Discovery has reported, but the report says “this does not reflect on SCC's view of Discovery's general performance”. Do you think this is a coherent position for SCC to take? - As Discovery stated in a meeting that the reason they are not accepting new business at this moment is that they can't keep people safe – but you have a duty of care to keep people safe?

When are you the elected going to make sure that what was pledged and promised will be delivered?

In the report to scrutiny - It's unfair to spotlight focus on any single area as the causes stretch beyond LDPS and now Discovery, e.g. years of poor support, poor local management, poor leadership, poor commissioning and poor monitoring (internally and externally). It has led Discovery to believe that there are notable pockets of low levels of ambition across Discovery- Then in addition in Stephen Chandlers report to scrutiny a lot of the problems Discovery are finding our historic – which contradicts are CQC reports in general – and remember we were under his guidance so can these be backed up with factual based evidence – as we can provide many success stories.

When the committees our formed can elected staff rep would be beneficial as we are still hoping to reach an achievable outcome to benefit the most vulnerable of Somerset.

On the 10th Feb 2017 councillor William Wallace stated that no front line staff would be affected – I look forward to the explanation of why 260 staff have left and as he assured people continuity of care is important – and as for the statement that he used on many an occasion the service without change will wither on the vine – unless the elected step in and monitor there may not be a vine left to wither.

*Response from Cllr David Huxtable, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care*

*Thank you Paul for your question. I know a number of these points have been raised in previous public meetings most recently at the Adults and Health Scrutiny. This council has always been clear that it was necessary in ensuring both the sustainability and delivery of a modern offer to people with a learning disability that significant change was necessary. The award of the contract to discovery set about the practical journey that is necessary including those difficult areas such as changes to terms and conditions and the transformation of both residential and day services. And there is absolutely no benefit to criticising either past or present staff and management but equally so it is unfair not to*

*recognise shortfalls whether those be in the services whilst within the council or since transfer. There is a genuine desire to ensure the future viability of these services but this can only be achieved if we all work together to deliver the transformation that is necessary. As previously mentioned, the Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee have established a clearly defined task and finish group with the express aim of giving a more balanced view of the delivery of Discovery, with a wider suite of information provided about the performance.*

## **11. Transport provisions**

From Melissa Whittaker

I am here as a representative of the group Everybody "Get On Board". We are members of the community who have concern linked to the transport provisions presently available to our respective communities.

We are concerned that members of our community are being left isolated and unable to get access to relevant services and support due to the provisions as they stand, and are excluded from social events due to them simply not being accessible.

With recent cuts in adult social care funding, we are concerned for vulnerable adult's ability to access relevant services alongside the adverse impact the lack of bus services has on unpaid carers abilities to provide the care required.

The ONS suggests that unpaid carers save the government approximately 60 billion pounds a year, thereby assisting County's with a reduced adult social care bill. These unpaid carers no longer qualify for concessionary bus passes. They face barriers financially, often have minimal support and barriers to provide care due to the lack of bus services particularly on evenings, weekends and during holiday periods. We also note that some bus services offer a reduced timetable during non-term times. These barriers to access are discriminatory, in that they create barriers to a significant proportion of the community who cannot do anything about it.

The Office for National Statistics Summary for Somerset (also on SomersetIntelligence, the Council's webportal) shows that some 10% of the population of Somerset are within the highest 20% of national deprivation indices for affordable housing and barriers to accessing services, including access to transport.

With proposals being made to remove Children's Centres an expectation that young parents will be able to travel to alternative venues, it creates similar challenges and again impact upon their abilities to gain access to relevant support and may then negatively impact upon the health and wellbeing of family units.

We live in an age of an ageing population, and there will come a time when retirees can no longer drive and, while still living in rural communities, will require access to transport – these numbers will grow and the number of transport users will grow.

We have many manufacturers, retailers and care providers all of whom operate on all days of the week and beyond the traditional 5 o'clock finish due to our demands of our modern society.

Businesses benefit from having access to a wider range of applicants, therefore access to a wider skill base. With a more comprehensive and integrated transportation network in place, it would not only make our County a more attractive place for businesses to enter, but would equally enable people to be able to gain access to work opportunities, training opportunities provided by the employer and "upskilling" and fulfilling their aspirations. It would reduce state dependency on benefits in some cases and therefore actively combat in reducing the cost of welfare, lifting people out of debt and poverty and increase spending in the local economy due to higher incomes being created.

With the central funding due to end, and business rates being a source of income to the County of which it will be able to retain all of, to enable businesses to remain viable in a

turbulent economic climate due to national and global factors, we believe that supporting businesses to remain viable by having access to a range of applicants, will only result in better financial outcomes and reduce the risk of closure. It would also give them access to a wider range of customers to spend within our local economy and would assist with tourism.

We believe that this would benefit the county, businesses, and the wider community and strongly believe that transport underpins community cohesion, reduces social isolation and exclusion of the elderly, the young (especially during holiday times in rural villages) and those members of the community who do not have access to their own transport.

Somerset County Council propose to establish the Total Transport Project, which offers better information obtained through their web portal. Aside from the fact that the most vulnerable in our community, who rely most heavily on public transport, do not have the skills for, nor access to information technology, better information does not help an isolated elderly, disabled resident of a small village, who has lived there all her life, even if she does have access to the portal, when the transport services she requires do not exist. Somerset experiences significant deprivation in the areas of housing and access to services (ONS- Somerset Summary Deprivation Indices); it is also experiencing the decline of village life.

Rejuvenating the rural community should be part of a long term integrated strategy, which includes affordable housing, local business and amenities, as well as health and social care and education.

For villages and rural communities generally, commercial services are not viable.

We believe that access to transport is a community entitlement, along with health, education, waste disposal and policing, all of which are paid out of national or local taxation. To this end, can you confirm if the council will;

1. Undertake a review and evaluation, based on quantitative and qualitative research of the transport needs of Somerset's urban and rural communities to implement an innovative integrated transport system to meet identified community needs, which operates alongside, but does not necessarily replace, private systems, which can operate within open commercial environments.

2. From the outcomes of the review to plan and develop imaginative and innovative solutions to a 21st century problem, to meet the needs of the diverse rural and urban communities

3. To undertake a financial review to support a socially and environmentally sustainable transport system, which is financially sound, supported by a hypothecated County precept (subsidised by National Government, where appropriate) with the specifics to be decided by review and evaluation of existing services.

Can I have a full written response to the above?

Thank you for your time.

*Response from Cllr John Woodman, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport*

*Thank you for your questions and the associated time and effort that has obviously gone into researching the impacts that may arise from changes to provision in rural services.*

*I can confirm that the Council reviews transport needs in the area, particularly when considering changes to services. We use this to work imaginatively with our bus operators and our communities to ensure that needs are met as far as is possible within our available resources. We take every opportunity to discuss innovative funding models with Government.*

*I understand that officers from our transport team have arranged to meet you to discuss these matters further.*

## **12. Taunton Park and Ride**

From John Hassall, Chairman Bus Users Group, Severnside Branch

We are often exhorted to talk up Taunton but how can we when transport facilities such as the Park and Ride are being cut on a Saturday from 2018 ?

Last weekend I went to Bath and passed Cambridge on my way to Bury St Edmunds. Both Bath & Cambridge have P & R's operating 7 days a week.

There are people who work in Taunton on both Saturdays and Sundays in Banks and retail in particular so how are they meant to get to work? Drive into Taunton and increase both Congestion and Pollution which I understood the County Council was trying to reduce.

I would love to talk up Taunton but how can I?

*Response from Cllr John Woodman, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport*

*The pattern of use for the Taunton Park & Ride is significantly commuter based with daytime and weekend use relatively low by comparison. On Saturdays, use of the service is 65% lower than on weekdays. Parking is more readily available in the town centre and car parking charges for shorter shopping visits are comparable with Park & Ride fares. The difference in charges is a limited incentive for those travelling into Taunton on a Saturday.*

*Whilst we recognise that the removal of the Saturday service will have an impact, the overall numbers using the service on Saturdays is low.*

## **13. Children's Centres**

From Katherine See

I wish to raise my concerns, again, over the council's proposals regarding the future of Somerset's Children's Centres. I have raised concerns at the Scrutiny Committee meetings and by letter but do not feel my questions have been satisfactorily or truthfully answered.

The public consultation is both leading and inadequate. I am aware that some councillors and many members of the public have raised this, yet nothing has been done to address this.

The public are being led to believe that there will be 8 actual Children's Centres remaining as a result of the proposal, yet the term "Family Hub" does not appear to mean Children's Centre in the terms that the public understand this. The new hubs will merely offer a sign posting service and will not actually host any groups or activities for families on site. The public are being misled.

The Council has held a procurement event and continues to invite tenders from private providers with a view to exploring how services may be most cheaply provided in the future. This information is not being openly shared with the public in order that they can make informed responses to the consultation.

The Council maintains that there will be no drop in the level of services as a result of their proposals yet has failed on three occasions to answer my question as to how the situation at Dulverton can be explained. Dulverton Children's Centre, once a hive of activity and family support, now only hosts a once weekly appointment only health visitor clinic. There are no SCC Early Years services for the whole of Exmoor.

*Response from Cllr Frances Nicholson, Cabinet Member for Children and Families*

*I note and thank Katherine for her interest and continuing input to this consultation process. As she will appreciate, an extensive process such as this will attract a wide array of opinions and views and we commit to considering every representation made during this consultation period. Our intention remains to provide a network of services that takes support to families where and when they need it. It is therefore right that we challenge existing delivery models that can be seen as being too focussed on physical infrastructure such as our expansive network of buildings. We do recognise the value that our communities place on these places and it is my challenge and that of the teams that support me to find the best possible blend of provision, be it from a fixed point such as a Childrens Centre or out in our communities and ensure that we support great outcomes for the children of Somerset. Katherine will know that the specific points that she raises in relation to Exmoor have already been rebutted on other occasions and in correspondence directly with her. So that all members should be aware of the facts, I will be providing this detail again in a written answer.*

#### **14. Hinkley B station**

From Theo Simon

In the event of a serious off-site emergency at Hinkley B nuclear power station exposing people in Somerset to airborne radiation beyond the 3 km Emergency Planning Zone, how would Potassium Iodate tablets be distributed to all children in the affected areas in the timescale necessary?

*Response from Cllr Anna Groskop, Cabinet Member for Corporate & Community Services*

*Current off-site emergency planning arrangements at Hinkley Point B (under the Radiation [Emergency Preparedness and Public Information] Regulations 2001 [REPPPIR]) provide for detailed emergency planning arrangements from the site fence out to a 3.5km radius. This is the detailed emergency planning zone [DEPZ] as confirmed by the HSE's Office of Nuclear Regulation.*

*Within the DEPZ all households & premises are in receipt of a calendar (which gives emergency response information) and a supply of stable iodine tablets (with instructions for use).*

*Beyond the DEPZ the Hinkley Point B off-site emergency plan provides outline planning arrangements out to 15km. This extendibility planning area is broken down into three areas:*

- From 3.5 to 5km;*
- From 5 to 10km; and*
- From 10 to 15km.*

*In the very unlikely event of a nuclear emergency the off-site plan would be triggered by the site operator, with the multi-agency Strategic Co-ordinating Group (led by the Police) overseeing & co-ordinating the response.*

*Detailed emergency planning arrangements are based around 'the worst credible event'. Beyond 3.5km outline planning is in place to respond to an incident which could have the potential to go beyond the worst credible event.*

*Such an incident would trigger the outline planning arrangements within the plan which, amongst other things, could include the requirement to distribute stable iodine tablets to downwind areas beyond the 3.5km zone. Such a decision would be taken dynamically by the strategic group at the time:*

- Downwind from 3.5km out to 5km – bulk storage reserve stocks are held locally and would be made available to householders within the area; and*
- Downwind from 5km out to 15km – such an event would require immediate access to the national stockpile of stable iodine.*