

Public and Member Questions and Answers

From	Topic	Question/statement	Response
Nigel Behan	Outsourcing Oversight / Revenue Budget	<p>Q1 Relates to <u>Outsourcing Oversight? The case for reforming access to information law Report of the Information Commissioner to Parliament, 2019</u> (Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 139(3) of the Data Protection Act 2018)</p> <p>Here is the link to the report: https://ico.org.uk/media/about-the-ico/documents/2614204/outsourcing-oversight-ico-report-to-parliament.pdf</p> <p>Elizabeth Denham (The Commissioner) stated in her message that:</p> <p>“Information is an asset. Information is knowledge. Information is power. That’s why having access to it goes to the heart of a healthy, functioning democracy.”</p> <p>She further stated that (referring to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR)):</p> <p>“These laws equip citizens, the media, advocacy groups and others with information through which they can scrutinize the myriad of decisions and actions taken by public authorities at all levels.</p> <p>Services that are both accountable and transparent are better public services. The principles of access to information laws promote better decision-making, which in turn improves services. Strong laws are an essential part of the bigger picture for effective open government that is democratically accountable to the people it serves.”</p> <p>And then went onto comment that:</p> <p>“When I was appointed Commissioner in 2016, I raised the prospect of extending FOIA to contractors delivering public services.² Following the collapse of Carillion last year, I submitted evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) and was clear that FOIA should be extended.³ After the Grenfell Tower tragedy in 2017, I also highlighted my concerns about access to information about fire safety and the fact that housing associations are not always covered by information access law.⁴ These events have sharpened my resolve to improve transparency and accountability.</p>	Response from Cllr Mandy Chilcott

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	<p>I want the evidence-based case made in this report to promote an urgent and constructive dialogue that will result in the strengthening of our access to information laws. This reflects one of the key priorities of our draft information rights strategy ‘Openness by Design’.5” (The references can be found in the report).</p> <p>Somerset County Council has outsourced some high profile services e.g. the In House Learning Disability Provider Service in 2017 to the Social Enterprise known as Discovery (part of Dimensions UK Ltd https://www.dimensions-uk.org/about/discovery/).</p> <p>Does this Council believe “Access to information legislation is essential to democratic accountability and helps to create what we all want to see – better public services,” and (will it) ask Somerset MP’s to support (and campaign for) these proposals in Parliament?</p> <p>And will this Council promote the FOIA (within the Local Government Association for instance) to apply to organisations that have public service contracts (e.g. Discovery/Dimensions UK Ltd contract with SCC)?</p> <p><u>Q2 Relates to Agenda Item 6 Paper C Revenue Budget - Medium Term Financial Plan 2019-22 (of the 20 February 2019 County Council Papers)</u></p> <p>http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s9851/Paper%20C.pdf</p> <p>and</p> <p><u>Agenda Item 6 Revenue Budget Monitoring Update – Quarter 3 2018/19 (of the 11 February 2019 Cabinet Papers)</u></p> <p>http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s9712/Revenue%20Budget%20Monitoring%20Report.pdf</p> <p>It is noted that there is now an approximate underspend of £1m compared to the forecast overspend of £20m+ last summer. It is also noted that the Children’s Services budget was reset (increased by approximately £20m) during the financial year 2018/19. (The Adult Services base budget is forecast to reduce.)</p> <p>The forecast underspend was based on a number of one-off adjustments (e.g. capital flexibilities for transformation etc. and savings on the revenue set</p>	
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		<p>aside for debt payments) plus one offs for highways and winter pressures etc from the Governments Autumn finance position.</p> <p>SCC will be part of the Business Rates pilot as well.</p> <p>The general reserves are forecast to improve as are the earmarked (including negative) reserves for 2019/20. (With the Discovery Equalisation negative reserve forecast to disappear in the next financial year.)</p> <p>The budget requirement (about £328 for 2019/20) appears to be approximately £10m higher than last year (about £318m) whilst there is still a shortfall to address with a Council Tax Increase of 3.99% (SCC's part that is).</p> <p>What would SCC need to do next year in the financial modelling once the one off adjustments, debt repayment adjustments, capital flexibilities, Council Tax collection surpluses are discounted and is there any expectation of further overspends in Children's Services (did SCC contribute to the recent National Audit Office report on Children's Services)?</p>	
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Answer:

Thanks Nigel for the question. Somerset County Council has a strong record of fulfilling its statutory duties in regard to data sharing, data protection and data access. You will note an item on the agenda about a new statutory appointment in this area. We are happy to comply with all government regulation in terms of data access and will of course continue to do so should the government change its approach to public service contracts. As an example, I would hope you may have noted this transparency over the past year or so, in how little information is contained in confidential papers within our reports.

In relation to your questions on the Council's finance and budget, I'm pleased that you have picked up on the very positive improvements in our overall financial sustainability – and in particular that you have noted the very significant improvement in our general fund level. That, combined with the increased reserves position, gives assurance that this Council will have improved its resilience and be able to weather any surprises that the end of 2019 may present. Furthermore, we will continue to work over the coming months to refine our estimates. This council, as do all councils, continuously models and reviews its finances throughout the year. Numerous monitoring reports will be presented to various committees of this council and I am sure you will agree with me that this years reporting of the financial position has been more in depth, transparent and frequent than this council has probably ever seen. This means Members and the public will continue to be kept informed about the financial position throughout 2019/20, whilst work continues to model and refine the projections for future years.

As to the specifics of your question about financial modelling, I would point out the report contains a lot of information about the financial years 2020/21 and 2021/22 already. While we do not have sound information about the funding arrangements that the Government is planning for the years

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after 2019/20 – nobody does – we have taken account of the all the one-off funding and savings that you highlight. Even with that in mind the report highlights that there are outline plans to reduce the estimated gap to about £5m. That, combined with the increased resilience through reserves, gives assurance that the Council can weather any surprises that the end of 2019 may present. Furthermore, we will be undertaking more work over the coming months to refine our estimates. This council, as do all councils, continuously models finances throughout the year bringing monitoring reports through our governance processes on a fixed routine. Members and the public will be kept informed about the position in 2018/19 and the prospects for future years, as they have been to date.

Kevin Greenwood	S151 Remuneration	How can the council justify paying the new S151 approximately £211,000 p/a?	Response from Cllr Mandy Chilcott – Cabinet Member for Resources
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Answer:

The rate being paid for the Director of Finance & section 151 Officer is £900 per day. This price has been influenced by the market for these skills, which are in short supply, and we have tested this with recruitment exercises over the past 12-months. We had similar questions asked when the current interim 151 officer was appointed; I believe that the current financial position of Somerset County Council demonstrates that this has been a successful engagement. We have worked with the proposed new s151 officer now for a number of months and are confident that this will be a similarly successful appointment. I would remind Kevin that the day rate does NOT include holidays, sickness or pension payments.

Elvira Elliot	Get Set	<p>Since the recent cabinet meeting we have been struggling to make sense of what we are being told. The council bandies about statistics about closing children’s centres, use the line “it’s about people not buildings” and then tells us they are not in fact closing. They tell us initially that difficult decisions have had to be made for financial reasons, then 2 weeks ago they tell us that no saving is being made in this area and they are in fact improving the system. GETSET is to continue another year during which time the staff will train volunteers to do their jobs for free, but the staff are all leaving and there is no plan to recruit. What then, becomes of the children’s centres? I have found out that should the council close them they could become liable for having to pay back the original sure start grant from the DofE. In Norfolk where similar cuts are on the table a figure of 16 million was mooted. “Local authorities that “dispose of or change the use of buildings or assets funded wholly or partly through sure start capital grants” risk being told to pay the money back.”</p> <p>So, the centres stay open in name only, but the staff go. Already, though, in Yeovil the centre has been taken over by a private nursery, Shepton, by a school</p>	Response from Cllr Frances Nicholson
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		<p>and so on. Technically they are still being used for early years settings but they are now not an open community resource for all families. These must be the “partners” so euphemistically referred to in CAF 14B and these centres are now not providing a universal service. Parents will get their mandated 5 visits from an overstretched health visitor, then nothing until nursery funding kicks in unless they can afford to pay privately. I can tell you that this age from 0-2 is a time of intense financial difficulty for many families, and I would say the time when you need the most community support. I would like to suggest that the council tells these partners that the price of taking on one of these centres must be the provision of at least 2 affordable, universal stay and play groups per week and supports them to provide this. At least then the universal groups could be run by trained staff.</p> <p>Parents and staff are very worried that if universal groups are run by volunteer parents that cliques could form leading to bullying, gossip and social exclusion. There needs to be some level of professional oversight.</p> <p>It seems that there is currently poor oversight nationally about what constitutes a children’s centre. If ours are to become children’s centres in name only. I will be raising this issue with MPs and the DofE.</p> <p>Regarding community and voluntary organisations. Time and again the only example the council has given is home start in west Somerset. They have said there is no level 2 demand there. As Minehead was recently shown to be the borough with the lowest social mobility in the entire UK. Could it be that most families in need in such a troubled area have higher needs due to the compounding factors of deprivation.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I would like to know what is the level 3 demand in West Somerset like compared to the rest of Somerset?2. West Somerset is a small area with the vast majority of its population concentrated in Minehead and Watchet. I ask the council, have they considered the logistical implications and the travel they will be expecting of their volunteers in areas where the population is not centralised in this way?3. Can the council guarantee that there will be any early help available for families whose needs present over the coming 12 months?	
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Answer:

Thank you Elvira for your question. In terms of Q1...The current open cases within level 3 services are 836; 29 of those are in the West Somerset area.

As you will be aware, all public bodies face significant financial challenges, and all of us must make the most effective use of the resources that we have. Early Help is the responsibility of and must have input from all partners in the Children’s Trust. This is something that we must all do together.

We will continue to support services at Level 2 where there are external sources of funding. Schools, for example, continue to contribute significantly to early help services for children of school age, investing £1.8 million per annum in the Parent and Family Support Advisers and the Team Around the School model – all level 2 services. Children’s Services continue to bid for national programmes and we have secured £38k for the DWP Reducing Parental Conflict Programme and a £70k grant in the coming year (following £40k this year) for parenting work with youth offenders.

The third sector is a very important partner in early help. There are some outstanding models of support provided by highly skilled and supported volunteers. In Somerset we have our own examples of good practice including HomeStart in West Somerset and Yeovil Churches’ work in South Somerset. We will continue to support them.

Learning from adult services’ community connects developments, we will establish a £200k (annually) fund that can be used to start groups and activities, but we will also have staff that can work with these groups to find other sources of funding.

National funding bodies have reported that Somerset’s take up of third sector funding is low, and often local authorities are unable to access these sources of funding. We want to work actively with the voluntary and community sector and secure more external funding into the county. We know this can take time so would ensure seed funding is provided over a period of time to allow bidding application processes to happen.

For the next year the getset level 2 team will continue to support families providing parenting programmes and group work.

We will strengthen the first point of contact with a family including website information and advice that is available on Somerset Choices and the local offer for children with SEND. For clarity, Somerset Direct is the council’s call centre and have highly trained staff who can provide advice, guidance and signposting via email and on the phone, and we are considering how this can be improved even further.

It is also important to emphasise that we are committed to continuing to provide services at Level 3 of the early help continuum, which directly reduce the need for statutory children’s services

<p>Marriane Evans / Gracie Evans</p>	<p>Young Carers</p>	<p>Young Carers gives me a much-needed break from helping my mum care for Brother who has learning disabilities and Epilepsy.</p> <p>This vital group ensures that I have someone to talk to who understands.</p> <p>Socialise with other young carers who understand.</p>	<p>Response from Cllr Frances Nicholson</p>
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		<p>It's a safe haven and most of all we have fun and ive built strong friendships and my confidence has grown.</p> <p>How will you ensure that the support groups and trips are going to continue with my young carers family? And when are we going to be told when the trips are through the school holidays?</p>	
<p>Holly Baker</p>	<p>Young Carers</p>	<p>Young Carers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If we lost them it would be like losing one big family • Always there when there needed • Helps you with any school problems • Helps u achieve things that u thought your not able to do and achieve things that u want to achieve • Easy to talk to and listen well • Struggle to get time on your own when ur not at yc and get your own space • They help u feel safe • Pushes ur confidence to become who u really are • Supporting u at home • When a young carer leaves it's been very emotional having to say bye to them because they like family • When they take us to events it helps bring our communication up • Become housebound due to medical need for the person u care for • My School is one of a few that have worked in partnership with the service but there is no appointed person to talk to when yc aren't there <p>Why will you not tell us who will be there for us? Why will you not tell us when we can meet with our extended yc family who understand us? We are supposed to trust the adults who say they are here for us. Why do you not hear us?</p>	<p>Response from Cllr Frances Nicholson</p>

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Answer:

Thank you, Marianne and Holly for your questions. Let me start by saying that you and all young carers ARE appreciated by me and by the whole Council. We are committed to supporting more young carers and providing a greater range of support, we can do this best by getting funding which is not open to the Council and using our limited resources to support this.

We recognise how important the regular social support groups are to our young carers and have already made the commitment that these groups will continue to run regularly, although staffing may well change. As well as the groups, many of our young carers have identified safe and trusted adults to who they can go when they feel the need. These links will continue to be promoted when any assessment of a child or young person identified as a young carer is completed.

The calendar of respite events and trips will be completed asap and shared with young carers and their families.

Eva Bryczkowski	Discovery	<p>Service users are central to what we are all about here. They are not customers. It's not a sausage making factory. They use our services - that's why I still call them service users.</p> <p>When I worked at Learning Disabilities for 16 years, the staff put the service users first, second and last. They cared more about them than their own salaries and working conditions. Obviously, the latter were important, but it was the service users they were most concerned about.</p> <p>Since the outsourcing of Learning Disabilities, when Discovery began to run the service in 2017, I come across former colleagues and service users, and the latter, especially, are upset about the way they think it is going.</p> <p>Councillor Fothergill asked me to give him names of these people, but I feel that their privacy needs to be protected.</p> <p>It has been reported, in the public domain, that redundancies and early retirement have cost upwards of £475,000, (is this figure correct?), so far.</p> <p>Unfilled vacancies; shifts; not fully covered, agency staff, (who don't always know the full extent of the needs of service users), have, according to staff, parents and service users, led to a deterioration of the quality and standards of care.</p> <p>Discovery say that a lot of buildings need to be updated - maybe, but this shouldn't be done at the expense of the service users. They are paramount, above everything else.</p> <p>From my research and what I can see, Discovery has not had proper monitoring from the Local Authority and other independent checks into its quality of care. This leads me to wonder whether they are, in fact, marking their own homework.</p>	Response from Cllr David Huxtable
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		<p>Frankly, if a private outsourced service does not meet independent criteria, [Discovery might be one example], I think that the Local Authority should have the courage and confidence to say, 'This is the contract, this is what you are supposed to be doing, you are not, therefore, we will bring it back in-house with no compensation.'</p> <p>Q1. Since Discovery took over the running of Learning Disabilities, how closely have the Council been monitoring their progress and performance according to external indicators of quality of care and standards required by service users, parents and staff?</p> <p>I absolutely do NOT want vague abstract phrases, (that we can all agree on).</p> <p>Q2 Please give specific examples and hard evidence of about how the Local Authority is doing this and provide a report on how Discovery is performing, including whether they are succeeding, failing, or otherwise ?</p> <p>Q3. In the Proposed Capital Investment Programme 2019/20, in the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on January 23rd, it is written that:</p> <p>"Learning Disabilities is now forecasting a positive variance due to a reduction of £0.500m of costs associated with previously assumed contractual transformation costs. It is planned to use both positive variances, (£1,500m in total), to reduce the balance on the Learning Disabilities equalisation reserve, hence improving the Council's resilience as shown on its balance sheet".</p> <p>Can somebody please make this crystal clear, in plain language, as to what this exactly means? Again, no vague abstract phrases. Can the Council be specific in their explanation.</p> <p>(Otherwise, and this may seem to some rather controversial, people may think that the words in the statement are being used in such a way as to almost hide the true meaning of what is actually being expressed). But I have no idea whether this is in fact the case, because I don't understand what it all means.</p>	
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Answer:

Thank you for your statement and questions clearly the themes contained within both have been covered many times before and indeed in the main answered. This council takes the transformation of the learning disability services very seriously, and that is not just the learning disability services provided by Discovery but all of the other Learning disability services commissioned and delivered across this County. I reject your view that we do not monitor this contract indeed we monitor it very closely.

The council monitors this contract in a number of ways, there are formal contract review meetings are held each month (including from this council, senior commissioning officers, contract officers, finance officers and the junior cabinet member). In addition there are scheduled teleconferences fortnightly monitoring both delivery and transformation. The council also responds in a reactive manner when we get referrals such as safeguarding etc. In addition the adults and health scrutiny committee regularly has an update report on the contract performance, the next report is at the March scrutiny meeting. We are absolutely committed to the success of this contract and will ensure it delivers the transformation needed.

Quite simply this means that we have underspends in both the budget for our Discovery transformation costs (Linked to reduced anticipated costs being incurred) and underspends in the broader non-Learning Disability services. We are intending to use both these underspends to pay off an element of the LD Equalisation reserve. This is effectively paying off a debt in one-go and has the added benefit of freeing up revenue to spend on our day-to-day services going forward.

In addition the adults and health scrutiny regulars has an update on the contract and finally I have myself been out with my junior cabinet member been out to visit services recently and got some good feedback from the people we met both those who were being supported and those staff working in the services (Staff who had both transferred and staff who are new to discovery).

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From	CLIMATE CHANGE QUESTIONS	Question/statement	Response
Timothy Eggins	Climate Change	Will Somerset County Council declare a Climate Emergency and set a target to become carbon zero within 10 years?	Response from Cllr David Hall
Melanie Smith – Taunton Green Parents	Climate Change	<p>Declaration of a Climate Emergency 20th Feb 19</p> <p>My name is Mel Smith, I am a Taunton resident with 2 young children and I helped to set up a local environmental group, Taunton Green Parents.</p> <p>Just a year ago I would never had imagined myself standing here. I cannot claim to be a lifelong environmentalist. I am just a Mum who loves her children and I am worried about their future.</p> <p>The IPCC report estimates that we have just 12 years to limit catastrophic climate catastrophe. This was a huge wake up call for me. I read the report whilst breastfeeding my daughter during the night and I cried. As a Mother all I want to do is to protect my children. My inability to guarantee their future safety is heart-breaking.</p> <p>My hopes and dreams for my children are somewhat different to those that I had imagined just a short time ago.</p> <p>I want my children, and others around the world and future generations to grow up on a habitable planet, with a stable climate, access to water and food and clean air. A world free from conflict brought about by a scarcity of resources and the chance to enjoy the natural world, our oceans, the woodlands, forests and the incredible biodiversity that our planet currently offers.</p> <p>Sadly right now these basic foundations for life are at risk unless we commit and deliver urgent and dramatic decarbonisation.</p> <p>On our current trajectory we are heading for at least a 3-4 degree rise in temperature which would result in a potentially largely uninhabitable planet within my children’s lifetime.</p>	Response from Cllr David Hall

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		<p>At the current 1 degree rise, the level of suffering at both a human and natural level is already immeasurable. Many people, often the most vulnerable who have contributed least to emissions have already lost lives, loved ones, livelihoods and homes. Many people are already experiencing extreme temperatures and drought. We are also witnessing a devastating mass extinction of species and a disruption to valuable eco-systems which we are both part of and dependent upon for our survival.</p> <p>So, I ask for your support in supporting the declaration of a climate emergency. This is our opportunity to lead the way and join the growing global movement in the fight against climate change. Change is never easy and there are challenges ahead but the evidence is clear; We have no choice and we have limited time.</p> <p>I am not alone, we all have loved ones- children, grandchildren, nephew, nieces and friends that we must protect. This is our chance to do our bit.</p>	
<p>Christopher Maunder</p>	<p>Climate change</p>	<p>A month after 9-11, in October 2001, I attended my first protest, organised by a group of people that became the Stop the War Coalition.</p> <p>I attended because I felt that a new war would hinder our global society from uniting in order to tackle the threat of climate breakdown.</p> <p>In 2001 climate breakdown was still just about a threat. Now, it has become an emergency. Sadly, of course, the world is also now a much more divided and broken place. Stop the War didn't manage to stop any wars!</p> <p>This is why, I believe, the Extinction Rebellion movement is so profound. It has risen at a time when the world is on its knees because it has at its core 3 simple demands; 1, for the truth to be told. 2, for action to be taken to reduce carbon emissions to net zero and reduce consumption by half by 2025 and 3, for the formation of a national citizens assembly and smaller, local citizens assemblies to determine the path we take as a society to achieve demand number 2.</p>	<p>Response from Cllr David Hall</p>

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		<p>It is a movement that has spread to well over 100 countries in a third of a year, precisely because its aims are based on the empowerment of the people.</p> <p>We here in Somerset have shown ourselves to be more than ready to stand together and begin to force the necessary changes. We are here today for that reason. We want to see action on climate change. We want to prevent further breakdown of the environment where we can. We want the people to be able to take the lead on delivering that change. We want you to declare a climate emergency and begin that process of change.</p> <p>We are the Extinction Rebellion and we demand you declare a climate emergency and act to make the changes we, as living beings, naturally desire.</p> <p>We are the Extinction Rebellion.</p> <p>We are rebels for life.</p> <p>We will not be going away until our extinction is averted and the ecology of our planet and the society of our species are united and working together for the protection and benefit of each other.</p> <p>Life does face an emergency so we demand that you declare it so that we can all begin to work together to change it.</p>	
Sigurd Reimers	Climate Change	<p>There are in the region of 100 000 dependent grandchildren in Somerset. As a grandparent, I am concerned at the bleak future they and others of their generation face because of climate change. Scientific report after scientific report (most recently UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, World Wildlife Fund, UK Met Office) are showing that, on present efforts (many of them good but insufficient) global warming will put this generation at risk of harm, much of it irreversible. I beg members to take the bold step of declaring a climate emergency, and so show that it is committed to the long-term wellbeing and survival of its youngest citizens. Sigurd Reimers, Grandparents for a Safe Earth.</p>	Response from Cllr David Hall
Bill Butcher	Climate Change	<p>Forum 21 supports the motion that calls on the County Council to declare a Climate Emergency as tabled by Councillor Tessa Munt under item 10(1).</p>	Response from Cllr David Hall

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Forum 21 volunteers support several projects that contribute to mitigating climate change. For example it helps people with energy saving, renewable energies and low carbon fuels so that they can enjoy warm homes. It initiated the Steam Coast Trail and is now helping local communities install public charge points for electric vehicles, at community shops and village halls. Forum 21 produced a Climate Change Strategy for West Somerset Council in 2008 and worked with the Exmoor National Park Authority to write a plan to enable the National Park to become carbon neutral by 2025.

The County Council is already taking some useful action, especially in the area of adaptation to climate change impacts and getting renewable energy installed on some of its own buildings. This is welcome, but a much greater effort on mitigation, in particular the reduction in carbon emissions, is needed.

Some of you may be thinking that the Council, with all of its challenges in maintaining services on a shrinking budget, can do without taking on more. If you are thinking that, we urge you to think again, for two reasons.

First, timing. The time to act must be now. The motion has set out why climate change must be addressed now, for ourselves, our children and grandchildren. Another five years of business as usual and it will be too late.

Secondly, the good news. Actions that this Council can take on climate change will be good for Somerset people, Somerset business and Somerset's reputation as a green and healthy county. For example, action to accelerate the move towards electric vehicles will improve health through reducing air pollution and noise, while boosting tourism. Action to help insulate buildings will reduce poverty and create local jobs. Action to accelerate renewable energy production will keep money in the local economy.

We are not asking the County Council to do it alone. You can rely on the support of local organisations and people around the county. Some of the most effective things you can do involve drawing down central government funds or removing barriers to

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		<p>actions that others can take. The County Council has the power to make it possible for the people of Somerset to make the choices that we need. You have the power to work with partners and local communities to enable the changes needed, and these changes will help to make Somerset a healthy, resilient and attractive place to work, visit and live.</p> <p>Sir David Attenborough, reputed to be the most trusted person in Britain, says “it must be now”. Please, act now, support this climate emergency motion.</p>	
<p>Ian Gauntlett</p>	<p>Climate Change</p>	<p>I would like to ask council whether they accept the motion put to them by Tessa Munt calling on the council to declare a climate emergency? http://www.tessamunt.co.uk/call_to_declare_a_climate_emergency</p> <p>Somerset is uniquely vulnerable to climate change, in particular to raised sea levels and excessive rainfall leading to flooding. Our recent history has been clear to all, and has already caused severe damage to property and livestock. We are custodians of our children and grandchildren’s futures, and if we do not act urgently, the consequences will be disastrous ... literally.</p> <p>We have signally been failed by our national government, in fact by most if not all world governments, so the responsibility to act now devolves to local government; districts, Counties and Cities. Many areas of this country, and internationally, have already declared climate emergencies, and we see this as the probable solution to getting action urgently, now. There is no time to waste. The October 2018 IPCC report, supported by the United Nations Secretary General, gives us, at best 12 years, to get our carbon emissions to zero. This may seem a difficult task, but it will be nothing compared to managing our communities in the wake of climate catastrophe.</p> <p>Declaring a climate emergency, and implementing it, need not be hideously expensive, which I suspect may be the thought uppermost in your minds. Encouraging new green technologies, reducing fossil fuel dependency, building carbon-neutral housing (and retro-fitting old stock), reducing traffic</p>	<p>Response from Cllr David Hall</p>

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		<p>and encouraging walking and cycling by building cycle paths instead of roads, can all help to reduce both Council's and citizens' costs.</p> <p>I guess ultimately my question to you would be; "can you afford not to declare a climate emergency"?</p>	
Callie Gauntlett	Climate Change	<p>Extinction Rebellion raised a petition on 25th January calling on Somerset County Council to declare a climate emergency. 1157 people have signed supporting zero carbon emissions by 2025. What is the Councillors' response to their constituents' concerned voices:</p> <p>From Taunton:</p> <p>'This is so important- we need to lead the way and put our children, future generations and the planets biodiversity above all else.'</p> <p>From Minehead</p> <p>'We all know that we may only have 12 years we must all turn things around to save our planet, not enough is being done at government level, we need to have incentives'</p> <p>From Yeovil</p> <p>'We are the Earth the Earth is us and all the following generations of every living thing need to be able to live on the earth in balance with nature'</p> <p>From Milverton</p> <p>'Not enough forward thinking is being done to address global warming. There are measures that local government can implement from turning off street lights to building cycle paths.'</p> <p>From Chard</p> <p>'I am signing because I am concerned about climate change and it's effects on all of us'</p> <p>From Wellington</p> <p>'This is a genuine emergency unfolding. It may seem slow but it is the biggest emergency ever.'</p> <p>Glastonbury</p> <p>'The signs of climate change and its impact on this area can be blatantly seen.'</p>	Response from Cllr David Hall

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Wiveliscombe

'I know we must all make a change if we are to save the world from extinction. We can all make a difference but we need the governments of the world to lead us'

Frome

'For our children sake.... Somerset council should announce the climate emergency.'

Shepton Mallet

'I believe the government should be more active and acknowledge the climate crisis!'

Langport

'I believe there is nothing more urgent and I want to know that my county council are making this climate emergency their upmost priority.'

Bridgwater

'Once we've killed this world, there is nowhere else to go'

Burnham on Sea

'It's in everybody's interest to tackle this at every level'

Norton Fitzwarren

'I'm signing because I believe all statutory authorities need to make a response to climate change central to all their work.'

Wells

'The people of Somerset are amongst those societies and eco-systems who are very vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.'

Watchet

'The issue of climate change is not being taken seriously in Somerset. I am not seeing action reflected in the policies at County, District or Local levels.'

Public and Member Questions and Answers

<p>Michael Dunk</p>	<p>Climate Change</p>	<p>Dear Council,</p> <p>I am writing in support of the above motion. I have been a resident of Frome for about 35 years and to say that I have fears for the future would be an understatement. I refer to the increase in CO2 in the atmosphere caused by human activity and its effects on the stability and temperature of the climate.</p> <p>Council are in the unenviable position of having to acknowledge this fact and assess the risks to the environment, ecology and population of Somerset. Reducing Council's carbon footprint is an obvious starting point and this should be something that government can help to facilitate.</p> <p>However there is already degradation to the ecology and wildlife of the region caused by the way we use the land and as a county that relies heavily on farming and tourism, I would like to see the Council mitigate against this in whatever way they can; not just because of the jobs and livelihoods that will be lost but because I want my Grandchildren and their children to be able to enjoy this beautiful county with all the flora and fauna that should naturally coexist alongside us.</p> <p>With this in mind will the council commit to?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set a date by which it will stop using Glyphosate herbicide throughout Somerset. The use of Glyphosate is already banned by Frome Town Council and a temporary ban has been put in place by Nth Somerset Council. 2. Commission yearly reports about the condition of wildlife, insect populations and plantlife in Somerset to monitor progress and flag up any concerns that are raised. 3. Set up regular (suggest 6 monthly) reports to Council on the progress towards the 2030 target to be carbon neutral. <p>I would like the Council to read the following supporting information taken from an email from David Warburton to a friend.</p> <p>On Mon, 4 Feb 2019 at 14:55, WARBURTON, David <david.warburton.mp@parliament.uk> wrote:</p>	<p>Response from Cllr David Hall</p>
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Public and Member Questions and Answers

Whatever other issues continue to occupy Parliament, you are absolutely right that we neglect the environment at our peril. This matters to us particularly here in Somerset. We are surrounded by an astonishing environmental legacy, and it's our duty to preserve and maintain this heritage.

And this requires something of a strategic plan. A joined up approach with a keen eye to the future: looking at our biodiversity and biosecurity, minimising waste, safeguarding the beauty of – and accessibility to – the natural spaces around us, ensuring we're using resources more sustainably and efficiently, reducing the risks of environmental hazards, protecting our wildlife-rich habitats, working to secure clean air and water - and all this while mitigating and adapting to the threat of climate change.

As I am sure you know, the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report makes the case for nothing less than global carbon neutrality within the next 12 years if we are to prevent something of an ecological catastrophe including widespread crop and water failure.

Frome has officially declared a climate emergency and set ambitious aims to be entirely carbon neutral within just eleven years. To achieve this, a multitude of new plans will be rolled out in the coming months, including increased insulation of local homes, ramping up the number of electric cars on the road and using more solar, hydro and wind energy.

Similar initiatives are being explored across Somerset, with councils and groups working with businesses, land agents and schools to minimise dependence on fossil fuels, and focus on our collective future. As a member of the Conservative Environmental Network, I must say I'm keen to support such ambitious thinking and I've been pleased with many of the measures introduced by the Government's 25 year environment plan last year. I certainly hope that we will see similar initiatives elsewhere in Somerset, and I can assure you that I will wholeheartedly support any such action by local authorities and offer whatever assistance I can.

David Warburton MP

Public and Member Questions and Answers

Member of Parliament for Somerton and Frome
Parliamentary Private Secretary to the
Department for International Development

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Lastly I can think of no better person to sum up the situation that now confronts us all, Sir David Attenborough speaking at the recent Davos summit, the following youtube clip is an edited version of his address.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xuudPum21nE>

I look forward to your response to the questions raised.

Yours faithfully,

Answer:

Thank you all for coming along today to share your views on this important issue. I am sure you are pleased to see the climate change motion on the agenda today. This motion has been put together as a cross-party initiative and brought forward with cross-party support and does indeed recognise the serious nature of the climate change challenge. The motion would commit the council to address the issue and makes budget provision for this. Mr Dunk asks some specific questions and these can and will be picked up in the proposed development of a climate change strategy.

Public and Member Questions and Answers

From	Topic	Member Question/Statement	Response
Cllr A Broom	Chard Junction	<p>Year 3 children, from Manor Court Primary School in Chard, have recently been learning about the history of Chard Railway stations. They concluded “We are certain that if Chard Junction Railway Station was to be reopened it would mean more job opportunities for people in the local area. We are sure that reopening the railway would encourage more people to visit Chard which would help boost the local economy. Without a doubt, Chard is growing with more houses being built. Our roads are getting busier, therefore more toxic gases are being used by cars. Did you know it would be more environmentally friendly to use the train? Currently, there are not many bus services in our area. Consequently, we need other transport options. People in the local area would like to be able to visit other local towns more easily. For these reasons Chard Junction Railway Station should be reopened”.</p> <p>Considering this conclusion, made by Year 3 Primary School children, what guarantees can SCC make that the dire transport situation in Chard will be a priority for resolution? What incentives/encouragement can SCC directly make to Manor Court School to ensure these children remain interested in local improvements and have an opportunity to engage fully with SCC about future opportunities?</p>	Response from Cllr John Woodman
<p>Answer:</p> <p>We support the principle of reopening stations where there is proven sufficient demand to make the service viable and where the necessary rail timetable changes can be accommodated. We are supportive of the proposal to open a new rail station at Chard Junction subject to the necessary demand and feasibility studies being undertaken and are happy to assist communities in commissioning such studies once funding has been secured. Unfortunately the Council does not currently have sufficient available funding of a project of this scope.</p>			
Cllr A Broom	Cresta Pool	What is the current status of the Chard Cresta Pool in comparison to SCC’s initial planned dates; if there is a discrepancy between the two, can this be explained.	Response from Cllr David Hall
<p>Answer:</p> <p>The pool has been decommissioned as planned. Property Services are currently exploring the options for disposal and/ or demolition of the site.</p>			

Public and Member Questions and Answers

Officers had been working closely with Holyrood Academy to look at whether the premises could be converted, but the school have now informed SCC that the premises are not suitable for any educational re-use without major financial investment.

Cllr G Verdon	Numatic International	<p>Given the positive economic news for South Somerset, that in the same week Dyson announced a move to Singapore, Numatic International in Chard are investing in the local area. Will the Leader join me in welcoming the announcement by Numatic; the UK manufacturer of the Henry vacuum cleaner, that they will be creating 300 new jobs in Chard.</p> <p>And would he accept an invitation to visit Numatic's Headquarters if one is forthcoming, to see for himself how, when it comes to economic growth, Chard is very much open for business</p>	Response from Cllr David Fothergill
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Answer:

This is tremendous news for Chard and the surrounding area and I'm delighted to hear a local company are confident and successful. It is a tremendous statement of confidence in Somerset as a place to do business. New jobs will bring new prosperity to a significant number of households and further stimulate the local economy. SCC has a good and constructive relationship with Numatic and the growth of the business fits well with the emerging priority for the Heart of the South West local industrial strategy of developing the advanced manufacturing strengths of our area. As well as the direct employment benefits this is great news for supply chain businesses and consumer confidence in this part of Somerset. I would be delighted to visit Numatic should an invitation come forward.

Cllr J Lock	Brexit	<p>What plans are SCC making for Brexit?</p> <p>What challenges have been identified? How will the £87000 Government grant be spent and is it sufficient?</p>	Response from Cllr David Hall
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Answer:

We have looked closely at our operations and activated our Corporate Business Continuity Plan and are refreshing our service business continuity plans in response to the approaching deadline for Brexit. Although we believe the impact of Brexit – either with or without a deal – has a limited implication for our staff, services and operations, we continue to be vigilant and to learn from other councils as to likely challenges. And we continue to be mindful of the advice and guidance from central Government. We believe the Council is in a solid place to response to Brexit. Some of the areas identified include such diverse teams as recruitment, IT, and data hosting. We have not identified any “show-stoppers”. We have also liaised closely with the wider Somerset public sector and stand ready to assist in any appropriate areas. The £87,000 has been useful in supporting our civil contingency team carry out this important preparatory work and we will continue to liaise with our District colleagues and other partner agencies to make sure our plans and preparations are joined up.

Cllr L Redman	Young Carers	The DCS when questioned, confirmed at Cabinet that the children service element as outlined in the budget allows the current level of service to be continued for	Response from Cllr
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Public and Member Questions and Answers

	<p>the coming year, at the same meeting a number of service cuts were reversed (gritting and gully cleaning included) as there was an unexpected cash surplus, in fact I recall Cllr Chilcott when introducing the changes due to the surplus "that it was being used to avoid some of the items that impact our residents."</p> <p>I want to make reference to the young carers service, that was highlighted at Cabinet when the Leader accepted a petition instigated by the young people.</p> <p>When cabinet withdrew the proposal CAF-20, that was put forward towards the end of 2018 the result of which was that our work in that service (young carers) continued unchanged, there was an indication that a revised proposal may come forward in Feb 2019, the result of this change was that staff, due to the uncertainty of the service sought other roles within the council, I understand that staff who were able to gain other roles, were able to delay take up of the new roles, to allow a revised proposal to come forward, if it did.</p> <p>I now understand that the uncertainty is continuing, a members briefing indicated that a proposal may now come forward in early summer, I understand that the long serving and dedicated staff, staff that have built up relationships with young carers over time, staff that are experienced in operating our very successful young carers service, have been told that they need to decide if they want to move jobs, 'as they may not be available later'.</p> <p>We will all agree that this is not a good position to be in, a proposal is still not a guarantee and we are treating young carers and staff in a poor way.</p> <p>With no proposal in sight and a fully funded service for 2019-20, I want to ask the Cabinet member for children to remove any doubt in this vital service, a service that everyone agrees saves the council and stakeholders money, remove the axe that is hanging over this service so that we can get on with supporting these young people without fear of cuts?</p>	<p>Frances Nicholson</p>
<p>Answer:</p> <p>Thank you, Leigh. I note, and am very pleased to do so, that earlier this morning in the budget debate you endorsed the direction of travel for the redesign of young carers' support.</p>		

Public and Member Questions and Answers

The DCS has made it clear that he is confident that he has adequate resources to meet the statutory functions of children’s services. He has also said on a number of occasions, including at children’s Scrutiny that there is no statutory requirement to have a Council run Young Carers service.

I and the DCS have made it clear that young carers in Somerset are missing out, as in most Council areas the support needs of young carers is met by the voluntary sector, which are able to access funding not open to Councils. It is this work which is due to report to Cabinet after the local election period.

I and the DCS is concerned that the Chair of Scrutiny is commenting in paragraph 4 on Operational Performance, he should know from the statutory guidance that this is not a matter that elected members should comment on without objective evidence provided by either through the DCS or Ofsted, neither has been requested.

He also questions the Councils HR processes and policies, no evidence has been offered that the Council’s processes are at fault.

Given the improved financial position there is no intention to reduce the Council’s funding to support young carers, indeed we remain committed to changing the service to support substantially more carers.

We do recognise that change is unsettling however it is important that all of us support vulnerable families and children during this period of change.

Cllr J Clarke	Young Carers	<p>Please can Councillor Nicholson provide assurance in terms of the Young Carers service where I understand that the majority of staff have chosen to leave or accept re-deployment:</p> <p>Why were team members offered re-deployment when no proposals had been made as to the future of the service?</p> <p>Is it not the case that the Council only offers re-deployment where posts are clearly identified as being at risk?</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member tell us how the service and "activities will be maintained" and what arrangements have been put in place to ensure the service continues in its present form until proposals are presented about the future of this vital service?</p>	Response from Cllr Frances Nicholson
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Answer:

I refer to my previous answers to both member and public questions.