

Annex A
Public Questions – Executive 8 April 2024

Question submitted from	Question
<p>David Redgewell</p>	<p><u>Question 1</u></p> <p>With the merger of the District Council and Somerset council, we are still very very concerned about the lack of progress in the setting up of structure to manage the public transport Network and infrastructure. Such as the county bus and coach stations and interchanges, It appears the structure at present is not effective on management of the bus shelters and especially the bus and coach stations Bus priority measures there does not appear to be a bus and coach station in infrastructure manager or a Department head to look after facilities at Bus and coach stations such as Wells bus and coach station Travel centre and toilets, Yeovil bus and coach station and it now closed passengers facilities toilets and waiting room, or repair it shelter, Frome Cork Street coach station, Wincanton bus and coach station facilities now with Wincanton Town Council, Wellington coach station, Glastonbury coach Park, street coach park ,Bridgwater bus and coach station, Interchanges at Shepton mallet. With Wincanton Town Council, and Shepton mallet Town Council taking over passenger facilities and toilets, The appears to be not structure set up to manage these facilities or staff to manage the infrastructure example of Is Yeovil bus and coach station Where Yeovil Town Council do not have Infrastructure management team to maintain a passengers bus and coach station This is very worrying as the Somerset unity Authority has to provide by the 12th June 2024 a submission to the Department for transport funding for its bus services improvement plan money 2024 2025 and bus and coach station and interchanges are part of the submission along with community safety partnership, cctv, policing, Equalities impact for passengers travelling with reduced mobility and partly sighted, so what progress is the council making urgently to set up a structure to manage with the City Town and parish councils to manage it public transport Network infrastructure and save money with staff Duplication and structure that do not work for the passenger and Taxpayers, this of course involves the setting up of new structure urgently. Including redundancy or early retirement.</p> <p><u>Question 2</u></p>

	<p>We welcome the urgent Restructuring of Somerset unity council to make effective service delivery for its stakeholders and residents, This was a difficult time when council merger, we saw this in Dorset Council, Bournemouth Poole and Christchurch, Wiltshire and Swindon Councils and Cornwall Council in South west England, Whilst this is very difficult in the short term to reduce offices, staff and building a streamline organisation should be able to make savings sale property, But must importantly protect front line service by partnership working with city Town and parish councils, the Private sector and community sector So what public consultation and discussion are taking place to transfer assets such as public toilets, bus and coach station terminals building to other council in service level agreements whilst protecting front line services.</p> <p>In the case of Transport, car park fees and bus coach departure fees at bus and coach station should be ring fenced to maintain the bus and coach station facilities or devolved to city Town and parish councils.</p> <p>What is happening to bus and coach station departure and park charges at Somerset bus and coach stations and why is this not being revested in maintenance of bus and coach station like Wells, Yeovil, Bridgwater, and a future Taunton bus and coach transport hub as per the Department for transport provision for bus and coach stations.</p>
<p>Response</p>	<p>Response from the Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Cllr Richard Wilkins:</p> <p>Taking both of your questions together as they are closely aligned, the existing Bus Service Improvement Plan sets out our aspirations for improving passenger facilities, but we have always been clear that these aspirations are subject to funding. Thus far, we have not received the level of fund from Government to deliver all the aspirations and have prioritised investment in bus service provision and reliability. To clarify the position, the submission of an updated Bus Service Improvement Plan in June 2024 does not represent a funding bid to Government on this occasion but will, again set out our ambitions, subject to funding. We are following Government guidance on the submission and will meet the deadline for the submission.</p> <p>As you will be aware, we have needed to make some very difficult decisions in recent months to set a balanced budget. Those decisions included the closure of public toilets because of the cleaning and maintenance costs. Some town, city, and parish councils are stepping in to keep some of these facilities open. Once devolved like this Somerset Council passes control to the other organisation and they would be</p>

managed as best that organisation sees fit – so there isn't a role for us. We have had discussions with Yeovil Town Council but they are not currently in a position to take on the responsibility for the facilities at the town's bus and coach station.

Thank you for your comments regarding the restructuring, it is vital that Somerset Council moves forward to a long term financially sustainable position to deliver the vital services. Bringing together five complex organisations takes time, we are still in the process of aligning some areas because we don't have the resources to do everything at once. I have asked officers to take a detailed look at bus and coach infrastructure over the next year so that we will be in a better position to move forwards from.

In terms of car park fees, you'll note from the decision taken by Executive on 6 Dec 2023 that surplus parking income is being used to support the Taunton park and ride. We will continue to evolve our use of income, where available, to best support the needs of the travelling public.