

Appendix A - Public/Member written submitted questions to County Council November 2018

PQ/MQ	From	Topic	Question/statement	Response
PQ1	Chris Rix	Bid for Cycling and Walking Scheme	<p>Will Somerset County Council commit to work with TDBC and ourselves to prepare and prioritise a major scheme bid for cycling and walking for the Taunton Area?</p> <p>Taunton has enormous scope for high levels of cycling, which would reap large transport, environmental and public health benefits. The joint 20 year transport vision wants to double cycling from its current 9% level. Sustainable transport should be at the heart of transport planning for our Garden Town.</p> <p>The current network is fragmented and many neighbourhoods simple do not have cycling as an option due to hostile road conditions. We have produced a quality assessment of the network (see leaflet) which we believe is feeding into your planning work.</p> <p>It was suggested to us that we try to secure funding through the Small Improvement Scheme process. We did a lot of work on two of the 15 hotspots from our initial survey but neither were taken forward. We are therefore convinced that we should be seeking serious resources through the same mechanism that the County uses for its numerous new road projects.</p>	Cllr John Woodman, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport
<p>Answer:</p> <p>The Council is currently developing a local cycling and walking infrastructure plan for Taunton. When the plan is finalised we are keen to explore all opportunities for funding the implementation of the plan. Our small improvement schemes programme is currently fully committed. At the moment there is no obvious funding source for a 'major scheme bid' for walking and cycling available to this Council. However, we hope that the Government will make provision for such a fund as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.</p>				
PQ/MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement	Response
PQ2	Melanie Hudson	Safe Passage	<p>My name is Melanie Hudson I am part of Refugee Support Group (South Somerset). We have 9 committee members and 7 helpers who are backed up by 56 online members. Some of our members support the resettlement of refugees in the local area by offering English lessons. Our main focus though is raising money through holding events throughout the year, collecting clothing and blankets to be</p>	Cllr Frances Nicholson, Cabinet Member for Children and Families

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		<p>sent to crisis areas throughout the world and raising awareness of the plight of refugees in the twenty first century.</p> <p>We are strongly supported in our request to you by LARA (Langport Area Refugee Action group) which has eight committee members, six helpers and fifteen email correspondents and supporters. LARA are actively supported by Long Sutton Quakers and the Vicar of Langport and the surrounding village parishes. LARA runs an ongoing collection of essential supplies for refugees: the success of this is evidence of community willingness to help refugees. LARA also organises fundraising events and an annual party for Syrian refugees resettles across the county.</p> <p>I would like to start by thanking Somerset County Council for the work you have already done in supporting refugees. Our council have worked hard on Refugee resettlement and resettled 27 families through the VPRS scheme in the last three years. You have taken on the serious responsibility of working with families themselves and supporting them to create a new life here.</p> <p>Thank you for taking the decision to transform the lives of the 27 families. This year is the 80th Anniversary of the Kindertransport, the scheme through which Britain welcomed 10,000 child refugees, over 2 years. This anniversary marks the best of what Britain is about. As part of this anniversary, we are joining a national campaign with Safe</p> <p>Passage, led by Lord Alf Dubs, himself a Kinder child, to call on Central Government to start a fully-funded scheme for 1000 child refugees to be resettled in the UK every year. If the UK were to take 1000 children a year spread across the UK, each local authority would take just 3 children.</p> <p>Lord Dubs has spoken eloquently and movingly about this campaign on television and national radio and we look to Somerset CC to support this important humanitarian initiative.</p> <p>Other Councils have already pledged to create additional resettlement places.</p>	
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			<p>Hammersmith and Fulham Council have offered 100 places for child refugees over 10 years and Perth and Kinross Council in Scotland have offered 20 places for child refugees.</p> <p>We hope that Somerset would wish to show leadership on the issue and we would pledge to support the Council to resettle 15 child refugees.</p> <p>So, we are here to ask two questions?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Will you work with us to continue to make Somerset a welcoming place? 2. Will you commit to resettle 3, 4 or 5 child refugees in 2019 if Central Government creates a new fully funded scheme. 	
<p>Answer: Thank you for your question.</p> <p>As you have said the County Council has been resettling families under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme since March 2016 including 48 children arriving within family units, both under the Syrian scheme and under the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme. The work of volunteers and support groups has been and is invaluable, as is the work of schools and colleges. As you know, this work continues.</p> <p>We continue to meet our statutory duties to child refugees and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children under the Government funded scheme, even though the actual level of funding provided the Government does not meet all our costs. There is a current shortfall in Government funding of £891,000.</p> <p>We cannot volunteer to take more children than this as we do not have enough foster carers to look after them. There is a national shortage of foster carers; this is reflected here in Somerset, and we are doing our level best to recruit foster carers for all sorts and conditions of children. Last year we ran a recruitment campaign specifically for foster carers for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, but there was only one applicant.</p> <p>It is clear from your question that there are many groups who wish to do their part and are doing it. It would be immensely helpful if you and colleagues could do all you can to support the finding of potential foster carers for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who could come forward for assessment.</p>				

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PQ/MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement	Response
PQ3	Cheryl Freeman	Six Acres	Has a decision been taken to sell the Six Acres site in Taunton?	Cllr David Huxtable, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care
<p>Answer:</p> <p>No formal decision has yet been taken to sell the Six Acres site or any part of it. There is a prospective purchaser and we are ready to progress discussions with them as and when the site is no longer required by the service at which point the proper procedures and governance will, of course, be worked through. However, I am aware that a council issued press release stated: "Somerset County Council are selling the site" and this is clearly misleading and I apologise for that. For clarification, we are looking to sell the site but have not yet committed to or concluded a sale. I hope that clears up the situation.</p> <p>Adult Social Care are progressing with the already established plans for transforming day opportunities for people with a learning disability into more community focused, skills based opportunities. As Somerset County Council has been approached with an offer on purchasing part of the Six Acres campus site, this has brought forward the planning for people getting a much better range of options and outcomes sooner. Officers are confident that everyone currently attending will have their needs met in advance of the closure at the end of March.</p>				
PQ/MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement	Response
PQ4	Nigel Behan	New Social Value Contracts	<p>On Monday 19th November the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, David Lidington, announced new government procurement measures: <u>New 'Social Value' contracts to revolutionise government procurement</u></p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-social-value-contracts-to-revolutionise-government-procurement</p> <p><u>The Register reported that:</u> "Capita, Serco and Sopra Steria are drafting "living wills" with the government in case they collapse – a measure agreed to after the Carillion debacle.</p>	David Fothergill, Leader of the Council

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			<p>After the multinational construction firm was <u>liquidated</u> in January, the extent of the government's reliance on it became clear as it struggled to gather the information necessary to step in and take over.</p> <p>This put the spotlight on other outsourcing deals, with the government under pressure to make better preparations for a similar crisis – as well as re-igniting calls for more transparency around crucial contracts.</p> <p>As a result, the Cabinet Office is attempting to put some safety nets in place so it won't get caught out if another firm was to collapse.”</p> <p>a) Does Somerset County Council have similar arrangements with its (commissioned and) outsourced providers to ensure service continuity and minimise the risk of failure?</p> <p>b) Is there a “living will” type arrangement in place for the outsourced Learning Disability Service to Discovery/Dimensions UK Ltd in case they collapse? If not, will there be?</p>	
<p>A) For large, complex, long-term and strategically important contracts being procured by Somerset County Council, the Authority will generally adopt the approach that performance bonds will be sought from suppliers so as to safeguard the financial stability of services being delivered in the event that service providers begin to experience financial difficulties.</p> <p>This is supported by contract terms and conditions that seek to understand the service provider's business continuity arrangements, that guarantee that the Authority has step-in rights in the event of a serious failure or breach of contract and that ultimately failing contracts can be terminated and walked away from. In these circumstances, the scenario would be covered under performance management clauses in the contract and also dealt with under Exit/Termination clauses, such as what happens if an insolvency event occurs and what is our recourse.</p> <p>B) So do we have a “living will” arrangement - No is the short answer. There is no need for any ‘living will’ type arrangement in place with Discovery or Dimensions UK. In the event Discovery were to fail or become insolvent Dimensions UK would take over operation of the Services as the parent company. In the event Dimensions UK were to fail or become insolvent, as a separate legal entity Discovery could potential continue trading albeit without the support of Dimensions UK. There is also a Performance Bond in place. Somerset County Council</p>				

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is reassured that the current arrangements in place are more than sufficient that a “Carillion” type even would be highly unlikely to occur in the Discovery contract.

Discovery have a Business Continuity Plan and Service Continuity Plans for each of their services which are refreshed annually. In the event of a critical incident Somerset County Council have access to these plans in order to provide support to Dimensions UK to take over the running of the service in the event of a whole service failure.

PQ/MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement	Response
PQ5	Nigel Behan	Getset	<p>In the Getset Public Consultation (http://www.somersetconsults.org.uk/consult.ti/Getset/consultationHome) it is stated:</p> <p>“The County Council, like councils across the country, has had its funding from central Government significantly reduced in recent years. As a result, we have had to consider ways to reduce spending in all our services. Considerable savings have already been made by working differently and more efficiently, but we also have to consider savings that can only be made by reducing the levels of service we provide.”</p> <p>And:</p> <p>“Our proposal is that the County Council stops providing getset support for children and families with additional needs at Level 2. This would mean the groups and activities that the getset Level 2 service currently provides, along with the targeted work that supports individual families would stop.”</p> <p>And also:</p> <p>“Please note: As well as the getset groups above, there are an estimated 427 similar groups and activities that are run by other people or organisations that provide the same kind of support for children and families with both universal (Level 1) and additional needs (Level 2). These are run by many different community groups and organisations, often in community venues such as libraries and churches, and sometimes in children’s centres. This includes health run sessions such as local healthy child clinics, young parents support and breastfeeding support which will continue.”</p>	<p>Cllr Frances Nicholson, Cabinet Member for Children and Families</p>

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			Can you supply the risk register associated with the 427 groups taking on additional work and, if there is no additional capacity identified, are there examples in other local authority areas where they have removed similar provision?	
<p>Answer:</p> <p>There is work underway now to identify the support and capacity that exists in Somerset. The public consultation will also help to inform this and will be used to inform the equality impact assessment that will help to identify where there are any gaps in support for our most vulnerable children and families. This in turn will inform the final recommendations for the future of getset to cabinet in February 2019, alongside any detailed exit and transition plans for group activity and individual family work as appropriate.</p>				
PQ/MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement	Response
PQ6	Andrew Lee	Broadband	<p>Openreach are about to be offered more work on getting superfast broadband to Somerset homes. The money they are returning to be spent on a new project could surely be given to someone else just as easily to do the job properly. When the Connecting Devon and Somerset project was set up - to which SCC contributed £10m, parishes and various community organisations were contacted by SCC and CDS with documentation promising the project would deliver 90% broadband coverage. This project has, according to latest figures from the House of Commons library (published this month), failed to delivery 90% coverage in 4 out of 5 of constituencies in the SCC area (only Yeovil has over 90%). These figures though are after Gigaclear has been working on an additional project to extend coverage. That may not have gone well but it has increased coverage. The problems with Gigaclear are well documented. The fact is the best ranked constituency in Somerset - that of Yeovil - is ranked 492 out of 650 constituencies in the UK. Somerton & Frome is ranked 616.</p> <p>Why has SCC not held Openreach to account when we are still way off having 90% coverage. In Somerton & Frome coverage is actually only 81%. Why have Somerset businesses been left lagging far behind the rest of the country, despite £94m being spent on the project? And why should Openreach continue to do yet more work in Somerset on the broadband project?</p>	Cllr David Hall, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Community Infrastructure

Answer:

Thank you Andrew for your question.

Turning first to broadband coverage, central government estimated that overall two thirds of all broadband infrastructure in rural England would be provided commercially. However commercial coverage across Somerset at 40% is lower than this and CDS has already funded 46% of the superfast coverage across the whole county with a further 8% coverage planned in the Phase 2 contracts.

The Government announced in December that it had achieved its target of 95% superfast broadband coverage nationally. However, this is an average figure for the whole country including urban areas and also includes all the commercial-funded provision.

Superfast coverage for Somerset is made up 2 elements: Commercial Broadband deployment by companies such as BT and Virgin and CDS deployment.

When CDS entered into contract with BT/Openreach for phase 1, a process called an Open Market Review (OMR) was used to identify commercial build scope and scale. Information from operators about their commercial deployment plans identified areas where commercial deployment was not planned and informed the areas where the phase 1 contract should deliver.

The phase 1 contract target for superfast delivery was for 278,000 premises which when added to commercial build that had already taken place and the build which commercial providers had shown they were planning to deliver should have provided a total superfast deliver of 90% superfast coverage for the CDS area.

BT/Openreach delivered its contractual target of 278,000 and in fact surpassed this figure by a significant amount. The shortfall in delivery is a result of commercial providers failing to deliver on the commercial deployment plans. Whilst CDS and SCC can express disappointment at the lack of commercial deployment we have no commercial levers to require any telecom provider to undertake commercial deployment.

I can confirm that BT/Openreach will be carrying out further Superfast Broadband deployment as part of the Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) Broadband Programme. However, I must explain that this is a result of a contractual commitment for BT/Openreach to return money to the CDS programme as take-up of superfast broadband rises.

Turning to your question about Somerset lagging behind the rest of the Country, it is important to say that whilst CDS is the biggest programme in England, its deployment area is extremely rural and therefore the cost of deployment is significantly more due to the dispersed nature of premises.

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The constituencies that top the ranking tables are almost all urban areas where deployment is far easier and much less costly.				
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PQ7	Eva Bryczkowski	Council Spending	<p>The Council has stated that it has had to make difficult decisions regarding having to make savage cuts in services. Employees affected by these cuts have had to make far far more difficult decisions on what to spend their money on – which bills do they pay first, mortgage/rent, heating and other costs, as they are increasingly plunged into debt, particularly the employees you have decided to make redundant.</p> <p>1. Regarding capital spending and the refurbishment of part of County Hall, (which has been reported will cost 9.9 million pounds), as a council tax payer, I believe that this capital could be spent on more sorely needed things. Surely that's not the ONLY thing the Council can spend it on, and I'm wondering whether the Council can provide other examples of what the money could be spent on?</p> <p>2. Regarding Council Tax, this could be raised up to the limit allowed by the government. It might seem controversial but the Council could explain to council tax payers what the money is needed for and why it had to be raised. Rather than another consultation, (which I believe is not necessary up to a certain amount, if I'm not mistaken), the Council could consider doing this to avoid some of the savage cuts it has decided to make.</p> <p>3. Regarding employees being made redundant, when I was a care assistant for 16 years, many employees at risk did not get suitable jobs. I am wondering whether councillors, (I realise you are in a very difficult situation), can demonstrate that you have empathy with the people affected by these cuts and redundancies imposed on employees. You say that we are all in it together. Prove it by at least cutting the salaries of the highest earners to the level of the average employee, or better still, to the level of some of the lowest earners. They can afford it and this would save money. The Council might respond by stating that we need to pay them high salaries. I would like to quote something:-</p>	<p><i>Response by Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill</i></p>

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			<p>To make the rich work harder we pay them more. To make the poor work harder we pay them less. Some may think this is a controversial statement, but, in other words, let's have equality for all employees. They all contribute in important ways. Finally, again, I fully appreciate that the Council is in a difficult financial position. I'd like to suggest, if at all possible, that the Council consider having a moratorium on present and future planned cuts, ('savings' sound better, but they ARE cuts), and aim for a win-win outcome between the Council and people affected by the cuts. Not compromise, where the more powerful party ends up getting a lot more than the least powerful. A win-win with the people affected, and when negotiating with the relevant trade unions.</p> <p>We all need to work together for the good of all the employees, groups, and individuals affected by the situation we find ourselves in.</p>	
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Answer:

1. This plan is about ensuring one of the Council's key assets is fit for purpose while saving money by bringing staff back to County Hall and relinquishing costly leased premises elsewhere in Taunton.

There has been no significant investment in this listed building since the 1980s and as an invest to save project it will also yield an immediate and ongoing payback for the Council amounting to over £700,000 revenue savings annually.

Over £6.4 million, two thirds of the total cost, is taken up by the essential works including a replacement of the boiler and heating system, asbestos removal and electrical works which are needed to keep County Hall and the Crown Courts at Shire Hall functioning.

The remaining £3.5 million will achieve the immediate and ongoing revenue savings of over £700,000, generated by modernising the offices so staff can be moved in from several other buildings in the Taunton area, ending significant lease costs.

Importantly, these works will also free up C Block for sale or redevelopment at substantial benefit to the Council, as it will become surplus to needs.

You ask about alternative spending and further proposals for capital spending will be presented to Scrutiny meetings and the Cabinet over the next month or so. All of these are aimed at improving our infrastructure to either release savings, generate income or ensure that the Council's statutory obligations are met.

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2. All of the Council's financial planning for the future is based upon raising the Council tax to the maximum permitted by government regulation. For 2019/20 this is 3% for our core Council Tax and a further 1% for the Adults Social Care precept. The Council does not need to consult if the intention is to raise the Council Tax by up to these levels.

If there is any suggestion of raising the Council Tax above the referendum limit (currently 3% for 2019/20) then the Council would have to undertake a referendum of local residents. There is no intention to follow this route at this time as the prospect of a positive vote for an additional increase is extremely limited and the cost and disruption of the referendum itself is significant.

3. Like all local authorities, we have to live within our resources. This does mean that teams will be restructured as we look to change the way in which services are commissioned and delivered. It also means that we have improved many of our services, such as children's and adults' social care, with our highways continuing to be recognised as top-performing. Independent reports, such as our Peer Review and Ofsted, demonstrate an improving council.

You have asked whether councillors empathise with people affected by reductions to services and who are faced with the prospect of redundancy. This is something that I have witnessed during my career in other organisations as well as Somerset County Council and of course I feel for those who are affected. I do know that officers are doing as much as they can to support those who apply for voluntary redundancy and to redeploy those who are faced with compulsory redundancy.

Regarding your points about pay and equality, this Council would never suggest we pay people less so that they work harder. We are part of national terms & conditions that are agreed with trade unions and we uphold the principles and value of robust job evaluation when assessing what to pay for roles. This applies to all roles, from business support staff to social workers to directors. There have been no gratuitous pay increases for our senior staff and annual pay awards for the leadership team follow national agreements. We regularly compare the number of senior staff and their pay with other relevant organisations and we are most certainly not at the top end. You may also recall that there was a restructure of our leadership team, earlier this year, which resulted in a post being made redundant. All of the information on senior salaries is, of course, publicly available.

PQ/MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement	Response
PQ8	Mr David Redgewell	Public Transport	<p>1. We want to see Somerset Council supporting the bid from the Great Western Railway Community Fund for the West Somerset Railway to run the service for 60 days from Bishops Lydeard to Taunton next summer.</p> <p>2. We want the West Somerset Councils and Minehead Town Council to work together to improve the buses between Taunton and Minehead and also to ensure that local buses in Taunton are well connected to the Railway.</p>	Cllr John Woodman, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

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			<p>3.The council should also ensure that good bus passenger waiting facilities are available at Minehead railway station.</p> <p>4.What liability does the County Council as owners of the West Somerset Railway have regarding the remedial work directed by the Office of Road and Rail?</p> <p>5.Will the County Council make a statement to the Transport Select Committee “Health of the Bus Market”on how their partnerships work with local councils, parish councils and local bus operators such as First – which led services under threat continuing.</p>	
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I would like to thank Mr Redgewell for his questions and statements regarding public transport. Responding to each point in turn.

We are very happy to discuss with GWR and West Somerset Railway what support they need for the bid to the Great Western Railway Community Fund. However, we are not in a position to be able to offer any financial support.

I note your aspiration to improve bus services between Taunton and Minehead, and the link to the railway. This is a commercial service, but we are happy to participate in any discussions that may be taking place regarding improvements to the service and customer waiting facilities.

In response to the query regarding the Council’s liabilities, any remedial works identified by the Office of Road and Rail are the responsibility of West Somerset Railway PLC as the Statutory Railway Operator.

Finally, I can confirm that we will be submitting a short paper to the Transport Select Committee enquiry which will outline the challenges of bus provision in our rural County.

PQ/MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement	Response
MQ1	Amanda Broom	Cresta Pool	<p>In October, the government have launched a new “Drive to ensure all children can swim by the end of primary school”. This drive will see the government rolling out more swimming lesson, extra teaching and improved guidance – supported by £320 million PE and Sport Premium.</p> <p>Considering that Somerset County Council would not sell the Cresta pool to the community of Chard, can I ask if Somerset County Council will be lobbying the Government to see if some of the intended money can be used to help primary</p>	<p>Cllr David Hall, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Community Infrastructure</p>

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			schools in and around Chard get their pupils to swimming lessons? This is in light of most primary schools having now seen a decrease in the amount of swim time for pupils since the closure of the Cresta pool.	
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Answer:

Thank you Amanda for your question.

We welcome the commitment by the Government to ensuring that every child learns to swim by the end of primary school.

The PE and Sport Premium is a grant that has been around for a few years now (since the 2012 Olympics). The grant must be used to fund additional and sustainable improvements to the provision of PE and sport for the benefit of primary-aged pupils in order to encourage the development of healthy, active lifestyles.

The premium will be paid to schools by the County Council or Education Funding Agency (dependent on their status) and it will be for each school to decide on their priorities for use of this funding.

We are expecting some guidance from Swim England following the recent announcement. Amanda - officers will ensure you are provided with a copy of the guidance when it becomes available.

PQ/MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement	Response
MQ2	Terry Napper	A361	What is the mechanism to change the A361 main route? Could you explain the process required to remove the designation as a county freight route on A361 between Cannards Grave and Glastonbury?	<i>Cllr John Woodman, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport</i>

Answer:

The Council's freight route designations form part of the Local Transport Plan. The Council will be refreshing the LTP strategy including its transport policies over the next eighteen months or so. There will be a consultation as part of the refresh process followed by a Cabinet decision to adopt the revised plan. There is currently no intention to change the freight route designations as part of this refresh.