

**Meeting of Somerset County Council held in the Council Chamber, Shire Hall,
Taunton on Wednesday 21 February 2018 at 10am.**

Agenda Item 5 – Public Question Time

Member questions submitted in advance of the meeting:

1. Funding in schools

From Jane Lock

This Council believes that Somerset children are still being badly let down by Government in the funding of our schools. Even with the minor adjustment in the Funding Formula our schools are still being shortchanged by £28million a year or £400 per pupil and remains in the F40 Group. What further steps are the Administration proposing to address this unacceptable position?

Response from Cllr David Fothergill, Leader of the Council

Thank you Jane. You are right to point out that Somerset has been short-changed over many years, in reality over many decades. The recent review that saw Somerset do well compared to other counties was welcome but still leaves us well short of where we should be. We have brought together all the MPs in Somerset and pointed this out to them. They are fully aware of the unfair position Somerset finds itself in and they are putting pressure on Government to try to bring about change. This issue was also highlighted in a letter to the Prime Minister co-ordinated by the Council Leader and with the signatures of all the MPs again to raise the issue. It is a national issue but locally we are keeping the pressure on.

2. Library Consultation

From Tessa Munt

The timing of this Council's Library Consultation, including the Council's stated intention to make decisions about the service by the end of June 2018, appears to exclude the option for local Parish, Town and City Councils to support their local Libraries through the County Council's 'redesign' of the service by raising funds to contribute towards the costs of running our Libraries' service. Can our Parish, Town & City Councils across Somerset be assured that this Council's Cabinet understands their budgeting and precepting schedules? What action will the Cabinet Member, Cllr David Hall, take to ensure these Councils and the communities affected by changes are aware that this option is available?

If a Parish, Town or City Council can contribute towards the cost of a local Library alongside the provision of volunteers to assist with staffing needs, will that Library still form part of the County Council's statutory provision for Libraries in Somerset?

Can the Cabinet member, Cllr David Hall, write to me with details of properties owned or leased by Somerset County Council in each of the Areas defined in the Library

Consultation, with an indication of the consideration given to potential use of those properties by the Library service?

In Shepton Mallet, Cheddar, Highbridge and Street – what other premises have been looked at for libraries and why were they discounted?

Response on behalf of Cllr David Hall, Cabinet Member for Resources and Economic Development

SCC has not carried out a recent review of other premises for libraries in Highbridge or Street. The premises in Street and Highbridge are provided (by the Street Library Trust and Sedgemoor District Council respectively) on very good commercial terms – in both locations, SCC pays a minimal rent that is well below market value. The county council is liable for repairs and maintenance and other buildings running costs, but these are not significant in these locations. The County Council has already undertaken a co-location project in the Street / Glastonbury area, and many services have been co-located in the Glastonbury hub building (alongside Glastonbury Library). In Highbridge, our proposal for outreach service delivery would look at the potential to deliver library services from suitable alternative venues, if required.

In Cheddar, the work carried out by the Somerset Academy project recently included a survey of community assets (both council owned assets and other assets owned by various community bodies). This was conducted jointly with local community representatives and the importance of the library building as a community asset was highlighted – it is in a good location, and (although access is currently sub-optimal) it has good potential for development.

The only one of the four where other premises for a static library have been looked at in the recent past is Shepton Mallet, where the current location is very unsuitable due to ongoing maintenance and condition issues and very high rental costs. As I am sure you are aware, we have been working with Mendip District Council to look at the potential to re-locate the library building into the Shape Mendip hub – a very cost effective potential location which we feel would provide a sustainable, long-term home for the library. In addition to this work, the property service also conducted a review of potential alternative locations in 2016, using the following criteria to assess various buildings on the market at that time. These criteria were:

- Right size at approx. 100m² in shared space (or 150m² standalone)*
- Ground floor location*
- Compliant with Disability Access legislation and energy efficient*
- Sharing location with other public services and facilities, to reduce running costs.*
- Current opening hours maintained or increased*
- Premises costs reduced by at least 25% per annum*
- Modern facilities with scope to offer wider range of services*
- Affordable set up costs and viable timescale*
- No more than ½ mile from the existing location*

At that point, there were no available alternative locations offering better value than the potential Shape Mendip solution when assessed against these criteria. However, we are happy to work with the local Town Council in Shepton to explore potential alternative sites for the library, which could be taken forward after decisions are made (depending on what the decision is for library provision in Shepton). My email to Shepton Town Council attached explains where we are with this ongoing discussion – it is a complicated and locally very contentious issue, and I would be happy to brief you further if you wish.

I hope this answers your question, but if you would like any further information please do not hesitate to contact me or the team.

3. Somerset Library Service

From Liz Leyshon

Can Council please be assured that literacy is properly valued by the Cabinet member, Cllr David Hall, as he takes responsibility for the Library service redesign in Somerset? Does Cllr Hall appreciate literacy as one of the basics of all education, from the early days of childhood and continuing throughout the decades of our lives? And does he accept that the Library service of this County has an important role to play in making literacy available to all residents, wherever they live in Somerset?

As we celebrate one hundred years since the first votes for women, we must accept that deprivation of education is still used to control the lives of girls and women, to keep them at home and to stop them realising their potential. Can we be assured that the Cabinet member for Children and Family, Cllr Frances Nicholson, has the best interests of every child in mind when considering priorities for literacy within our schools and by involving our Libraries and their staff?

How will the Leader, Cllr David Fothergill, ensure that the Library Service of the future fits the new 'Vision for Somerset'?

We must continue to turn the pages and move the bookmark to the 21st century. But we must not break the spine of the Somerset Library service; we must not close the book on the written word.

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

I thank Liz for the question which in the main relates to education and therefore my colleague Frances Nicholson. However there is obvious cross-over with the mentions of our libraries and literature. This is a consultation and as I have said a number of times, no decisions have been taken. I would encourage Liz and all others interested in literacy, literature and libraries to take part in the consultation and ensure their views are heard.

I will offer the opportunity for Frances and indeed the Council Leader to comment if they wish on the other points you have raised. What I would say in response to your comment about the County Vision is that the vision for the library service is that it is "fit and sustainable for the future". We know that a strong library service will help to "improve lives" which is at the heart of the County Vision and that is our ambition both for the library service and indeed for all our services.

4. Chard Junction

From Cllr Amanda Broom

It is now nearly three months since we had the initial meeting to discuss the viability of reopening Chard Junction station. Can you provide a full written answer detailing the work completed to date, and confirm when we will have a report to update all those who attended, along with wider interested parties?

Response from Cllr John Woodman, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport
Whilst we are happy to support the project in-principle it may be challenging to move forward in practical terms without a funding partner to finance the required business case activity. The Council will not be able to undertake or commission any feasibility work until a suitable funding source has been identified.

5. Public Transport in Somerset

From Cllr Amanda Broom

Will Somerset County Council be analysing the results of Councillors who attempted the challenge set by the Get on Board team? Will this detail be used to help support a better understanding and gap analysis of the current Public Transport situation in Somerset?

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

We would be happy to analyse any results and feedback from Councillors relating to the challenge set by the Get on Board team.

6. Strategic plan for highways infrastructure

From Bill Revans

In the RECENT Planning Inspector's Hearings into the proposed Sedgemoor Local Plan it became evident that there was a need for a strategic view of the A38/M5 corridor between Burnham & Highbridge and Taunton. This area has seen substantial development over the last ten years with considerable amount to come. What plans are there to produce a strategic plan for highways infrastructure in this area?

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

Thank you Bill for your question. There is a huge amount of strategic work taking place across the county – just a couple of examples, a strategic traffic model for Taunton/Bridgewater/Wellington, and the Highways England route study of the M5. I can assure you Somerset County Council is at the heart of all these conversations and plans and I'm happy to meet with you and run through the detail.

7. Service to vulnerable people

From Bill Revans

What plans do the cabinet members for Adult Social Care and Children and Families Services have to support providers of services to vulnerable people who need sleep-in care support, if they are expected to fund or part fund the six years night care pay-back bill? Mencap estimates that this is a £400 million bill nationally and could put at risk of closure 25% of specialist homes. What efforts have there been to lobby government ministers on this issue?

Response from Cllr Frances Nicholson, Cabinet Member for Children and Families Cllr David Huxtable, Cabinet Member for Adult Social

Thank you for your question Cllr Revans, as you might expect we are well aware of the issues linked to the current employment claims related to sleep ins. We have had a number of discussions with providers about the individual implications for them and I am pleased that to date these have been positive.

8. Delayed Transfer of Care

From Bill Revans

Can the Cabinet member for Adult Social Care please update council on the Delayed Transfer Of Care situation in Somerset over the winter of 2017-18? What have been the impacts of the closures of beds at Chard and Shepton Mallet hospitals on this? What has

been the impact of the closure at night of Weston-super-Mare hospital to emergency admissions? How many cases have there been on readmission to hospital within 48 hours? What further measures have been planned to further reduce Delayed Transfers Of Care?

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

Council will be interested to hear about another success story in this area. This time last year delays of transfers were high and we launched a new approach – closer working with consultants, putting the patient at the centre of joined up thinking, and of course our innovative Home First approach – specifically to help in this regard. Home First is an approach where people are assessed for their needs at home rather than having to wait in a hospital bed to be assessed. It is based upon the principles of ‘Promoting Independence’ and is a closer partnership between the health services and social services, working together effectively. “Home First” service, which started in September last year and has so far assisted over 750 people to leave hospital when no longer requiring acute treatment and without waiting for lengthy assessments or for care to start.

I have to say that this year Somerset has not seen anything like the same levels of delays. In fact delays – known as DTOCs have more than halved and this is despite the unprecedented demands on our NHS colleagues this winter. I’m sure councillors will want to join me in congratulating the director of adults services and his team, as well as their NHS colleagues, for such a remarkable turn around and look forward to further improvements in the future.