

Public and Member Questions County Council 18 November 2020

Public Questions

PQ	From	Topic	Question/statement
PQ1 – John Woodman	Susannah Clemence	Road Safety	<p>For the Climate Emergency, the mental and physical health emergencies and the imminent employment emergency:</p> <p>our historic main roads between towns are scenic, level and direct. Originally created by walkers and drovers, they are now virtually inaccessible to anyone not travelling at speed in a motor vehicle.</p> <p>Make it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• possible,• easy, and• normal <p>to commute between towns and villages without a car, ie active travel: cycle, walk, skate, run, mobility scooter, pushchairs, wheelchairs</p> <p>And:</p> <p>Make these paths visible and appealing to people now driving on the roads, so they are tempted to cycle or walk next time they commute.</p> <p>To this end, it would be reasonable to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• devote 1/3 of Highways funding, in addition to any specific Government grants, to laying and maintaining permanent pathways running alongside the direct, main routes <p>What is the Council's aspiration for the proportion of car journeys switching to active transport in the next 20 years?</p> <p>Background:</p> <p>Somerset, has a network of ancient and wonderful ridgeways and level droves, created by and for</p>

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		<p>travellers on foot and with animals. Most of these direct, efficient routes are now inaccessible other than in a car, due to their being entirely taken over by fast, heavy motor vehicles. They have become the A39, the B3161, the A303 and so on.</p> <p>Now we want, and urgently need, to get out of our cars, to cycle, walk, or use mobility scooters, and we can't. Whether to get to work, to or from school, to visit relatives or medical services or to go shopping, we have to get in a car. At best, we might have to go a very long way round, using ill maintained routes with many intervals of dangerous high roads. We are campaigning to lower motor traffic through Glastonbury, to make it easier for us all to move around town without resorting to cars. This will be ineffectual as long as people can't get out beyond the town, to Street, and on to Bridgwater, to villages such as Meare en route to Burnham and Cheddar, to Wells, to Pilton and Shepton Mallet.</p> <p>All these are within easy cycling distance for daily commuting. Yet none of them is linked to Glastonbury by a safe, direct path wide enough to accommodate cyclists and walkers.</p>
		<p>Suzannah, thanks for the interesting questions.</p> <p>Reducing Somerset's carbon emissions due to the transport sector will be key to the achievement of our stated goal of carbon neutrality within the county. We have not set any targets regarding the proportion of journeys switching to active travel, however active travel solutions will play an important part in our ability to drive down carbon emissions, particularly for shorter distance journeys. We will also look to facilitate other forms of behavioural change to enable a reduction in the county's overall emissions including reducing the number of single occupancy vehicle journeys, encouraging more people to use public transport and enabling alternative fuels which will be key to</p>

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			<p>decarbonising longer distance journeys where other transport options are not a viable.</p> <p>The government gives us a highway maintenance grant to keep our roads, footpaths and cycleways in a good state and safe for the road-using public. If we don't spend this money on maintenance then the repair costs will spiral out of control quickly. There are currently not many Government grants for sustainable and active transport in rural areas. You will be pleased to learn that the government looks like it is changing its support and is putting in place firmer guidelines and a specific fund for pedestrian and cycle schemes. We will need to bid for funding and we don't yet know what the rules will be to access any funds, but we are looking forward to the opportunity to bid.</p> <p>We have noted the great support from the majority of the public for the emergency active transport arrangements put in place to enable covid secure shopping in our high streets over recent months. We have now secured a further £450k of Government funding for such measures so can now expand this type of provision subject to agreement with our district council colleagues and also reflecting the views of the business community.</p>
<p>PQ2 – John Woodman & David</p>	<p>David Redgewell</p>	<p>Public Transport and Covid-19 impact.</p>	<p>I would like to address the meeting regarding public transport infrastructure in the county.</p> <p>It would appear from inspection by South West Transport Network and Somerset Catch</p>

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Fothergill			<p>Bus Campaign that bus shelters have not been cleaned adequately across the county and are not COVID-19 secure. The bus shelters need urgent attention and clean district wide. Bus shelters in the West of England Combined Authority, Gloucestershire and North Somerset undergo regular special COVID-19 cleaning. For example, some Frome bus shelters haven't been cleaned in years. The bus shelter at Badcox, Frome, has around 20 full dog poo bags stuck around the timetable casing and is a public health hazard.</p> <p>The government has allocated money to Avon and Somerset Police. Are you able to advise how this money is being distributed across Somerset. What enforcement on the public transport network has happened to date for wearing face coverings in Somerset? We would like to see covid-19 marshals at Bus stops in Taunton town centre and in Town and city centres and in Bus stations in Yeovil, Wells Wellington, Bridgwater, Minehead and smaller towns.</p> <p>There needs to be proper enforcement of wearing face coverings across the Somerset bus network. School children often take off their face coverings once they are sat down on the buses. COVID Marshals and Journey Makers are now in operation in Bath and Bristol to ensure enforcement of face coverings. Can Somerset County Council look into getting some COVID marshals to cover the Somerset public transport network?</p> <p>We welcome the wear of face covering by all children on Somerset school and college buses as well as service bus we would like to screen fixed to all driver's passengers safe scheme fitted to all buses. The bus timetables need updating with First Group, especially in Mendip District and also with the other operators.</p> <p>We also have a social distancing problem at the main bus stop in Taunton town centre in Castle Way, Corporation Street and The Parade. There are too many buses and coaches trying to use bus stands. A proper safer bus departure plan needs to be put in place and</p>
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this should also include using the old bus station site. and a new Public transport interchange facility in Taunton town centre.

We would like bus facilities included in Yeovil town centre Bridgwater, Glastonbury in social distancing and pedestrians scheme and cycling schemes.

We are very concerned with Travelwatch south west about the proposals to turn Taunton bus and coach station into a car park. This will undermine climate change emergency and cause poor air quality in the Town centre and undermine the Taunton park and rise service from Gateway and silk mills via Musgrove Park Hospital.

We are opposed with other transport user group to this proposal.

It also is a good reason for one Unitary Authority in the Taunton area dealing with planning and transport functions.

The D2 school bus service, funded by Somerset County Council and West of England Combined Authority runs from Frome via the villages to Bath. However, the afternoon service omits Rode village. This means school children from the age of 11 have to walk 2 miles down narrow predominantly single country lanes or across muddy fields (this will soon be done in the dark) to get home. We need a school bus service that covers all the villages on the D2 route.

A proper COVID-19 secure bus waiting facility needs to be developed in Taunton including new bus interchange facilities and shelter with provision for disabled castle kerbs. If a new bus interchange is designed and developed it could be funded by the Department for Transport grant through the South West Transport Board. A great example of new bus and coach interchange facilities are Gloucester and facilities under CONSTRUCTION in Weston-Super-Mare.

Please could the Council write to all Parish, Town, City and District Council's about the important of bus shelters cleaning and update bus service information. We welcome real time information system displays being installed in Frome town centre and should be rolled out county wide.

Waiting shelters are required at Minehead town centre and railway station. Welcome the West Somerset railway reopening over Christmas 2020. And work on new stations at Wellington, Langport and Somerton. We welcome proposals to reopen Chard junction station. The Radstock to Frome line should be protected as should the Frome to Shepton mallet route via the East Somerset railway and tracked to Wells.

It must be remembered that all public transport is funded by the Department for Transport COVID-19 grant's £27500 million for bus a week and £182 million for railway services.

Frome Town Centre redevelopment has been a success, improving traffic flow and bus shelters. However, the wheelchair castle kerbs is the wrong place and too short meaning that two buses can't park in the bus bays (Boots side) at one time. and more sides on the shelter s to keep passengers dry from the wind and rain.

We welcome First group new proposal for the D2x between Bath Spa bus and coach station to Frome. The D2x will increase capacity on the route which is especially needed as bus capacity is reduced at the moment due to COVID social distancing measures (single decker only carries 18-20 while a double decker can carry 33 people).

We would like to see improved bus services to Frome train station. We also need good bus rail interchange facilities at Frome railway station and Castle Cary station. Need to

		<p>provide public transport network bus information at the stations too.</p> <p>We would like to see an integrated bus ticket for all operators in Somerset like Wiltshire and a bus rail integrated ticket. We also need a new local bus depot in Frome following the closure of Westbury bus depot.</p> <p>The barriers again need repairing at Wells bus and coach station There needs to be a discussion with First group about reopening the travel shop and information centre facilities at Wells bus and coach station. Also, in Bath spa bus and coach station.</p> <p>The timetable also needs to be displayed for Berry Coaches to London Hammersmith bus station.</p> <p>To restore the late bus service on First Bus 172,173 and 174 to Wells bus station and Shepton Mallet from Bath Spa bus station. And later and Sunday bus service on 126 from Wells bus station to Cheddar and Weston-Super-Mare bus and railway stations Weston super mare to Burnham on sea 20 Sunday services .. These will require further local authorities support or Department for Transport funding.</p> <p>On planning we ask that the new planning application for the new development known as Selwood Garden Village near Sainsbury's (Frome) has a full sustainable transport plan. This should include proper road width for buses, a bus service to Frome town center and Frome train station, plus walking and cycling.</p> <p>We also hope Mendip District Council will respond to the government's White Paper: Planning for the Future. There is little mention of public transport access and planning in the paper.</p> <p>With regards to Somerset County Council reorganisation we would like to see the option</p>
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		<p>of a merger with BANES Council and becoming part of the West of England Combined Authority. Mendip District Council look north to Bath and the Wells. There should be full consultation on this issue. It is very important to get full public support for the reorganization of the Somerset region. North Somerset council needs to become part of the west of England combined authority.</p> <p>We would suggest that full public consultation take place in Somerset North Somerset and Banes about the local government reorganisation and mayoral combined authority with the county and mayoral elections take place in may 2022 to allow for public consultation on the unity option proposed by Somerset county council and the District s. and unity authorities and WECA.</p> <p>A review will need to be undertaken of the Two region transport board: Western Gateway and South West Transport Board.</p> <p>David Redgewell South West Transport Network and Railfuture Severnside.</p>
		<p>I thank David for his question and his continued campaigning to improve transport arrangements for people across our county – he does a great job and his views are highly regarded. He raises a wide range of questions and observations some of which relate to the responsibilities of this Council and some of which do not. I will briefly set out our response to those questions indicating which relate to our areas of responsibility and I also note the range of observations and ideas for future enhancements to bus and rail services in the County that David has provided.</p> <p><u>Covid-19 bus shelter cleaning and social distancing:</u> Unlike the West of England Combined Authority, ownership of Bus Shelters in Somerset lies with either District, Town or Parish Council’s and they are responsible for their maintenance and cleaning. The</p>

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District Councils have advertising contracts, which include cleaning and maintenance and therefore most of the busy town centre bus tops in the County should be subject to a regular cleaning regimes. We will write to District, Town and Parish Council's about the concerns being raised.

Face covering enforcement on public transport: Again this is not the Council's responsibly. I am not aware of any enforcement in the wearing of face coverings that has been undertaken by Avon and Somerset Police but will make them aware of the concerns raised.

Face coverings on school and college transport: We are working closely with Secondary Schools and Colleges across Somerset on the wearing of face coverings by students. The fitting of screens in vehicles is a matter for operators, where we have received requests for financial assistance for funded services we have supported operators through the Covid 19 Bus Services Support Grant allocated to Somerset County Council.

Proposals to turn Taunton bus and coach station into a car park: This is a project being developed by Somerset West and Taunton Council.

The D2 school bus service: Somerset County Council does not fund the D2 service. We are aware of issues relating to school children on this route, which we understand is being addressed by BANES. We have offered to provide a contribution through our allocation of Department of Education funding for additional capacity to provide access to Education, but to date we have not been asked to assist.

Frome Town Centre redevelopment: This is a Town Council project.

Facilities at Wells bus and coach station: This facility is owned by Mendip District Council.

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			<p><u>Berry’s Coaches to London Hammersmith:</u> We posted timetables at several stops when this service recommenced after the first lockdown. This service is currently suspended but we will check again with Berry’s coaches to see if there are any pick up points where timetable information is not available.</p> <p><u>Bus services on First Bus routes (172,173,174, 126 and 20):</u> Services were provided on a commercial basis by First Bus and we would expect them to resume once passenger numbers begin to increase.</p> <p><u>Selwood Garden Village:</u> We are not the planning authority so are unable to issue directives on the requirements of planning applications, but as a consultee we are keen to see good sustainable transport options provided with new development.</p> <p><u>Local Government Reorganisation:</u> David – you reference the proposal put forward by the district councils. This has already been roundly rejected by Bath and North East Somerset who want nothing to do with the proposal. Our own proposals will give more weight to local views in Mendip area and place power where it should be – at the heart of local communities.</p>
<p>PQ3 – John Woodman</p>	<p>David Orr</p>	<p>Travel Plans</p>	<p>Councillor John Woodman has submitted a generally positive review of the ECI service. However, I have evidenced concerns about a lack of oversight of Section 106 agreements and Travel Plans.</p> <p>I welcome the undertaking in section 2.1 to “improve the way planning applications are considered and processed between the planning authorities and the County Council as highway authority”.</p>

During a recent Parking Review undertaken for the Richard Huish College area, where student on-street parking is the principal issue, the Parking Manager decided to utilise a residents' petition urging the College to take responsibility for the student parking problems.

The petition count was added into consultation returns that were inadequate on their own to justify charged parking schemes.

Richard Huish College had no active Travel Plan despite a Planning Condition requiring one as long as new teaching blocks were occupied.

The Parking Manager saw no issue with allowing the College to take no part in a parking review for their student parking problems in an area named after the College! Despite this Council's claims to support a unitary council, I was left playing "two-tier council bingo" between the Local Planning Authority and SCC as the Travel Plan Authority.

ECI stated that the requirement for an active Travel Plan by the College had been discharged, but on further legal advice it was shown that viewpoint was wrong, so the College does need a current Travel Plan.

ECI maintains a web-based Travel Plan system whereby monitoring records submitted by the developer are made. For Richard Huish College, their original Travel Plan 2011-16 had no ECI monitoring records. I then checked the Travel Plan for the Killams Park development in the Taunton South division. Again, there were no monitoring records showing and repeated requests to ECI for them have been ignored for weeks.

On completion of Travel Plans, ECI does not review them to see how effective they were

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		<p>in reducing car journeys and shifting people to walking, cycling and bussing. This lack of a review of completed Travel Plans to assess their effectiveness is, in my view, a failure of policy and common sense.</p> <p>We are here today debating climate change yet it appears that Travel Plans are not managed and resourced effectively by ECI.</p> <p>I ask that the Audit Committee now place Travel Plans on to the SWAP audit schedule to ensure that the policy is fit for purpose and that Travel Plans are effectively managed for compliance by developers. I found out in 2016 that a key s106 condition for Killams Park to have a Travel Plan had been overlooked by ECI.</p> <p>I asked ECI many weeks back (with follow-ups) for a simple report on the current s106 agreement status for Killams Park.</p> <p>In October 2016, SWAP auditors investigated s106 monitoring in ECI and, in a “partial opinion”, concluded that “the current system relies upon the honesty of the developers”. ECI Management then gave commitments that a costly new IT system would be implemented by March 2017, with updated processes to address the many failings found. Why now can’t ECI simply print a progress report on the Killams Park s106 status?</p> <p>Should SWAP auditors review the s106 oversight system again? Would ECI also commit to web-publishing s106 status by planning permission and area, so that Councillors, Town and Parish councils and engaged citizens can track progress and assist in s106 compliance?</p>
		<p>Thank you for this highly complicated set of questions David, I am aware that you have received full responses from officers on both these travel plan issues which have been</p>

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			<p>raised previously in correspondence. Richard Huish College has discharged its planning condition to prepare a travel plan and we continue to work with them to encourage as wide range of sustainable travel options as possible. The outstanding monitoring data from the Killams site is now being uploaded to our monitoring system by the Developer.</p> <p>As I am sure you are aware, SWAP undertook a follow up audit on the management of s106 agreements during 2018/19. SWAP were assured that there was both an auditable system and a set of management processes in place associated with the management of s106 agreements. These systems and processes still remain in place today. Your request to the South West Audit Partnership is noted by you should know that SWAP have reduced their work considerably in order to redeploy staff to support councils' efforts to control and combat Covid-19. I would like to thank them publicly for this approach which is a huge help at a time of most need.</p>
<p>PQ 4-6 Cllr Fothergill</p>	<p>Eva Bryczkowski</p>	<p>Central Government Funding</p>	<p>QUESTION ONE: County Councillors, regarding getting increased funding from central government, will you, in groups, brainstorm and and create a long list of various imaginative activities that SCC can take in order to capture the attention of the media and government - eventually leading to the treasury coughing up the necessary funding on a sustainable basis?</p> <p>QUESTION TWO: Coming from the premise that</p> <p>THERE IS NO FAILURE ONLY FEEDBACK</p> <p>What are the reasons as to why you might not carry out various actions, described above, that are imaginative, inspiring and more likely to achieve success than what the LGA has been doing for many years?</p>

			<p>QUESTION THREE: Turning the above doubts into clear goals, will SCC provide a rough outline of what needs to happen in order to achieve the outcomes described in question one?</p> <p>*For example</p> <p>i) Turning problems into opportunities and clarifying what SCC wants to achieve.</p> <p>ii) Stating when will the above happen.</p> <p>iii) Decide who will be mainly responsible for overseeing the above and making sure this happens.</p> <p>iv) Outline the criteria and checkpoints along the way that will let you know your outcomes are being achieved.</p>
			<p>Thank you for your comments and questions Eva. I'm afraid the idea that the government is providing extra funding to this council to carry out non-essential works is a fallacy. There is no "spare" fund to be used in the way you describe. Instead this council will set a balanced budget despite the enormous workload and expense that Covid-19 has brought about. I would however like to point out a couple of areas where creativity and innovation have brought about improvements to people's lives in our county. Our adults services are rightly hailed nationally as leaders and ground-breakers in the way we work with the NHS and communities in order to target the right support to the right people in the right way – a hugely successful and innovative approach that helps the NHS,</p>

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			<p>improves outcomes for our residents and actually saves this Council money at the same time. We are now embarking on a creative new approach to supporting children with a new family approach that again bring about better outcomes for families and is an exciting plan that has been welcomed by our children’s services and community groups alike. And as for the process of setting goals and delivering on them, I would point to our creative use of using AV robots in classrooms – again nationally acknowledged, our award winning contact centre which again is in the regional finals, and our new digital transformation programme which is delivering improvements and developments for the public and staff alike at a time when they will have great impact.</p>
PQ5 Cllr Clare Paul	Sigurd Reimers	Climate Change Strategy	<p>Towards a Climate Resilient Somerset Somerset’s Climate Emergency Strategy: The County Council and the District Councils are to be commended for having produced such a comprehensive and accessible report.</p> <p>In Section 4, Our Goals, (pages 96-98) the report rightly outlines the role that the Councils themselves have in decarbonizing their own operations, estates and assets (“Goal 1: To decarbonise Local Authorities, the wider public sector estates and reduce our carbon footprint”). In this section there are some laudable and important proposals, but I see no reference to the investments that the County Council holds, particularly via its Pensions Scheme, many of which are placed in fossil fuel companies. How is the County Council (and the District Councils) intending to influence the upcoming review of Council pensions when it comes to phasing out these investments?</p> <p>Sigurd Reimers, Somerset CC Pensioner</p>
			<p>Thank you for your question. The answer has not changed since you last asked this at full council. As you are aware responsibility for the running of the Pension Fund has been fully delegated to the Pensions Committee. There are very good reasons for this. The Pension Fund is not the Council’s money, we are custodians of it on behalf of a wide range of stakeholders and Pensions Committee is specifically set up with representation</p>

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			<p>of all of these stakeholders.</p> <p>Pensions are a very complex area, the members of the Pensions Committee commit themselves to training so as to be able to deal with these complexities and also can devote the time to discuss and explore them which would not be possible for Full Council. The Climate Emergency and how to respond to it within the Fund's investments is a complex issue, especially as it is intertwined with the pooling of investments that the Fund is obliged to do.</p> <p>The Somerset Fund is working with our pool, Brunel, and the other members of the pool to develop climate aware investing. Brunel's Climate Change policy can be found on its website (https://www.brunelpensionpartnership.org/climate-change/).</p>
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Member Questions

MQ	From	Topic	Question/statement
MQ - 1&2 John Woodman & Pat Flaherty	Cllr Leigh Redman-	Highways and Council Tax Exemption for young people leaving care	<p>Q1. Question to cabinet member for Highways. Small improvement schemes.</p> <p>There is an assumption that next years county election may be delayed. In the previous quadrennium members of council were able to submit annual requests for safety based highways improvements in their divisions, at the start of this quadrennium this was changed (I would say surprisingly) to limit applications from local members, in some cases disadvantaging some of the more proactive members, you will recall that we were in a concerning financial position when the decision to limit applications was made, at the time although frustrated I agreed with the decision because of our financial position, as a council we now find ourselves in a slightly better financial position, having had an injection of highways money, I would argue that the position has changed and therefore could be reviewed.</p>

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		<p>I have had a project in my division that has been dipping in and out of action for the last 6 years, in fact I was a little surprised that it was not included in the 'shove ready' list of projects that benefited from the last round of government cash, the project could have saved a number of vehicles being written off or damaged and improved safety on a busy road in my division.</p> <p>My question is, can we reopen the SIS scheme for applications so that members can action opportunities to make it safer for constituents in our divisions?</p> <p>Q2. Question for Chief executive. Council tax exemption for young people leaving care. You will recall I asked a question of full council a while ago, seeking support to have a simple and effective process in place across all councils for young people when leaving care that may be required to pay council tax. The tax would mean some of the most at risk young people we are charged with supporting are dealt a financial blow when living alone for the first time, the Chief executive agreed to try and find a process by liaising with district leaders, I know that this was raised and work started.</p> <p>Can I ask for an update please?</p>
		<p>Q1. Thank you Leigh. I'm pleased to say that the Small Improvement Schemes programme, will feature within our budget proposals coming forward over the coming months. I hope that it will be supported across all parties.</p> <p>Draft response (Claire Winter)</p> <p>Your question for council tax exemption for young care leavers is a good one. I would love to tell you that the district councils support this council's view that ALL care leavers should be exempt from council tax to the age of 25, in line with nationally recognised good practice. Unfortunately, the four district councils continue to have their own</p>

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			<p>approaches to this. Sedgemoor, Mendip, Somerset West and Taunton have agreed at different times and at a strategic level that they will exempt all Somerset care leavers from council tax to the age of 25. However, it is only in Sedgemoor that care leavers feel the process is clear and the staff respectful of their circumstances. In other districts (Somerset West and Taunton in particular) front line staff appear unaware of the exemption, resulting in senior managers regularly having to intervene to ensure that the exemption is provided as agreed. South Somerset continues to exempt only those up to the age of 21 and to then employ an “individualised approach” up to 25. Frankly, it is a shame, if not a disgrace that districts cannot coordinate a consistent and easy to access system for the benefit of the most vulnerable young people in our county. As a result, our care leavers continue to experience a post code lottery depending on where they live. If anything demonstrates why FOUR councils should operate at ONE this is the case.</p>
MQ 3&4 – John Woodman & Frances Nicholson	Cllr Mike Rigby	Brexit Lorry Parks and Funding for families in need.	<p>Q1. In September, Communities Secretary, Robert Jenrick, announced that Government was awarding itself the power to build Brexit lorry parks, required in the event that contrary to promises made, cross-border trade was not in fact frictionless and significant numbers of lorries could not get out of the country as planned. These lorry parks would not require planning permission and would be built without reference to local residents. Somerset County Council is on the list where such lorry parks can be built. Can you tell us where in Somerset these lorry parks might be built and detail the consultation that this council has had with government before and after the new legislation was introduced</p> <p>Q2. At the beginning of the recent half term, in response to pressure from Marcus Rashford’s campaign, Somerset County Council announced a fund of £125,000 to help families in need through the holidays. Please can you tell me how much of that fund was spent during the Autumn half term and what it was spent on.</p>

Q1 Thank you Mike – I am not aware of any request for lorry parks in Somerset. On 8th October, the Government published the updated Border Operating Model. That document gives locations for new border infrastructure including lorry parks. There are none planned for the South West.

Q2 – Agreed with Frances -

As Councillor Rigby says, the county council announced that it would add an extra £125,000 to the funding that had been made available by Government to address whole population food needs in Somerset. Arrangements were already in place to support families through the half term, so none of this £125,000 was spent during the autumn half term. However, at that time there remained concern about provision over the winter and it was considered prudent to boost the funds available to address winter need.

Members may wish to note that the council’s strategy was and is to support local arrangements to ensure that support can reach as far as possible. During half term any families who needed help with food, whether or not they were eligible for free school meals, were asked to:

- Check the national websites for local food solutions, for example ‘Help out now Schools Out’, or ring the Coronavirus helpline 0300 790 6275.**
- Where there was not a local offer the Council was able to provide frozen meals, or else help from the Village Agent.**
- Although the line was well publicised SCC received limited calls to the Helpline, and there were no requests for meals or referral to the Village Agents.**
- 700 frozen meals dispatched to Village agents to support families in need.**
- Village agents supported 150 families.**

Somerset County Council would like to thank the many community groups and

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			<p>suppliers who donated meals to children during October half-term.</p> <p>We welcome the extra funding that has recently been made available by Government and arrangements for food support over the winter are being finalised. When they are complete both a members' information sheet and a press release will be issued.</p>
MQ5 Cllr Fothergill	Cllr Jane Lock	One Somerset	<p>Should the Secretary of State for Housing Communities & Local Government decline to accept both the One Somerset and the Stronger Somerset business cases, what will happen and what is the process in terms of:</p> <p>a. re-submission of a different or amended business case? b. will a rescheduled election then take place later in the year ? c. will the entire cost of a rearranged election fall to SCC ?</p>
			<p>Thank you Jane – should that unlikely scenario occur (and to my knowledge it never has anywhere else), the deferred election is most likely to take place in May 2022.</p>
MQ6 Cllr Fothergill	Cllr Liz Leyshon	Covid-19 Funding	<p>How can Members of this Council be assured that the Covid-19 funding from Government, now forming part of budget equalisation reserves, will be spent where it is most needed for the residents of Somerset. This Council has recently placed £9.5m in a reserve (Cabinet decision, 23rd September) while other Councils may need to draw on their reserves this financial year.</p>

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			<p>Thank you Liz – yes I can confirm that every penny of government provided Covid-19 funding – and in fact several millions of pounds of unfunded activity – WILL be spent on our fight against this pandemic. We have seen significant cost pressures from Covid in the current year and also in the next financial year which we will built into the MTFP. We will continue to update and inform Members of the financial impacts of Covid through the monthly budget monitoring report to Cabinet and Scrutiny.</p>
MQ7-8 Cllr Purbrick	Cllr Munt	One Somerset and IT	<p>1. How many laptops, computers and tablets have been distributed during the first Coronavirus lockdown from supplies held:</p> <p>a. by the Government?</p> <p>b. by Somerset County Council?</p> <p>i. to Somerset students, and in which years of school or college?</p> <p>ii. to other individuals?</p>
			<p>“Prior to the DFE initiative we made 70 reconditioned laptops available to vulnerable children using income generated by selling old devices and that more recently we have loan around 100 second hand devices to schools to help out with home learning.”</p> <p>The government asked for bids for laptop computers at various stages through the pandemic and Somerset County Council bid for the maximum each time. Our total allocation from the Department for Education is 998. These have been allocated as</p>

follows:

**515 to children with a social worker
156 to disadvantaged children in Year 10
36 to schools as a reserve according to need
122 to schools through further requests, again as need arises.
This is a total of 829 laptops.**

We currently have 100-200 laptops that are available to schools for use. These are allocated prioritising those new into care or children looked after.

At the point of a school bubble being closed due to a confirmed case of Covid, we received a list of all the vulnerable pupils within that year group. The Head of the school is invited to make contact to discuss the laptop ordering process, and they are also made aware at their point of what their allocation is.

Cllr Munt will also know that alongside the government devices, we are also working with a stock of 50 AV1 Robots. We have tried to ensure that schools are able to access these more easily under the current circumstances. They can be borrowed for the 2-week self-isolation period, or loaned for a longer time to young people who are unable to attend school due to being CEV.

We have held back a small reserve of devices to support those children currently on the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) list. Children's SMT and school partners are aware of this.

Again, thanks for the question.

Public and Member Questions County Council 18 November 2020

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