

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

Public Questions

PQ	From	Topic	Question/statement
PQ1 -	Alan Debenham	Council Tax increases, Debt borrowing,	<p>Question 1</p> <p>In the recent Commons debate on the Local Government Settlement, the MHCLG Minister, Luke Hall MP, said that this year's settlement was very generous in that overall it involved a 4.5% increase in REAL TERMS compared with last year and local residents would much benefit. The opposition strongly refuted this by saying that Local Councils generally were having to take a serious hit over inadequate funding for the Covid-19 emergency, whilst still suffering from real terms cuts of up to 40% over the past decade through severe Tory austerity cuts, AND including still cuts to Revenue Support for 2021/22. The so-called 4.5% real terms increases are achieved ONLY by loading them onto very regressive Council Tax, with nearly all Councils – including this one – making local residents, especially the struggling poor, pay another 4.99% more for less services. What is the Leader's response to this damning critique of the government and this Council's position?</p> <p>Question 2</p> <p>From the Treasury Management Strategy (TMS), which includes vast millions of debt borrowing paid for at 4.66% interest and a few millions of County Council cash investments gaining a return of only of 0.73%, you can easily see how the billionaire so-called national and global investors of this world use usury to make themselves forever richer at the expense of the 99% rest of us. Is there no alternative which the Council can use to stop this daylight robbery and immorality?</p> <p>Question 3</p> <p>It is noted that the TMS and the accompanying capital programme should be serving the best interests of the County Plan which now includes the much-vaunted Climate Emergency Strategy (CES). Why is there not a full description of how in detail everything in the TMS adheres to the CES, particularly in divestment from any investment whatsoever in fossil fuels or associated products and all other environmentally damaging products or enterprises?</p>

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

Response - Cllr Mandy Chilcott

My thanks to Alan for his questions, as ever thoughtful if not strictly accurate. In his first question he asks in effect why residents should pay an increased council tax for fewer services. I would point him to look at the actual budget which has significant investment in the key services closest to his heart – adults social care and children’s services. We propose a budget that will INCREASE spending in our Adults’ social care budgets by more than £10m. That is an increase, NOT a decrease. For children’s an INCREASE of £9m, for our infrastructure and economic and community infrastructure teams, an INCREASE. In fact the only area that will be reduced Alan, is our back-office service. I hope you would agree that we have got the emphasis right in this case – providing MORE funding for our adults and Children’s services and to Improve Lives in Somerset and providing less funding for back-office provision.

Your second point is about the historic debt that we as an administration inherited. I have no doubt that at the time, the ruling party of the day made decisions that they believed were valid and good value at that time. It has of course not stood the test of time and this Administration has had to deal with that level of debt repayment. There is nothing we can do as this borrowing is locked in for a generation to come with considerable financial penalties with any early repayment. By way of example, to repay the £159m of PWLB debt would cost more than an extra £125m in penalties.

Your final point is about the Climate Emergency Strategy. I’m pleased that our budget for next year shows considerable investment in this area but you are right to point out we need to do far more. That is why the on-going unitary debate is of such importance to Somerset. With a single powerful voice for Somerset, with one unitary council to speak for the population, we will be able to lobby and fight for more funding for our county and in particular our big ambitions for climate change. We will work hard to ensure the government consultation is successful and that they reach what this council believes is the right decision for us all.

PQ/MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement
PQ2	Andrew Pope	Council Tax increase	I appeal to you to refuse the 4.99% increase in council tax. Ask yourself whether this is really justified when there has been money wasted on One Somerset which no residents of Somerset asked for, and where the County has a budget report which is deliberately opaque, long-

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

winded and hiding the truth.

The Cabinet Member responsible, as it is Councillor Chilcott's report after all, could have made it clearer, by asking officers to do so. Instead, the public has to interpret a total mess hiding the mis-spending of public funds on a huge scale. Why do I say the public? Because you councillors aren't doing your jobs.

There should be no taxation without representation. And the County Council has not listened to residents who want a referendum before any changes to how we are governed. In 2007, 82% of residents voted against a unitary. Even your own rigged consultation showed a lack of support. Please just stop it now.

Not only has this money been wasted, you are proposing to pay for other past, present and future mistakes by increasing council tax. £17 million for something that residents don't want, plus countless millions on who knows what in the future. No taxation without representation.

I spoke at the Police and Crime Panel recently, and for the first time, they refused an unjustified 6.6% increase which amounted to £15. They are councillors just like all of you apart from Councillor Hunt – national party politicians. Despite this, they stood up for residents and voted 11 for and 1 abstention. Your proposals are more than four times higher. Why? How?

I suggest to you that this level of increase is not justified, so you must refuse it today. Residents feel that you've got a cheek asking for any more money, let alone 4.99%, when your Conservative-run Council has provided no pushback whatsoever on the Conservative Government's failure to protect our county and its residents from the Pandemic. Instead, you beg for letters to and from failed Prime Minister Johnson. If you think Boris Johnson's support bolsters support for you, you are very much mistaken. He and you have failed us.

The public expect the county council to be responsible. Instead of this, you are proposing to cut

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

support for Freedom of Information, spend millions on a solar farm that won't pay back for many years, plus more wasteful IT spending. These are just some examples but there are many more. Please think again.

You've squirreled millions of un-ringfenced Government Covid money to bolster Council's reserves, asking suffering residents to pay more again. What a cheek.

You should be standing up for us. You should be refusing this increase today. I say again, the Police and Crime Panel finally found some backbone. So, should you, because you should respect the dire situation that residents find themselves in, and vote against this misguided budget. No taxation without representation.

Thank you for listening and I hope that I will get a written response, and there will be a healthy debate, about the points that I have raised. You can contact us at somerinds@gmail.com.

Response - Cllr Mandy Chilcott

Dear Mr Pope, I note that you ask this as leader of a form of a political party so I will respond in the same tone.

I have to say I find it extraordinary that you are advocating a real time cut in support for our most vulnerable people, that at a time of a pandemic when our care homes are under such extraordinary pressure and our schools desperate for all the support we can give them, you seem to think the most appropriate course of action is not to INVEST in our adults and children's services, as we propose, but instead REDUCE their funding. Extraordinary.

I'm hoping that we will have some cross-party support for our budget proposals – and that single demonstration of understanding of our budgets, the huge amount of care that we give and the need to invest all we can in our key care services is what underpins everything within this budget. That sends a strong message to you and your political party.

You make totally unfounded allegations about misspending and offer no evidence so I will offer some evidence to help you out. Our accounts are prepared by qualified accountants and our Finance Director who has a statutory position. Those accounts are then audited by an independent organisation, and then signed off. We are open and transparent in this process and anticipate ALL our spending will be signed off by our auditors. During the pandemic we have voluntarily provided relevant spending details to government to enable them to

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

approve our Covid spending – and as the Prime Minister has recently acknowledged, this has been welcomed and again given a clean bill of health.

You foolishly accuse us of “squirreling away covid funding in a reserve” - let me remind you this pandemic is far from over. We will need to spend this Covid money on combatting this virus and its impacts for many months to come. If by “squirreling away” you mean prudently and with common sense, we are setting aside some funding for the costs that will inevitably come, then we can agree on one thing.

As to your points about unitary status, we are in a government-driven consultation and will play our part in that. Be under no illusion, this is a government consultation that will lead to a decision by the Secretary of State. It is not in this Council’s hands as to what, if any, local government reform will be put in place but we are clear that we believe One Somerset is by far the proposal that will have the biggest impact on residents in Somerset with more investment, better services and a joined-up approach that will improve lives in our county.

Finally, a comment on your highly inflammatory comments about this council’s work during the pandemic and your charge that we have “failed” our residents. I have nothing but praise for our staff, our partners, our volunteers and all councillors across our county – and by that I mean at this council, our districts, our towns, city and parishes, who have worked so hard and so long to carry out the government’s message “protect the NHS and save lives”.

It is more than disappointing that you believe it is right to criticise this effort and I know that all councillors in this meeting will agree with me that our staff’s leadership, dedication and enormous efforts have been instrumental in helping manage this crisis and I have no doubts whatsoever that they have saved lives.

PQ	From	Topic	Question/statement
PQ3	Nigel Behan	Air Quality and Climate Change	Question 1 Whilst it is not too surprising, given the magnitude of the pandemic induced reaction, that the Taunton & Yeovil AQMAs have achieved compliance with mandatory standards for the first time how does SCC intend to maintain compliance (without transferring the problem (advecting) it elsewhere) and how will the Climate Emergency Strategy be put into reality (e.g. include practical actions and measurable, specific “targets”) to prevent increases in carbon dioxide (and other Greenhouse Gas) concentrations?

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

--	--	--	--

Response - Cllr Clare Paul

Answer Q1

Thank you Nigel for your questions, I will take them in turn if I may

Air Quality compliance is a District Council function and we will continue to provide support to them as they consider any necessary amendments to their Air Quality Action Plans in both Taunton and Yeovil.

As you know, Carbon Dioxide and other GHG emissions are not the sole contributor to local air quality issues, so different strategies are needed to address both climate change and local air quality, however some of the actions will undoubtedly be complementary.. For example we have recently, in conjunction with District Councils and Exmoor National Park, developed a county-wide strategy to support the strategic approach to the roll-out of Electric Vehicle charging points across the county, a strategy that will address both carbon emissions and air quality across Somerset.

We are in the process of further developing our Climate Action Plans, however, as noted above, many actions are already underway.

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

PQ	From	Topic	Question/statement
	Nigel	Air Quality	Question 2

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

	Behan	and Climate Change	<p>The report "Air Quality and coronavirus: a glimpse of a different future or business as usual" by the Parliamentary Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (11 February 2021) noted in the Summary Air Quality and coronavirus: a glimpse of a different future or business as usual - Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee - House of Commons (parliament.uk) that: Cleaner air and clearer skies were one of the few positives that many people experienced following the first covid-19 lockdown in March 2020. However, as the pandemic progressed evidence also began to emerge that air pollution might be playing a role in people's susceptibility to, and increased mortality from, covid-19. Air pollution is the largest environmental risk to UK public health and is linked to as many as 64,000 early deaths a year. It is an issue that our predecessor Committees returned to several times, concluding the Government had failed to address the scale of the challenge.</p> <p>What practical steps and measures will SCC (along with other Local Authorities) take to act and respond to this report's key findings?</p>
--	--------------	---------------------------	---

Response – Cllr Clare Paul

Answer Q2

Secondly, you refer to the Air Quality and Coronavirus report and you are seeking information about the practical steps and measures SCC will take to act and respond to this report's key findings.

Somerset's draft air quality strategy was put on hold while the climate change strategy was under development, to ensure that the two were compatible. For the last year the officers at the county and district councils who were working on air quality, alongside other duties, have very largely been working on Covid-19 matters. Due to the reduction in road traffic through the lockdowns, air quality was improved during 2020, but it is recognised that there is a risk that motor traffic could increase beyond previous levels if people prove reluctant to return to public transport, or to cycle and walk where feasible. This could worsen air quality in the short-term, as well as other public health factors such as physical activity and obesity.

In the last week air quality officers have briefly discussed the need to revisit the draft air quality strategy to revise and make fit for purpose, as soon as the Covid situation allows, hopefully this summer. This will include consideration of developments in policy and practice, such as the

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

document referenced in the question. It will have a particular focus on achieving compliance with legal limits in the Yeovil and Taunton Air Quality Management Areas. It will also consider other air quality issues such as use of solid fuels, for example wood burning stoves.

Members will be aware that the Active Travel Cell has been working throughout the pandemic to improve provision for active travel (walking and cycling). In the first phase this was focused on ensuring social distancing in shopping streets. In the next phase schemes are being brought forward to provide new cycle routes, in order to enable more people to cycle for everyday journeys. Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans are in development for Taunton, Yeovil and Bridgwater, and can play an important part in securing local and national capital funding for cycle routes that have been identified as high priorities for investment due to the high potential usage they would have for new and existing cyclists.

Many of the measures proposed as part of the Climate Change Strategy are expected to have a strongly beneficial impact on air quality in our towns, including electrification of the vehicle fleet. However, it is important to note that particle emissions from tyres and brakes are an important element of vehicular air pollution and are likely to increase proportionately if we simply switch from motor vehicles to electric like for like, given the much heavier weight of the latter. Electric buses and car clubs have much potential for reducing the numbers of vehicles on the roads in urban areas, and thus reducing particulate as well as gaseous pollution.

	Nigel Behan	Reform of Health and Care Services	Question 3 Whilst "Counties warn against social care centralisation" (Public Finance - Counties warn against social care centralisation Public Finance Local authorities require long-term funding certainty to help implement changes to the social care system, according to a new report.) And "If "parity" is expected between the NHS and social care, as the government suggests, then staff should have similar pay and conditions. At the moment, care workers are typically paid only £8.67 per hour, barely above the minimum wage, and a quarter of them are on zero hours contracts. The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services has called for wages to be linked to the pay of band 3 NHS health care assistants, who do a similar job but earn £10.90 an hour and have much greater security at work. That would be both logical and fair. Care workers from
--	--------------------	---	--

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

			abroad should have the same immigration rights as NHS staff in a truly integrated system.” Will SCC campaign for these reasonable proposals to be applied across the Care Sector, including Private Sector organisations that receive Cash - for providing Care - from Local Government (Commissioners)?”
--	--	--	--

Response - Cllr David Huxtable

Somerset has long been at the forefront of campaigning, led by Councillor Fothergill, for fair and permanent funding solutions for social care and those that work within it. Only last week we highlighted the dedication and courage of this workforce in a powerful film which highlighted the sadness and challenges that Covid has brought the social care sector as well as our NHS colleagues. We were also one of the first local authorities to support the Unison “Stop the spread” campaign for full pay for those ill with or isolating with Covid and have worked with our provider partners to maximise the Covid grant funding for this purpose.

We continue to raise awareness and understanding of the fantastic job that those who work in the sector do every day in support of our residents. Only a permanent funding settlement for social care would enable an open debate on the specific wage parity in your question. A balance and equality within health and care is indeed long overdue and we will continue to work on this with local partners, making the most of the opportunities presented by NHS reform announced last week. Our HR leads are already working on joint apprenticeships and training that are across NHS and Social care provision.

PQ/MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement
PQ4	Lucy Travis	Somerset catch the bus campaign	<p>Question 1 Firstly in Frome we still need a regular Covid 19 cleaning programme for all bus shelters. We need a bus shelter outside the Frome hospital in Frome Fields, one at Frome Railway station approach for bus 53 and one at Frome Cork Street coach station. Will Somerset County Council work with Wiltshire County Council to improve bus services to Frome station?</p> <p>Question 2</p>

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

On shelter maintenance I am very concerned that as a wheelchair user, I cannot get off the bus at Walton due to the shelter being closed down as it has barriers around it. The shelter of course needs to maintain Covid 19 secure cleaning standards and social distancing with social distancing notices. Will the Council help ensure the barriers and railings at Wells bus station are repaired and can we please have this shelter at Walton repaired?

Question 3

It is important with reductions in bus services from Mendip towns to Bath Spa bus and coach station from Frome, Shepton Mallet and the City of Wells bus station and from Street, Glastonbury, Wells bus station to Bristol Temple Meads and Bristol bus station, it is important that clear timetable information should be provided for passengers by the WECA mayoral transport authority, North Somerset Council and Somerset County Council about services operating within Mendip district. Will the County Council commit in the longer term to update bus timetables on all bus stops in the Mendip District Council area bus stations and interchanges and railway stations at Castle Cary and Frome?

Response - Cllr John Woodman

Thank you Lucy, for your 3 questions – I will take them one at a time:-

Answer Q1

Regarding the maintenance and cleaning of bus shelters, this is not a responsibility of Somerset County Council. Bus Shelters in Somerset are owned by either the local District, Town or Parish Council who are responsible for these matters.

With regards to new bus shelters we currently have no funding available for these facilities.

Somerset County already provide joint funding along with Wiltshire Council to support services that serve Frome Railway Station. There are currently no plans to improve these services, but we will continue to work with Wiltshire Council to support the existing service levels.

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

Answer Q2

With regards to your 2nd question, I can confirm that the Bus Shelters at Walton and Wells Bus Stations are both owned and maintained by Mendip District Council. We will raise the issues you have highlighted with Mendip District Council.

Answer Q3

Regarding your question about timetabling, First West of England update their timetable information in the Mendip area and Somerset County Council ensure that contracted services timetable information is correct. We will contact First West of England to check that they have updated their bus stop timetables and we will also carry out spot checks in the area to ensure that up to date information is on display.

I trust my answers have provided you with the information you are seeking.

PQ	From	Topic	Question/statement
PQ5	David Redgewell	South West Transport network	Question 1 Important of public transport in Somerset county council budget . We also need to invest in public transport network real time information on key bus routes D2 Bath Spa bus and coach station to Frome Sainsbury's, service 174 Wells bus station to Shepton Mallet bus interchange to Radstock, Midsomer Norton, Paulton, Peasdown St John to Bath bus and coach station, service 173 Wells bus station to Chilcompton, Midsomer Norton, Radstock, Peasdown St John and Bath Spa bus and coach station, service 376 Street, Glastonbury ,wells bus station Bristol Temple meads station and Bristol bus and coach station service 1 Shepton Mallet, Castle Cary railway station and Town to Yeovil bus station, service 29 Wells bus station to Glastonbury and Street to Taunton, service 126 Wells Cheddar, Axbridge, Wincombe, Banwell and Weston Super mare, service 30 Taunton, Chard to Axminster railway station with connections for Lyme Regis, Bridport, Weymouth and Dorchester, service 21 Taunton, Bridgwater, Burnham on Sea for Weston Super Mare, service 20 for Weston Super Mare, service 22 Taunton to Wellington, service 28 Taunton, Watchet and Minehead. We observe that the

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

public transport network is for essential journeys with services funded by the Department for Transport and we must lobby through the county MP's and Secretary of State for continued bus operators Covid 19 emergency grant and the new proposed Covid 19 bus service recovery grant. Grants should be awarded via Somerset County Council to the bus operators and not direct. As the Transport Authority will the Council confirm that it will keep a bus service budget and a community transport budget?

Question 2

We are still very concerned about provision of safe stopping places in Taunton town centre essential on journeys from Castle Way, The Parade and Corporation Street. Before lockdown we were very concerned about the lack of social distancing among passengers in Taunton town centre and the risk of super spreading and we would like to see the County Council and Somerset West and Taunton Council through its bus scrutiny commission to work on improving bus passengers interchange facilities. The vision for Taunton development shows no provision for bus and coach interchange facilities. It would appear that Somerset county council The Transport authority will need to work with Somerset west and Taunton council to make sure the plan includes Public transport interchange facilities in Taunton Town centre. In Exeter a brand new bus station is opening soon and a brand new bus station has opened in Gloucester as a transport hub with a second phase to link to the railway station and a new bus interchange in Weston Super Mare is to be constructed all with Department for Transport government grant. Swindon has just been give £25 million to regenerated the town centre and there is a new bus and coach station on Flemming Way, Somerset County Council (The Transport Authority) and Somerset West and Taunton Council need to bid for Government grant through the South West Transport board for bus and coach interchange facilities in Taunton town centre. Bus passengers facilities need improving in Minehead town centre and at Minehead Railway station. Is the County Council responding to the Government consultation on the rural transport strategy?

Question 3

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

			<p>We welcome the Work by Somerset county council The Transport authority. Working with First group west of England buses and First south west in developing bus services and community transport services and slinky bus services.</p> <p>The wells bus station Shepton Mallett cenotaph bus interchange to the Bath and west show ground is very welcome by Mendip district residents. And service no1 provided south west Coaches between Yeovil bus station to castle cary Town and Railway stations and the Bath and west show ground and shepton mallett cenotaph bus interchange. We work with first group south west the buses of Somerset. To provide a shuttle bus between Taunton town centre and Taunton racecourse vaccinations centre. Following the lack of Bus service to the vaccinations centre only first group bus 99 operates to the racecourse on its way from Taunton Town centre to chard every 3 hours funded by Somerset county council. The only other service is First south west buses of Somerset service 6 with a 15-minute walk to the racecourse vaccinations centre. Community transport and slinky bus only provides a limited service.</p> <p>Would the country council please ask Somerset clinical commission group vaccinations NHS vaccinations lead to look urgently at public transport to this vaccinations centres with 900 vaccinations planned every day?</p>
--	--	--	---

Response- Cllr John Woodman

Thank you David, for your questions

Answer Q1

Regarding your question around realtime information, we have no plans at present to provide bus stop real time information screens. However, we continue to work with our partners at National Passenger Transport Information (Traveline), on providing real time information to mobile devices. We continue to receive Covid 19 funding from Central Government to support bus services and to provide additional capacity on services into Schools and Further Education Colleges from both the Department for Transport and the Department for Education.

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

We are currently awaiting further information from Central Government in relation to any ongoing recovery funding. We have no plans to reduce SCC budgets for the funding of bus services in the 2021/22 financial year.

Answer Q2

With regards to bus top facilities in Taunton, we are continuing to work with South West and Taunton Council on the provision of suitable facilities in Taunton town centre, following the closure of the Bus Station. We have already responded to the Government consultation on the rural transport strategy.

Answer Q3

Your third question relates to improving bus links, I can confirm that we are currently working with the NHS to provide a better service link between the two sites.

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

PQ	From	Topic	Question/statement
PQ6	John Hassel	Railfuture Severnside	<p>Question 1 On Railways we welcome the return of trains over Christmas and hopefully again in the Summer and the investment in the study for a Langport and Somerton Parkway station and progress on Wellington railway station and the need also to look at opening Chard Junction station. The regeneration of Taunton railway station with a public transport interchange. and the need to get Trains service operating on the west Somerset railway from Taunton Bishop lydeard to Wilton watchet and Minehead with both steam leisure service and Through passenger's service s to the main line. By D MU service s.by First Great western railway. Is the county council able to support Go co-op rail proposals for an open access service from Swindon to Taunton and Bishop lydeard?</p> <p>Question 2 Has the country council raised with the Department for Transport the loss of train catering services on the First MTR south western railway service from Exeter st David and central to London Waterloo?</p> <p>During the Covid 19 emergency timetables it is very important that The Department for Transport, First Group Great Western Railway and South Western Railway have a emergency recovery plan to maintain connectivity across Somerset to the west country and connections elsewhere in the country for essential journeys.</p>
<u>Response - Cllr John Woodman</u>			
Thank you John, for your questions. I will answer them in turn.			

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

Answer Question 1

The county council is aware of the Go-Op proposals and has met with them on a number of occasions to discuss progress with their plans. We welcome the additional services and connectivity across Somerset that they might provide. We will continue to work with them, and with other stakeholders in the rail industry, and will look constructively at more specific proposals and their benefits as they come forwards. We also continue to work in support of the promoters of the various station re-opening projects referred to in the question.

Answer Question 2

We have not raised the matter of onboard catering with the DfT. We are aware that SWT has suspended all on board food and drink services and that the contract with the supplier was formally cancelled. This was in part to help maintain social distancing regulations during the ongoing Coronavirus measures but also because it was heavily loss making. DfT was involved in that decision within the current Emergency Recovery Measures Agreement.

The train operator is currently going through a Direct Award negotiation with a view to the franchise commencing in April. The consideration of whether onboard catering will be return will be an important factor within a tight cost envelope, reflecting the pressure on the Treasury's finances. If the outcome is not positive, there are a range of alternatives that we will discuss with the train operator including provision of extra facilities at stations.

Additionally, the county council continues to work in close collaboration with all the train operating companies and Network Rail to ensure the best level of rail connectivity to support connectivity and growth for Somerset, both during the current situation and as we move into a recovery phase.

Equally, we know that customer experience and service they receive onboard our trains is as important to them as having good connectivity and journey times and we continue to make this point with the operating companies and Network Rail.

Once again, thank you for your questions.

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

MEMBER QUESTIONS			
MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement
MQ1	Leigh Redman	Hinkley Point C	<p>Reference the impact of Hinkley Point C workforce to date, lessons learnt and following the proposed workforce increase.</p> <p>Question 1 Can the cabinet member please provide me with a list of 'what lessons have been learnt from the original assumptions of the project' and from those lessons what should we ask for to mitigate them if unresolved?</p> <p>Question 2 Can you also identify the 3 main areas, cross County, that may need additional mitigation following on from previous learning and the new request to increase workforce from 5600 to 8500?</p> <p>Question 3 Can the cabinet member also detail the impact on Bridgwater the proposed large increase of non-homebased workers could have on the town?</p>
<p><u>Response - Cllr Clare Paul and Cllr David Hall</u></p> <p>Thank you, Lee, for your questions to both myself and Cllr Paul. Having liaised with Clare, I will respond to all the questions you have asked, covering the elements within my portfolio and the Health-related elements on behalf of Councillor Paul.</p> <p>The Joint Councils (Somerset County Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset West and Taunton Council and North Somerset Council) continue to work with EDF Energy regarding their recently announced intention to increase the size of their workforce at the Hinkley Point C</p>			

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

site beyond the number that was assessed in the Development Consent Order. The workstreams already established are centred around Accommodation, Workforce Development, Transport, Health, Community Safety and Environment. We are seeking to understand the key assumptions and methodologies to be used in EDF's assessment and the positive actions that they propose to take.

It is of course a matter for EDF themselves to engage with the community about its intentions. This has already commenced in the form of 'virtual' drop in opportunities that were widely advertised. Consideration is being given by the Joint Councils as to how best to ensure the engagement of their members, over and above any activity undertaken by EDF Energy. This will provide an opportunity to explore our collective experiences of the project to date and raise any concerns about the workforce increase envisaged, balanced by the positive opportunities this increase may present.

The Joint Councils wrote to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) in July 2020 concerning EDF Energy's intentions to increase the workforce. PINS response signposts the Councils to the relevant Regulations which would be used by PINS and the Secretary of State should an application from EDF be necessary or forthcoming. Notably, the response does not highlight any concerns from PINS in respect of the discussions that are currently underway between the Joint Councils and EDF to take the issue forward. We have therefore concluded that we should continue our work with EDF on the workstreams and assessments. There is still some way to go with these discussions. Only when the assessments are complete will we be able to agree together what our next actions should be, and indeed consider whether the proposed change is material. It is therefore too early to consider what additional mitigation might be necessary or conclude if the workforce uplift would be acceptable.

In respect of your question about the issues and lessons learnt, I personally have been involved with this project for the last 11 years. As you would expect, there have been many lessons for all parties during this period, far too many to list them all today. One lesson which bears repetition, however, is the importance of avoiding snap judgements and decisions before all the facts in a situation are known and properly assessed. I would reiterate therefore that it is not appropriate at this stage to pre-empt the outcome of the assessment by predicting what the impacts will be or indeed what mitigation may be necessary and appropriate.

Turning to the Health-related aspects of your question, as part of the proposed workforce expansion, NHS and public health are engaged with EDF, through a standing group, and will review the proposals as they relate to health services and public health. That group has been advised that the original health impact assessment for the project is being reviewed, and they will critically appraise that review when it is available. Once again, it would not be appropriate to be pre-emptive in judging issues for additional mitigation ahead of this review process.

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

With regards to Covid -19, SCC Public Health, Public Health England, and Environmental Health colleagues from SWTC and Sedgemoor DC have regular and frequent contact with the Covid Office at HPC, and have developed a close and effective working relationship to review cases and controls through a standing Outbreak Control Team.

I trust this answer gives you the assurances you are seeking and I know that you will make every effort to ensure your colleagues and constituents are kept accurately informed of the position as matters develop.

MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement
<u>MQ2</u>	Jane Lock	A Block refurbishment	Could Council have an update on the income generated following the £10million refurbishment of A block?

Response Cllr Mandy Chilcott

Thank you, Jane, for your question.

The A Block project was completed in June 2020, within the original budget for the scheme in spite of cost challenges associated with the Coronavirus pandemic and the first national lockdown. It is important to note that a significant proportion of the cost related to the replacement of the historic heating system for the campus (which serves Shire Hall, B and C blocks as well as A Block) as well as other essential maintenance; this was far more than a refurbishment. The investment has enabled the council to free up space elsewhere in the County Hall campus, some of which will be used by a local NHS partner under a 10 year licence agreement for office accommodation which was concluded in October 2020. Appendix 2 of Paper A on your agenda sets out an annual net saving of £280,000 from this agreement, income which helps to balance the budget put before Council today, and which, over the life of the licence agreement, will repay a significant proportion of the project cost. Further savings associated with the investment include reduced energy costs following the replacement of the heating system, which are also included within the budget proposals put before Council today and which support the council's carbon reduction commitments. The property function is currently reviewing office accommodation for council staff on the County Hall campus in the light of new ways of working emerging from the pandemic, and we will continue to work with the NHS and other local partners to review further opportunities for collaboration and income generation.

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement
MQ3	Jane Lock	Government Grant spending	Could Council be told how much Somerset received from the Government Brexit transition grant and how was it spent?
<u>Response Cllr Mandy Chilcott & Cllr David Hall</u>			
<p>Thank you, Jane, for your question to both myself and David.</p> <p>In 2019/2020, Somerset County Council received from MHCLG £262,500 for Brexit related activities.</p> <p>The funding has been spent to date on staff time to plan for Brexit, support for businesses and the economy and promoting the EUSS Scheme. The remainder was held in case any unforeseen disruptive challenges were encountered at the end of the Transition Period on 31st December 2020. The remaining balance is now being allocated to further promote the EU Settlement Scheme, to assist people to make applications to the scheme and for business and economic support activities.</p>			
MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement
MQ4	Bill Revans		Q1 about Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) notices and if there were any known cases locally in which DNR notices had been added to adults with learning disabilities without their families knowledge during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

Response Cllr D Huxtable

Thanks to Bill for raising such an important issue – the rights of people with learning disabilities should be at the forefront of the equality and health and care debate at any time but particularly with regard to Covid-19. At the beginning of the pandemic we worked closely with the CCG and our Primary Care Teams to ensure that any miscommunication with families was rectified. Since then we are not aware of any DNR notices applying to this area in Somerset, nor of course would we support their use without full person and family involvement. This debate began in March 2020 and both the Director of ASC and Public Health were very clear with health and Primary care colleagues that no such practice would be appropriate in Somerset. The Primary Care lead at the CCG spoke to Primary Care Networks and practices about this to clarify the position following local discussions. We also continue to raise with local and national health colleagues the issue of annual health checks for people with Learning Disabilities and the equality of access that they deserve in this area.

MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement
MQ5	John Clarke		Q1 Regarding active travel initiatives – walking and cycling schemes – how will the money be distributed/spent in Somerset? Q2 Regarding the £1m held in reserves, has any consideration been given to using some of that for on-street Electric Vehicle charging points? Q3 Regarding the 'Baby tree project' could an update be provided on the number of trees planted (one for every child born in Somerset) since the project began?

Response Cllr C Paul

Answer Q1

In respect of Tranche 2 of the Active Travel Fund from DfT, we have received a sum of £457,900. Working in partnership with districts and

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

other stakeholders it has been agreed to make the following contributions to local schemes with the objective of supporting further walking and cycling opportunities:

- Frome: 'School corridor' scheme around Oakfield Road to Somerset Road, allowing safe access to three schools and connect access to a fourth – contribution of £117,000.
- Yeovil: Lyde Road Strategic Cycleway – three sections of segregated cycleway approximately one kilometre in length – contribution of £150,000
- Bridgwater: An improved walking and cycling route from Wembdon Road to Victoria Road to improve accessibility between the town centre and residential areas – contribution of £105,000.
- Taunton: Continuation of the East Street pedestrianisation with a more permanent scheme with monitoring and assessments on traffic impacts and access. It will also provide access for blue badge holders at limited times – contribution of £80,000.
- With a contingency sum of £5,900 to cover any additional costs.

With regard to future spending we will be focusing initially on the needs identified through our Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plans. These have been developed for Taunton, Bridgwater and Yeovil and will be available for wider review and comment at the end of February. The Department for Transport has stated that future allocations of walking and cycling funding will be looking towards those plans as a priority. In addition, we will be building on the success of our Active Travel Group and continuing our collaborative working with our partner authorities to identify key local priorities and develop a pipeline of potential schemes that can be brought forwards for future funding opportunities.

Therefore, there are no specific plans on how the new capital allocation of £1.5m will be invested, as yet. The schemes will emerge from the development of priorities from the LCWIPs and other pipeline proposals. However, we expect to be focusing on our town schemes in the early stages as these will benefit the largest number of users and the funding available is likely to deliver relatively modest schemes, unless we can use it to leverage additional funds from elsewhere.

Answer 2

I believe that the £1m reserve you are referring to is the £1m set aside for the Leader's Community Climate Emergency Fund - if not please let me know and I will attempt to answer this question again.

Assuming I am correct, we have received an overwhelming number of bids to this fund from the Town and Parish Councils (including the

Public and Member Questions County Council 17 February 2021

unparished areas) across Somerset and the activities which these bids cover are very wide ranging. We are still in the process of evaluating these bids against a set of agreed eligibility and impact criteria and the Decision Panel meets in early March to make a decision on which bids to fund. Whether amongst these are any bids to support the installing of On-Street Electric Vehicle Charging Points, I am not able to say, as I have not, as yet seen the detail of these proposals.

If you meant have we given consideration to using some of the fund for on-street Electric Vehicle charging points which would be installed by SCC as the Highway Authority, the simple answer is no, as that is not what the fund was intended for and we currently do not have a Somerset-wide EV Strategy and policy against which the Highway Authority can make decisions on if and where EV Charging Points, on-street could be sited. I can confirm, however, that we have recently undertaken work with our District colleagues to deliver the EV Strategy for Somerset which needs formal adoption by all 5 Councils and are currently working on the development of the Policy which will steer and legitimise any decisions regarding EV Charging Points on-street

The fund is very much focused on supporting community grass roots schemes which support our local Town and Parish Councils in getting local projects within their respective communities off the ground and in trying to encourage local communities to engage with our Climate Emergency Strategy.

Again, I trust this provides you with the clarity you are seeking but again, if I have misinterpreted your question if you let me know I will come back to you with a more appropriate answer.

Answer 3

We are in the process of working with partners to evaluate the number of trees that have been planted in Somerset over the last year against the number of births that have been registered. When I have the full picture of this number I will get back to you with the details.