

## **Appendix A**

### Public Questions

#### **PQ1 from David Redgewell**

Somerset catch the bus campaign Railfuture Severnside south west transport network and Dorset catch the bus campaign.

Passengers would like to know in view

Of the poor waiting facilities in Taunton the county town of Somerset and a principal Town in the south west Regional what progress is being made

With Somerset west and Taunton council First group plc South west buses National Express Coaches and other bus operators on plans to reopen and regenerate Taunton bus and coach station.

With waiting room information point public toilets and cafe

When will public consultation be carried out with passengers and stakeholders?

Taunton is losing bus passengers to the private car journeys because of poor waiting facilities.

When we need to encourage people to use public transport services in to Taunton and remove through traffic for the Town centre.

None of the present waiting shelter are designed for long distance Coaches or regional bus services

We also need inter city coach facilities.

In Gateway park and ride for megabus and Falcon Express Coaches services

To Bristol, Exeter and Plymouth.

Is the country council looking at all bidding opportunities for a new bus and coach station in Taunton?

The passengers and voters see this issue as just as important as Wellington railway station reopening.

#### **Response from Cllr John Woodman – Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

As part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) work, the issue of the bus station closure was raised by a number of stakeholders. Therefore, Somerset County Council commissioned a feasibility study to understand whether or not there was a need for either a bus station facility or mobility hub/interchange within Taunton and if the study indicated there was a need, then to understand where the most suitable location would be. The results from the feasibility study indicated that there was a need for a bus station in Taunton and that the previous site would be the most suitable location.

The previous site is owned by Somerset West & Taunton (SW&T) District Council so further discussions have been held with SW&T colleagues to explain the outcome of the feasibility study and understand how this work can be moved forward. A bid for funding to undertake the necessary work to re-open the previous facility and undertake any improvement works was submitted as part of the BSIP. We are currently awaiting the outcome of this bid.

As part of the BSIP we are also proposing to introduce mobility hubs where appropriate throughout the county, implement a series of bus stop improvements and ensure a better coordination between bus services and other modes of transport including express coach services. These proposals are all subject to the outcome of the BSIP funding bid and plans will be worked up in more detail once the funding allocation is announced.

### **PQ2 from Eva Bryczkowski**

The 18 months of the covid19 pandemic have been tough on local authorities, including Somerset County Council, who have been caught in a financial vice.

On the one hand, they have lost what would normally be assured income, for example from business rates, car parking charges or tourism.

On the other, managing the pandemic, giving both financial and practical help to local people, adapting services so they can function under lockdown conditions, providing additional support, has added enormously to their costs.

It is not surprising that the majority of councils are reporting massive funding gaps for last year, this current year, and years into the future.

Thus, the consequences for services, jobs and the communities councillors serve are unthinkable.

Recently the BBC reported that local authorities have a £3 billion shortfall in their budgets as they come out of the pandemic. Analysis of councils in the UK, (by the Shared Data Unit), found that:

\*\*LAs plan to make at least £1.7 billion worth of savings in the current financial year, (2021 to 2022), while also using more than £500 million worth of reserves to balance the books

\*\*A quarter of those savings will be made in adult social care

\*\*Despite making the cuts, these councils predict a £3 billion shortfall in their budgets by 2023/2024.

\*\*Nearly 60% of councils in England have raised council tax by the new statutory maximum of 4.99% to compensate for losses.

\*\*In October last year the LGA said that an extra £10 billion was needed every year from central government to plug their funding gaps.

Over a decade of austerity policies, (where ordinary people had to pay for the mistakes the banks actually made), has taken away £16 billion in government funding for local authorities.

Covid made things far worse leading to the situation we are facing now.

#### QUESTION ONE:

What is the financial position of Somerset County Council in relation to all the figures and research highlighted above, and how does it compare with the rest of the county councils in the UK?

Somerset County Council, along with other LAs and local government workers, have really stepped up to the plate, showing the wider public that the services they provide are indispensable. Local government workers in particular ensured that our communities were safe, educated our children and looked after the most vulnerable.

#### QUESTION TWO:

Prior to the onset of covid19, what was the anticipated gap between income and expenditure for SCC 20/21 & 21/22 and what are those same figures now - in full knowledge of additional costs shouldered by SCC during this public health crisis?

The current situation for LAs is totally unsustainable. Councils need emergency funding to make sure that local services can be maintained.

The funding gap needs to be closed right now. And more than that it is necessary.

A long-term financial settlement for LAs is necessary giving them the funding they need to provide local services; the stability they need to plan for the future; the knowledge and certainty that they will be able to provide services in line with local needs.

Year on year central government has failed to adequately invest in local government, it is not just services that are suffering.

Dedicated public servants working in councils and schools, who put themselves in harm's way throughout the pandemic, are now paying the price.

Nationally, 16% of them don't earn £10 an hour, despite costs of living and housing rising exponentially.

Two years ago, the government announced a 2% pay raise for local government staff, but without giving LAs any extra funding for it, so that councils such as SCC are more squeezed, while the government gets a pat on the back.

The bare minimum should be a pay rise in line with inflation. If SCC did this it would improve the local economy, prevent shortage of labour and help with recruitment and retention.

Yes, SCC have a massive debt and huge costs. But there will be more debt if there's a shortage of labour and having to depend on agency staff.

Also a rise in line with inflation will attract more skilled workers to keep vulnerable people safe.

QUESTION THREE:

This is regarding the current financial situation being unsustainable, the funding gap needing to be closed right now, and a long-term financial settlement so that there is stability for the future:

What is SCC doing to close that gap? To clarify, I don't mean cuts, reorganisation or privatisation dressed up as 'modernising' or 'improving' services.

I mean what steps will SCC take to close the gap regarding a dire lack of government spending and actually get the required extra funding from the government, either solely or together with other local authorities?

**Response from Cllr Mandy Chilcott – Cabinet Member for Resources**

Question 1

Covid 19 has had a significant impact upon the councils' finances and the costs of its services. There has been significant funding provided by the government to cover some of these extra costs and also there is a scheme to contribute to the loss of income to the Council. The on-going impacts upon our services are still very difficult to predict, as are the economic impacts on things like business rates income. The Spending Review in October announced details of the overall funding for the public sector and they showed a positive increase in the level of funding but the actual details for the Somerset County Council won't be known until the Government publishes the finance settlement in mid-December.

A key mitigation in dealing with this level of financial uncertainty is to have robust budget monitoring and financial planning processes in place. The budget monitoring report comes to both Scrutiny and Cabinet on a monthly basis and it highlights the impact that covid has had upon service demand and the quarterly reports also include details of the Covid funding provided by government. Due to the impact of Covid upon our finances, work started earlier on the MTFP process than in previous years, with the updated position being reported to Cabinet in October and a further updated being taken to Cabinet in December.

Question 2

Pay at Somerset County Council is, for most staff, governed by a national agreement known as 'Green Book'. This means that we are part of national pay negotiations and not at liberty to arbitrarily increase pay for staff. We regularly compare our pay and terms & conditions with other local authorities and, where we are having difficulties in attracting staff, apply recruitment and retention premia to roles. Our pay for most roles is therefore broadly in line with other comparable organisations. We do have shortages in some professions, such as social workers and some ICT staff, but these are regional and national issues and we are therefore doing some really good work developing people into these jobs through apprenticeships and, for our social workers, our degree programme at Yeovil College.

Question 3

SCC continues to lobby Government both directly to Ministers and through various associations including the LGA, CCN, SoLACE, Society of County Treasurers for further funding on an ongoing and long term basis.

**PQ3 from Peter Travis**

I am writing on behalf of the Somerset Bus Partnership.

Somerset has declared a Climate Emergency and so urgently needs to take action to reduce its carbon emissions.

In Somerset, 44.1% of our carbon emissions come from transport. That means we need to persuade people to stop making so many journeys in single occupancy cars. How? A move to electric vehicles will help but transitioning the car fleet to EVs across Somerset is going to be a very slow process. Active travel certainly can help too but it is primarily best suited for shorter journeys and our climate and topography further limit its appeal.

Persuading people to switch from single occupancy car use to going by bus potentially offers the most substantial and quickest modal shift.

That's why we welcome the Somerset Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and its programme of initiatives to improve the bus services across the County, initiatives to get them to a standard as deemed necessary by Cllr John Woodman, his Highways and Transport team plus their transport consultants, WSP. To achieve the standards set by Cllr Woodman and his team, Somerset is bidding for £165 million of funding from the Government to improve bus services across the County.

It is undoubtedly a remarkably ambitious bid.

We support it wholeheartedly.

And we congratulate the team on their well-researched proposal.

The SCC team with WSP have identified serious deficiencies in Somerset's current bus services in terms of their lack of frequency, too often no (or very few) evening bus services and very limited weekend bus services, that's if there are any at all.

As has been reported at recent Cabinet and Scrutiny meetings, these deficiencies have severely impacted on job and educational opportunities for many residents across the county as well as worsening the rural isolation experienced in many parts of the County.

The size of the Somerset bid indicates just how substandard are our County's bus services. This can be evidenced by Somerset having the second lowest bus usage in the country, the lowest in the South West and Somerset has the very lowest satisfaction score for its bus services in the entire country.

Why are Somerset's bus services so substandard? Why do we need £165 million from the Government to upgrade them?

To need such a large cash injection from Government, indicates the scale of underfunding by SCC in its bus services ... over many years.

Somerset in its BSIP has asked for £165 million grant from the Government.

The extent of this underfunding can best be illustrated by looking at rural Local Transport Authorities in the South West and how much each is spending on buses per capita.

Somerset would need to spend 40% more per capita to bring it up to just the average level of the other rural counties in the South West.

Given the long history of underfunding of buses in Somerset, the adverse impact this has had on many of its residents plus the imperative for Somerset to reduce its transport emissions because of the Climate Emergency, we would request that substantially increased council funding should be given to buses in the Somerset 2022/2023 budget alongside any central government Bus Service Improvement Plan money, so that overall funding for buses in Somerset can be made both sustainable and effective going forward into the future.

### **Response from Cllr John Woodman – Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

I'd like to thank Mr Travis for his involvement so far in the development of the Bus Service Improvement Plan which has been extremely helpful.

The plan itself goes into a great deal of detail about the extremely challenging bus market in Somerset and explores the likely reasons for the low patronage levels; and goes on to set out an ambitious plan for addressing this using the transformation funds that Government has earmarked for this purpose.

There are many factors contributing to the current standard of the bus offer, related to rurality, commercial viability, cost, demographic issues and relative ease of using other forms of transport. Somerset's population is based in many towns and villages that are widely distributed across the County with some long travel times between destinations which makes it difficult to run efficient and cost effective bus services. Most other rural counties tend to have 'chains' of settlements that are more easily connected to form linear routes into a large city, town or tourist destination, picking up customers along the way; and opportunities of this nature are few in Somerset. We therefore need many more individual bus routes to connect our towns and villages which makes bus operations more expensive and much harder for operators to run commercially.

The Council provides a substantial bus subsidy in order to maintain socially necessary services and has extremely challenging decisions to make each year considering the full range of services that we have a duty to provide and balancing of allocation of available public funds to manage competing risks across the authority.

In terms of our relative level of subsidy, Somerset is the fourth highest regionally and is ranked 23 out of the 92 local transport authorities nationally (2019/20 figures); 17<sup>th</sup> if metropolitan areas are excluded; so is in the top quartile of spenders nationally.



**PQ4 from Alan Debenham**

Question 1 : In the setting-up of the new Joint Scrutiny Committee please could special consideration be given to the inclusion of just one Green Party representative ( of which I am a member ) bearing in mind the crucial need for inclusivity and diversity in this new venture and the facts that the 15 Green Party Councillors overall for Somerset ( Labour have 17 and get a seat) are part of a relatively new public surge in this party's direction, very much in line with all Councils declaring a Climate Emergency and recent new found climate and environmental awareness through Glasgow's COP26 ??

Question 2 : Bearing in mind the Chancellor's Autumn Budget and Prime Minister Johnson's recent announcements of fantastic world-beating billions of pounds of new money being found for 'build back better' Local Government to combat Covid detrimental leftovers and make further provision for our coming Councils big re-organisation and climate emergency upheavals, what actual new funds do the County Council see coming its way for 2022/23 and will this be underpinned once again with a permitted and enacted uplift of 5% in harshly regressive Council Tax, including a dedicated allocation to Adult Social Care ? AND is the coming year likely financially to be one of expansion in services, or retraction, or just-about-managing, including expected increased staff wages and cost-of-living surge ?

Question 3 : As we all know life threatening greenhouse gas emissions, including CO2, for the world and the UK are still rising at 'sixth extinction' rates, what is the known situation for Somerset especially re meeting the target of net zero by 2050, or better, and including aviation and shipping, plus goods manufactured abroad ? AND in what way are plans being laid now to deal with emergency mass sea-level rise global migration and likely food scarcity and other serious resource depletions?

**Responses from Cllr David Fothergill – Leader of the Council and Cllr Mandy Chilcott – Cabinet Member for Resources**

Q1

Thank you for your question Mr Debenham. You will see the proposals and rationale for membership of the proposed LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee from the Monitoring Officer's report for the Council's consideration today. The Monitoring Officers of the five councils have worked together to prepare the draft Terms of Reference for the committee. The Terms of Reference propose a Joint Scrutiny Committee of sixteen members drawn from the relevant overview and scrutiny committees of the five councils,

eight from the County Council and two from each of the District Councils (eight in total) with the Chair being appointed from the District membership and the Vice Chair from the County membership.

Section 15 and Section 16 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 impose a duty to allocate seats on committees in accordance with political balance requirements. Section 17 allows an exception to be made to the political balance requirements but only where no member of the authority votes against such a proposal.

The proposed allocation of the seats on the Joint Scrutiny Committee has been based on the political membership of each of the individual councils. This ensures the political make up of each individual council is represented and is reflective of the fact that the five councils are currently individual sovereign councils.

Q2

The Spending Review in October announced

- Council tax thresholds will remain at similar levels to recent years, with the threshold for “core” council tax increases remaining at 1.99% and the adult social care precept by a further 1%.
- Local government in England will receive an additional £4.8bn increase in grant funding over the next 3 years (£1.6bn in each year).
- Additional funding will be made available for social care reform (£3.6bn over 3 years to implement “the cap on personal care costs and changes to the means test”).
- From the £5.4bn social care reform funding, a further £1.7bn will be allocated over 3 years “to improve the wider social care system” and £500m will be made available to “improve” the social care workforce.

The full details of how much funding Somerset CC will receive won't be known until the Finance Settlement is published by Government in mid-December.

The Cabinet received an update on the MTFP position at its October meeting with further reports coming over the next 3 months. It is clear that the Council will continue to invest in its key frontline services in its 2022/23 Budget proposals.

Q3 - to be answered by Cllr David Hall – Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Community Infrastructure

We know the baseline emissions for Somerset that include direct energy use, land use transport emissions etc, but the emissions as a result of aviation and imported goods are much more difficult to calculate and quantify and will need national and international consensus on measurement and action to address.

A great many actions are already underway to deliver the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy and those are in the process of being collated to track progress against the aims and stated outcomes of the Strategy and the contribution of those actions towards net zero targets are currently being evaluated.

Existential threats of the type mentioned by Mr Debenham will again need to be addressed at national and international levels and I don't believe that it is within the control of this council to put forward a plan to address these issues locally.

#### **PQ5 from Mr Nigel Behan**

Q1 & Q2 Concerns the Somerset's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and Somersets Climate Emergency Strategy

According to the latest published information on greenhouse gas emissions : "The transport sector consists of emissions from road transport, railways, domestic aviation, shipping, fishing and aircraft support vehicles. It is estimated to have been responsible for around 27% of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK in 2019, almost entirely through carbon dioxide emissions. The main source of emissions from this sector is the use of petrol and diesel in road transport." 2019 UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Final Figures (publishing.service.gov.uk)

How much will the "aspirational" Somerset BISP proposals help to reduce the figures mentioned above and correspondingly increase access and use of buses ("transform bus services") etc– are there any meaningful and measurable targets ( as "This plan is so important for when it comes to tackling climate change – it has the potential to make a massive difference" and "Somerset's Climate Emergency Strategy by getting more people out of cars and onto public transport.

The bid is for £163 million from Government – potentially a huge contribution to tackling climate change in the county.."  
(Somerset Newsroom)?

It (the papers on BISP) state: “**Long Term (2 years plus)** · Introduce infrastructure to aid the move to electrification · Reinstate a bus station/mobility hub facility in Taunton · Introduce bus priority measures where required - need input from operators · Set standards for vehicles over a period of time – Euro 6 and beyond.” Why is reinstating a bus station hub in Taunton (there already is a bus station in Taunton recently closed and presumably Somerset Council -the Local Transport Authority - will inherit it during the Unitary process) considered long term – and is it conditional on getting government money via the bid?

Q2 “Councils must battle inaction after announcing a climate emergency” according to LocalGov News (15-11-2021) and that “Research from the Local Government Association has shown that eight in ten councils have suffered climate-related incidents in the last five years. Despite the stark data, a third of English councils are still supporting policies that could increase carbon emissions.” Also “There are clear initial steps that councils can take and they must act now to address these issues and tackle the climate emergency head-on before local communities and infrastructure are put at any greater risk.” Additionally “A first, critical step is to build climate change into decision making – so that councils no longer unnecessarily make decisions that have an adverse environmental impact”.

What (measurable) contributions will the Climate Emergency Strategy (including the carbon neutral goal) help to deliver towards the (less than) 1.5 degrees Celsius increase (global warming) by say 2030?

#### **Q1a and b response from Cllr John Woodman – Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

The BSIP is a relatively high level document at this stage and its implementation is not yet fully funded. There will be detailed process to go through once we know how much funding is secured, to allocate that funding to deliver improvements to specific routes and services. Measuring the carbon savings associated with such a wide ranging and complex plan will be extremely challenging and will be an issue that we continue to work on as the detail emerges. Carbon savings will of course be related to the number of people who ultimately choose to change their travel behaviour and switch from driving a fossil fuelled vehicle to using a bus and this will always be hard to predict. What we do know from the research that we have undertaken to date is that this will be a critical component of our overall plans to reduce emissions, and this area of work will need to have meaningful targets and monitoring in line with all government funded projects.

At this early stage in the BSIP process we have suggested which initiatives can happen the most quickly once funding is awarded and in the main the shorter-term initiatives involve relatively straightforward processes such as tendering for contracts to run services. Capital projects such as bus station improvements by their very nature are longer-term propositions involving various stages of development such as planning, and construction of the physical improvements. As with most of the proposals in the BSIP this project is dependent on securing the necessary funding through the BSIP. As the bus station site is currently owned by Somerset West and Taunton Council it is assumed this will be an asset that transfers to the new unitary council.

**Q2 response from Cllr David Hall – Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Community Infrastructure**

It is not the creation of the strategy as such that will contribute towards the global efforts to keep temperature rise to less than 1.5 degrees, it is the actions that we take and the investments that we make that will have the impact; as a Council, as communities and as individuals.

A great many actions are already underway across Somerset to deliver the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy and those are in the process of being collated to track progress against the aims and stated outcomes of the Strategy and the contribution of those actions towards net zero targets are currently being evaluated.

We are making great strides in reducing our own carbon footprint in investing in crucial carbon reduction works across our estate and operations and will continue to work across public and private sectors to ensure that we deliver against the ambitions of the Strategy.

## Member Questions

### **MQ1 from Cllr Leigh Redman**

I was lucky enough to attend a workshop presented to Scrutiny on this topic, I had also seen the Movie Resilience (an opportunity that was shared again to allow members to watch this online film) and previously attended a session looking at 'Adverse Childhood Experiences'.

All of these have taken place over the past couple of years, Scrutiny and individual members have expressed a wish to embed learning around ACEs into our County.

Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years). For example: experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect, witnessing violence in the home or community, having a family member attempt or die by suicide.

Also included are aspects of the child's environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding, such as growing up in a household with: substance use problems, mental health problems, instability due to parental separation or household members being in jail or prison

ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance use problems in adulthood. ACEs can also negatively impact education, job opportunities, and earning potential.

However, ACEs can be prevented, and the future life of our children can be improved, this improvement will reduce future demand on services provided by Council & other bodies that include Health and Police.

Can I ask the cabinet member what Somerset is doing to bring a Trauma informed approach to our County?

### **Response from Cllr Frances Nicholson – Cabinet Member for Children and Families**

Thank you, Leigh, for your question.

I recognise, as do providers in all sectors from schools to primary care, that ensuring all contacts with children and families recognise ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and the trauma these may have caused them, can be helpful to improve their outcomes. I am very glad to be able to tell you that work is already under way to make this recognition a reality for Somerset's children and families.

Under the system leadership of the county council partners came together in July this year to showcase what they had achieved so far in developing a trauma informed workforce across the county and agreed that collectively we should identify the steps that we could take together to become a trauma informed Somerset.

A wide variety of training programmes is already available to staff across Somerset to increase their understanding of ACEs and what it means to work in a trauma informed way. Both third sector and statutory organisations are delivering these training programmes, however at present there has been a lack of co-ordination in delivering them. As a result it can be confusing for practitioners to know which training is right for them and difficult to identify who has been trained.

On 1 November a working group comprising representatives from Children's Services, Public Health, Avon and Somerset Police and Somerset Foundation Trust hosted a workshop attended by more than 60 stakeholders to pin down what a trauma informed Somerset would look like. The workshop agreed the following recommendations:

- To develop a common set of principles/goals with shared language
- To strive for a consistent and joined up training offer with support
- To develop a better system understanding of the impact of wider determinants of health on ACEs and trauma
- To conduct further research into best practice and evidence-based interventions which we could apply across Somerset

The initial working group has been expanded and by April 2022 is expected to have used responses from the event on 1 November to inform itself and set up a number of task and finish groups to:

- Develop a trauma informed workplan for Somerset
- Agree a set of trauma informed principles for Somerset
- Develop a set of training standards and an agreed practice model
- Engage with children, young people, and families around what would work for them

We are ensuring that there is robust oversight by the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership as to service standards, quality and content, and close alignment with other workforce priorities. I will be very happy to update members again in due course on how the work develops.