

## Public and Member Questions County Council 25 May 2022

<b>Public Questions</b>			
<b>PQ</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Question/statement</b>
<b>PQ1</b>	Mr David Redgewell	Railfuture Severnside	<p><b><i>Mr Redgewell was unwell and his questions were read out at the meeting by the Monitoring Officer.</i></b></p> <p>What plans do the council have for providing an integrated Transport system for Somerset, including investment in new local railway stations at Wellington, Somerton, Langport Parkway and chard junction?</p> <p>To support the bids by Network rail western route and First group Great western for access for all bids at Bridgwater, Castle Cary for lifts - Castle Cary being designed as a Transport interchange and for lifts at Yeovil junction railway station by First group MTR South Western railway Network. Where disabled passengers and mothers and fathers miss main line passengers trains due to signalling and Barrow crossing. This an important bus link to Yeovil Town and Yeovil pen mill.</p> <p>Has the county council support the bids to the Department for transport and Secretary of state Grant Shapps?</p> <p>What equalities Training is being undertaken by the Department for transport and Somerset County Council on member of South Wessex railway partnership.</p> <p>and Severnside railway partnership on diversity and disability.</p>

### **Response – Leader of the Council**

I would firstly like to wish Mr Redgewell a speedy recovery.

The council has actively supported the Restore Your Railway funding bids for both Wellington and Langport/Somerton. The Wellington bid (along with Cullompton) has been successful and is now being taken forwards with Network Rail in the lead. The new stations are expected to open in 2024. We currently await the outcome of the Langport/Somerton bid. Please note that both bids have included plans for better integration with public transport and for improved walking and cycling links.

The council has submitted a letter of support for the Access for All bids at Bridgwater, Castle Cary and Yeovil Junction stations and engaged in seeking support from other stakeholders.

## **Public and Member Questions County Council 25 May 2022**

Training for the Community Rail partnerships is a matter for the partnerships themselves in line with their stated policies.

<b>PQ/</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Question/Statement</b>
<b>PQ2</b>	Mr David Redgewell	Railway	With the West Somerset railway being an important Tourist Railway and part of west Somerset integrated Transport system and community railway, what progress is being on integration with the main line at Taunton, with First group Great western railway services and the bus 28 First group South west, Watchet and Bishop Lydeard to Taunton station and Town centre bus service.

### **Response – Leader of the Council**

The council has joined a project group, lead by the West Somerset Railway and involving Network Rail, Great Western railway and the Local Enterprise Partnership, to examine the feasibility and options for establishing scheduled services between Taunton and Bishops Lydeard.

<b>PQ</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Question/statement</b>
<b>PQ3</b>	Mr David Redgewell	South West Transport Network	What is the county council doing as the public transport Authority to promote Bus services, coaches and trains services this summer across the Historic county of Somerset and South West England to residents and Tourists - to such centres as Burnham on Sea, Taunton Minehead, Watchet, Wells, Glastonbury Street, Yeovil, Bath, Bristol Frome and Cheddar and Weston Super Mare; and Sunday bus service to Cheddar from Weston Super Mare and Wells bus station? Working jointly with the public transport companies such as First group buses and trains, stagecoach, National Express coaches, Megabus Falcon and Flexibus Berry coaches, and local operators and west Somerset railway.

### **Response – Leader of the Council**

We work closely with our colleagues cross the rail, bus and tourism industries, to understand and jointly promote their messaging through our own channels.

## **Public and Member Questions County Council 25 May 2022**

I understand that Mr Redgewell did ask a number of other questions and responses will be sent to him following the meeting.

<b>PQ</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Question/Statement</b>
<b>PQ4</b>	Mr Alan Debenham	Democracy	<p>(1) Democracy, measured by the amount of active engagement in government of the people at large, from the lowest level upwards - not the reverse - has become a big thing worth fighting for again, both in Ukraine and at home. Once again in local elections the turnout of registered voters ranged from about 25 % to 45% with the average in SWaT being 38.7%, with 43.2% in the Taunton Division where I was a Green Party candidate.</p> <p>In SWaT's parish and town elections the democracy picture was even bleaker, although much the same as in 2017, resting at the unbelievable figure again of less than 10% actually managing to drum-up enough democratic urge to have a contested election at all.</p> <p>In other words, the "don't vote" and "don't be a candidate" democracy wreckers have clearly won at all levels once again. Bearing in mind the big democratic deficit conjured-up in the enormous reduction in total frontline Councillors for the new Somerset Council (from 269 to 110), myself and many others are extremely interested in:-</p> <p>How and what will the new Liberal DEMOCRAT Council do to radically improve this pathetic state of democracy which currently exists throughout Somerset?</p>

### **Response – Leader of the Council**

Thank you Mr Debenham for your questions about the recent elections and election turnout in Somerset. The overall election turnout for Somerset was 37%. This is up from the district council elections in 2019 where the overall turnout was 35%. It was also higher than the other areas going through Local Government Reorganisation with North Yorkshire having a turnout of 35% and for the new Cumberland Authority in Cumbria that had a 36% turnout.

## **Public and Member Questions County Council 25 May 2022**

Those levels of turnout are common for local government elections in England. This is very different for General Elections where much higher turnouts occur. In Somerset we had a 72% turnout for the 2019 General Election.

The Council did a lot of communications to ensure people were aware of the elections on 5 May and to register to vote.

The Council and the four district councils will be doing more work over the next year to further improve awareness of the services and opportunities that the new Somerset Council will deliver.

<b>PQ</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Question/Statement</b>
<b><u>PQ5</u></b>	Mr Alan Debenham	Council administration	Now we have the great news for Somerset Council of a return to control by the Liberal Democrats, when can us green democrats, if at all, expect, a return to the former much fairer ( both for all councillors and voters ), more efficient and easily understood, system of Council administration, comprised of a power-shared top Executive Management Committee, plus power-shared, spending 'Services Committees' underneath it, simultaneously getting rid of ineffectual so-called 'Scrutiny' committees and any 'Mayors' with executive, rather than ceremonial, roles?

### **Response – Leader of the Council**

Thank you Mr Debenham for your suggestions and views. Along with the majority of county and unitary councils, the County Council has operated 'Leader and Cabinet' executive arrangements since 2001 in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000. That requires Overview and Scrutiny Committee arrangements to be established and the County Council has operated three scrutiny committees for several years to support the delivery of council priorities. The County Council has reviewed its governance arrangements previously and has confirmed that the 'Leader and Cabinet' executive arrangements best meet its needs. The County Council has never had a Mayor and Executive arrangement and the closest example for that is Bristol City Council. Prior to today's Annual Meeting, the Council had 16 Committees and some of these are joint committees with other councils. Just to contextualise the council's governance arrangements, in the last 12 months there have been 10 Cabinet meetings and there have also been 74 committee meetings so hopefully Mr Debenham will see that there are many opportunities for elected members, the public and partners to participate and influence council services and better outcomes for Somerset through the council's meetings. I would also like to highlight that the Council will consider today the creation of additional new committees and work will be undertaken during 2022 to consider the plans and proposals for the new Local Community Networks. I hope Mr Debenham and the Council would agree that there are many opportunities for people to engage and be involved in the Council's meetings.

**Public and Member Questions County Council 25 May 2022**

**MEMBER QUESTIONS**

None.