

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

Annexe A – Public Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question
<p><b>Alan Debenham</b></p>	<p>Studying Paper A Referred to in Agenda Item 5, Table 5 Requirements from Earmarked Reserves shows a Total of £51.9 m is required to satisfy present and future Budget Needs including £23 m adjustment for 2022/23 recovery and a further £26.9 m for 2023/24 forecasts.</p> <p>Is this now concluded by stating that necessary protection of Council's Reserves position entails finding cuts to spending to the order of £51.9 m and if so when will the public be made aware of these cuts and their likely content?</p> <p><b>Response from the Deputy Leader of Council and Lead Member for Resources and Performance: Cllr Liz Leyshon</b></p>
<p><b>Mr JC Woods</b></p>	<p>At the full council meeting of 23 Sep 2022 recording point 1 hours 35 mins Councillor Leyshon was content to group all landlords as a corporate body and able to claim the additional Council tax on their Corporation tax bill. She described the situation in London of empty properties gaining value with no occupants. What Councillor Leyshon failed to mention, as I indicated in my email below that no consultation was taken up with local Letting Agents and private landlords nor, the implication of small bills being raised with ongoing disputes between SCC, Tenants, Landlords and the cost to the Council. She commented that the Corporation Tax "was mentioned by one of her colleagues" it seems Council business is now conducted by throw away remarks of Councillor Layshon colleagues. Councillor Leyshon has been unable to provide any evidence of this suggestion of Corporation Tax and how it applies in Somerset when her reference was to London properties.</p> <p>Councillor Leyshon was tasked to rationalise what discounts the previous councils provided instead, she has with no or minimal consultation, she has grouped private landlords by the same " Demonised Brush " of property speculators based in London and holiday home owners</p>

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

	<p>My question is that Councillor Leyshon has allowed her personal views to cloud her view of private landlords like myself providing quality accommodation to young couples and their children who cannot afford to get on to the property market. That private landlords should have no recognition and that the previously, in place discounts, where not be rationalised across the County but removed entirely by Councillor Leyshon and her two colleagues.</p> <p>I would ask the full council to reflect on these omissions and personal views of Councillor Leyshon and that a standard 3 month 100% discount be applied to empty properties to allow for renovation and repair during the period of changeover of tenants.</p> <p>In my particular situation I was able to renovate the property as described below within 10 days to provide urgently needed accommodation this young couple and their children.</p> <p>This family were forced to leave their previous accommodation as the landlord sold up.</p> <p>Perhaps the actions of Councillor Leyshon and her "throw away comment" colleague demonstrates why their previous property was sold and why, I am now forced to raise my rent to cover any other periods when I change my tenants and the Council will come looking for Council Tax</p> <p><b>Response from the Deputy Leader of Council and Lead Member for Resources and Performance: Cllr Liz Leyshon</b></p>
<p><b>Sigurd Reimers</b></p>	<p>I was interested in reading the annual report on Public Health, Equalities and Diversity (agenda item 11 in the Reports pack). In particular, I found the section (5.1) on Air Quality and Climate Change (page 174) to be welcome. However, there was no mention of the effects of climate change itself and its impact on the County (eg sea level rise, drought and flooding) in the report. Following the declaration of a climate emergency by the five previous Somerset Councils in 2019, and the County Climate Emergency Strategy in 2020, Somerset West and Taunton Council, for one, decided to apply principles relating to climate change across all its activities.</p>

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

	<p>What evidence is there of such a broad awareness in this otherwise excellent Public Health report, given that the threat from climate collapse is already having public health implications, and with more to come? For example, climate change particularly affects the most vulnerable part of the population. The Healthcare Inequalities section of the report (section 6.4) could be a section where such an awareness could be better evidenced.</p> <p><b>Response from the Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change: Cllr Dixie Darch</b></p>
<p><b>Catherine Cannon</b></p>	<p>For some time, I have been asking Council to take action to help normalise plant-based eating by prioritising plant-based choices wherever the Council has an opportunity and ensuring that food served within council is as climate friendly as possible.</p> <p>Scientists say that cutting animal products out of our diet is the single biggest way for individuals to reduce their impact on the planet. A new Oxford University study published just two months ago showed that even just reducing meat consumption can make a huge difference, &amp; could be the equivalent of taking 8 million cars off the road. The amount of research over the years reaching similar conclusions is now frankly overwhelming.</p> <p>However what I'm asking is not about individual diet choices - it's about showing climate leadership. It's about local government stepping up to help flip the current norm in which menus are heavily biased towards meat &amp; dairy. It's about demonstrating that meat does not have to be the centrepiece of every meal, &amp; supporting people to make choices that are healthier &amp; more sustainable.</p> <p>Somerset has a large farming community. I come from a family of former beef &amp; dairy farmers, &amp; I understand the challenges farmers are facing with the weather, the supermarkets and the cost of inputs. Genuinely supporting farmers means looking honestly at the future and recognising where change is necessary. At the moment, farmers are forced to keep doing what they have always done because of subsidies, but continuing with the status quo is a betrayal of the future of farming. In order to ensure future food security &amp; financial security for farmers, as well as increase biodiversity, we need to strengthen &amp; expand our horticulture sector and shift our diets to match. This will allow us to rewild some of the 85% of UK farmland which is currently used</p>

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

	<p>for animal farming (despite providing just 37% of our calories - an unbelievably inefficient way to feed ourselves!) and allow nature to thrive again.</p> <p>The UK central government is currently facing a legal challenge regarding its failure to introduce measures to reduce meat and dairy in its food strategy. It is ignoring the insistence of its own advisors that a move towards plant-based must be the future, &amp; must be lead by the public sector.</p> <p>It is not always easy to find plant-based options in cafes, public buildings and schools. We urgently need to provide plenty of choice and availability of healthy, plant-based food. The Council has the opportunity – and I think, the duty – to simply prioritise plant-based food options wherever they can and treat the climate crisis with the urgency it requires.</p> <p>I would like to meet with councillors to address concerns over cost, inclusivity, choice and local impacts of such a direction, and for them to hear how it could be an enormous win for health, sustainability and budget. I ask council to please prioritise this issue &amp; this meeting.</p> <p><b>Response from the Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change: Cllr Dixie Darch</b></p>
<p><b>Paul Partington</b></p>	<p>Circa 2013 I carried out statistical analyses of the thirty-four shires and found that the number of kilometres of public rights of way per square kilometres showed Somerset at 16th about average and is less than Wiltshire 13th, Gloucestershire 4th (what was Gloucestershire) and Dorset 12th. Somerset, Wiltshire, Gloucester and Dorset were all within the statistical standard deviation. Does Somerset County Council as a highway authority accept that the number of kilometres of public rights of way that it is responsible for is about average for a shire county?</p> <p>2. How many outstanding defects are there recorded for Somerset Public Rights of Way?</p> <p>3. What measures are being taken by Somerset County Council to address in a timely manner the outstanding defects?</p>

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

	<p>4. Does Somerset County Council accept that the definitive map (DM) is a legal document and what is shown on it is correct unless shown otherwise?</p> <p>5. Does Somerset County Council accept that even if an application has been made to downgrade or delete it, the Highway Authority must assert and protect the right of the public to use and enjoy the highway at the status shown?</p> <p>6. Bridleway T 2/11 – Bickenhall has a record of complaints about obstruction dating back to 26 February 2007. When is Somerset County Council as the Highway Authority going to assert and protect the right of the public to use and enjoy the highway at the status shown?</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital: Cllr Mike Rigby</b></p>
<p><b>Andrew Strong</b></p>	<p>The draft Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 26th July 2023 contain a reply to a Public Question (no. 2) on bus issues that includes the following sentences: <i>“You will be aware that the Council has access to fairly limited bus recovery funds from Government which are provided in the form of a ‘BSIP+’ grant for the current financial year. The Bus Advisory Board, which is a public meeting, will discuss these matters in detail and ensure transparency about use of funds to support services.”</i></p> <p>The BSIP Plus Grant had been awarded by Government on 17th May 2023 and it amounts to £737,079 for the current financial year.</p> <p>The Bus Advisory Board had met on 25th July 2023 - the day before the Full Council meeting. It had been reconvened from 18th July. Cllr Mike Rigby was unable to attend but the draft Minutes of that meeting record that the Chair spoke about the BSIP Plus Grant in the following terms: <i>“He clarified that the Council has agreed in principle to provide some of its BSIP+ funding to offset the need for the bus operator to reduce the level of service on some routes which would otherwise be at risk.....”</i></p> <p>The Bus Advisory Board was unable to discuss this matter in detail and come to a consensus view because a decision had been made already.</p> <p>To rectify this oversight and to ensure transparency about the use of funds to support bus services, will the Council now publish a breakdown of spending from the BSIP Plus Grant on specific bus services, accompanied by the options analysis that informed the decision on which routes to subsidise?</p>

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

	<p>Furthermore, in view of recurring complaints from bus users about cancellation of timetabled journeys by the principal bus operator in Somerset, will the Council explain what measures have been put in place to ensure that the recipients of the BSIP Plus Grant operate in full the bus services which are now receiving financial support from that source?</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital: Cllr Mike Rigby</b></p>
<p><b>David Redgewell</b></p>	<p><b>Question 1</b></p> <p>With the closure of the First Group Plc South Bus Depots in Somerset at Bridgwater and the proposal to close Yeovil Bus Depot at Reckleford with the provision of an outstation Bus Depot in Yeovil with provision for 12 buses and but is this enough to grow the bus network in Yeovil and District.</p> <p>With drivers facilities, cleaning bus washing and fuelling facilities, but only mobile bus maintenance van, with only one main fully operating centre in Taunton Depot with full maintenance facilities of jack pits and rolling road and stall maintenance Depot at Minehead with cleaning washing and fuelling facilities and a mobile maintenance van and a Bus Depot in Weymouth for the West Dorset and Somerset area and the Bus Depots under First Group Plc Wales and West Bus Division at Weston-Super-Mare, Scarle Crescent, Bath Spa, Weston Island, with a maintenance Depot at Wells, Priory Road but main maintenance being at Bath Western Island.</p> <p>Under the bus services improvement plans and the bus strategy of the Somerset local Transport plans, with the need to improve the county bus network in Yeovil and District</p> <p>Bridgwater, Taunton, Wellington and Minehead and the Mendip Towns of Frome, Shepton Mallet, Glastonbury, Street and Wells.</p> <p>Has Somerset Council protected it Bus and Coach Depot in Somerset locals along with the county bus and coach stations at Frome, Cork Street, Shepton Mallet interchange, Wells Bus and Coach Station, Bridgwater Bus and Coach Station. Taunton Transport Hub, Yeovil Bus and Coach station, Wincanton Bus and Coach station, Wellington Coach Park, Glastonbury Coach Parks, Street Coach Parks, Bus interchange at Chard and Minehead and Bus Depot site from Development in Bridgwater, Taunton,</p>

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

Yeovil, Wells and Minehead. First Group Plc sites and South West Coaches Depots at Yeovil and Wincanton, Hatch Green Coach Depot, Beauchamp Taunton Somerset, Berry Coach in Taunton, Axe Valley Coach at Biddenham, Axbridge Somerset, Frome Bus Company, Bakers Coaches Yeovil, Libra Travel, and smaller bus operators from development and undertake a study of the needs of bus and depots in county of Somerset and held discussion with Vosa, the Traffic Commissioner Kevin Rooney and bus operators. Similarly to the protection of bus and coach operating centres in the west of England mayoral combined Transport Authority and North Somerset Council.

### **Question 2.**

What progress is being made?

For passengers on a recovery plan on bus services operated by First Group Plc South Buses to stop the cancellation of bus services in Taunton, Bridgwater, Minehead and Highbridge and Burnham on Sea and Chard

On services 21, 21a Taunton Bridgwater bus and coach station, North Petherton, Highbridge Town, Highbridge and Burnham on Sea station for service 20 Brean Berrow, Uphill Hospital Weston-Super-Mare railway station and bus and coach station, Taunton Town Centre, Taunton Railway Station, Bishop Lydeard Station, Watchet and Minehead Services 28, Services 22 Taunton to Wellington, Services 99 Taunton to Chard, Taunton Town services, Services 1, 6 and 7, Bridgwater Town service B1 and 14.

Whilst it may 1 to 2 % of passengers journeys it real lives of passengers unable to get to school college hospital the railway station for train connections from Minehead or watch on early morning journeys, nurses trying to get to work in Musgrove Park hospital when the early morning buses do not run on service 22, Passengers unable to work in the police office in Bridgwater from Burnham on Sea or a university student unable to get from Burnham on Sea to Highbridge and Burnham on Sea station to catch the First Group Plc Great Western Railway company train to Filton Abbey Wood station for UWE Bristol or pensioners unable to get home from Asda in Bridgwater by the bus station to Cannington on service 14 when the lunch time journeys fails to run.

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

Or passengers stranded in Bridgwater bus and coach station with no supervisor any more unable to get home to North Petherton, Burnham on Sea for Berrow and Brean on service 21 21a and onto service 20 at Burnham on Sea for Berrow and Brean, the 99 bus service cancelled to Chard with a 2 hour wait for the next bus.

These are real passengers who have complained to the First Group Plc South Buses or the Traffic Commissioner Kevin Rooney. So 1 to 2 % given out by First Group Plc South Buses to Somerset Council are real live not a council officer statics and what discussion are taking place about punctuality and reliability of the bus network.

**Question 3** - So what action is Somerset Council taking to ask First Group Plc South for a recovery plan especially on service funded by the Somerset Council.

**Question 4** - What progress is being made on the recruitment of bus drivers with help from Somerset economic development team.

**Question 5** - And what fines have levied on First Group Plc South or Wales and West bus divisions or other operators for none delivery of Somerset bus network for not delivering the councils contracted bus network and could we have figures similar to the West of England Mayoral Combined Transport Authority and North Somerset Council transport area in the North of Somerset.

### **Question 6**

What progress is being made on the reopening of historic Taunton Bus and Coach Station as new transport hub with passengers facilities waiting room changing places toilets and refreshments cycle hire and E. scooter hire, office for First Group Plc South Buses and facilities for National Express coaches.

Is there a date for a stakeholders and passenger consultation and when will NHS Somerset covid 19 medical centre leave the building for a High Street shop.

### **Question 7**

With the difficulties on operating first group plc South Bus service between Taunton Town Centre for connection with National Express Coaches and at Taunton Railway station for First Group GWR and Cross Country trains Arriva Germany State Railway



## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

	<p>Bishop Lydeard Station for the West Somerset Railway service to Minehead and the bus service to Watchet and Minehead for Butlins holiday camp and Bank Street.</p> <p>In view of the levels of passengers transferring to the First Group Plc South buses 28 to Minehead funded by Somerset Council and the need to improve bus shelter bus stops and waiting facilities at Taunton Station.</p> <p>What progress is now being made?</p> <p>On the reopening of the West Somerset Railway to through passengers trains to Minehead for the Butlins holiday camp and residents and Tourists of west Somerset.</p> <p>Working with the Department for Transport Network Rail western route First Group Plc Great Western Railway company the West Somerset Railway company Heart of the West Local Enterprise partnership and Peninsula Transport Board and Somerset Council to ease pressure of the A358 and A39 routes and on the bus service and help the West Somerset Railway company revenue stream at a loss of £216 317 Or £4000 a week .</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital: Cllr Mike Rigby</b></p>
<p><b>Robbie Bentley</b></p>	<p><b>Question 1</b></p> <p>With First Group Plc South buses and First Group property pulling out of Reckleford bus and coach Depot in Yeovil Somerset for a smaller bus depot site in the town as a outstation for its South Somerset and West Dorset Bus network and Yeovil Town service. The new Depot is planned to consist of a bus depot with drivers facilities supervisor office bus washing machine cleaning and fuelling facilities and limited maintenance overnight maintenance van.</p> <p>But with First Group Plc South moving their bus fleet to a new depot and bus service 77 ,55 Yeovil bus and coach station to Somerton Street Glastonbury and Wells bus and coach station to Wells Bus Depot.</p>

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

In its hey days Yeovil bus and coach depot had 43 buses and coaches keep at Neutilus works in Reckleford Yeovil for operations for the Southern Railways Southern National omnibus company and Royal Blue motor services, today first group plc South buses keep 12 to 15 buses at the Depot.

So with plans to pull down the 1912 / 1913 petters Engine's factory built Neutilus works with its Engineering and Aviation industry history building engines for Westlands before that firegrates and Engine's the works being connected by the first electric lights in Yeovil, the building is a major victorian building in Yeovil and from the 1940 / 1950 was taken over by the Southern Railway Southern National omnibus company limited and was the area operating office for Somerset and Dorset with major offices for the Regional Traffic Superintendent.

The Depot operated over 50 buses and coaches for Yeovil Town bus and bus routes across west and North Dorset and south Somerset and coach services for Royal Blue motor services Ltd Yeovil Town Railway station being a major bus coach and railway interchange,

With bus and coach service across London victoria Hampshire Somerset, Dorset, Devon and the Cornwall, with Western and Southern National omnibus company headquarters in Exeter Devon Western National omnibus company being owned by the Great Western Railway company and Southern National by the Southern Railway company, Yeovil was a major Transport hub and the Neutilus works and major bus and coach Depot and Engineering site.

The Depot past to the government owned national bus company and to Cawlett Holdings on bus privatisation a management buyout then to public transport company first group plc.

South buses but also run First group plc Great Western Railway company and south Western Railway company in Somerset and to and from London and South west England.

As the building is very important to the history of Somerset and South West England and under the threat of demolition by First group plc property or a Developer.

What action is Somerset Council Planning Department taking to evaluate the conservation value of the building for the conservation office to visit and write a report and to advise Historic England and Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport on the response to sport list the building.

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

And any planning permission for change of use for the site to hotel houses flats or a bus and transport museum, incorporating the Historical buildings should have a 106 agreement to funding a new bus and coach Depot for Yeovil.

### **Question 2.**

What Progress is being made in applying for Zebra 2 funding for zero Emissions bus regional area scheme with £129 million pounds and £ 25 million pounds targeted on Rural area such as Somerset with a need for electrification of Somerset bus network and especially with a modern mothballed bus and coach Depot in Bridgwater.

What proposal are being worked up for investment in a bid for Somerset and especially for Bridgwater and District important to the Town services links to Taunton 21 21a Service 21 to Highbridge and Burnham on Sea for Berrow, Brean and Weston-Super-Mare link to service 20

But as a through service, Service 75 Bridgwater bus and coach station to Woolavington, Purton, Walton Street, Glastonbury and Wells bus and coach station with service on Bristol Temple meads station and bus and coach station, Service 14 / 15 Bridgwater bus and coach station to Cannington Watchet and Minehead Service, Service 127 Bridgwater bus and coach station to cheddar Chew valley and Bristol, 126 Weston super mare bus and coach station locking Banwell ,Winscombe Axbridge, cheddar, Westbury sub Mendip Wells bus and coach station.

### **Question 3**

If a bid was put in with Electricity de France First Group Plc South or Wales and West buses big lemon buses Bridgwater Town Council Highbridge and Burnham on Sea Town Council,

North Somerset Council and the West of England Mayoral Combined Transport Authority Mayor Dan Norris and Tata Battery factory.

A successful bid may be forthcoming for Bridgwater and District into the Cheddar Valley and Chew valley.

The expression of interest need to be their by 20 th October 2023 and full bid by 15 th December 2023.

Will the Council look at progressing a joint bid?

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

	<p>Given that a commercial battery factory has gone ahead not far from the First Bus Depot and that concerns exist about the safety issues surrounding its proposed closure, would it not be better to have such modern facilities which are coming on stream around Bridgwater and elsewhere in the county be concentrated and therefore easily accessible to each other?</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital: Cllr Mike Rigby</b></p>
<b>Ian Beckey</b>	<p><b>Question 1</b></p> <p>With the difficulties on operating first group plc South Bus service between Taunton Town Centre for connection with National Express Coaches and at Taunton Railway station for First Group GWR and Cross Country trains Arriva Germany State Railway Bishop Lydeard Station for the West Somerset Railway service to Minehead and the bus service to Watchet and Minehead for Butlins holiday camp and Bank Street.</p> <p>In view of the levels of passengers transferring to the First Group Plc South buses 28 to Minehead funded by Somerset Council and the need to improve bus shelter bus stops and waiting facilities at Taunton Station.</p> <p>What progress is now being made?</p> <p>On the reopening of the West Somerset Railway to through passengers trains to Minehead for the Butlins holiday camp and residents and Tourists of west Somerset.</p> <p>Working with the Department for Transport Network Rail western route First Group Plc Great Western Railway company the West Somerset Railway company Heart of the West Local Enterprise partnership and Peninsula Transport Board and Somerset Council to ease pressure of the A358 and A39 routes and on the bus service and help the West Somerset Railway company revenue stream at a loss of £216 317 Or £4000 a week .</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital: Cllr Mike Rigby</b></p>

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

<p><b>Eva Bryczkows ki</b></p>	<p>THE ONGOING YEOVIL REFRESH SCHEME</p> <p>STOP KILLING THE HIGH STREET AND WRECKING LOCAL BUSINESSES</p> <p>I appreciate that there are a number of essential works needed to be done in the centre of Yeovil. However, aims to spend £24 million pounds and counting, on non - essential improvements, does NOT justify this amount of money being spent.</p> <p>AUSTERITY</p> <p>Along with many other councils, due to the catastrophic lack of funding since 2010, Somerset County Council is in huge debt, and councillors have done their best to save money by reluctantly cutting back on things that ARE essential.</p> <p>IMPROVEMENTS THAT ARE NOT ESSENTIAL AT THIS STAGE IN TIME</p> <p>Yeovil Refresh has been going on for three years or so, and will continue, despite residents and local businesses saying loud and clear,</p> <p>ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.</p> <p>Plans such as the installation of street furnishings and soft landscaping, like raised gardens, might make the town centre more attractive, but they are NOT essential at this stage. Certainly not at the expense of small businesses, who are struggling financially due to reduced footfall.</p> <p>They have suffered enough already during the pandemic, and yet you, Somerset County councillors, have confirmed in the news today, that all of this scheme, including the lovely enhancements portfolio holder Mike Rigby has waxed lyrical about, will continue, ignoring what Yeovil residents and businesses are telling you.</p> <p>They can be completed when the money is available, it is certainly NOT at the moment, and it is needs to be spent on more important things.</p> <p>VALUE FOR MONEY</p>
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## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

I want to see my council tax money being spent on more essential things, like social care, helping vulnerable residents, and many other necessities during this cost of living crisis.

### THE TOWN IS A TOTAL MESS

I occasionally go by bus from Glastonbury to Yeovil for hospital appointments and shopping.

The last time I went I didn't realise that there was no longer a bus stop in the centre of town. I was early for my appointment, but instead of getting off at the soon to be gone bus station, I got off further away from the hospital, thus causing me to be late.

The streets were difficult to navigate due to the town centre being in a total mess, and similar to a bomb site. I kept having to ask frustrated locals for directions. This often led me into dead ends, where I'd get to the end of a pavement and then had to turn back again.

After my appointment, I did some shopping. (All we have in Glastonbury are mainly hemp, psychic candles, and crystal shops).

In every shop I went into, local business people told me they were struggling financially, not just from rising energy costs, but from what formerly Somerset District councillors decided to do, which now Somerset council have voted to continue.

Frankly, councillors, you risk local residents not voting for you because you haven't properly listened to them, despite what councillor Rigby has said.

The portfolio holder cosying up to local businesses and promising to attend meetings to consult and reassure them just doesn't cut it.

You already know how local business people feel, and what they want. Stop wasting time attending meetings, immediately start taking ACTION to restore the high street and save local businesses.

Yes, carry on doing essential repairs and improvements.

But stop wasting our money, to the tune of 24 million quid and rising, on what are follies dreamt up by councillor Rigby and the former South Somerset District Council.

This is the same person who refuses to put speed calming measures on the road into Dunstan Park estate, where children play on the roads and risk injury or worse from speeding vehicles.

He wrote to us residents saying that, because no injury or fatality had been reported yet, they do not consider this a priority.

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

	<p>Yet raised gardens and attractive enhancements in the centre of Yeovil are more of a priority than preventing serious harm or fatality occurring to young children.</p> <p><b>QUESTION ONE</b> Regarding representing the wishes of Somerset people you represent, are you going to continue spending 24 million pounds on those refurbishments that are non - essential? Yes, or No?</p> <p><b>QUESTION TWO</b> Can you proceed immediately, to scrutinise the decisions made by the portfolio holder and the Highways department, in order to make it less expensive to do those repairs that are essential, thereby providing a timeline for delaying some of them wherever possible?</p> <p><b>QUESTION THREE</b> Can you make a clear decision to recompense local businesses who have suffered for a long time due to reduced footfall, spending the money intended for unnecessary, at this stage, enhancements? (Which will make it more likely they will vote for you instead of someone else at the next County Council election. It'll come sooner than you think).</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital: Cllr Mike Rigby and Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets: Cllr Ros Wyke</b></p>
<b>Nick Hall</b>	<p>Good afternoon. My name is Nick Hall. I live in Pilton, near Shepton Mallet. I am a Parish Councillor speaking in a personal capacity on the draft Statement of Licencing Policy – agenda item 8.</p> <p>I want to make two broad points today:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I don't believe that the Licensing and Regulatory Committee has properly considered my views or those of fellow consultees.</li></ul>

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

- There are significant gaps in this policy.

### **Unresponsive consultation process:**

In May the consultation period was suddenly reduced from eight to six weeks. Consultation responses were only published on 4 September. These responses did not address the substantive issues that were raised by me and others. Four days later I had to submit questions for the Licensing Committee to be able to answer them at their meeting on 14 Sept. Disappointingly there was no discussion of my questions or those of another participant. Moreover, no answers were forthcoming at the meeting. When I challenged this lack of response, I was told that I would be provided with written answers before the Full Council – I am still waiting. Contrary to guidance (14.9 of the section 182 Guidance, Licensing Act 2003) I don't feel that the Licensing and Regulatory Committee has given any weight to my views.

### **Significant Policy Gaps**

The nub of the problem is that this policy must cover 2500 to 3000 Licensed premises across the whole of Somerset, one of which is for the Glastonbury Festival with 210,000 people. There are unique issues associated with the Festival but this Licensing policy needs to address them to reduce the risk to public safety and reduce public nuisance.

With limited time I can only highlight three significant policy gaps:

1. Surely an 'Area of Concern' is overcrowding and crushing at large indoor and outdoor events? There are multiple recent examples of tragic outcomes – O2 Academy (Brixton Dec 2022) and Astroworld (Houston Nov 2021) being the most notable. Moreover, last year Mendip District Council's Scrutiny Board expressed concerns on this matter.
2. An applicant is not legally required to notify a Parish Council of a License application or variation. Hence the new policy of Somerset Council notifying affected Parish Councils is a good step forward - this should be written into this statement of policy.
3. Alongside the main Festival there are 20 to 30 off-site events each individually regulated by a Temporary Event Notice (TEN). There needs to be a more effective policy mechanism to control the cumulative impact on our community from this situation. I welcome the commitment to introduce a searchable database for TENs but much more needs to be done to assess the situation and implement effective solutions.



## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

	<p><b>Conclusion</b></p> <p>I assert that the views of some consultees have not been properly considered and hence the policy cannot be determined. Moreover, significant gaps remain in this statement of Licensing Policy.</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture: Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts</b></p>
<p><b>Carolyn Griffiths</b></p>	<p>I am here to raise concerns over the failings of the Council's conduct of the so called consultation of the Licensing Policy and to caution you against approving the proposed new policy.</p> <p>I live in Pilton. I was motivated to respond to the consultation as I have seen at first hand the failings of the existing policy. The proposed new policy on today's agenda is almost identical simply because your officers and the Licensing Committee have failed to engage with proposals for change. In almost every case the changes proposed by consultees have been rejected; but worse still they were rejected with no credible explanation or on invalid grounds.</p> <p>I asked the Licensing Committee to intervene. I alerted the committee to these failings. The chair in the face of evidence to the contrary refuted the allegation and stated at the meeting <i>the consultation responses were considered</i>. That's all he said; he gave, no explanation and no response to the issues I (and others) had raised.</p> <p>So here I am today. The three minutes allowed for public contribution gives no opportunity to convince you of the extent and seriousness of the failings of the consultation. Yet I cannot see how you can approve the proposed policy. It is based on a failed consultation process and it fails those who are affected by the licenses you grant.</p> <p>I can only give you some illustrations; just two examples. Please don't respond to just these as there are many other equally important issues that warrant the Council's proper attention.</p> <p><u>a) Noise controls, monitoring and enforcement :</u></p>

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

My consultation response described (using the Glastonbury Festival only as an example) the evident inadequacy of the existing policy to protect (a number of) communities from the repeated nuisance of noise. The problems of noise is a fact and was recognised by members of the public and Councillors at Mendip’s Scrutiny Board. This seems to indicate that the existing policy, its application, monitoring and/ or enforcement provisions of the policy needs to be improved. Astonishingly your officers (who have prior involvement in the application of the existing policy) rejected any changes to the policy stating

*‘Any complaints received will be assessed and appropriate action taken’...*

In other words they failed to understand the point and the opportunity for improvement of the policy was ignored.

### b) Cumulative Impact Assessment

The current policy does not encourage the consideration of cumulative impact; yet events in parts of this County particularly merit this. The reasons given for the policy not including cumulative impact assessments is ‘that Somerset Council has no immediate plans for this’. No explanation. Just a stark refusal. This is simply not a competent response to a proposal for change .

### **In the light of the foregoing**

**a) I would like the Council to explain how it can consider the proposal before it to be a real reflection of improvements that could *and should* be made to the policy . It represents a failure of due process and a failure to serve the public interest.**

**b) If the Full Council refuses to accept the need for a fresh review (by councillors/officers persons who have no prior involvement in the consultation or the Council’s operation of the existing policy ) then I would like its advice as to where I must take this matter next.**

I am prepared to further elaborate the issues I have raised and which the Council has discounted without valid explanation. But there are many other consultees responses that similarly need to be reviewed. I had hoped the new Council would be a listening Council. This has so far proven not to be the case.

**Response from Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture: Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts**

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

Annexe B – Member Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question
<p><b>Cllr Dave Mansell and Cllr Gwil Wren</b></p>	<p>Section 19 flood investigation reports</p> <p>With the Lead Local Flood Authority having insufficient staff and budget, and following severe floods in Milverton, Queen Camel and other areas in May 2023 and in Wellington and West Somerset in September 2023, would it please be confirmed when sufficient resources will be provided to allow the council to start work on important Section 19 flood investigation reports. These reports are vital to target future maintenance and to build a resilient and sustainable network in the face of changing climatic conditions.</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change: Cllr Dixie Darch</b></p>
<p><b>Cllr Lucy Trimnell</b></p>	<p>I am very concerned about the guardianship of our heritage assets within Somerset Council following a recent highways Small Improvement Scheme in Bruton and would like this council to consider appointing a heritage champion role within the executive. Over the summer works were completed to a junction in the middle of the conservation area in Bruton to widen pavements. This included the removal of slabbed paving and iron kerb edging, the same as can be seen in areas of cities such as Bristol and Manchester and it's removal caused a great deal of upset amongst residents, particularly those who live within the conservation area and have to comply with incredibly strict rules for even the most minor of alterations to their properties</p> <p>Conversations with highways officers reveal that although Heritage South West were consulted on this matter as of April this year there is now no contract between Highways and a heritage body and therefore no advisory body to refer to regarding our heritage assets.</p>

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

	<p>A heritage champion liaising with highways, local members and Heritage South West could have focussed on establishing ways to incorporate the metal edging into the design scheme (as has been done in Bristol) and therefore respect the heritage and built environment both in Bruton and other parts of Somerset.</p> <p>It is thought that 70% of councils already have a Heritage Champion and with Somerset Council being the custodian of a vast array of heritage assets, Grade I and II listed buildings and Conservation Areas it is clear that such a role within the council is very much a necessity and I would like to see this explored at pace to ensure that heritage is placed at the heart of everything Somerset Council does.</p> <p>For some of these the exterior appearance of their properties has been significantly altered by the rep</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets: Cllr Ros Wyke</b></p>
<p><b>Cllr Norman Cavill</b></p>	<p>As we all know there is a requirement by this LPA for any additional development within certain catchment areas, to be phosphate neutral</p> <p>Mitigation is now required to provide neutrality for a minimum of eighty years.</p> <p>Some of the larger developments are providing mitigation, by constructing wetland habitat from existing farmland, which will require a maintenance plan to ensure their continued operation.</p> <p>Recent events clearly show that flash flooding will bring with it substantial quantities of silt, resulting in clogging and filling up of waterways within the mitigation site, in turn reducing the effectiveness of the mitigation site.</p> <p>On new development sites, it is now common practise to set up management companies. Are we to rely on these companies to undertake costly mitigation maintenance?</p> <p>What provision has this council, the LPA, made to regularly inspect and ensure the continued full operation of these important systems?</p>

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

	<p>Can you give assurance that future budgets will contain a specified and adequate sum, so that proper inspection and enforcement if necessary will be available?</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets: Cllr Ros Wyke</b></p>
<p><b>Cllr Sue Osborne</b></p>	<p>Questions regarding the resourcing of the Somerset Council Planning Service.</p> <p>The creation of the new Somerset Council has presented numerous challenges in bringing together the four District Council Planning Teams, particularly in how they have been resourced, job descriptions and employment contracts. Some areas, eg, Area South have relied heavily upon Agency Contract staff whose contracts are likely to end soon. A job evaluation policy has now been introduced to cover any vacant posts. For the Planning Service, this has resulted in posts being valued at less than the previous District salary/contract fee. My Questions are as follows:</p> <p>What is the timescale for completing and implementing a workforce strategy for the planning department, including job evaluations?</p> <p>What is the likely uplift in budget requirements in order that current planning team members are not financially disadvantaged by the Job Evaluation process and hence leave Somerset Council as a result?</p> <p>What plans are in place to strengthen planning enforcement? I am getting an increasing number of complaints about lack of both action and response from officers working in enforcement to Parish Council enquiries?</p> <p>What is the risk and what are the Consequences for this Council should the planning service start to fail due to inability to recruit and retain enough experienced planning team members?</p>

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Response from Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets: Cllr Ros Wyke</b></p>
<p><b>Cllr David Fothergill</b></p>	<p>There is growing anecdotal evidence of modern slavery issues relating to the recruitment, contracting and employment of overseas care workers. These issues raise serious concerns both for the welfare of those individuals brought to the UK and also with regards the quality of safeguarding checks.</p> <p>Please can the Executive Member of Adult Social Care advise of the number of overseas care workers who have been recruited into Somerset Care Homes and (separately) into Somerset Domiciliary Care: which agencies have been used by care and domiciliary care providers and what local authority checks are in place to ensure that providers and their agencies are using appropriate procedures.</p> <p>Somerset has a responsibility to those employed in our County and those receiving services in our County and therefore if the information is not readily available, I would like to know what steps are being put in place to improve levels of safeguarding for all those concerned and when these will be introduced.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Response from Lead Member for Adult Services: Cllr Dean Ruddle</b></p>
<p><b>Cllr Diogo Rodrigues</b></p>	<p><b>One</b></p> <p>Given the refurbishment at Crescent Car Park in Taunton, which resulted in a 37% reduction in regular parking spaces and an expected loss of income totalling approximately £173,000 (excluding the £20,000 monthly loss during refurbishment), Somerset Council's stated 'Stark and Challenging' financial situation, and their plan to continue reduce parking availability in urban areas to promote alternative transportation methods, I would like to ask the lead member the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do you believe that reducing the income from Crescent Car Park by £173,000 was a prudent financial decision, given the council's financial challenges?</li> </ol>

## Full Council 27 September 2023 – Public and Member Questions

2. Can the council afford the self-inflicted financial loss resulting from rolling out reduced parking availability in urban areas, considering the budget constraints

### **Two**

It was concerning to learn recently about the potential loss of over £100 a day on the Somerset Council operated 68 bus service from Yeovil bus station as a result of allowing passengers on for free due to not having a contactless payment service. Only last week I had confirmation that the issue was still ongoing on this service.

This self-inflicted financial damage takes on a greater seriousness when we consider the 'stark and challenging' financial situation that this council has described itself to be in. I would like to ask the lead member the following:

1. Exactly how many Somerset Council-operated bus services currently do not offer contactless payment options, and can you provide a list of these services?
2. What is the estimated weekly financial loss attributed to the absence of contactless payments on these Somerset Council-operated bus services?
3. Could you please outline the concrete plans and timelines in place to implement contactless payment options on the affected bus services

**Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital: Cllr Mike Rigby**