

Annex A

Public and Members Questions – Executive 6 December 2023

Question submitted from	Question
<p>Nigel Behan</p>	<p>This question relates to Item 6 2023-24 GF Budget Monitoring Executive Report Q2 - Month 6 and Item 11 - 2023 - 2024/25 General Fund Revenue Budget & Capital Programme update</p> <p>With dwindling reserves and without a capitalisation direction how likely is it that SC may be left with no option but to follow Nottingham City Council Section 114 Report updates - Nottingham City Council ?</p>
<p>Response</p>	<p>Response from Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon:</p> <p>The paper that we will consider later in this Executive meeting, titled 2024/25 General Fund Revenue Budget & Capital Programme update, has as an Appendix which is the Review of Earmarked Reserves. That paper identifies £36.8m of reserves that can be repurposed to better support the budget for 2024/25. Approval of that action is one of the recommendations for Executive today.</p> <p>We completely understand and accept that any reserves can only be spent once, but we must acknowledge that Local Government is in a position we have not seen before. Use of reserves will form part of dealing with our projected overspend this year, and our budget setting for next year.</p> <p>The more we can identify savings this year, the more we protect our reserves for future years.</p> <p>Another recommendation in the same paper is for Executive to agree to formally ask Government for a Capitalisation direction, and that does indeed feel essential now that we understand the scale of our financial challenge and the ongoing impact of inflation, particularly on placement costs.</p> <p>How much that capitalisation direction is for and how we might fund it – either by disposal of assets or borrowing OR a combination of both – remains to be seen and is entirely dependent in the first instance on the response from Government.</p> <p>Although we hear and read of so many other Councils in similar positions to Somerset Council, we can see that we have a particular</p>

	<p>challenge in being such a new, and immature, organisation. I cannot imagine how we could have found a more difficult time to undergo Local Government Reorganisation.</p> <p>Yet that programme of Reorganisation is what might lead us to a sustainable position for Somerset Council, although we acknowledge that this is a time of concern and anxiety for many of our staff. We will continue to be as open and transparent as possible, in explaining both our ongoing position and our developing plans for the financial future.</p>
<p>David Redgewell</p>	<p>Whilst we understand the 87 million pounds of saving for the unity council in Somerset and the threat of a section 114 notice, we note Somerset other unity council of Bath and North East Somerset council and North Somerset council also have to make savings of million of pounds as Does Devon County Council.</p> <p>The council and Regional bodies like South west councils the Greater South west partnership, Western Gateway partnership should with Mps and members of the House of lord pressing some the government for proper fund for public services in the south west and especially in Somerset.</p> <p>Question 1 What action is Somerset Council taken with Regional bodies and mps and members of the house of lords to raise the funding issues of the budget emergency in Somerset.</p> <p>Question 2 On Devolution of public Transport service to city town and parish councils. With the Department for transport settlement of capital grant and revenue through the bus service improvement plan money or fares cap grant. If the bus stop infrastructure and shelters and bus stop are devolved to Wells city council or Frome Town Council ,Shepton mallet, Glastonbury and street how will the Mendip Region. Shelters coach bus stop infrastructure be maintained or should a service be provided by the council Transport Department the Town and Parish councils fund under a service level agreement one to 4 mainance vans are very cost effective across the unity council. Funded by Town and parish councils and Somerset as the Transport Authority. Each council can</p>

apply badges and Brands to the shelters and maintenance vans as a joint service.

But we feel the Transport Authority should own the county bus and coach assets, On bus and coach stations their is for Department for transport grant aid to continue to own the bus and coach stations at Taunton Transport hub,Bridgwater bus and coach station, Yeovil bus and coach station, Wells bus and coach station, Wincanton bus and coach station memorial hall, Frome Cork Street, Shepton mallet interchange, Chard interchange Minehead Bank Street, and parade Minehead railway station.,coach park Coach station/ Parks at Wellington, Glastonbury, street . As their is revenue through coach parking charges and car park income for Somerset council. However if day to maintenance agreement can be. reached with First group plc and Bridgwater Town Council Wells city council, or Yeovil Town Council with First group plc and South west coaches Ltd a way forward can be found. In the case of Yeovil bus and coach station we also have the Northern Ireland owned shopping centre company. We would welcome any service level agreement but can details please be brought to the Somerset bus service advisory Board for discussion and support in January or with public transport users as part of this budget consultation process.

Question 3

Tendering of public transport services bus and community transport services and railway partnerships schemes On bus services in view of the bus services improvement plan and the support bus network we welcome the proposal to look working in Partnership with city ,Town and Parish councils Including community transport services. and registering of service with the Traffic Commissioner. But this would require Somerset unity council as Transport Authority to let the Bus or coach services contract .

The 67 Wells bus and coach station to Wookey Hole ,Wookey village, Wedmore, Highbridge and Burnham on sea is a good example of partnership working. But on Main line routes with first group plc South buses. And First group plc Wales and West buses Division Would require very detailed partnership working service levels agreement and management structures and partnership with the partnership councils and Transport Authorities. Examples being from Taunton to Minehead bus 28 It would require at the Taunton Town ,Bishop Lydeard, willton

Watchet and Minehead Town Council To contribute. And the smaller Parishes With first group plc South buses First Group plc Great Western Railway company. 25 Taunton Dulverton via Wiveliscombe and Bampton will require the Town Council in Taunton, first group plc Great Western Railway company, Parish councils and Town Council including Wiveliscombe and Bampton in Devon and Dulverton council. Devon County Council and Exmoor National park Authority.

Or 58 Yeovil bus and coach station to Yeovil pen mill station First Group Great Western Railway company Sherborne Town Council Dorset Sherborne Railway station, first group plc South western railway company, Templecombe, Parish Council First group plc South buses Western Railway company Wincanton Town Council and close working with Dorset Council as the other Transport Authority. And the smaller Parish councils 54, Taunton to Langport, Somerton Ilchester and Yeovil bus and coach station, Will require First group plc South buses and Town and Parish councils, Services 1 Yeovil bus and coach station to Castle Cary Town, Railway station, Evercreech and Shepton Mallet interchange.

Will require discussion with Somerset council first group plc Great Western Railway company Castle Cary Railway station and Town and parish councils NHS Somerset at Shepton Mallet. In the Mendip region Route 376 street, Glastonbury, Wells bus and coach, Chewton Mendip, Farrington Gurney Clutton Temple Cloud, Pensford, Whitchurch Hengrove Bristol Temple Meads station Bristol bus and coach station. Will require discussion with Town and city and parish Council in Somerset unity and Banes unity and the West of England mayoral combined transport Authority. First Group plc Wales and West buses Division, First Group plc Great Western Railway company at Bristol Temple Meads station and Bristol city council Similar with the 172, 173, 174 Wells bus and coach station, St Cuthbert without, Chilcompton, Shepton Mallet Town Council, Paulton, Midsomer Norton, Westfield, Radstock Peasdown St John Town and parish Council s Banes council and West of England mayoral combined transport Authority, First Group plc Wales and West buses Division and First group plc Great Western Railway company at Bath Spa interchange. NHS Trust at Royal United Hospital Trust at Peasdown St John. The previous successful version of this was Frome to Bath Spa bus and coach station involving, Banes council, Somerset council, Frome Town Council, Beckington parish Council, Rode parish Council, North St Philips parish Council Midford parish Council. First Group plc West of England buses now First group

	<p>plc Wales and West buses Division and First group plc Great Western Railway company.</p> <p>And now sevenside community railway partnership And South wessex community railway partnerships And the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority. In all case metro mayor Dan Norris. Council Sarah Warren transport executive Fiona Gourley public transport lead member council Kevin Guy leader On 126 Wells to weston super mare bus and coach station.</p> <p>Wells city council, st cuthbert without Parish Council, Westbury sub Mendip, Draycott Cheddar Axbridge winscombe Banwell locking Hutton Weston super mare Town and parish councils and North Somerset council.</p> <p>Councillor Mike Bell leader and councillor Hannah young transport executive . But the the cb3 Crewkerne Beaminster to Bridport bus and coach station and hospital services Saturday service funded by Beaminster Council and Bridport Town Council funds Town bus services as does Lyme Regis Town Council park and ride and a town service so this can be made to work but will require at lot of technical issues and services and Tendering by Somerset unity council public transport unit and work With North Somerset council west of England mayoral combined transport Authority Banes council in Somerset. And Dorset ,Devon, and Wiltshire Councils and incase of bus services improvement plan and fund the Department for transport. The same with the Department for transport funding for community railway partnership with parish Town and city council with First group plc MTR South Western Railway company and First group plc Great Western Railway company. Cross country trains arriva Germany state Railway. Does Somerset unity council have a way of talk to all theses partners and put joint budgets together during this budget round and consultation with public transport company Parish ,Town and city council and neighbouring Transport Authority councils and mayor's. Department of Transport and the Traffic Commissioner.</p>
<p>Response</p>	<p>Responses from:</p> <p>Question 1 - the Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans:</p> <p>Thank you for the question, Mr Redgewell. The Council is in regular communication with relevant bodies both nationally and regionally. We</p>

have offered a briefing to local MPs who we have asked to engage directly with Government on our behalf. I would like to thank 4 of our 5 MPs for meeting with me to discuss the issues at Somerset Council. We are continuing to reach out to the other MP and do hope that he will meet with me and my senior officers.

The Local Government Association and County Councils Network have been very supportive of Somerset Council, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank regional and national colleagues for their support. We will of course continue to add Somerset's voice to the work being led by the LGA, CCN, and other national bodies, calling for fairer, more sustainable funding for local government.

The Council will continue to lobby for a settlement that recognises the stark truth that there is not enough resource in local government as a whole to continue to deliver the statutory responsibilities Councils have. However, despite our best efforts, and that of our Local Government colleagues, it is disappointing that Government do not intend to make changes that help councils with this financial burden. So, we must act ourselves to make the tough decisions to balance the books.

Question 2 and 3 – the Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Cllr Mike Rigby

Firstly, I would like to take the opportunity to thank Mr Redgewell for his thought-provoking suggestions and questions. Taking both questions together if I may, the Council is in discussions with our City, Town and Parish Councils regarding asset and service devolution. At this point, the devolution of Somerset Council's statutory duties as a Transport Authority has not been put forward as option, beyond any existing local arrangements of service funding.

We are happy to consider the further devolution of the ownership and maintenance of Bus Shelters to Town and Parish Councils if this is something that is of interest to them and their communities. In terms of the support to routes that may be under pressure as a result of reductions in the Councils operating budget, as part of our ongoing work to engage with City, Town and Parish Councils we will be open to discuss how the impacts could be mitigated through working closely with our local council partners. The same principle applies to working with partners across the region where there is benefit to Somerset in doing so.

<p>Robin Horton</p>	<p>It was reported in the local news that this meeting was to discuss the transfer of assets to town and parish councils.</p> <p>Firstly is this the case and if not then when will this be discussed in open forum. In addition, you will be aware of the requests sent to you over the previous 12-18 months for transfer of assets to Shepton Mallet Town Council. Nothing has been forthcoming from the Somerset Council as yet about this and can I ask when the council will be in touch with SMTC to progress this issue, especially given that the public consultation event on the town councils precept for 24/25 happened YESTERDAY !!! and the transfer of assets will certainly affect the precept for the town council.</p>
<p>Response</p>	<p>Response from the Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources, Cllr Theo Butt Philip</p> <p>Thank you for the question, Mr Horton. Whilst the Asset and Service Devolution Framework is not on the agenda for this meeting, we are discussing the future of the Council. The draft Asset and Service Devolution Framework was discussed at yesterday's Corporate and Resources Scrutiny Committee, additionally a link to that document was sent to all City, Town and Parish Councils on Monday. Feedback from both the scrutiny committee and the local councils will help us develop the framework, which we are intending to bring back to the Executive in January.</p> <p>We continue to be in regular dialogue with the sector about devolution opportunities. This includes via our fortnightly clerks' working group, which last week was an extended devolution Q&A session, officer attendance at Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) meetings to respond to questions, and on Saturday the Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader of the Council and I attended Somerset Association of Local Councils' (SALC's) AGM where devolution was the main topic.</p> <p>Following the letter to all City, Town and Parish Councils in early November has been generally positive and officers are in the process of engaging with city, town and parish councils.</p> <p>We recognise that local councils are currently setting their budgets and will need to consider levels of precept which is appropriate to them. It is in my view not the most transparent thing to do to look merely at the percentage increase for a precept. In Somerset we have a significant variance of precepts charged by parishes, ranging from over £200 in a</p>

	<p>number of cases (over £300 in one case) to the low single figures. Any increase needs to be considered in the context of the individual parish.</p> <p>Looking at Shepton Mallet Town Council in particular – officers are currently in conversation with the clerk about how to progress a variety of services and assets in which the Town Council has expressed an interest.</p>
<p>Susannah Clemence</p>	<p>I address you today to underscore the critical importance of Somerset Council retaining responsibility for our bus services and related infrastructure, including bus shelters, interchanges, and bus stations. Buses are not merely a convenience but an essential service, serving as lifelines for our community, facilitating school transport, employment commutes, hospital visits, and more.</p> <p>It is imperative to acknowledge Somerset Council's responsibility to fund these vital services. As we navigate the complexities of Department of Transport (DfT) funding, it becomes clear that this responsibility must remain with Somerset Council as the local transport authority (LTA) to ensure a seamless flow of resources. DfT funding is contingent on the services being under the purview of an LTA, preventing direct transfer to town and parish councils.</p> <p>Furthermore, Somerset Council's current standing as one of the least funded councils in the region for bus services demands our attention. This issue is crucial, especially when considering the broader context of the climate emergency and Somerset Council's commitment to becoming a carbon-neutral county by 2030. Bus services play a pivotal role in promoting sustainable transport, aligning with our environmental goals.</p> <p>While other services may be more easily devolved to town and parish councils, bus services pose a unique challenge due to the intricate negotiations involved with multiple councils. The intricacies of service level agreements (SLA) for funding bus services and infrastructure must be carefully managed to ensure the continued flow of DfT funding.</p> <p>In conclusion, I urge the Somerset Council Executive to prioritise the retention of responsibility for bus services and associated infrastructure. This is not only a matter of that responsibility, but a strategic move to secure the funding necessary for maintaining and improving our county's bus services. Let us remain steadfast in our</p>

	<p>commitment to the community, mindful of the broader impact on our environment and the well-being of Somerset residents</p>
<p>Response</p>	<p>Response from the Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Cllr Mike Rigby:</p> <p>Thank you very much for all the support in those questions and comments.</p> <p>The Council is in discussions with our City, Town and Parish Councils regarding asset and service devolution. At this point, the devolution of Somerset Council's statutory duties as a Transport Authority has not been put forward as option, beyond any existing local arrangements of service funding.</p> <p>We are happy to consider the further devolution of the ownership and maintenance of Bus Shelters to Town and Parish Councils if this is something that is of interest to them and their communities. In terms of the support to routes that may be under pressure as a result of reductions in the Councils operating budget, as part of our ongoing work to engage with City, Town and Parish Councils we will be open to discuss how the impacts could be mitigated through working closely with our local council partners. The same principle applies to working with partners across the region where there is benefit to Somerset in doing so.</p>
<p>Questions from</p>	<p><u>Helen Eccles</u></p> <p>With reference to Item 11 - 2023 - 2024/25 General Fund Revenue Budget & Capital Programme update paragraph 22, how can you guarantee that:</p> <p>There are no health and safety implications arising from this report given that there is a proposal to save £87million and make significant reductions to the workforce by the end of Quarter 2 2024/25?</p> <p><u>Neil Guild</u></p> <p>With reference to Item 11 - 2023 - 2024/25 General Fund Revenue Budget & Capital Programme update paragraph 20, how can you guarantee that:</p> <p>There are no direct community safety implications arising from this report given that there is a proposal to save £87million and make</p>

significant reductions to the workforce by the end of Quarter 2 2024/25?

Alison Hann

With reference to Item 11 - 2023 - 2024/25 General Fund Revenue Budget & Capital Programme update paragraph 19, how can you guarantee that:

There are no specific equalities implications arising from the recommendation in this report given that there is a proposal to save £87million and make significant reductions to the workforce by the end of Quarter 2 2024/25?

Tom Kennedy-Hughes

With reference to Item 11 - 2023 - 2024/25 General Fund Revenue Budget & Capital Programme update paragraph 24, how can you guarantee that:

There are no direct Social Value implications arising from this report given that there is a proposal to save £87million and make significant reductions to the workforce by the end of Quarter 2 2024/25?

Max Lester

With reference to Item 11 - 2023 - 2024/25 General Fund Revenue Budget & Capital Programme update paragraph 23, how can you guarantee that:

There are no direct health and wellbeing implications arising from this report given that there is a proposal to save £87million and make significant reductions to the workforce by the end of Quarter 2 2024/25?

Paul Windsor

With reference to Item 11 - 2023 - 2024/25 General Fund Revenue Budget & Capital Programme update paragraph 21, how can you guarantee that:

There are no direct climate change and sustainability implications arising from this report given that there is a proposal to save

	£87million and make significant reductions to the workforce by the end of Quarter 2 2024/25?
Response	<p>Response from Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon:</p> <p>Thank you for your interest and concern regarding the budget setting process. We appreciate your involvement and feedback.</p> <p>We would like to reassure you that in setting the budget we will consider all relevant impacts and conduct robust assessments for each budget proposal, using a range of evidence and data sources, as well as consultation and engagement with stakeholders and communities where relevant.</p> <p>We welcome any further engagement in the budget setting process.</p>