

Public Questions – 15 January 2024

Question (submitted by / response from)

Ray Tostevin, Chair of Quicksilver Community Group

The future of emergency Stroke Services at Yeovil Hospital has been the subject of an extensive public consultation by NHS Somerset in recent months. Later in January, the NHS Somerset Integrated Care Board is due to present its final decision-making business plan, to close Yeovil's Hyper Acute Stroke Unit, and move emergency stroke care to Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton.

The plans have been described by lead stroke specialist at Yeovil as ill-conceived. This council's Adults and health Scrutiny committee has already voiced its collective concern. Members have not been convinced that the planned changes to emergency stroke care will not be in the best interests for all residents of Somerset. They have urged the ICB to delay any proposed changes, and come back with revised plans.

The Council leader Bill Revans indicated at Full Council just before Christmas, that he had received a response from NHS Somerset, in response to the request from councillors to delay making any final decision, on emergency stroke care provision for ALL residents in Somerset. What have NHS Somerset ICB said to Councillor Revans in their reply? Have the ICB agreed to delay releasing any final decision on the future of Yeovil's Hyper Acute Stroke Unit, to allow more time for alternatives to be brought forward. To ensure NO residents of Somerset, no matter where they live in the county, receive anything less than the highest standard of emergency stroke treatment and care,

Response from Cllr Bill Revans

Alan Debenham

Bearing in mind the build-up to and now operation of our new Somerset Unitary Authority Council on the basis of pressure from ex-Conservative control because of so-called big savings and enhanced services, how is it, in public understandable language and sufficient detail, that the proposals for the present emergency budget, with a Council Tax 10% increase and probable Section 114 (insolvency warning) application, have come about?

Response from Cllr Liz Leyshon

Nigel Behan

These Questions relate to Agenda Item 7 [2024/25 Budget and Somerset Council Vision update](#)

It is stated that:

"8. It is recommended that the Council bridge the remaining gap by requesting dispensations from Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). These requests are summarised in table 2 and are based upon: • approval to increase Council Tax by 9.99% in 2024/25 to bring Somerset's charges more in line with other unitary councils. This would generate an additional £17.1m per annum on an ongoing basis; and • be granted a capitalisation direction for the balance of £20.8m, or, if the request to increase Council Tax by 9.99% is not granted by £37.9m. Table 2: Option to close the budget gap for 2024/25

"Remaining budget gap 2024/25 £m Budget gap – December 2023 37.9 Increase Council Tax by a further 5% (17.1) Capitalisation Direction from DLUHC (20.8) Balanced position 0.0"

9. If DLUHC do not grant either dispensation request the Council will not be able to balance the 2024/25 budget. This situation will force the Section 151 officer to use his statutory powers and issue a section 114 notice."

Q1 a) Is the assumption - if DLUHC agree to the request - that there would be no requirement to have referendum for a Council Tax increase of 9.99%?

Q1 b) Have no other alternative measures been considered to avoid issuing a S114 notice if DLUHC do not approve the requests for an additional 5% Council Tax increase and/or a Capitalisation Direction (since £37.9m is a relatively small amount in relation to the proposed draft budget of £637.3m)?

Paragraph 14 states: "The Council cannot continue to provide and operate services in their current format and rapid, radical, change is required if it is to become financially sustainable. To address this, the Council is developing a Transformation Programme to deliver our vision for the council to be a smaller, leaner council, employing fewer people, requiring fewer offices, focusing only on the unique value the authority can provide."

(And Paragraph 13 "It is widely recognised that the funding mechanism for local government is broken and needs urgent reform.")

Q 1 c) Then is it reasonable (premature?) to "only" focus on the "unique value the authority can provide" ("the vision?") which seems to equate to less services and less jobs for the community of Somerset - at a greater cost?

Response from Cllr Liz Leyshon

Eva Bryczkowski

I am asking on behalf of Joe, a local councillor in Glastonbury, who is also a busy farmer.

1. Could this committee give more information and details of how the future budget of Somerset will affect:

*local councils, *parishes, *community networks, and *former districts,

*particularly in view of the fact that many of the above are likely to bear the brunt of the broken funding system, especially in the case of the exponentially increasing costs of adult social care, children's and other services?

2. How much extra work are they possibly expected to do as a result of the above?

3. What consideration has been given to rural, environmental and farming issues, regarding the above?

Response from Cllr Theo Butt Philip

David Redgewell**Question 1**

With regards to the retendering of the unity council bus network as a propose budget savings what consultation are taking place with bus and public transport users groups passengers and stakeholders and the council in the North of the county North Somerset council, Banes and West of England mayoral combined transport Authority mayor Dan Norris, Devon County Council, Wiltshire Council, and Dorset Council, bus and coach operators and railways and coach services operators that connect into the local bus network

Especially with routes like service 54 Taunton to Yeovil bus and coach station via Langport and Somerton

Service 25 Taunton to Dulverton via Bampton and Wiveliscombe.

Joint with Devon County Council and Exmoor National park.

28 Taunton to Watchet and Minehead Town Centre Bank Street Minehead railway station and Butlins,

Service 58 Yeovil bus and coach station to Yeovil pen mill station Sherborne Town Sherborne Railway station Templecombe Wincanton bus and coach station,

All First group plc South services

Service 1 Shepton mallet interchange Evercreech Castle cary railway station Castle cary Town, Yeovil bus and coach station,

South west coaches.

Their may well be savings in retendering routes ,with First group plc Wales and West buses Division First Group plc South buses, stagecoach South west, Hatch Green, Riddell coaches ,Bakers Frome bus company and go head group South west ,south west coaches

Providing staff are Tupe over and discussion take place with the RMT and Unite union and the bus and coach operating companies have have bus and coach Depots across the the Historic county of Somerset and into Bristol, Devon, Dorset and Wiltshire.
and funding from local city Town and parish council to run bus services

Question 2

Passenger safety and passenger facilities

What consultation has taken place with

The Avon and Somerset police British Transport police and the Police and crime commissioner mark Shelford

Bus coach and railway operators

Over the proposal switch off of cctv cameras in High Streets and Bus and coach station in Wells, Bridgwater Yeovil, Wincanton Shepton Mallet interchange, and future Taunton bus and coach station, coach station in Glastonbury, street, Frome, Wellington

Wells bus and coach station has 18 hour a day bus service provided by First group plc Wales and West buses Division, and Mendip community Transport and Berry coaches Service to London Hammersmith,

Wells bus and coach station is also a bus Depot registered with the western Traffic commissioner and Somerset council The Transport Authority.

Town centre Bus stops and railway station where cctv covers the station approach roads such as in Highbridge and Burnham on sea, Minehead, Frome and other Town centre locations,

and coach station Which need to include the provision of bus and coach shelter interchange and public toilets.

Safe of public transport Network and passenger safety especially for women and girls

Question 3

Passenger information at interchange and Town centres

What discussion are talking with Public transport operators and passenger and city ,Town and Parish councils about maintaining the Tourist information and visitors centres open option from Taunton is to move the information visitors centre in the new Taunton Transport hub formerly Taunton bus and coach station, These arrangements have taken place Devon in Cornwall and Isle of Wight.

Response from Cllr Richard Wilkins

Joanna Stevenson – Club Secretary Yeovil and Sherborne HC

Reduction of Sports and Leisure Facilities at Yeovil Recreation Centre - Impact on Hockey

Yeovil Recreation Centre has been the home of Yeovil & Sherborne Hockey Club since 2013. The new artificial pitch was laid as it was recognised there was a shortfall in the provision of sports pitches in South Somerset. Following the completion of the new

pitch, the provision of all sports facilities was reviewed by SSDC in 2017 as part of the *Playing Pitch Strategy* - and the need for open spaces and sports provision was a key part of this strategy that has subsequently been adopted by the current council.

Yeovil and Sherborne Hockey Club has over 500 members playing hockey throughout the year at junior, senior and masters level evenings and weekends. Clubs from all around the country travel to play fixtures at Yeovil. The league matches and tournaments we host at weekends bring visitors- and therefore custom - to the town and surrounding area. Our players acknowledge the positive impact playing hockey has on their personal fitness and mental well-being and it has been a life saver for those dealing with serious illnesses. The Club provides opportunities for members of the local community to participate in the sport and organises taster sessions in schools, hockey holiday camps and school festivals. The pitch is also used independently by the local schools and football clubs. Many children who attend these establishments have been valued club members starting at junior level and now playing in senior teams.

The construction of the new artificial pitch in 2013 was a collaborative venture between Somerset District Council, the Hockey Club and England Hockey with each party contributing a significant amount towards its construction (England Hockey invested £117,000 in its construction along with £224,000 from South Somerset District Council and £476,000 from a Section 106 payment from a housing development). The club continues to invest in this facility and has just made a contribution of £10000 towards the provision of equipment so that the café can provide players with meals and bring more income to the Rec.

In March 2023 the 10-year Community Use Agreement was renewed and obligates the Council to provide the Club with access to the facilities until 2033 and commits all parties to look for ways of guaranteeing the long-term sustainability as this pitch is the only approved league hockey surface in South Somerset.

While there may well be opportunities for hockey to continue in the wider area it would have a detrimental impact on the local community as many take part in activities at the Rec because it is an easily accessible resource. It would be devastating if the facilities we have worked so hard to establish between us were now abandoned or recommissioned as we know that once gone they will be gone for good. It would be another nail in the coffin of this area of South Somerset which is recognised as one of the most deprived areas in the South West where the children and young adults need to be nurtured and encouraged to take part in the positive social interactions that team sports can provide for them. The negative impact of these proposals on the health and well-being of this local community should not be under-estimated at a time when these issues are at the top of the national agenda and will undoubtedly lead to increased costs elsewhere in an Olympic year when we should be encouraging all young people to have a go at sport and be the best they can be.

I would also urge councillors to look at the petition on [change.org](https://www.change.org) which has now reached over 7000 names in just 3 days and shows clearly to strength of feeling and

concerns about this proposal that go far beyond the views of just our club. To be found at:-

[Petition](#)

Response from Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts

Geoff Cole – Yeovil Olympians AC and Somerset Athletics Association

My name is Geoff Cole, and I am chair of Somerset Athletics Association and of Yeovil Olympians Athletics Club. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak in connection with the proposal to close all managed sport and leisure facilities at Yeovil Recreation Ground.

This would mean the closure of the Bill Whistlecroft Athletics Arena.

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I am here representing not only the members of our club and all Somerset Track & Field Athletes, but also the thousands of other athletes from all over the Southwest and beyond who visit this regionally important facility every year. As a show of the depth of feeling we have received well over 8,000 signatures for our petition within just three days, copy of which has been sent to you all.

I am also here representing the thousands of school aged children who attend local schools and use the facility. All 3 of Yeovil's secondary school hire the track and have for many years, for some of their most vulnerable young people this may be the only exposure they ever have to high quality sporting facilities and the opportunity to experience the kind of community cohesion and positivity that comes with sporting events.

Somerset was identified in 2022 as an education investment area due to the low outcomes of children and rising levels of deprivation.

And following the recent 'Centre for Justice report that stated Physical Activity is key to helping children engage with their education, why would we even consider closing a facility that can offer just that?

As a club we see this on a daily basis, where children who have struggled to access formal learning have thrived within the club, which may well have played a significant role in their ability to remain in education where they were previously at risk. The club also caters for children of forces families, the mother of one child for example whose father is about to be deployed for 9 months to the Falklands later this month, describes the facility as his, and some of his friends, lifeline. There are children who have been placed in care and struggled to maintain their placements in education and yet attend the club week in and week out.

At our most recent AGM, it was agreed to explore this avenue more, having seen the positive impact activity has on young people, and to look into providing holiday activities to grow the council's portfolio of care in the holidays, particularly for the most vulnerable. The club would certainly be very willing to work with the council to explore this further and grow the potential of the facilities in positively impacting on children's lives and raising aspirations, rather than taking this lifeline and opportunity away.

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In addition, the athletics arena which has been in Yeovil for over fifty years, hosts County, regional and national level competitions that simply cannot be held anywhere else in the Somerset.

This is a unique facility within the County... the only nationally certified, publicly accessible athletics track in Somerset, and we simply cannot afford to lose it.

The significance of this facility extends beyond sport – It fosters community spirit, promotes physical and mental health and wellbeing for people of all ages and abilities and it contributes to our regional identity.

We must ensure that we preserve this facility for current users and future generations. The Club has invested significantly in the facility with improvements to the clubhouse to ensure unrestricted access for all, and we have hosted national championships for Cerebral Palsy Sport and regularly welcome para-athletes from across the Southwest and Disability Sport Wales.

We do understand the financial emergency and your position in having to make very difficult decisions. However, if this facility is lost, it will be gone forever. We are very willing to work with the Council to ensure that doesn't happen. The proposed level of financial savings made by the removal of this critical and acclaimed sports facility is insignificant against its true worth within the community it serves.

Over many years, we have had a great relationship with the County and District Council before that. We are already working to increase the number of events, and open meetings being held at the arena that not only bring income to the Council run Café on site, but also to the wider area of Yeovil and South Somerset, bringing in visitors from outside the County.

This multi award winning facility, that is so important to the Community in Somerset, must remain open. We implore you all to take the proposed closure of the facilities off the table.

Thank you

Response from Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts

Nick Mowat – Yeovil and Sherbourne Hockey Club

Acceptance now at Cllr Revans discretion.

Response from Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts

Debs Gremmell

Acceptance now at Cllr Revans discretion.

Response from Cllr to be confirmed