

Annex A
Public and Members Questions – Executive 15 January 2024

Question submitted from	Question
<p>Nigel Behan</p>	<p>These Questions relate to Agenda Item 7 2024/25 Budget and Somerset Council Vision update</p> <p>It is stated that:</p> <p>“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</p> <p>“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”</p> <p>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.”</p> <p><u>Question 1 (a)</u></p> <p>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%?</p> <p><u>Question 1 (b)</u></p> <p>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)?</p>

	<p>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.”</p> <p>(And Paragraph 13 “It is widely recognised that the funding mechanism for local government is broken and needs urgent reform.”)</p> <p>Question 1 (c)</p> <p>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?</p>
<p>Response</p>	<p>Response from Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon:</p> <p>Question 1 (a)</p> <p>Yes, that is correct. DLUHC can agree to an increase above the referendum level and they did this for Croydon (15%) and 10% for Slough & Thurrock this year. They have already said they will do allow 10% for Slough, Thurrock & Woking for 2024/25.</p> <p>That does not put Somerset in the same league of difficulty as these Councils; we are one of the first councils to act in a timely way on a situation that is reaching many formerly very secure Councils across the whole country.</p> <p>Question 1 (b)</p> <p>We have been forecasting a significant budget gap for 2024/25 for some time. We have taken arrange of actions to address this including:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of £35.2m of savings options • Reviewing, challenging and reducing pressures including deep dives into both Adults & Childrens • Reviewing & reducing the capital programme • Reviewing and repurposing of reserves £36.8m

Despite all of this work we still have a budget gap of £37.8m for 2024/25.

Therefore, the two options which are left if we are to avoid a Section 114 notice are:

- Additional Council Tax increase
- Capitalisation Direction

If a Section 114 notice is issued then Government Commissioners would come into Somerset – without local knowledge – to work solely on the budget’s bottom line, selling assets, putting up Council Tax as we have seen in other Councils. And we would have to pay very significant fees for Commissioners – For example in Birmingham 8 commissioners have been appointed for five years, they are paid £1,100 to £1,200 per day plus expenses for up 150 days per year.

Question 1 (c)

While I do believe that it is possible to create a sustainable Council for Somerset, I share the concerns of those who fear loss of services that they really care about in places they frequent and love, staffed by Somerset Council employees, often with many years of service and corporate knowledge. No Councillor wishes to make those decisions, no one stands for election to make others unhappy – we all want to make a better difference.

I will ensure that I include my introduction to this paper in my written reply to you following this meeting – please see below

Agenda Item 7 2024/25 Budget and Somerset Council Vision Update

Introduction by Cllr Liz Leyshon

Colleagues, we know that this Council is facing a stark and challenging financial future. We know that following the Autumn Statement and the Financial Settlement last year the Government is not listening.

The funding available to councils has simply not kept pace with the costs of delivering services and we face a budget gap of around £100million for 2024/25. We are in an unprecedented position due to the rising costs faced by local authorities across the country, largely driven by costs of social care.

The Council has to set a balanced budget or Government commissioners will do it for us, without local knowledge or concern for the longer term. They will consider the same actions, and more.

These are not things that we would ever want to be considering, but the broken model of local government funding leaves us with no choice.

This paper is our response to the situation in Somerset and needs to be read with understanding that we are one of many Councils looking for solutions to a situation of growing challenge, complexity and sensitivity.

The biggest factor in the marked increase in our budget gap is the full re-base of the Adults budget, completed during the late summer of 2023, the first such re-base for at least 10 years. The previous fee structure for care home beds was low, and many factors have impacted, causing the weekly costs to rise by more than 45% and still rising.

This situation was rightly predicted by the previous Leader of Council, with the Panorama programme filmed in Somerset in 2019 making it absolutely clear how critical social care is to so many lives. In May 2019 Cllr David Fothergill said “The time bomb is ticking and it’s getting louder.”

Since then, Covid-19 has exacerbated our situation nationally: inflation reached double figures; interest rates reacted to the Truss/Kwarteng mini budget; energy costs increased following the invasion of Ukraine; and the Government Covid grants ended after two years of masking the low fee structure.

Mortgage rates and increasing rental prices are creating greater homelessness and we know that Somerset has been particularly impacted by the need for nutrient neutrality, reducing new home building for years now.

We have also seen increased pay awards, which we all welcome for our officers, but at the same time as our income from Council Tax is limited to the referendum limit of 5%.

Perhaps it should be no surprise that we have such a huge challenge, and that it is a challenge we are seeing right across the country. It is our responsibility to speak for Somerset and to be an ‘early warning’ to the current Government and all political parties.

The increasing costs of social care now create a threat to the provision of services that are not statutory. These are often services and facilities that were previously the responsibility of the former District Councils, many of which can fairly be called preventative services. Open spaces, sport and the arts, CCTV provision, community grants. These all help people of all ages live healthier, safer, more fulfilling lives in their own homes, for longer.

In addressing the One Somerset Business case, I would say that on one hand Local Government Reorganisation has allowed savings that are sorely needed in Somerset, many in the back office, but the £18.4million savings identified in 2020 are at an inadequate level for these changed times. The business case, not unreasonably, did not predict the causes of the current, greater challenges.

We are considering today the spreadsheet of savings that has already created huge concern, indeed outcry, and which will lead to this Council having to take decisions that are fairly called painful and, to quote the Leader of Council, “heartbreaking”.

I recall introducing the budget papers last February and saying that the identification of savings for the current year would make the following years more difficult. Regrettably, that prediction was also correct.

This is where we are now:

We know that Council Tax does not work as a funding mechanism for social care: Where Council Tax income is lower, need is generally higher.

Somerset has a low Council Tax base, and a low Council Tax rate due to historic factors, much lower than geographical neighbours such as Dorset where the six year Council Tax freeze was better understood as a detrimental factor in planning a medium term financial strategy and plan.

Somerset’s situation, identified in this paper, is truly an early warning for Government and all political parties. We are looking at losing services we care about – and believe we need - in order to fund the statutory social care services.

- What will happen when Councils have made savings that take out all the non-statutory services and there is nothing left to cut?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will happen when a council's income is no longer adequate to fund those social care services? That is not far away now. • What will happen when the statutory override ends on the High Needs Block where Somerset is facing a deficit of up to £45million by the end of this financial year. • How can Government believe it is sound financial management to tell us to keep that deficit separate, work on a recovery plan when we know the money has already been spent and other Councils are saying they are already borrowing to cover the cost of, for instance, SEND transport? <p>It's a very difficult future and one that needs careful and considerate thought from politicians of all persuasions across the whole country.</p> <p>In this General Election year, it will suit Government and others to try to pin blame on non-Conservative Councils, and on mis-management.</p> <p>That is to wholly miss the point we make: that the current funding model for local authorities – for adult social care, for children's services, for housing and homelessness – is broken and will fail completely within the next two years or so. Council Tax does not work, and is failing the people who pay it.</p> <p>While this is Somerset's problem to solve right now, we are hearing other councils, and national organisations such as the Local Government Association, County Councils Network, District Councils Network, sharing our view that a national crisis is approaching for local authorities.</p> <p>This is a national problem and requires a national solution.</p> <p>We must speak with one voice to look for a fairer funding mechanism so that we can continue to maximise opportunities in Somerset while taking care of those most in need of support.</p>
<p>Alan Debenham</p>	<p>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?</p>

Response	Response from Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon:
	<p>Thank you Alan for your very good and timely question. Many people on Parish and LCN meetings have asked exactly the same question, as it feels the financial situation has moved so far in such a short time. As a Council we are not on our own in this situation.</p> <p>The short answer is that the business case for One Somerset was written in a different time. That might seem ridiculous when we're referring to just four years – from 2020 to early 2024. Yet a massive amount of financial change and pressure has impacted on the Council in those years and we now find that the real 'gap' in the 2024/25 budget is £100million where the Business Case was planned around savings of £18.5million. They are clearly very different figures.</p> <p>I will address the reasons for the increased budget gap in my introduction to this item, and I will send you a full answer by email following this meeting – Please see below as promised.</p> <p><u>Agenda Item 7 2024/25 Budget and Somerset Council Vision Update</u></p> <p>Introduction by Cllr Liz Leyshon</p> <p>Colleagues, we know that this Council is facing a stark and challenging financial future. We know that following the Autumn Statement and the Financial Settlement last year the Government is not listening.</p> <p>The funding available to councils has simply not kept pace with the costs of delivering services and we face a budget gap of around £100million for 2024/25. We are in an unprecedented position due to the rising costs faced by local authorities across the country, largely driven by costs of social care.</p> <p>The Council has to set a balanced budget or Government commissioners will do it for us, without local knowledge or concern for the longer term. They will consider the same actions, and more.</p> <p>These are not things that we would ever want to be considering, but the broken model of local government funding leaves us with no choice.</p> <p>This paper is our response to the situation in Somerset and needs to be read with understanding that we are one of many Councils looking for</p>

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- What will happen when the statutory override ends on the High Needs Block where Somerset is facing a deficit of up to £45million by the end of this financial year.
- How can Government believe it is sound financial management to tell us to keep that deficit separate, work on a recovery plan when we know the money has already been spent and other Councils are saying they are already borrowing to cover the cost of, for instance, SEND transport?

	<p>It's a very difficult future and one that needs careful and considerate thought from politicians of all persuasions across the whole country.</p> <p>In this General Election year, it will suit Government and others to try to pin blame on non-Conservative Councils, and on mis-management.</p> <p>That is to wholly miss the point we make: that the current funding model for local authorities – for adult social care, for children's services, for housing and homelessness – is broken and will fail completely within the next two years or so. Council Tax does not work and is failing the people who pay it.</p> <p>While this is Somerset's problem to solve right now, we are hearing other councils, and national organisations such as the Local Government Association, County Councils Network, District Councils Network, sharing our view that a national crisis is approaching for local authorities.</p> <p>This is a national problem and requires a national solution.</p> <p>We must speak with one voice to look for a fairer funding mechanism so that we can continue to maximise opportunities in Somerset while taking care of those most in need of support.</p>
<p>David Redgewell</p>	<p><u>Question 1</u></p> <p>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</p> <p>Especially with routes like service 54 Taunton to Yeovil bus and coach station via Langport and Somerton</p> <p>Service 25 Taunton to Dulverton via Bampton and Wiveliscombe. Joint with Devon County Council and Exmoor National park.</p> <p>28 Taunton to Watchet and Minehead Town Centre Bank Street Minehead railway station and Butlins,</p> <p>Service 58 Yeovil bus and coach station to Yeovil pen mill station Sherborne Town Sherborne Railway station Templecombe Wincanton bus and coach station,</p> <p>All First group plc South services</p>

Service 1 Shepton Mallet interchange Evercreech Castle cary railway station Castle cary Town, Yeovil bus and coach station, South west coaches.

There 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 Ahead Group South West, South West Coaches. Providing staff are taken over and discussions take place with the RMT and Unite union and the bus and coach operating companies have bus and coach Depots across 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,
Theses arrangements have taken place Devon in Cornwall and Isle of Wight.

Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Cllr Richard Wilkins:

Question 1

The proposal set out in the budget report is to review the supported bus network in Somerset, which would include all services mentioned by Mr Redgewell such as the 54, 25, 28, 58 and 1, as well as others. If taken forward, officers will carry out the review and any proposals that involve significant changes will be subject to a formal public consultation process.

With regard to the four 'at risk' services (25, 28, 54, 58/58A) mentioned, these are all currently being supported with BSIP Plus funding from government. The operator will be reviewing the impact on patronage of the promotional work undertaken since September 2023 and making a decision on the future of the services, which they will be required to present at the Bus Advisory Board meeting on 6th February 2024. Any changes to these services will be implemented from the agreed change date of 15th April 2024 and we will maintain BSIP Plus funding until that date.

Question 2

Thank you for raising your concerns about the impact of CCTV changes. No decisions have been made yet and appropriate consultations will be undertaken.

Question 3

A visitor centre could be jointly located with a transport hub, in Deane House as a public service hub, retained in its current location or placed in a number of other buildings. The saving option put forward by Community Services is to close the visitor centres due to the cost of operating them. The greatest part of this cost being the staffing

	<p>resource rather than the accommodation costs. If this service can be delivered in partnership and at a reduced costs this would of course be preferable to closure. Discussions are ongoing with Taunton, and Yeovil Town Council regarding potential service funding and or devolution.</p>
<p>Eva Bryczkowski</p>	<p>Eva Bryczkowski submitted the following question on behalf of Joe, a local councillor in Glastonbury, who is also a busy farmer.</p> <p>Question:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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?
<p>Response</p>	<p>Response from the Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources, Cllr Theo Butt Philip</p> <p>Thank you Eva for your questions, responding to all 3 together. In addition to the debates now well underway in a number of our local community networks, discussions and engagement is ongoing with our City, Town and Parish Council partners. It is clear that given the funding challenges that are well documented, we know that the Unitary Council will not be able to continue to deliver some services in local communities. Moreover, there are examples where local communities are better placed to determine which services are important to them and the standard to which they should be delivered. This is not about setting an expectation of local Councils but enabling them to take services should they wish to do so. We are working closely with sector including, SALC and SLCC, to support the transition of some towns and parishes as they consider this.</p> <p>Regarding your query relating to environmental and rural issues, I am sure that this will be a key area of focus for our Local Community Networks where they have determined it is a priority.</p>

Geoff Cole

My name is Geoff Cole, and I am chair of Somerset Athletics Association and of Yeovil Olympiads 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.

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.

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.

<p>Response</p>	<p>Response from Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts (Lead Member for Communities, Housing & Culture):</p> <p>Thank you for your question and for so clearly articulating the benefits this facility provides to the local community. We are aware of the online petition and look forward to receiving it formally.</p> <p>As you have/will hear in the report this Council is being forced to consider reducing or removing many discretionary services due to the soaring costs of providing adults and children's social care. This is not a position any of us would want to be in.</p> <p>These facilities are clearly well used and liked, they support active lifestyles and promote sport locally and for the national benefit.</p> <p>Unfortunately we are having to review all services which are not statutory in order so we can continue to care for the most vulnerable in our communities.</p> <p>Should this saving option ultimately be approved by Council, which is not a decision being asked of us today, we will do everything we can to minimise the impact where possible. We are already in talks with a number of local partners about alternative funding models and would be delighted to talk to any third parties who may wish to take control of this asset and service in order to secure its future for the public.</p>
<p>Joanna Stevenson</p>	<p>Reduction of Sports and Leisure Facilities at Yeovil Recreation Centre - Impact on Hockey</p> <p>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 <i>Playing Pitch Strategy</i> - 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.</p> <p>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</p>

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 underestimated 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.

	<p>I would also urge councillors to look at the petition on 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:-</p> <p>Petition</p>
<p>Response</p>	<p>Response from Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts (Lead Member for Communities, Housing & Culture):</p> <p>Thank you for your question and for so clearly articulating the benefits this facility provides to the local community. We are aware of the online petition and look forward to receiving it formally.</p> <p>As you have/will hear in the report this Council is being forced to consider reducing or removing many discretionary services due to the soaring costs of providing adults and children's social care. This is not a position any of us would want to be in.</p> <p>These facilities are clearly well used and liked, they support active lifestyles and promote sport locally and for the national benefit.</p> <p>Unfortunately we are having to review all services which are not statutory in order so we can continue to care for the most vulnerable in our communities.</p> <p>Should this saving option ultimately be approved by Council, which is not a decision being asked of us today, we will do everything we can to minimise the impact where possible. We are already in talks with a number of local partners about alternative funding models and would be delighted to talk to any third parties who may wish to take control of this asset and service in order to secure its future for the public.</p>
<p>Ray Tostevin</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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</p>

	<p>the ICB to delay any proposed changes and come back with revised plans.</p> <p>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</p> <p>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.</p>
<p>Response</p>	<p>Response from Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans:</p> <p>Thank you for the question regarding the Somerset Acute Based Stroke Reconfiguration proposal.</p> <p>This is obviously a decision with huge impacts for the population of Somerset, and Dorset as well. After seeing the concerns from fellow Councillors especially from HOSC and being made aware of the letter Dr Rasheed sent to the ICB I met with the ICB Chair and Chief Executive, last week, to ensure that all views will be taken into account and properly considered as part of the decision-making process.</p> <p>To that end the ICB have offered a meeting to any member of HOSC who didn't feel fully informed at their meeting so the ICB can address any issues with the conduct of the meeting and feed back to their Board as appropriate any outstanding issues.</p> <p>I can confirm that the ICB will be engaging with and responding in full to Dr Rasheed. I understand this information will also be available as part of their Board decision making pack.</p> <p>You specifically asked about the ICB response, and I can confirm that the ICB responded on the 18th of December to the letter written on behalf of the Health Scrutiny Committee.</p>

In their letter, the ICB outlined the extensive programme that has been undertaken over the preceding 6 years to improve stroke services within the area.

In short, the ICB letter says:

With regards to the acute-based stroke service proposal, the letter outlined that the current configuration of stroke care is not meeting the required national standards and that the ambition is to achieve high quality stroke care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

To achieve this Doctors, nurses, other professionals involved in stroke care, people with lived experience including carers, and Voluntary Community Social Enterprise organisations came together to identify a long list of potential solutions for transforming acute hospital-based stroke services in Somerset. This list was reviewed with a broad group of professional and clinical stakeholders at a facilitated workshop.

This long list of options included four options which would see a HASU retained at Yeovil District Hospital and two options where HASU services would be shared either with Dorset County Hospital or Musgrove Park Hospital.

A set of hurdle criteria were used by a range of expert groups to assess each of the options using a 'pass/fail' criterion. This resulted in 4 options being retained - 2 options included retaining a HASU in Yeovil.

The 4 shortlisted options were reviewed by the SW Clinical Senate in Sept 2022, and the panel deemed that the 2 options that proposed retaining a HASU at Yeovil would not address the reasons set out in the Case for Change and that the remaining 2 options were consistent with a strong clinical evidence base.

The ICB has assured me that the outcome they seek, by reshaping the service, is very much about better outcomes for patients. This review, undertaken over many years, has followed an extensive independently led public consultation exercise, which included seeking the views of the Committee and those in rural areas.

The ICB have told me that they do not believe any new information is available which would necessitate the need to repeat this

process. They acknowledge the need to ensure the Business Case makes clear how rural communities will not be further disadvantaged as part of the reconfiguration and this will be reflected in the Equality Impact Assessment. The ICB does not believe therefore, that there is a need to delay its decision-making on the Business Case.

The ICB will continue to liaise with the Council to ensure relevant committees and stakeholders are kept updated on progress.