

## Full Council – 23 April 2024 – Public and Member Questions

	Annexe A – Public Questions
Name of person submitting	Question
<p><b>David Redgewell</b></p>	<p><b>Questions 1a</b></p> <p>With Somerset council going through local government reorganisation and save money, similar to other Southwest councils Especially Cornwall, Devon, Bournemouth Poole and Christchurch Gloucester Swindon and Bristol all have finance difficulties. Somerset council has to operate with less officers and buildings to run Services, with partnership working and city Town and parish councils is important but also with community groups residents association, Tenants associations business organisations Education organisations public transport Network companies bus and railway companies, bus and public transport users groups,</p> <p>With the council needing to maintain bus stop passengers information, maintain bus shelters Interchanges Partnership working is required in the case of Yeovil bus and coach station their a urgent need to maintain this bus and coach station facilities not just the waiting room and toilets facilities which need upgrading but bus shelters that need roof repairs and the kiosk need to remain open and the cafe brought back into use, will the leader of the council arrange with Transport executive councillor Richard Wilkins a meeting with stakeholders and partners to find solutions to the ongoing maintenance of passengers facilities at Yeovil bus and coach station with First group plc South buses Division, Wales and West buses Division, Southwest coaches group, Berry's coaches part of megabus Scottish City link coaches and Flixbus coaches network services to London Hammersmith, Stagecoach South west, Transpora buses, Somerset own bus company, First Group plc Great Western Railway company and First Group plc MTR South Western Railway company Ltd, due the important rail link bus service to Yeovil pen mill station and Yeovil Junction railway station, Dorset Council as public transport Authority, Yeovil Town Council, Sherborne Town, Yeovil chamber of commerce Yeovil Trades Council, Representative of the mp Chris loder mp Dorset west and Marcus Fysh mp Yeovil, property owners Martin property Group of Northern Ireland,/ Ireland, Which has the bus and coach station and shopping centre up for sale, South wessex railway partnership, Somerset bus partnership West Dorset Transport action Group Sherborne Transport action Group, South west transport Network and Railfuture, Travelwatch South west, All are interested</p>

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stakeholders in the Regional Transport hub bus and coach station in Yeovil remaining open with good passenger facilities and future investment and modernisation of the Transport hub, We need to find solutions to keeping the existing facilities open for passengers waiting room facilities toilets and very urgent repairs to bus shelters roofs .

Also to make sure any access charges for the bus and coach station by bus and coach operators is being reinvested in the passenger facilities by Somerset council Transport Department

But also seeing what stakeholders and partners can do to keep the bus station open

And a new First Group plc bus Depot for Yeovil, west Dorset and south Somerset,

### **Question 1b**

In view of the importance of Somerset bus service improvement plan submission to the Department for transport on 22nd June 2024 To the secretary of state for Transport and local Mark Harper MP and the Department for transport,

What discussions are taking place with passengers and stakeholders, bus coach and Train network companies Avon and Somerset police British Transport police , Banes west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council in the North of Somerset Dorset Poole and Christchurch, Devon County Council, Wiltshire Council, western Gateway Transport Board and Peninsula Transport Board, including in the submission improvement in Bus and coach stations and interchanges at Taunton, Wells Bridgwater Yeovil bus and coach station, Wincanton, Frome Cork Street coach station and Town centre, Chard interchange, Shepton Mallet interchange, Minehead Town Centre, Bank Street and Railway station, Wellington Town centre and coach station,

Including improvement in lighting CCTV cameras real-time information systems toilets, Cafes and waiting rooms , information screen disabled passengers facilities, hearing loops, improvement in interchange with National Express coaches limited, Megabus Scottish City link coaches and Flixbus coaches network, In East Brent ,Bridgwater, Taunton Wellington, Ilchester, Yeovil bus and coach station and Wincanton bus and coach station, Cleaning and maintenance of Bus and coach shelter throughout the unity council, part of Somerset, improvement in retaining bus and coach drivers, Supervisors Engineers cleaners and work with operators and the Department for transport and Department of work and pensions to retain for the recruitment of staff ,

and important of working with the police and crime commissioner and police forces on Transport security.

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Will the Somerset council Carry out passengers and stakeholders consultation on the plans submission to the Department for transport for funding 2024 2025 and for the spending review after the General election of Autumn 2024 ,

### **Question 1c**

Passengers information, With the importance of passengers information at Bus stop shelters Interchanges railway stations, coach station and park and ride sites.

What provision is being made work with bus operators First group plc Wales and West buses Division and First group plc South buses Division, Stagecoach South west, Go ahead group South west, South west coaches group, Berry's coaches, National express coaches limited, Frome bus company Libra Travel, Hatch Green, Ridlers coaches at west ,Mendip Transport ,First Group plc Great Western Railway company Ltd, First Group plc South western railway company Ltd, inter city cross country train Arriva 1sq capital,

To make sure passengers information is correct at the county bus and coach stops and interchanges, Including real-time information systems at railway station like Taunton Station, On Bus and coaches and public transport Network timetables The new First Group plc bus timetable for unity Somerset whilst improved With First group bus service from Burnham on sea to Berrow and Brean to weston super mare bus and coach station in the book service 20

And service 126 Weston super mare bus and coach station,Railway station Uphill Hospital, Hutton locking, Banwell Winscombe Axbridge cheddar Westbury sub Mendip Draycott Easton Wells bus and coach station 126 ,

Service 375 Bridgwater bus and coach station to Street Glastonbury Wells bus and coach station, Chewton Mendip,Farrington Gurney, Clutton Pensford whitchurch ,Hengrove, Bristol Temple meads station, Bristol bus and coach station, in the book 374 Taunton Town centre, street ,Glastonbury street,wells bus and coach station to Bristol Temple meads station, Bristol bus and coach station in the book, 174 Wells bus and coach station to Shepton mallet interchange, midsomer Norton Westfield Radstock Peasdown st john, Bath spa bus and coach station, Service 30 connection from Taunton Town centre future bus and coach station, to Chard interchange Town centre Axminster station for Lyme Regis, Bridport bus and coach station Dorchester and Weymouth missing Service D 2 2X Bath spa bus and coach station to Midford, Rode Beckington and Frome sainsburys

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	<p>171 ,172 ,173 , 522 Bath spa bus and coach station to peasdown st john Radstock Westfield midsomer Norton paulton Wells bus and coach station or Bristol bus and coach station are missing from the book As is the local bus operators coach and rail operators, in the summer edition What action is Somerset unity council do urgent to make sure bus coach and Public Transport information up together in the unity council public transport Authority is correct for residents, stakeholders groups bussiness and tourists visiting the county and the south west of England.</p> <p>David Redgewell South west transport Network and Railfuture Severnside</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Councillor Richard Wilkins</b></p> <p><b>Response from Lead Officer: Service Director for Infrastructure and Transport, Mike O'Dowd-Jones</b></p>
<p><b>Full written response to be distributed within 5 working days</b></p>	<p><b>Response to Q1a</b></p> <p>As you will be aware, we have needed to make some very difficult decisions in recent months to set a balanced budget. Those decisions included the closure of public toilets because of the cleaning and maintenance costs. Some town, city, and parish councils are stepping in to keep some of these facilities open. Once devolved like this Somerset Council passes control to the other organisation and they would be managed as best that organisation sees fit – so there isn't a role for us. We have had discussions with Yeovil Town Council but they are not currently in a position to take on the responsibility for the facilities at the town's bus and coach station.</p> <p>It is vital that Somerset Council moves forward to a long term financially sustainable position to deliver the vital services. Bringing together five complex organisations takes time, we are still in the process of aligning some areas because we don't have the resources to do everything at once. I have asked officers to take a detailed look at bus and coach infrastructure over the next year so that we will be in a better position to move forwards from.</p> <p><b>Response to Q1b</b></p>

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	<p>To clarify the position, the submission of an updated Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in June 2024 does not represent a funding bid to Government on this occasion but will, again set out our future ambitions, subject to funding. The submission of the BSIP in June is to release the 2024/25 funding tranche already allocated by government, as part of the original BSIP. We are following Government guidance on the submission and have consulted with operators, the Bus User and Stakeholder Group and will be consulting the Bus Advisory Board next week prior to our submission by the deadline.</p> <p><b>Response to Q1c</b></p> <p>Our position on the provision of timetable displays at bus stops is that this is an operator responsibility where the service is commercial, or part funded by Somerset Council. Where a service is fully funded, we will look to ensure that all displays are updated unless we have assurance from the operator that they are going update timetable displays. With the recent changes on 7<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> April we had assurances from both First Group companies that all timetable displays would be updated in time for the changes introduced. However, we have been advised by First West of England that due to a delay in supply of their displays from the printer they have not been able to update displays along their routes in Somerset which have changed. We have been advised that these timetables will be delivered to First West of England by the end of w/c 15 April, and we have offered our resources to help get these displays posted as soon as possible. We do not have the resources to undertake widespread updates of timetable cases on our own when large changes occur and we rely on operators to fulfil this task in a timely manner, but we are able to assist when requested.</p>
<b>Rosa Kell</b>	<p><b>Question 2a</b> - Can I ask what action is being taken to ensure that passengers travelling through the Yeovil Bus Station can use the WC and waiting room to shelter given that the passengers have long stays in Yeovil awaiting buses.</p> <p><b>Question 2b</b> - What progress has been made by Somerset Council in their discussions with Yeovil Council and Bus of Somerset (First Buses Southern Division) in locating a site for the new Bus Station.</p>

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	<p>The passenger are greatly concerned that due to the Somerset Council financial crisis this important essential facility may disappear. Can you assure us that a new Bus Station will be announced soon.</p> <p><b>Question 2c</b></p> <p>May I please ask the council to give us an approximate value in cash that is received from Bus and Coach Operators in Yeovil, Taunton, Shepton Mallet, Somerton, Wells and all bus hubs in Somerset and the amount of it being diverted to funding services other than support of buses, bus station, road side bus infrastructure etc</p> <p>We the bus users are concerned that no obvious bus infrastructure expenditure is shown from income received for that purpose</p> <p>Rosa Kell Lead on Wells Bus Users Group</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Councillor Richard Wilkins</b></p> <p><b>Response from Lead Officer: Service Director for Infrastructure and Transport, Mike O’Dowd-Jones</b></p>
<p><b>Full written response to be distributed within 5 working days</b></p>	<p><b>Response to questions 2a and 2b:</b></p> <p>As you will be aware, we have needed to make some very difficult and heartbreaking decisions in recent months to set a balanced budget. Those decisions included the closure of public toilets because of the cleaning and maintenance costs. We appreciate that this difficult decision also reduces facilities available for bus users and we will continue to seek opportunities to reduce the impact of these changes. We are also aware that the Glovers Walk shopping precinct, the Bus Station and part of lower Middle Street has been put on the market. We appreciate that there are concerns about the potential impact of this sale on bus infrastructure, and once a sale has been completed, we will be able to engage with the new owners to understand their intentions and ascertain if there will be any impact on the bus station operations. We will then be able to determine what if any action is necessary to maintain appropriate facilities for bus users. We appreciate the concerns and will be working</p>

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	<p>collaboratively across the various transport, planning, community and property services to deal with these matters, and will engage with stakeholders on any plans and proposals at the appropriate time.</p> <p><b>Response to question 2c:</b> Awaiting information from finance. Likely to be: The Council does not currently derive income from bus operators in relation to use of bus hubs or bus stations. We understand that minimal access fees have been charged on specific facilities in the past where these have been in local authority ownership and will be reviewing the relative benefits and disbenefits of access fees on public transport operations as part of our ongoing work on the medium-term financial plan and the enhanced bus partnership.</p>
<p><b>Peter Travis (Linda Snelling will be asking via teams)</b></p>	<p><i>I have been asked to send this question on behalf of Linda Snelling (who is copied on this email) for this two questions to be raised at the Somerset full council meeting on April 23rd.</i></p> <p><b>Submitted on behalf of Linda Snelling of Yeovil Bus Users Group</b></p> <p>The National Bus Strategy for England stated: 'Bus stations should be protected from closure and redevelopment and be improved.' Essential features of any bus station are toilets for passengers and for bus drivers ... and a waiting room for passengers. Improving bus infrastructure is a key aim of Bus Back Better ... and Somerset recognised this in its successful BSIP bid. Yeovil bus and coach station is a key regional transport hub, as identified by the two regional Transport Boards: Peninsula Transport and Western Gateway and for both Somerset and for Dorset bus and coach services. Yet Somerset Council is now planning to close the toilets and waiting room at Yeovil bus station on May 31<sup>st</sup>. Without these facilities, many older people and people experiencing a wide range of ailments will be unable to travel by bus to Yeovil ... significantly reducing passenger numbers on the already 'under threat' 54 and 58. Yeovil bus and coach station is part of the Glovers Walk Development, one of the biggest redevelopment sites in Unitary Somerset. This site is currently up for sale (and is reportedly under offer). It's vital that Yeovil bus and coach station is preserved and considered a key part of any future development that replaces Glovers Walk.</p> <p><b>Question 3a</b></p>

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	<p>What urgent steps is Somerset Council taking to ensure there are functioning toilets and a waiting room at Yeovil Bus Station from June 2024 onwards?</p> <p><b>Question 3b</b></p> <p>What discussions are happening with Northern Ireland Property Company (owners of Glovers Walk) about securing the future of Yeovil bus and coach station?</p> <p><b>Submitted on behalf of Linda Snelling of Yeovil Bus Users Group</b></p> <p>Peter Travis Co Chair - Somerset Bus Partnership</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Councillor Richard Wilkins</b></p> <p><b>Response from Lead Officer: Service Director for Infrastructure and Transport, Mike O'Dowd-Jones</b></p>
<p><b>Full written response to be distributed within 5 working days</b></p>	<p>As you will be aware, we have needed to make some very difficult and heartbreaking decisions in recent months to set a balanced budget. Those decisions included the closure of public toilets because of the cleaning and maintenance costs. We appreciate that this difficult decision also reduces facilities available for bus users and we will continue to seek opportunities to reduce the impact of these changes. We are also aware that the Glovers Walk shopping precinct, the Bus Station and part of lower Middle Street has been put on the market. We appreciate that there are concerns about the potential impact of this sale on bus infrastructure, and once a sale has been completed, we will be able to engage with the new owners to understand their intentions and ascertain if there will be any impact on the bus station operations. We will then be able to determine what if any action is necessary to maintain appropriate facilities for bus users. We appreciate the concerns and will be working collaboratively across the various transport, planning, community and property services to deal with these matters, and will engage with stakeholders on any plans and proposals at the appropriate time.</p>



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	<p>The Council does not currently derive income from bus operators in relation to use of bus hubs or bus stations. We understand that minimal access fees have been charged on specific facilities in the past where these have been in local authority ownership and will be reviewing the relative benefits and disbenefits of access fees on public transport operations as part of our ongoing work on the medium-term financial plan and the enhanced bus partnership.</p>
<b>Nigel Behan</b>	<p>Dear Chair</p> <p><a href="#">(Public Pack)Agenda Document for Full Council, 23/04/2024 14:00 (somerset.gov.uk)</a></p> <p>It is stated:” <a href="#">Report of the Leader and Executive – Items for Decision</a></p> <p>“That the Council continues with the aim of avoiding a section 114 notice by taking all of the necessary actions and continuing to operate as if one had been issued.”</p> <p>and</p> <p>“Funding reforms – actively engaging and campaigning for the reform of local government including giving freedom to councils to set their own council tax levels without a need to hold a referendum.”</p> <p><b>Question 4a</b> - Does this proposed campaigning also include seeking reforms to/of the existing (regressive) Council Tax system?</p> <p><b>Question 4b</b> - Does the Council think (believe) that City/Town/Parish Councils should have limits (set externally/prescribed) to the precept they require if (or otherwise), for instance, they indirectly/directly take on services (“devolved”) from the Unitary Authority or should be able to set meaningful budgets that, at least, attempt to meet “community” needs?</p>

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	<p><b>Question 4c</b> - Whichever government is formed after the next General Election, how confident of legislative/statutory change is the Council - which creates a sustainable fully funded local authority which delivers for citizens, service users, residents, council taxpayers and electors?</p> <p><b>Response from the Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Councillor Liz Leyshon</b></p> <p><b>Response from Lead Officer: Executive Director Resources and Corporate Services, Jason Vaughan and Service Director Finance and Procurement, Nicola Hix</b></p>
<p><b>Full written response to be distributed within 5 working days</b></p>	<p><b>Question 4a Does this proposed campaigning also include seeking reforms to/of the existing (regressive) Council Tax system?</b></p> <p>The short answer is yes, absolutely. However, we must be realistic in our expectations. Council Tax was introduced for a short period of time – back in 1993. A completely new system of local taxation would be a massive undertaking and my hope would be that a new Government take some actions to improve Council Tax by revising the Bands and introducing higher bands for properties valued more highly.</p> <p>If a new Government wanted to take one action that would make an immediate difference and put monies where they are most needed, they could look for a modern Council Tax Reduction Scheme – such as we have in Somerset – and fund it nationally. That was the origin of the CTRS, with Government funding but that disappeared into less specific grants and left local authorities with a part-mandated system which impacts on each Council’s income. As an indicator, SC’s cost of delivering the CTRS is approximately £36million, with £16m for the mandated part of the Scheme for pension age, and £20m for working age households.</p>

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**Question 4b - Does the Council think (believe) that City/Town/Parish Councils should have limits (set externally/prescribed) to the precept they require if (or otherwise), for instance, they indirectly/directly take on services (“devolved”) from the Unitary Authority or should be able to set meaningful budgets that, at least, attempt to meet “community” needs?**

We don't believe that any council should have limits set upon them by Government. This position has long been supported by the Local Government Association. In the MTFs papers today, as recommended by the Executive earlier this month, there is reference in the recommendations to 'greater local freedoms' and for me that would include the ability to set Council Tax to reflect the need for services in a community, and to reflect the Council Tax base and rate as they vary far more than most people understand.

'Greater local freedoms' could also be taken to relate to planning application fees and licensing fees. Full cost recovery, as a minimum, would seem a perfectly reasonable request to any government.

**Question 4c - Whichever government is formed after the next General Election, how confident of legislative/statutory change is the Council - which creates a sustainable fully funded local authority which delivers for citizens, service users, residents, council taxpayers and electors?**

In the DLUHC response to the Select Committee report on 'Financial Distress in Local Authorities' the words most used were 'in the next Parliament' so that gives us a very clear indication that nothing will change before the General Election.

We believe this should be priority for the “new” government but realise that in practice things are very unlikely to be changed in time for the 2025/26 budget, and it becomes more difficult as the GE timing goes further into the autumn – when councils are already working on the next year budget. If nothing changes, more Councils will move towards the position of Somerset Council, more Reserves will be used, and more assets and investments will be sold. That is not a sustainable situation, the issue is how quickly might change come forward. It's horribly overdue already.

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**Eva  
Bryczkowski**

- \*Despite the consultation, which didn't go the way NHS Somerset ICB wanted,
- \*Despite the clear clinical evidence provided by NHS staff at Yeovil hospital hyper acute stroke unit, (HASU),
- \*Despite the overwhelming concerns expressed by many Somerset residents at a number of meetings, and,
- \*Despite the flimsy and dodgy financial evidence that the ICB put forward,
- \*They still voted unanimously to close Yeovil HASU. This included Duncan Sharkey, representing Somerset Council and Somerset residents.
- \*They decided to do this all along, no matter what.
- \*At the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee in May last year, they brought the big guns out, arguing that Yeovil HASU was not fully fit for purpose.
- \* Since then, their concerns have largely been dealt with. The lead physician has delayed his retirement, and recruited more skilled staff, despite attempts by Musgrove Park to poach some of them.
- \*At their packed meeting on 25th January 2024, people from the Quicksilver Community Group, stroke survivors, carers, myself, and other Somerset residents attended.
- \*Many provided compelling arguments and watertight evidence in favour of keeping the HYPER acute aspect of Yeovil HASU.
- \*Hyper = meaning the critical hours when emergency treatment is urgently needed by stroke patients.
- \*At this meeting nobody from NHS Somerset put the case for keeping Yeovil HASU open.
- \*The debate was totally biased in favour of Somerset potential stroke patients, (ie possibly you or me), having only ONE choice, to rely solely on Musgrove Park hospital for emergency stroke treatment.
- \*Not the medical staff at Yeovil, or the senior physician, Dr Rashid, MBE, who in a letter to the chair, stated that it would be a catastrophe for many potential stroke patients if Yeovil HASU was closed.
- \*At the 25th of January NHS Somerset moved the goalposts in a spectacularly unfair fashion.
- \*In order to  
"solve"

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the problem of Yeovil HASU apparently being under staffed, and only open 9am to 5pm, they decided to dismantle the hyper acute service, move Somerset money, an eye watering 1.8 million pounds, and counting, and transfer hyper acute services to DORCHESTER HOSPITAL,

\* which is isn't fully equipped either!

\*Thus rendering Yeovil HASU being open NIL hours, and only used for rehabilitation for stroke patients, who only have the choice of Musgrove Park to receive urgent treatment.

\*When we consider the long waiting and drivetime of ambulances, this would indeed be a catastrophe for many stroke patients in Somerset.

\*Thus 170,000 people living in south and east Somerset can expect poorer health outcomes if they are unable to access emergency stroke treatment as they are now.

\*This has an inevitable knock - on effect on the dire financial situation at Somerset Council. adding to the spiralling debt faced by health and social care, in that such things as slower recovery rates and brain damage will increase the need for those who receive subsidised adult social care.

\*On March 1st, with three days notice, NHS Somerset head a public meeting, waxing lyrical about only having Musgrove Park hospital for emergency stroke treatment.

\*Over a hundred people turned up, including Somerset councillors.

\*When the consultant from Musgrove Park ended his speech, I stood up and asked why was there nobody from Yeovil HASU to put the opposite case?

\*Then other people expressed their fury and dismay at the decision they made.

\*This, again, along with everything else, was completely disregarded at their next meeting.

\*On March 28th NHS Somerset reached a new low.

\*Even before members of the public put forward questions, the ICB had already made their decision on the financial aspects and voted it through.

\*One of the speakers, Andrew Lee, after seeing the agenda, spoke to the chair beforehand, saying that this was questionable, to say the least.

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\*The chair replied that this was allowed and also happened at the previous meeting on the 25th of January.

\*\*\*This was a lie.

\*For evidence of this, look at the minutes of the January meeting.

\*The reasons for the financial case were flimsy, not taking into account, for example, the £1.8 million cost, like many other schemes elsewhere, would almost certainly rise, among other things.

\*Taking note of the Horizon Jijitsu Post Office scandal, shouldn't we make sure that ICB members are made known to the general public, accountable for their actions for future reference, and not allowed to walk away from the results of their decisions and the effects on the communities they are supposed to serve?

\*This supposedly all - knowing board have more power than potential stroke patients, who have nil power compared to this group of unelected bureaucrats.

\*The ICB members could state that 4 plus 4 equal = 49 and get away with it.

\*THEY DO IT BECAUSE THEY CAN.

\*This has not always happened in the past.

\*Basically, indirectly, unintentionally or otherwise, Somerset Council is in danger of colluding with the convincing hype peddled by NHS Somerset.

\*Of course you don't want to do this, and have the best of intentions.

\*I know that some of you, recently, on scrutiny committees are sharp enough to see through this, and I salute you.

\*In conclusion, a number of Somerset residents are now writing to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, asking her to call - in the decision made by the ICB.

I don't hold out much hope for this. Victoria Atkins is a Conservative minister and is part of the relentless privatisation of the NHS. But I hope that I am wrong on this one.

**Question 5a** - Councillors, there is a clear choice.

Either to continue allowing some portfolio holders/councillors to carry on rubber stamping NHS Somerset ICB decisions, claiming that, by monitoring stakeholders, this leads to marvellous, fluffy health outcomes,

OR

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	<p>Will you ensure, instruct ALL relevant portfolio holders/councillors do their actual job, which is to carefully monitor and scrutinise stakeholders, sometimes challenging them when necessary, seeing beyond the hype:</p> <p>a) In Scrutiny Committee meetings and b) In response to questions from the public?</p> <p><b>Response from the Lead Member for Adult Services, Councillor Sarah Wakefield</b></p>
<p><b>Full written response to be distributed within 5 working days</b></p>	<p>I have seen and read the powerful question from Eva B. She is of course reflecting the concerns of many in the Yeovil area about the decision which I understand has been made to move the HASU to Musgrove but to keep open the Acute Stroke Unit at Yeovil.</p> <p>I witnessed some of the debate at a briefing before the decision was made and at Scrutiny too. In my view the matter has been very thoroughly aired and the objections of concerned locals about lowering of standards of care, increased journey times for patients and relatives and the real fear of poorer outcomes for those who live closest to Yeovil hospital and who feel that either Musgrove or Dorchester will not give them the security they need and are entitled to expect from the NHS services. Whilst I share these very real concerns which are I know sincerely held by many I think that there are two powerful points to be made here. The NHS is actually struggling successfully to recruit the doctors and staff they need for stroke units at both Musgrove and Yeovil and does not have the time or resources to continually delay a decision which they have been trying to make for many months if not longer. I am quite convinced that, were the NHS in a more comfortable position in terms of resources and staff, a different decision might have been made. Sadly that is not the case and those who run and operate the service have concluded that in order to run an acceptable service giving the best outcomes for the most people in their particular situation they need to concentrate their HASU's in Musgrove and Dorchester but not in Yeovil.</p>

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	<p>I believe that we as a council have allowed and facilitated debate on this and have participated in the discussions and decision making as far as possible listening to and emphasising the points made by many residents as far as possible. However, this is ultimately and primarily a clinical decision made by professionals and their governing bodies about how best to use the resources that they have available. In an era where the rationing of services due to financial and staffing constraints is only too familiar to us here at Somerset Council I can only add my concern and sympathy to those affected and my hope that the new arrangements will not prove to be as unsatisfactory or damaging as is feared.</p>
<b>Matt Harrison</b>	<p><b>Question 6a</b></p> <p>Dear Councillors –</p> <p>I last spoke to you at the start of your journey to establish Somerset Council at your inaugural full council meeting in May 2023. Everyone predicted amalgamating 5 councils across a large geographic area with inherent structural demographic and economic deficiencies would be an immense challenge so I would personally like to thank you for staying the course and serving our communities, especially when the local government funding model is so broken and there is a dearth of leadership, ideas or support from central government.</p> <p>My message last year was that Shepton Mallet Town Council, after years of lacking a strategic direction and joined-up working ourselves, was now in a position of strength. We are about to complete our first 4 year strategy which has resulted in numerous improvements across our town. We have a richer events calendar, have invested in our public realm, have campaigned to protect facilities and services and built relationships with businesses and the third sector to build resilience for the future. I still look forward to realising many of our asks of you last year; we still seek to have clarity on the future of the Shape Mendip campus (not a Travelodge please!), to take ownership of the West Shepton playing fields to build a sports park, to devolve the Commercial Road car park which is currently redundant town centre space and to allow us to take over the running of our 750 year old Friday market – which is hanging on by a thread.</p> <p>But today is an exciting day. For once, the stars are aligned. There is an opportunity which for Shepton Mallet could be completely transformational. The government’s recently announced <i>Culture Projects Levelling Up</i> fund has come at a critical juncture. One of our town centre’s landlords is looking to divest their property portfolio which includes the former Amulet theatre. The building, which is not in a good physical state, dominates our town centre and casts a physical and metaphorical</p>



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shadow over our town. Envisaged to provide the town as a cultural venue, it was perhaps, before it's time. I won't bore councillors today with a history lesson, but it has remained mostly empty for a decade and is now decaying. Knowing that the building was up for sale, the town council commissioned a structural survey and commercial valuation. A Community Benefit Society (CBS) has been established to model how to refurbish the building and some initial funding has been won to model cultural and commercial plans to enable it to become a long-term viable project.

Shepton Mallet has no theatre. It has no cinema. It has no leisure centre. It has no tourist information centre. It has no bank. It doesn't even have a town hall (ahem, hello Shape Mendip!). We have a budding arts scene but that relies on a sporadic mix of spaces across town (think disused shops and registry offices!) The CBS has already planned on making the Amulet a multi-user space. The project has attracted support from numerous organisations from the arts and cultural sectors and national attention from architectural and theatre companies. What the project needs most is money; a bid was already being prepared for the Community Ownership Fund but that would only have allowed a light-touch opening. This new funding round could enable the facility to open from day one and positively impact the whole town.

Frome has the Cheese and Grain. Wells has a theatre and a cinema. Street has Strode Theatre and cinema. Glastonbury has the Town Fund. I understand the Mendip towns are understandably vying for this money. But what matters here is the biggest impact on the most culturally under-served conurbation in the Mendips. Shepton Mallet.

I would therefore ask you to consider the Amulet bid to help deliver an enterprising, flourishing and fairer Somerset.

Thank you for your time.

Councillor Matt Harrison, Chair of Shepton Mallet Town Council.

**Response from the Lead Member for Housing, Communities and Culture, Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts.**

**Response from Lead Officer: Executive Director for Communities, Chris Hall and Service Director for Culture, Elizabeth Dawson.**

## Full Council – 23 April 2024 – Public and Member Questions

Full written  
response to  
be  
distributed  
within 5  
working days

Thank you for your interest in the capital funding from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for cultural projects in East Mendip. I appreciate the background information you have provided.

As the Lead Member for Housing, Communities and Culture, I want to assure you that we have a process in place to work with the City, Town and Parish Councils of the East to develop a list of potential projects that could benefit from this funding. The Cultural Directorate is leading this project and will collaborate with both internal and external stakeholders, including Shepton Mallet Town Council.

The Amulet project is one of the projects on the list for consideration. We will use a set of criteria to decide which projects to take forward, based on the alignment of their outcomes with the White Paper from the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Arts Council Strategy, the Somerset Council's Corporate Objectives, and the expectations of the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

We have a tight deadline to submit our investment plan by 10th May 2024. We have a critical path that we will follow to ensure the delivery of this plan, which will involve ongoing stakeholder engagement with external and internal stakeholders, including the relevant Councils and MPs.

With regards to your comments around the future of Shape Mendip, the devolution of assets and services, and the markets. The Service Directors for Regulatory Services, Strategic Asset Management, and Partnerships and Localities have been notified and will get back to you with an update.

I also wanted to confirm that, I understand, following your email, officers from the Cultural Directorate have been in touch with Shepton Mallet TC regarding their project proposals, which were due on Monday 22nd April at 9am. I will be meeting with the Service Director for Cultural Services and Shepton Mallet TC representatives on the 24th to discuss progress to date and next steps.

## Full Council – 23 April 2024 – Public and Member Questions

	<p>I hope this clarifies the process and the timeline for the capital funding. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.</p>
<b>Neil Rhodes</b>	<p><b>Question 7a</b></p> <p>Mr Rhodes wishes to raise concerns regarding alleged dishonesty and restrictions on democracy by Council officers as well as his ability to access senior managers</p> <p><b>Response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Bill Revans</b></p> <p><b>Response from Lead Officer: Executive Director for Strategy, Workforce and Localities, Alyn Jones</b></p>
<b>Full written response to be distributed within 5 working days</b>	<p>Thank you for raising your concerns Mr Rhodes.</p> <p>To ensure that your concerns are thoroughly reviewed and addressed in a manner consistent with our Council's complaints policy, I would kindly request that you submit the detail of your concerns in writing. Providing a written record of your concerns will allow us to proceed with a formal evaluation and ensure that all necessary details are considered carefully.</p> <p>Please include any relevant information or documentation that would assist us in understanding and resolving the matters you have raised. Once we receive your written submission, we will initiate the review process as outlined in our complaints policy and keep you informed of our progress.</p> <p>Thank you for your cooperation and understanding. We are committed to addressing your concerns promptly and efficiently.</p>

## Full Council – 23 April 2024 – Public and Member Questions

Name of person submitting	Question
<b>Cllr Norman Cavill</b>	<p><u>Question. re Connecting Devon &amp; Somerset</u></p> <p>Residents have brought to my attention the many delays in providing the promised FTTP in cluster DC09, an area covering Ruishton, Thornfalcon, N Curry, Stoke St Gregory and Burrowbridge. This area suffers from abysmal broadband speeds, which CDS via SC's contract with Airband had promised to improve.</p> <p>Airband has consistently failed on its timetabling of delivery with apparently no financial penalties or charges holding them to account.</p> <p>It is published information that Airband, as part of its restructuring, is laying off some of its workforce. In fact, since Airband published its accounts no one has seen its work force in the DC09 area. This area does not appear to be hugely challenging, good road systems and poles already service the area.</p> <p>One wonders how this reduction in workforce benefit Airband's performance against its contract with SC to deliver FTTP and is this being monitored by this authority.</p> <p>There is a warning in the recent Airband accounts, stating</p> <p>" There is a material uncertainty that may cast significant doubt that the whole Group and Company's ability to continue as a going concern" This is a serious position.</p> <p>There are also notable post balance sheet events set out in the accounts.</p> <p>Shares were issued for cash consideration of £33.2m, effectively bringing in some cash which has clearly since been used.</p>

## Full Council – 23 April 2024 – Public and Member Questions

In August 2023 the major shareholder agreed a £56m loan facility secured by charges over the assets of the company and subsidiaries. This facility was fully drawn down by 2 February 2024.

The notes also evidence-

"Following a strategic review in February 2024 the company commenced a restructuring of the business *to transition from a phase of rapidly building our network to focus on commercialising the existing network*. As a result of the revised strategy the company *anticipates incurring contractual penalties and restructuring costs, with a reduction in the recoverability of grant income and capital expenditure*."

It would seem it needs to secure immediate revenue. Its operating loss to Dec 2022 was £20.972m which is double the 2021 loss of £10.515m. Its 2023 accounts are not due for filing until December this year and the warnings suggest this year may be no better financially.

So Airband has confirmed that its focus is now on commercialising its existing network, its sales, and that it has moved from the focus of building the network. This alone must be enough to question their contract, as Airband appears to no longer be concentrating on its contract to build FTTP. Surely it is not for the County or CDS's to support any business which is not complying with its core contract to bring FTTP to our rural areas.

***Question 1a. Is it not SC's role, as the accountable body, to monitor those contracts entered into with providers, both for accountability with timescales and financials? Penalties for failure generally form part of a sound contract and are generally used if needed.***

***Question 1b. Please at this time, I would ask you to carry out a critical review of Airband and if you find they are not delivering, to very quickly take action and if necessary to award the contract to another provider?***

## Full Council – 23 April 2024 – Public and Member Questions

	<p><b>Question 1c. Can you also confirm that all funding provided to CDS and SC intended to be used for CDS connectivity is being used for that said purpose?</b></p> <p>Taxpayers want to see value for money and have promises fulfilled.</p> <p><b>Response from Lead Member for Planning and Digital, Councillor Richard Wilkins</b></p> <p><b>Response from Lead Officer: Executive Director for Climate and Place, Mickey Green and Service Director for Economy, Employment and Planning, Paul Hickson</b></p>
<p><b>Full written response to be distributed within 5 working days</b></p>	<p><b>Question 1a.</b> Yes, SC as the accountable body does monitor the contracts with providers.</p> <p>The contracts reflect the terms of Building Digital UK’s standard template contract, which does not include contractual penalties for delay. Building Digital UK is the government’s responsible agency and National Competency Centre for broadband delivery. The contracts are based on a gap funded model in which public subsidy provides “top up” to bridge the gap between the investment from the broadband supplier and the full cost of delivery to areas which are not commercially viable.</p> <p>These publicly subsidised contracts do not cover the full cost of network build. The broadband supplier must cashflow the full cost of network build until each required work item under the relevant contract (referred to as a "milestone") is achieved and has been technically and financially assured by SC.</p> <p>In such contracts the supplier therefore faces inherent commercial risk if it overspends or delays. Subject to contractual terms, the supplier cannot require more subsidy from the authority, and subsidy payments are only paid in relation to a milestone when the supplier has completed that milestone to an acceptable standard in accordance with the relevant contract.</p>

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**Question 1b.** Somerset Council and its partners in the CDS programme are aware of the reports that Airband has been restructuring and has seen the published accounts. Officers have met with Airband personnel to seek clarity about the impact of the restructuring on the CDS contracts. Those discussions are ongoing and are commercially confidential.

When the factual position becomes clearer options can be considered and it will then be possible to provide updates to members, residents and businesses about the impact of Airband’s restructuring on the CDS contracts.

For procurement and legal reasons, it would not be possible to award the contracts to another provider.

**Question 1c.** Yes. Grant funders only pay grant once a claim is made supported by evidence of payment. Suppliers must achieve milestones which then pass through technical and financial assurance before any payment can be made. Once Somerset has paid the milestone it can then claim grant from the relevant grant provider.