

Full Council – 26 September 2024 – Public and Member Questions

Name of person submitting	Annexe A – Public Questions Question
Keith Elliot	<p>Question 1a - Somerset Strategic Drug and Alcohol Partnership</p> <p><u>Note - we are awaiting confirmation that the revised wording below will be accepted by officers</u></p> <p>Somerset Council, SDAS and SSDAP: an overly-long tale of deficit, duplicity and dysfunction.</p> <p>Identify the worst restaurant chain in the country serving the most unpalatable and probably noxious food, then promise it greatly augmented funding with the only proviso that it increases portion size. No other changes required.</p> <p>As analogies go, that's disturbingly close to the government's current 'From Harm to Hope' 10 year strategic plan for cutting the supply and demand for drugs in our communities and "delivering a high quality treatment and recovery system".</p> <p>In 2021 Dame Carol Black's government-commissioned enquiry into services in this domain concluded that "since 2012 the government has entrusted all decision making on drug treatment services to local authorities with virtually no accountability or recognised standards". Yet this exact-same fatally-flawed commissioning and delivery paradigm has received 3 years of highly significant funding uplift throughout the country contingent almost exclusively upon increasing adult service user numbers by 20% and youth service numbers by 50%. Somerset's share over 3 years has been 2.8 million pounds equating to a 20% budgetary supplement for that period.</p> <p>Dame Carol got it spot on. "No accountability or recognised standards" perfectly characterises the state of drug and alcohol services in Somerset even prior to 2012 and dating back to when Turning Point first won the Somerset commission from the NHS in 2008.</p> <p>It is also exactly what I've been reflecting to Somerset (County) Council for over 10 years now and which has been met with a stridently irresponsible response throughout, refusing to countenance any of the manifest failings repeatedly highlighted. Its instinct for evasion and gaslighting in these matters has been of Post Office proportions but unfortunately many many more individuals in Somerset will have lost their lives and had their futures stunted as a result of this council's fatal indifference than</p>

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	<p>ever resulted from the Horizon scandal, for that is the inevitable cost of the overwhelming clinical deficits evidenced year on year by this service.</p> <p>The council has required me to remove at this point, and at others elsewhere in this tract, references to council posts and generic postholders whom I believe to have been highly unobservant of their Duties of Care, and I have complied with its wishes in order to bring these matters to your attention.</p> <p>I hope you will all read on and respond mindfully given the Duty of Care accorded to each and every one of you by your important and influential public roles:</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Public Health, Climate Change and Environment, Councillor Graham Oakes</p>
Full written response	<p>Thank you for attending our meeting today and for sharing your views.</p> <p>You don't specifically ask a question, however, on behalf of The Council I would like to respond to a couple of the issues that you raise:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Since 1st April 2013 Local Authorities have been responsible for commissioning specialist drug and alcohol treatment services, which are regulated services under a framework by the Care Quality Commission (CQC). This produces a set of standards against which services are judged. The Somerset Drug & Alcohol Service (SDAS) was last inspected by the CQC in 2018 and was rated as good across all domains with 'well led' rated as outstanding2. Somerset Drug & Alcohol Services (SDAS) have been run by Turning Point as SDAS, the last contract award was in 2019. Quarterly contract review meetings have been held throughout the life of this contract. These meetings focus on all aspects of clinical governance, including monitoring service performance. The funding and partner contributions have significantly changed since 2008, when you describe a completely different set of service offers, from those which are funded by central government today in 2024.3. Meeting the needs of the population within available finance remains an ongoing challenge, in the face of emerging challenges such as synthetic opiates and rising demand among young people.

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	<p>4. Somerset Council was awarded additional funding under 3 grants, to support people with more high-quality treatment services and to increase the proportion of people receiving detoxification services. These grants total more than £3.5 million over the 3-year period to March 2025, funding beyond that time is uncertain, above the core PH grant, which nationally has in real terms received a 27% cut</p> <p>5. Progress against achieving the objectives (high quality treatment) and numerical targets (numbers of people into treatment) are reported annually back to the Department of Health & Social Care but monitored by Office for Health Improvement & Disparities (OHID) regionally on a more regular basis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Against the 20% increase in adults in treatment based on a rolling 12-month total, in July 2024 there were 2438 adults in treatment from a baseline of 2195 in December 2021 (nationally defined)• In terms of quality of treatment Somerset continues to perform above the national average in relation to the rate of successful treatment completions, without re-presentation, 25.3% of people in Somerset successfully completed their treatment in Q4 2023-24, compared with 19.7% nationally. <p>6. Annual progress of the Somerset Strategic Drug and Alcohol Partnership (SSDAP), which delivers the local drug and alcohol strategy, has been transparently reported to the Somerset adults and health scrutiny and Somerset Council executive in both 2022-23 and 2023-24. This work is challenging and requires the work of all organisations to identify people who need support with their substance use and support the individual to identify the harm this use is doing to their own health and consent to engage in treatment. SDAS is one part of this support but requires the whole system to pull together to achieve the ambitious targets of the Harm to Hope strategy.</p>
Brian Clarke	<p>Question 2a – PETITION (no debate – less than 5000 signatures)</p> <p>My name is Brian Clarke. I have been diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease and depend on a wheelchair to get around Wells. I am here to present to you a petition signed in Wells by more than 1400 people – 1400 being the number of blue badge holders in Wells. Many of the signatories are people who have serious accessibility issues like me and are now effectively co-complainants. The petition demands that you take immediate steps to end discrimination against disabled people, by addressing the complaints and recommendations made in the Wells Pavements Accessibility Survey 2023.</p>

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	<p>In December 2023 I co-authored and submitted, to Duncan Sharkey, Mickey Green, David Carter, Tessa Munt, Adam Dance and Richard Wilkins, a printed copy of this survey.</p> <p>It describes in clear detail the poor and discriminatory pavement and road infrastructure in Wells that places me at disadvantage and considerable risk compared with able-bodied people. It identifies multiple examples that show how the current environment in Wells places Somerset Council in breach of its statutory duties in relation to the Highways Act 1980, the Road Traffic Act 1988 and the Equalities Act 2020.</p> <p>The report may look like an academic report, but it is a formal complaint from a disabled, vulnerable person. Since December 2023, neither I nor my co-authors Theo van Hensbergen and Bob Payne have received any meaningful written response from any representative of the Council – just one acknowledgement last month.</p> <p>It is not unreasonable of me to have expected a response with your plans in the interval and for some of the very worst issues to have been remediated.</p> <p>I suggest to you that, in relation to Highways planning and delivery, you urgently need to address the total disconnect between your Council’s policy and the outcomes you deliver. To quote from your stated Somerset Equality Objectives 2024 to 2026 - “By 2025, and by working with partners from across the County, improve access to, and information about, public amenities and services for those residents who are otherwise excluded by disability.”</p> <p>I see no evidence of your policy’s outcomes in Wells.</p> <p>My question is: “Does Somerset Council have any intention of remediating the serious discriminatory issues identified in the survey, which blight people’s experience of living in Wells”?</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Waste, Councillor Richard Wilkins</p>
Full written response	<p>Thank you, Mr Clarke, for raising these issues.</p> <p>I would like to offer apologies at the delay in providing you with a response to your report. I hope that you have received the letter that we sent regarding this matter earlier in the week.</p> <p>I appreciate that this has resulted in considerable frustration and concern. Our team has been carefully reviewing the report and had hoped to map out a way forward by now and to have been in a position where we could share a meaningful update. For a number of reasons we have not achieved this to date. However we will ensure that progress is made going forward.</p>

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	<p>Can I reiterate that we do appreciate the enormous effort that went into drafting this report, we value its content and we are now setting up a task and finish group which we are asking representatives from yourselves, Somerset Council and Wells City Council to be part of. This group will identify possible works within the report which can be prioritised within the coming year, within our ongoing maintenance and other works programmes.</p> <p>we cannot do everything you have identified, but there should be measures which can be realised fairly quickly, working in partnership.</p> <p>Once again, please accept my apologies for the delay. We look forward to working with you alongside the City Council.</p>
<p>David Redgewell</p>	<p>Question 3a</p> <p>With the public Consultation on Taunton Transport hub no completed What is the progress on passengers and staff facilities at the new Transport hub such passengers waiting rooms information point. Working with Taunton Town Council and public Transport users' groups. Transport providers and regional authorities Peninsula Transport Board. Catering concession, Toilet including changing places toilets, Quality waiting shelters, for bus passengers and National Express coaches limited Flixbus coaches, Berry's coach services Realtime information systems for bus coach and Train services CCTV and staff accommodation for First Group plc South buses, Go head Southwest buses, Stagecoach Southwest and Hatch Green and operational offices In both buildings 1 and 2. Now the Consultation has closed and input from public Transport companies like First group plc South buses Division Stagecoach west and National Express coaches including accessible area to lower wheelchair rumps on coach services Avon and Somerset police and crime commissioner. Do we now have an opening date for Taunton Transport hub in spring 2025 So, passengers can use a warm well lite Transport hub instead of some of the poor passenger facilities in Taunton And any progress on the similar bus and coach station rebuilding and passenger facilities at Yeovil bus and coach station, with waiting room, Toilets Kiosk / catering and staff accommodation.</p> <p>Question 3b</p> <p>It's Great to see bus coach and Public Transport users stalls by Somerset bus partnership and other Transport users groups across Somerset in unity Somerset council, Banes and North Somerset council, But after all the good. Work in catch the bus month When bus and coach users turn up at bus stop shelters bus and coach station Railway stations and Transport interchanges</p>

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the often fund out date bus timetables and bus and coach services number for bus services that no longer run and damage bus shelters In Somerset unity council, Banes and North Somerset council area.
Especially on cross boundary services Like 376, 375 374 Yeovil bus and coach station to Bristol Temple meads station and Bristol Bus and coach station via street, Glastonbury and Wells bus and coach station 374 Taunton Town centre soon to be the Transport hub to street, Glastonbury Wells bus and coach station to Bristol Temple meads station and Bristol Bus and coach station, 375 Bridgwater bus and coach station, Bridgwater Hospital Glastonbury, Wells bus and coach station and Bristol Temple meads station and Bristol Bus and coach station D2x Bath spa bus and coach station to Odd Down Peasedown St john Radstock Withington, Buckland, Dinham and Frome Town centre, Sainsburys or Railway station. D2 Bath spa bus and coach station, Midford. Norton St Philips Rode Beckington and Frome Sainsburys. 171, 172, 173 .174 Bath spa bus and coach Peasedown St john Radstock Westfield Midsomer Norton, Chilcompton Shepton mallet Paulton and Wells bus and coach station. Shepton interchange next to Tesco has out of date services number on the bus stops Bus stops along service 161 Shepton mallet interchange to Frome Town centre as a example

Many timetables case has timetable displays that are unreadable. The fonts size being to small for passengers who a partly sighted. The west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council use a larger size as does Wiltshire Council and Devon.

There is a need to install Real time information displays at Wells bus and coach station and other key bus and coach station in the unity council area. Yeovil bus and coach station when rebuilt, Bridgwater bus and coach station Minehead Town Centre.
Does the council have plans to improve passenger information displays and plans on where to catch your public transport Network services at main interchanges or produce a county Network map. And take action with city Town and parish councils to remove graffiti and Repair bus stops and shelters and improvement passengers' information.

Question 3c

With the labour government policy on Devolution and taking back control of Bus, coach and railway services.

With more local and regional control of Railways network. Including Regional Railway services like metro west railway south services. Between Bristol Temple meads, Bedminster, Parson Street, Nailsea and Backwell, Yatton for Clevedon, Worle parkway weston Milton weston super Mare, Highbridge and Burnham on sea Bridgwater, Taunton Wellington, Cullompton Exeter St Davids and Exeter Central. With the new stations at Cullompton and Wellington with bus interchange.

What discussion at Somerset unity council having with North Somerset council, Banes and West of England mayoral combined transport Authority Western Gateway Transport Board and Peninsula Transport Board the Greater southwest Partnership.

About a Regional Devolution deal. Including Franchising powers for the bus and coach Network or Municipalation of the bus and coach Network.

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	<p>David Redgewell Southwest transport Network.</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Waste, Councillor Richard Wilkins</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>Question 3a: Now that the consultation on the Taunton Mobility Hub is complete we are considering the responses and are commissioning the detailed design and procurement stages which will take the consultation responses into account. A detailed programme for completion of the scheme is being developed as part of the next stages of work and we will provide updates via the Bus Advisory Board.</p> <p>Question 3b: We work closely with the bus operators to ensure that they provide up to date timetable information at bus stops. We are happy to raise any specific instances of out of date information with them. Ideas for improved bus stop infrastructure are best raised at the Bus Advisory Board and associated stakeholder group which is the body we have set up to consider such issues in partnership with bus operators and stakeholders. I know you regularly attend this and look forward to your input via that forum.</p> <p>Question 3c: We are currently awaiting detailed Government guidance on proposals for greater public control over bus services including franchising. We envisage discussions about these matters taking place at the Bus Advisory Board in due course which includes our cross boundary local authority colleagues; and have raised the need for Peninsula Transport Board to consider the regional implications.</p>
<p>Nigel Behan</p>	<p>Question 4a - We would like to speak on matters related to Agenda Item (Motion) 10: Changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance and protecting Somerset pensioners</p> <p>Unite the Union is running a campaign To Defend the Winter Fuel Payment</p> <p>Noting that: “The Labour government’s plan to slash entitlement to Winter Fuel Payment have shocked millions of UK pensioners.”</p> <p>And: “In response, Unite has launched a national campaign to defend the Winter Fuel Payment. If enough of us take action, we can change the government’s plans and help all our pensioners keep warm this winter.”</p> <p>Additionally:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pensioners’ winter fuel allowance - CUT - Cap on social care costs - SCRAPPED - Energy bills this winter - RISING AGAIN

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“After 14 years of Tory cuts, Labour could have chosen to tax the wealthy to fix broken Britain. Instead, they have chosen more cuts.”

Does the Council agree that:

“Why should pensioners pay the price?”

[The] Labour [government] does not need to choose austerity. Energy company profits have more than trebled since before the pandemic and the 50 richest families in Britain own a combined £500 billion in wealth - the same as half the UK population.

The wealth is there in our society, and [The] Labour [government] could choose to tax it.”

Does the Council (motion) request for **“...a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty”** envisage the suggested proposals set out immediately above and/or some other redistributive/fairer solution?

Question 4b – In the introduction to the Open consultation **Proposed changes to bus franchising guidance** Published 9 September 2024([Proposed changes to bus franchising guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-changes-to-bus-franchising-guidance)) it is stated that:

“The government is determined to deliver better bus services, grow passenger numbers and drive opportunity to under-served regions. Bus services support our missions to kickstart economic growth and break down barriers to opportunity by connecting people to education and employment opportunities. It is clear, however, that the current system where services are predominantly run on a commercial basis and bus operators decide on the routes and provision is not delivering for communities across England. This has led to declining levels of bus services and passenger numbers.

The government has pledged to fix this and has developed a plan for delivering better buses, centred around supporting local transport authorities to take back control of their local services.”

Will SC (the LTA) incorporate service users’ responses to the questions in the consultation to be submitted to the DfT (“The consultation began on 9 September 2024 and will run until 7 October 2024. Please ensure that your response reaches us before the closing date.”)? The questions include:

(These questions are listed here to give you an overview of what we are asking.

See the [Ways to respond section of the GOV.UK page for this consultation](#) for an online response form and other ways to respond.

Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to lower the consent threshold that LTAs are required to meet to prepare a bus franchising scheme assessment and why?

Do you have any other comments on the consent threshold that LTAs are required to meet to prepare a franchising scheme assessment?

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	<p>Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to revise the approach to the option identification and why? Do you have any other comments on the proposal to revise the approach to option identification? Do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes to reduce the content LTAs need to provide in the franchise assessment and why? Do you have any other comments on the proposed changes to the franchise assessment? Do you agree or disagree with the addition of the section entitled ‘putting people at the heart of franchising’ and why? What, if any, suggestions do you have on how the franchising guidance could better:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support the delivery of the government’s missions • promote the government’s objectives? <p>Do you have comments on any other parts of the guidance?)</p> <p>Response from (Q4a) Lead Member for Adult Services, Housing and Homelessness, Councillor Sarah Wakefield and (Q4b) Lead Member for Transport and Waste, Councillor Richard Wilkins</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>This is best responded to as part of the discussion on motion as the question appears to be one for the author of that motion.</p> <p>Response from (Q4a) Lead Member for Adult Services, Housing and Homelessness, Councillor Sarah Wakefield Question 4a – There is a motion coming in today Full Council We agree that there should have been an Equalities Impact Assessment taken place to inform this decision.</p> <p>Response from (Q4b) Lead Member for Transport and Waste, Councillor Richard Wilkins Bus franchising was discussed at the last meeting of the Bus User and Stakeholder Group and the Council will take that discussion into account in formulating our response to the DfT consultation.</p>
<p>Amy Frend</p>	<p>Question 5a – PETITION (debate – more than 5000 signatures)</p> <p>A361 East Lyng speed limit My name is Amy and I have been a resident of East Lyng for just over a year. I started the petition to try and get the speed limit reduced on a section of the A361 due to my concerns of the safety to both drivers and pedestrians.</p>

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	<p>This particular section of the road has a speed limit of 50mph which is often ignored and vehicles travel in excess of this. It's a busy stretch of road with agricultural vehicles and lorries passing through constantly. My house is on one side of the road and a housing estate opposite comprising of about 15 homes. As drivers we are dealing with near misses on a daily basis, pulling out or into the junction or one of the many well used driveways due to a campsite and cider farm being located here is at times extremely dangerous, cars will often go to overtake as you start to slow in readiness to turn, which is just an accident waiting to happen.</p> <p>My biggest concern though is for the safety of pedestrians, children cross the road daily for the school bus along with the users of the public bus. Residents have to walk in the road to get to the main part of the village to access either the church or village hall. Not being able to use these services or attend events in the village leave people feeling isolated and not part of the community. Less than 300 metres away the 30 mph zone starts as you enter the main part of the village, I feel this needs to be extended to at least Staggs Farm which is 1/2 mile down the road, there are then bends in the road causing people to naturally slow down. Myself and the 15,000 plus people who signed the petition feel something needs doing about this section of the A361 before anyone else tragically losses their life, thank you for listening.</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Waste, Councillor Richard Wilkins</p>
Full written response	<p>Following the tragic incident which recently happened on the A361 near East Lyng, we are working with the Police to understand the circumstances. At this stage we are not aware of speed being a contributory factor in either collision, but investigations are ongoing . The outcome of these, due to their extensive nature, can take some time and if there are any recommendations about engineering measures when the investigations are completed this will be considered.</p> <p>Somerset Traffic Engineering officers met with County Councillors, representatives of East Lyng Parish Council and residents of Hill View Terrace in July 2023 where several issues were raised and actions agreed upon. These works will be completed in this financial year and include:</p> <p>To replace 2no pedestrian warning sign posts with taller 89mm 4m high ones for housing Speed Indicator Device (SID)s on. Warning signs to also go back on the posts.</p> <p>Lining improvements including refreshing white edge lining through the village, additional 30mph roundels on the road, refreshing yellow bar markings on entrance to speed limit and enhanced entry treatment with white hatched markings.</p> <p>40mph buffer zone beyond Hill View Terrace.</p>

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	<p>Any speed limit request is assessed on its own merit in line with Department for Transport Guidelines as set out in circular 01/2013. Consideration of collision history, road function, mix of road users including presence of vulnerable road users, road geometry, engineering and environment and actual traffic speed enables traffic authorities to determine the appropriate limit on single carriageway rural roads.</p> <p>We have given the speed limit change a great deal of careful consideration using the DfT guidelines, and the key issue is that a 30mph speed limit should only be applied in an environment where drivers would usually expect to encounter it; typically in the more built-up areas. Extending the 30mph out to an environment where drivers are typically expecting to drive at higher speeds risks it being ignored entirely at that location and then possibly further into the village. A 40mph buffer is usually more successful in bringing speeds down on approach to the 30mph limit.</p> <p>Speed data was collected last year in the vicinity of Hill View Terrace which recorded average speeds of 45mph which is above intervention for a 30mph speed limit. The DfT guidance does however state, that ‘it might be appropriate to consider an intermediate speed limit of 40mph prior to the 30mph terminal speed limit signs at the entrance to a village, in particular, where there are outlying houses beyond the village boundary or roads with high approach speeds.’ which is what was referenced to in determining the proposed 40mph buffer zone that has already been agreed.</p>
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Annexe B – Member Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question
Cllr Mark Healey	<p>Question 1a - It appears that the council has resource issues regarding the amount of planners we have. This affects the public and business alike. Regarding the delivery of new and affordable housing.</p> <p>The council needs to understand that the length of time gaining planning permission in some cases taking literally years to achieve let alone the increase burden of ever-increasing costs to the developer and public alike, this has a knock-on effect. I have read the document regarding planning and transport, I will concentrate on planning, which appears to be aspirational, one of my questions is, how do you intend to deliver what is within the said document when there is little or no money to achieve what is written?</p>

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	<p>It saddens me that the most complaints I am receiving to date is regarding planning, Which I am sure fellow colleagues must be getting as well.</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Councillor Mike Rigby</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>Its fair to say that across the country local authorities, including Somerset Council, are facing capacity challenges in delivering their planning functions and in recruiting and retaining planners and other specialist professionals that are important to planning. Somerset Council is indeed facing these challenges and it is important that we do all we can to address this. I am pleased to say that this is recognised as a corporate priority and that the Chief Executive is chairing a planning stability board given this. Senior officers are working closely with the HR service to address our recruitment challenges and have facilitated senior management restructure in the service. Operationally the planning service is working to reduce the backlog of planning applications and putting in measures to stabilise the service. As part of this work we are introducing a piece of software in order to extract management information in a consistent way from the 6 IT systems in use. This will enable a better understanding of the work in progress and where it is stuck and develop further measures to ensure there is transparency and that resource is appropriately allocated. There are also area specific approaches being put in place to manage and reduce work on hand which is starting to show improvements.</p>
<p>Cllr Leigh Redman</p>	<p>It has been known for some time that EDFe have been breaching the previously agreed uplifted workforce number on site, originally the limit was 5600 set by the DCO and had attached financial penalties should they breach this with financial payments being due if the number of staff exceed limits in specific areas, the monitoring is done by HPC. The limits were put in place to ensure EDFe encourage a fair spread of their staff across all areas, limiting concentrations in villages and towns closer to site (travel time to site was always going to be instrumental and increased pockets of staff in some areas would negatively impact on local people by increasing rental costs and decreasing available property for them).</p> <p>There was an uplift agreed that covered an increase for the numbers already on site, uplifting to 8600.</p> <p>For many months there have been in the region of 11,000 workers on site and living in our communities. It looks like we will be asked to agree an uplift that would see more than double the originally agreed number of staff working on site...</p> <p>Question 2a - Can I ask the executive member when we will see topic papers and have an opportunity to discuss the uplift? Can I ask that SC officers and members are given the necessary time to adequately review and respond? and if necessary, have any mitigation backdated, reflecting the fact that EDFe, likely, first breached the 8,600 agreed number early in 2024?</p>

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	<p>I am conscious that officers are already busy dealing with normal HPC works, can I ask that we push for EDFe to fund any necessary officer/legal support in SC to ensure we can respond to their further increase application without impacting day to day works?</p> <p>Question 2b - Can I ask that when we do respond we ensure that there is more detailed location information of where their staff are living and an independent body be employed, at their cost, with monitoring and reporting, as the current self-administered system is not working?</p> <p>Thank you and Stay safe,</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Councillor Mike Rigby</p>
Full written response	<p>Question 2a</p> <p>Thank you for the questions. Like you I am keen to see matters relating to workforce uplift addressed and for EDF to work positively and proactively with the Council – it appears at present that the Council is having to press EDF to progress this with us. The revised topic papers have not yet been received by the Council from the Developer, however, when they are received, the council will carry out the detailed consideration of these. Officers will assess topic papers in detail and work with members through the-HPC Monitoring Group (to which all members with divisions in the HPC impact area are invited) to develop the Council's preliminary view on a response. We will continue to engage with members through this group throughout the uplift process. I am aware that HPC run a Community Forum which you, and other Members, attend which gives a different, but additional, opportunity to ask questions.</p> <p>The nature of any mitigation and the topic it relates to, will directly affect whether it is feasible for backdating, however it is of paramount importance that mitigations are proportionate and for an appropriate length of time. This will need to play out in the negotiations. Whilst the sentiment of the use of the word breach is understood, a technicality of the project is that the number of workers is not a control within the HPC Section 106 agreement, therefore they are not in breach of their agreement. You are correct though, that the number of workers that the previous set of mitigations was based upon (8600), has been exceeded, and for some time.</p> <p>Thank You for acknowledging the officer's workload to manage the business-as-usual aspects of this complex project. The additional demands on time and resource are, of course, being felt due to the workforce uplift process as well as the ongoing process linked to the proposed HPC application to the Secretary of State to vary their Development Consent Order. EDF have</p>

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	<p>allowed flexibility in the use of funds currently held by the Council to secure appropriate staffing and indeed, have encouraged us to do so as they need our support. Further funding will be requested through the uplift process to continue this support.</p> <p>Question 2b This subject has been raised periodically throughout the project’s lifetime. With the benefit of hindsight, the Council would have negotiated an information sharing agreement linked to the measures and controls within the Section 106. The legal agreement between EDF and the Council outlines the metrics that they will measure and report on, and that they will conduct the six-monthly workforce survey where the majority of project information on spatial distribution is found. We are raising with EDF their reliance on this data and would like to explore how it can be triangulated with other project information sources. <i>An all-Member Briefing to give a general update on HPC, will be issued in early October.</i></p>
<p>Cllr Susannah Hart</p>	<p>Cllr Faye Purbrick asking on behalf of Cllr Hart This question is raised in the context of a number of tradesmen approaching their elected representatives to seek redress for the failure of payments being made to them, for works already undertaken on the Life Factory Project, which forms part of the Glastonbury Town Deal suite of projects. It is understood that an independent audit of the finances of the Life Factory and the other projects administered by the Red Brick Building is currently being undertaken and we look forward to a timely publication of the report</p> <p>Question 3a - Payments are apparently outstanding for over six months, to tradesmen who were deliberately chosen because they were small, local firms. Such small businesses simply cannot remain in business without payment. We ask therefore, on their behalf, when can all outstanding payments expect to finally be received?</p> <p>Question 3b - The last published minutes of the Town Deal Board refer to the Life Factory as being “a project of concern” and state that the outcome would be “at best a watertight shell”, given that the scaffolding is currently being removed and the timber beams will, as such, be exposed to the elements, as we move in to winter, is it really likely that even this minimal outcome can be achieved?</p> <p>Question 3c - Furthermore, at present 74% of the £3 Million allocated to project has already been spent, only to result in a roofless structure, in all honesty has there been any consideration of the voracity of the entire scheme in terms of value for public money spent?</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Councillor Mike Rigby</p>

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Full written response	<p>The Life Factory project is one of ten projects in the Glastonbury Town Deal (GTD) programme.</p> <p>A Grant Funding Agreement (GFA) is in place between Somerset Council (as the Accountable Body) and the Red Brick Building (as the grant recipient). Under the terms of the GFA, it is the RBB that is responsible for The Life Factory, including delivery of the capital works, paying creditors and raising match funding, as required.</p> <p>Somerset Council identified The Life Factory as a “project of concern” in January 2024 and paused grant payments because of concerns about its financial management. This decision was made in accordance with the terms of the GFA. Shortly after the Red Brick Building Board paused the project itself. The GTD Board has been kept informed throughout 2024 and it has been discussed at all its 2024 meetings.</p> <p>To date, RBB has drawn down 74% of the Towns Fund grant allocated to The Life Factory project, this includes a part claim in May 2024 for the wages of two apprentices and ensure essential health & safety works were legally compliant at the project site.</p> <p>Somerset Council has been working closely with the RBB since January 2024 to resolve this matter and find a positive way forward. Early in 2024, the focus was on reviewing the project and formulating a rescue plan; during this time The Life Factory project team was told not to incur further costs until the way forward was agreed, however, contractors continued to work at risk. In Spring 2024, the RBB Board took on a new accountancy firm whose first task was to rework their accounting records, this was a huge task that took over 3 months to complete.</p> <p>It became clear that South-West Audit Partnership (SWAP) involvement was absolutely necessary and an Audit was required. The purpose of the Audit is to assess whether there are sound governance arrangements and financial controls in place for this project, this includes checking if the project is compliant with relevant legislation/regulations. The Audit started in mid-June 2024 and a report is imminent. It is noted that the time taken to do the Audit reflects the complexity of the project, its governance arrangements and financial management.</p> <p>Currently, the Council is working with professionals who are checking if capital works done to date are to the right standard and represent value for money. This necessary work is nearly complete and happening in parallel with the SWAP Audit.</p> <p>The priority is to pay existing creditors from The Life Factory’s remaining Towns Fund grant, subject to SWAP Audit outcomes.</p>
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	<p>RBB's aim is to make Building C watertight as soon as possible because the structure is exposed to the elements. Somerset Council shares their concerns and recently appointed an independent structural engineer to check if the walls & gables of Building C could support a roof and to look at the condition of the wooden roof frame. The key findings are that some gable ends need further work before they are strong enough to hold up a roof and the wooden roof frame is OK for now but should not be left uncovered for much longer.</p> <p>Before the roof can go on, the Red Brick Building needs to do a few things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(1) sign the Section 106 Agreement to secure planning consent.(2) secure a bat licence.(3) procure a roof contractor. <p>To note, the RBB has also had significant and unexpected structural problems with Building B that resulted in closing the event space and moving out tenants causing a loss of income in the short-term. When Somerset Council's structural engineer visited the site, he was able to confirm that the problem was crumbling bricks and not the work to Building C which is the adjacent site of the Life Factory project. The Building B works to rebuild the foundations and walls are nearing completion, this will enable reopening of the event space and offices. RBB's Board has fundraised for the cost of the work on the foundations and pillars in Building B.</p> <p>By way of context, we are working with ten projects in the Glastonbury Town Deal and eight of them are progressing as planned. Two town centre projects are due to complete by end of 2024 - these are the Glastonbury Abbey Piazza and the Sports & Leisure Hub which will benefit both organisations in terms of their economic and workforce development and residents & visitors in terms of their quality of life and wellbeing.</p>
Cllr Diogo Rodrigues	<p>Question 4a - Could the council inform me, Westonzoyland Parish Council, and concerned parish residents, of the progress, decisions or action relating to the Parish Councils request for enforcement investigations relating to 3 separate areas of the Towns Weston Site, Springwat Lane, Westonzoyland Airport.</p> <p>The parish council first raised concerns to this council back on 9th August 2023, covering areas of concern around transport, environmental impact and potential breaches of planning conditions. The Parish Council provided further detail in December 2023 and again more detail in June/July of this year, but are yet to see any change or adequate response.</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Councillor Mike Rigby</p>

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Full written response	<p>Somerset Council has received a number of reports of activity on the former airfield, at Springway Lane, from numerous individuals, groups and others. Some have been directed to the area enforcement team and some to the Minerals & Waste enforcement team.</p> <p>The two teams are working together to establish what is occurring at each of the 3 sites. There has been constructive dialogue with regard to the recycling center and regularising the current uses and it is anticipated that a planning application will be received in the near future, which will be subject to the usual consultation processes.</p> <p>Over and above that – dialogue remains ongoing with the operator about the current use of the pallet storage area and the temp waste store so that the authority can understand the situation and determine the best way to proceed.</p>
Cllr Andy Dingwall	<p>This question is regarding the ongoing use of Deane House.</p> <p>Following attendance at a recent committee meeting, I was made aware of the significant personal efforts that the Democratic Services Team are having to make in order to ensure the JMR facility at Deane House is operational. This includes coming in hours before their working day starts on a Monday morning to set up, and moving heavy equipment on a Wednesday lunchtime in time for the tenants who occupy the room for the second half of the week. This is often done without the aid of facilities teams.</p> <p>I am also aware of the effort that senior leaders, managers and others from the wider team must make to move between County Hall to Deane House for specific meetings or presentations. Making the journey by foot must waste many hours of productive time. Making the journey by car, while quicker, adds to traffic, pollution and cost of fuel and does not make for a more sustainable Somerset.</p> <p>With this in mind, please could I have information on the following points:</p> <p>Question 5a - The actual cost of maintaining a presence in Deane House for Monday to Wednesday Lunchtime</p> <p>Question 5b - The estimated cost of resource for the teams movements between County Hall and Deane House – this would be based on the transit time, both ways, per person per meeting, and the average hourly wage for those in attendance of the meeting (that tend to be senior level managers)</p> <p>Question 5c - The unpaid, voluntary effort required by council team members in order to ensure the room is ready for business</p>

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	<p>Question 5d - A review of the actual or reputational risk involved in being unable to handle public meetings for 50% of the working week</p> <p>Question 5e - A cost assessment of re-opening County Hall for public meetings</p> <p>Question 5f - An understanding of the strategic long term view for the councils provision of public meetings</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Councillor Mike Rigby</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>To respond to the first part of your questions relating to the cost to maintain a presence at Deane House, the Facilities Management team have a Monday-Friday presence at Deane House, providing an FM service for Somerset Council's operations in the building but also, increasingly, as part of our landlord function at this multi-tenanted site. There is a requirement to oversee compliance, incident control and premises health and safety for the whole site across the whole week – following the review of Taunton Accommodation this service is funded largely through income received from the various tenants. The costs of maintaining a Democratic Services team presence and travelling back and forth to set up and facilitate meetings has not been explicitly calculated and will be issued as part of a fuller written response. I note that you have highlighted a concern that staff are working on 'unpaid' time and will look into this and provide a full written response.</p> <p>Regarding the council's provision of public meetings, the Council will continue to use the JMR and committee rooms at Deane House for the near future (as well as the use of this [Canalside] venue for Full Council meetings), pending a further review of the use of A Block in County Hall. In order to minimise non-essential spending, we will be reviewing whether to close A Block for the winter period again over the winter of 2025-26; because of this the telecasting equipment used for public committee meetings has remained in Deane House and we have designed the democratic calendar around a reduced Mon. - Weds. availability. There is some learning and review to do to ensure that problems with this approach are fully ironed out, but it is part of a review that has delivered significant cost savings, and we feel that so far it is working reasonably well, with limited reputational risk.</p> <p>Question 5a - The Facilities Management team have a Monday-Friday presence at Deane House. This is requirement of the managed site for compliance, incident control and health and safety and is costed as part of the Facilities service following recent restructure review. The cost of presence for Monday to Wednesday lunchtime is included within the cost of the service.</p> <p>Question 5b - We estimate that the time per person to get to and from County Hall and Deane House would be 30 minutes maximum – this would equate to a range of between £10.15 and £12.32 depending on the grade of the Officer supporting each Committee meeting.</p>

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	<p>Question 5c - Any unpaid voluntary resource that may be required will be a Democratic Service operational management issue, we have highlighted your concern to the relevant managers and would expect that staff would be actively using the Dynamic Working Strategy and flexible working policy for staff to take back any time in lieu in agreement with their manager.</p> <p>Question 5d - Public committee meetings are arranged quite a number of months in advance by Democratic Services and calendars published – the use of Deane House for 50% of the It is likely that an extraordinary meeting would be arranged with a minimum of a week’s notice and the Council would look for alternative suitable venues outside of its meeting facilities and hire space as required. We do not believe the Council is exposed to an unmitigated reputational risk in this respect.</p> <p>Question 5e - The ground floor committee room meetings at County Hall do not currently have telecasting equipment in situ; we also do not have a public reception open at County Hall for the safe welcome and management of public attendance at the meetings. For this reason it is more cost effective, at the moment, to maintain the JMR as the principle committee meeting venue for the council. The Council Chamber at Shire Hall is out of use due to ongoing Courts repair works.</p> <p>Question 5f - The Council will continue to use the JMR and committee rooms at Deane House for near future, as well as continuing to use the Canalside at Bridgwater for Full Council meetings for the foreseeable future. The Council will need to make a decision about the longer-term use of A Block in due course, and as part of this decision, options for a longer- term strategy for meeting rooms will be developed, considering the cost and benefits of different options.</p>
Cllr David Fothergill	<p>The Future of Taunton’s Brewhouse Theatre</p> <p>There is widespread concern in the County Town about the lack of support from this Council for the Brewhouse Theatre, Taunton.</p> <p>Question 6a - Given the extensive support that has now been extended to Bridgwater Arts Centre and the Octagon Theatre in Yeovil can the Executive Member please confirm what future support is planned for the Brewhouse in Taunton.</p> <p>Question 6b - Can she also confirm that the future of the Theatre and its environs will be secured by a fully funded asset transfer to the Taunton Town Council and give a target date for the transfer.</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Communities, Housing Revenue Account, Culture and Equalities and Diversity, Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts</p>

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<p>Full written response</p>	<p>Question 6a - The external funding opportunities to support theatre and the arts are always gratefully received, we remain optimistic regarding the in-principle support for the Octagon Theatre from Department for Culture Media and Sport, and Yeovil Town Council.</p> <p>In setting the budget for 24/25 Council took a decision to reduce the revenue grant payable to the private operators of the Brewhouse, Taunton Theatre Association. This was a phased reduction following engagement with TTA.</p> <p>Somerset Council continue to be the property owners of the Brewhouse, the tenants being TTA, there are landlord responsibilities associated with our ownership and we will continue to meet those.</p> <p>Question 6b - Officers are in conversation with TTA and Taunton Town Council regarding the future of the lease and any transfer of the asset. The Council has not yet made a formal decision on this as negotiations are ongoing.</p>
<p>Cllr David Fothergill</p>	<p>Following my question at a recent Executive meeting on the lack of 5-year Electrical Safety Certificates it was reported in the publication, Somerset Confidential that the Council had confirmed 378 homes properties did not have the legal certificate. In the article a Council spokesman is quoted as saying '<i>whilst we cannot demonstrate 100% compliance with certification at this time, we do not let properties that are unsafe</i>'. This was taken within the article to indicate that the 378 homes without certificates are not currently let. Please can you confirm that this is the case.</p> <p>Question 7a - Are all properties without a 5-year certificate unoccupied and if not how many are occupied? Question 7b - Can the Council please also confirm when 100% certification will be in place?</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Communities, Housing Revenue Account, Culture and Equalities and Diversity, Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>To clarify the compliance levels are as follow: Stock managed in house 96.17% meets the requirements (214 homes without certification) Stock managed by Homes in Sedgemoor 99.19% (32 homes without certification)</p>

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With just under 10,000 homes managed by SC there is a continuous programme of inspections and remedial works. Both landlords have issues with hard to access properties for inspection. However, upon inspection any urgent safety critical works are undertaken.

We do not currently evict tenants for failure to grant access and where access is granted the inspection is undertaken and any remedial works are completed.

We would not provide a new let without an EICR certificate in place. Prior to a new let there would be a void period where we have access to the property for inspection and remedial works. Hence, we do not let properties that are unsafe.

As mentioned the key to achieving 100% compliance is obtaining access from tenants – we have a process in place whereby the tenants are contacted by letter and phone by the contractor (which works well in the majority of cases), but where this is unsuccessful contact responsibility reverts to ourselves and we again contact by letter, phone and door knocking. The inhouse team have steadily increased resource to undertake this work, but a 'hard core' of tenants still refuse to engage. For the avoidance of doubt, we have contacted all outstanding properties – many of which on several occasions.

There is sufficient contractor resource readily available to promptly undertake the inspections, together with any required remedial works. If access were available, 100% compliance could be achieved within approximately three months.

Whilst we have been working with our Tenancy Management colleagues, we have now included a specific action to review the no certificate property list with tenancy team to prioritise for legal action where required. Legal action is not our preferred route but will become necessary if tenants fail to engage.

Finally, just to provide some context to this matter, we regularly benchmark our performance against our peer group via our membership of Housemark. The latest data available demonstrates that many similar organisations are also finding this a challenge to achieve.

Housemark pulse report from July, EICRs for “Local Authorities and ALMO’s under 10k properties” -

Q1 - 99.49%

Median - 98.38%

Q3 - 93.83%

Peers - Smaller LA's and ALMOs under 10k properties'

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Cllr Gill Slocombe	<p>I became a Councillor in 1999 for Sedgemoor District Council and a Bridgwater Parish Council which is now Bridgwater Town council. I did this because I cared about many issues that I felt were not being addressed in my community, the political balance in my Ward which was one of each, would you believe.</p> <p>To be a councillor you need to care about people, want to help, want to make a change and direct them to the best possible route. Up until this time I have always felt that I have managed to achieve this, but now since the new Unitary I feel as lost as many of our electorate.</p> <p>Customer Service seems to have gone out of the window, if you want to speak to someone it's almost impossible. When you ring the outside number you are reminded that if you wish to go on line it will be quicker and more efficient, really? Well tell me when did we stop caring enough to want everyone to be digitally connected? Some people actually want to speak to a human being, someone they can explain their personal issue to, someone who will listen, perhaps when they cannot connect to us as Councillors.</p> <p>The expectation in this council is that we all have mobiles, so when we are told to hold on, we can do so because we all have so much time on our hands, it's absolutely fine to keep people hanging on for over 20 minutes, this I believe is done so the person will eventually find the means to go online with the help of someone else.</p> <p>Question 8a -</p> <p>I ask this council to remember the 'Equalities Act' to remember the inclusivity of each of us, to remember that not all of our customers want a mobile, and IPAD, or Computer. In our communities many of our electorate just want to speak to someone to explain their problem, directly, being it a personal financial issue or that once again their bin has not been collected, or even just to tell you that the pothole outside of their house has now reached to Australia. They want to be independent and feel they are being heard, so they continually try to find something that is called customer service!</p> <p>Please let us not become so big that we have forgotten the people that pay their rates, elect their councillors, the people that pay the council's wages, the people that matter.</p> <p>Let's become a caring council surely that's why we are all here?</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Communities, Housing Revenue Account, Culture and Equalities and Diversity, Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts</p>

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Full written response	<p>We would like to give assurance to Cllr Solcombe that Customer Services work hard to deliver a good service to customers and ensure inclusivity to the 1.2 million contacts that they deal with each year. Customer Services passionately care about the people they serve, giving advice, information, and support and this is reflected in the customer satisfaction rating of 83.71% for July 2024 where 1,204 customers told us that they were happy with the way they had been treated and the outcomes achieved. It is true that some days customers wait longer than we would like, but it is a demand led service and we try very hard during peak times to make more Advisers available to resolve customer queries at the first point of contact, so they do not get passed around the council or tell their story more than once. In July 2024 we managed to resolve 81.25% of calls without having to pass them onto the service and we continue to work with services to prevent failure demand. This is where Advisers pass customers to service such as Adult Social Care, Housing or Planning for professional or technical support. Customers also have options to visit one of Face-to-Face Customer Service Points or use our 'contact us' form on the website.</p> <p>The service is also contributing to the to the financial emergency and delivery of the Digital Strategy for Somerset Council by actively encouraging those customers who can do it for themselves to do so. Over recent months we have been asking and supporting callers to the Waste Service to make their payment or report a missed bin collection for themselves online. We have seen encouraging results with online transactions increasing from 71% in November 23 to over 88% in May 2024. Importantly this channel shift means that Advisers can spend less time on calls where they add little value and more time focused on our most vulnerable customers and those who are digitally excluded who genuinely are unable to do it for themselves. Currently we are also promoting VAL our Virtual Assistant Link in a number of partnership locations around the county where customers can be supported to speak to Advisers using the 'VAL' software.</p>
Cllr Tom Deakin	<p>The Heavitree Way estate has experienced parking issues for a number of years, these largely take the form of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• parking on corners - particularly around Compton Close• parking too close to the main road - junction with Priorswood Road• parking opposite the entrance to Compton Close• parking over dropped kerbs <p>I have numerous photos and videos from residents demonstrating the problem on a daily basis.</p> <p>This is exacerbated in this particular area given its proximity to both the railway station and cricket ground. I have seen first-hand the significant danger this situation is posing - indeed I had a near miss only the other day whilst on foot in the area.</p>

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	<p>I don't believe a full resident's parking consultation is necessary nor desired by the residents. Some simple double yellow lines and enforcement would help to mitigate the problem.</p> <p>I know that this issue has been looked at previously but I'm afraid the outcome just isn't satisfactory - the residents need this council to take action.</p> <p>Question 9a Please can you let me know what action this council will take to help resolve the issues faced?</p> <p>It is essential we take action before an incident occurs, not in response to one happening as is so often the case.</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Waste, Councillor Richard Wilkins</p>
Full written response	<p>Somerset Council as the Highway Authority is responsible for over 6,600 km (4,100 miles) of road in Somerset which requires very careful prioritisation taking in to account the known safety/accident history of the area along with the level of recorded congestion, impact on public transport journeys and limited budgets during the current financial emergency.</p> <p>On a positive note, we have no recorded incidents of accidents. With this area effectively a cul de sac with no through road there are no known congestion issues or public transport delays.</p> <p>In the circumstances this area would be a low priority for the Council, in addition the current under resourced parking team is fully engaged in day-to-day matters ensuring the service is fulfilling its statutory duty and delivering the MTFP savings.</p> <p>In the short term should vehicles be parked causing an obstruction or dangerously they can be reported to the Police who retain the powers to act.</p> <p>Vehicles parked across a dropped footway/crossing point can be acted upon by the Council's enforcement contractor.</p> <p>The request for a dropped footway needs to be made by the property owner, the enforcement team will visit as soon as possible and serve a penalty charge notice should the vehicle be parked in contravention. A contravention occurs when most of the vehicle is parked across the part of the footway that is level with the road (the taper kerbstones do not count).</p>

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	<p>They can be contacted on 01823 219035 or email somersetparkingenquiries@nsl.co.uk</p> <p>On-street parking restrictions (somerset.gov.uk)</p> <p>It is noted that you don't believe a full resident's parking consultation is necessary nor desired by the residents; some simple double yellow lines and enforcement would help to mitigate the problem.</p> <p>In some instances, yellow lines may solve the matter but before proposing such lines it is important to consider the impact of the displaced vehicles. Due to the proximity and easy access to the town centre and rail station, the vehicle may simply move into the residential cul-de-sacs causing further access issues for residents.</p> <p>Longer term it is anticipated this area along with others across Taunton who experience similar issues will be considered as part of the draft Taunton Intergrated Parking Strategy</p> <p>https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s18754/Appendix%20D%20-%20Taunton%20Integrated%20Parking%20Strategy%20-%20DRAFT.pdf</p> <p>Detailed within Item 82 as part of the award of the Taunton park and ride service.</p> <p>https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=213&MId=2379&Ver=4</p> <p>The Intergrated Parking Strategy will encourage the use of the park and ride and public transport and discourage parking in town centre car parks and currently free unrestricted residential areas within easy access to a parking generator such as a rail station.</p> <p>The strategy and any other new schemes/proposals can be considered once the current workforce transformation, council restructure, new operating model and objectives have been completed, identified and agreed.</p>
Cllr John Hunt	<p>The proposed disposal of Mary Street/High Street Car Park in Taunton.</p> <p>This decision was made by the Somerset Council Executive at a meeting held on 5th August 2024.</p> <p>At that meeting, and on the assumption that the car park is replaced, I commented “it will help address lingering issues of antisocial behaviour in this part of the town.” I went on to say “an alternative use for the site is a good idea from that perspective.”</p>

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	<p>My comments were quoted in local press articles, one using the headline, “Cllr welcomes plan to turn Taunton car park into flats.” This was understandably taken by several residents to mean that I supported the removal of this very popular car park, which I do not. In fact, I’d rather see the existing car park secured and policed properly, particularly at night.</p> <p>As you can all imagine, these articles generated a lot of public concern over the loss of this vital facility, and I feel that I must support their calls for the Mary Street/High Street Car Park to be withdrawn from sale.</p> <p>This car park is used mostly by shoppers and commuters during the day, whilst in the evening, the ground floor is used by the many people taking advantage of the thriving entertainment facilities such as the Creative Innovation Centre (CICCIC), The Lawns and the many restaurants and public houses nearby. It was suggested at the Executive meeting that people could use the multi-story as an alternative. Can you imagine leaving The Lawns or CICCIC after dark and walking to the multi-story? It is closed in the evening for good reason.</p> <p>We are trying to attract people to Taunton, if they cannot park, they will not come. Yes, in a perfect world they’d all use the Park and Ride, cycle or walk..... However, in the real world, they want to drive. Losing these 269 conveniently situated spaces, will hugely affect Taunton’s already fragile economy.</p> <p>It also makes financial sense for the council to retain this vital asset. To support my case, I wanted to share the estimate of this assets value, however this was detailed confidentially in the executive report, so I’m unable to do so. What I can point out to my fellow councillors is that this facility is currently generating enough revenue to cover the estimated freehold valuation in short order, making the decision to dispose of this car park ill-conceived, in my opinion.</p> <p>Of course, I realise the council needs to sell assets, however, selling this one will undoubtedly damage our county town’s economy, whilst making no financial sense whatsoever, based on the figures provided to me.</p> <p>Question 10a - I therefore ask that this car park is removed from the list of proposed disposals.</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Waste, Councillor Richard Wilkins</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>Thank you for your question John and I understand your anxiety about potential misinterpretation of your views so thank you for taking the opportunity to clarify your position for the record. The points you raise are well made and whilst we have an immediate need for asset rationalisation we also need to make sure we develop a strategic view on these matters for the longer term that take into consideration the needs of a Garden Town moving forward.</p> <p>Turning to the decision on this specific car park. This is one of several assets considered by the Executive on the 5th of August, following extensive discussions at the Corporate and Resources Scrutiny on the 24th of July. The Executive considered the list of assets as part of an ongoing review of a disposal programme to rationalise Somerset Council’s property and land portfolio to reduce holding and management costs, to achieve capital receipts which will help to bridge the funding gap for the</p>

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	<p>current and the next financial year. The Mary Street/High Street Car Park was put forward for release by Parking Services, noting that its capacity requirements can be accommodated by the Council's owned Orchard Street multi-storey.</p> <p>As you have noted, there have been reports of anti-social behaviour issues, and this car park requires ongoing management and investment in maintenance. The income from parking fees previously provided for 2022/23 and 2023/24 does not take into account the ongoing maintenance costs, business rates and the required refurbishment to enable the car park to be a parking destination of choice. There is spare capacity in the Orchard Street car park during the day and indeed The Crescent car park which is well located for some of the needs that you mention. The asset strategy is linked to potential housing development which would deliver additional revenue to the Council via Council Tax.</p> <p>The Executive voted to approve the recommendations, and Officers will be submitting a planning pre-application and obtaining external advice to market the site as a residential development.</p>
<p>Cllrs Barry Clarke and Philip Ham</p>	<p>The question that is brought here today has been raised on two different occasions at Scrutiny meetings with no definitive answer. The current Somerset budget for adult and children's social care is around 70% of the total.</p> <p>Question 11a - How much of this expenditure remains in the County and how much in the UK?</p> <p>Question 11b - How much is taken out of the UK via various investments, pension funds and other offshore interests?' Children's Services Response - We do not track spend outside of the UK or complex company structures and how much those companies invest in pension funds and off-shore interests.</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Adult Services, Housing and Homelessness, Councillor Sarah Wakefield</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>Response from Lead Member for Children, Families and Education, Councillor Heather Shearer</p> <p><i>11a) The Children's Services revenue budget in 2023/24 was £126.1m. Much of this budget is for staffing, although there are some large areas of spend such as for children's fostering, residential care and other placements. Because there is a lack of sufficient accommodation in-county and nationally, we do need to make use of placements outside of Somerset. Sometimes this is because it's best for the child, but normally we would prefer to place within Somerset and it is a Council priority to increase the proportion of in-county homes. In 2023/24 we spent £57.4m on placements for children in care, with £27.7m going to providers who are registered outside of Somerset.</i></p>

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Children’s Services is also responsible for the Dedicated Schools Grant. The portion of Dedicated Schools Grant that is not passported to schools in 2023/24 was budgeted at £112.1m. This spend includes SEND placements in Independent Non-Maintained Schools of £33.3m, most of which are day schools in Somerset with a small number which are outside of Somerset. The cost of SEND placements outside of Somerset in 2023/24 was £2.1m.

11b) We do not track what monies our suppliers may hold outside of the UK through complex company structures nor how much those companies invest in pension funds and off-shore interests.

Response from Lead Member for Adult Services, Housing and Homelessness, Councillor Sarah Wakefield

Question 11a - Thank you very much for your question about where the very considerable adult social care and childrens’ services budget is spent and whether the larger proportion of it remains within Somerset and with companies that are owned and run in the United Kingdom.

When the council commissions services from providers within these areas and it seeks tender responses from private registered companies, we do ask for the details of any parent companies to be provided. However, the only time that such information can be taken into account regarding the award decision under the procurement rules is if that company or parent company falls within any current UK Government embargoes, restrictions, and/or sanctions. We do also ask questions about persons of significant control within the company concerned but do not require details to be supplied of where each shareholder is based. The council does of course undertake financial checks on suppliers as part of the procurement process.

As far as Adults Services are concerned we commission services from a wide variety of providers of which most are based within the county although they may not be entirely owned and controlled within the county. As far as care homes are concerned we are fortunate to have a large variety of these in our county – some being part of larger groups and some being individually owned or owned in small local groups which may or may not be serving just the county of Somerset. We do not routinely place individuals outside Somerset unless there is some family or other particular reason to do so. Our care providers for home care services are similarly varied in size and location within Somerset or owned and controlled from elsewhere usually if part of a larger group or company. Specifically checking where the expenditure on services is going to end up as profit is not the object of the work carried out. This is focussed on providing the best and most appropriate care and support for the individual according to their circumstances at any particular time at a cost we can manage within our budget.

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	<p>Some of our providers are not for profit companies and/or charities specifically set up to provide services for Somerset residents. In my view it would not be a good use of officers' time to seek to trace in whose hands or where any profit ends up in the many providers we engage with and commission. Should such a question be included as part of a tender document I suspect many would refuse to respond to it. As members will be aware the CQC regulates and inspects care homes and we also seek feedback from residents and their families too. We seek to keep our weekly fees paid for residents we look after at the rates we can afford and to shape the market for our residents as far as possible through the commissioning process. '</p>
<p>Cllr Sue Osborne</p>	<p>I welcome the fall in the number of overdue care assessments as reported to the September 2024 Executive meeting, which now stands at 435 overdue assessments against a target of 200. However, I am concerned that the number of overdue care assessments in Area South stands at 180 overdue assessments compared to 30 - 40 overdue assessments in the other areas.</p> <p>Question 12a - Why has the number of overdue assessments remained disproportionately much higher in Area South and what steps are now being taken to reduce this backlog?</p> <p>Question 12b - When do you anticipate Area South's performance getting back on track and on target?</p> <p>It is now proposed that the project costs for the Newton Europe contract, including the 'my life my future' transformation work (cost £7m over 2 years) will now be funded from flexible use of capital receipts.</p> <p>Question 12c - As this project was anticipated to save this council between £10 and £14m, why is this not being funded from the savings to be delivered?</p> <p>Question 12d - Please can you demonstrate that the savings have indeed been made as per the agreed contract with Newton Europe?</p> <p>This is important as I understand that this contract was drawn up on a payment by results basis.</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Adult Services, Housing and Homelessness, Councillor Sarah Wakefield</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>Question 12a</p> <p>Across our Adult Social Care Operational Teams, we have seen improvement surrounding productivity with a 25% increase in productivity across our operational teams, this is due to the Operational Oversight meetings introduced by our leadership team and the new ways of working introduced through the My Life, My Future transformation programme.</p> <p>In relation to the performance of South Somerset Neighbourhood team we have experienced recruitment challenges with vacancies and long-term sickness, in the last few weeks we have successfully recruited to 3 Social Workers and a number of</p>

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Adult Social Care Practitioners who are all undertaking their Induction into Adult Social Care in Somerset. We have a new Service Manager within the team who is leading on the oversight and monitoring of the team's performance. The team are also linking in with Health colleagues within the Primary Care Networks to ensure people are weighting well and adopting collaborative approaches to supporting individuals.

Question 12b

Following our recruitment we have already seen a reduction in the number of pending Care Act assessments reduce to 160 and we are expecting to see a continued reduction to the timeframes for people waiting for a Care Act assessment within the South Somerset Neighbourhood team over the oncoming weeks. Our Service Manager will continue to monitor progress through weekly performance reports and Oversight meetings chaired by our Head of Service for Neighbourhoods.

Question 12c

'My Life, My Future' is one of the projects which, as part of the Council's overarching transformation programme, has been approved as fitting criteria for using flexible use of capital receipts. This is in accordance with UK government guidance which outlines that a local authority must be able to demonstrate that ongoing savings in a programme of this kind are as a result of the application of receipts. Originally, we had anticipated that the funding for this programme would have been made through Reserves, however upon planned review of this the decision was made to use capital receipts. Using flexible use of capital receipts is a benefit to the Council's overall revenue position because we can keep the revenue savings generated from any transformation activity in our revenue budgets while the project cost is funded from capital receipts.

Question 12d

The Programme set out to improve outcomes for the people we support by allowing people to maintain or increase their level of independence wherever possible. This might be supporting them to regain skills and confidence after a crisis through an improved short-term service, using new ways of working to keep someone at home rather than moving them to a residential placement, or by supporting someone to learn new skills and abilities to do more things for themselves. This focus on independence for people will allow people to live the lives they want to, but also reduces or avoids increases in the level of long-term care provision and support required from the local authority, leading to a financial benefit.

The support from Newton Europe is also provided on a contingent fee basis. The fees for both the My Life, My Future Programme and the preceding diagnostic are fixed and fully contingent on financial benefits being delivered and signed off by Somerset Council. For every £1 spent on the programme, we expect to save £1.30 at minimum. The target benefit for the programme is £14.2m - significantly greater than this minimum expected return.

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These benefits have been measured by comparing agreed historic baselines to the current actual operational performance in each of the relevant areas, then using the agreed set of equations to translate this to an annualised “run rate” for the programme. This “run rate” is therefore agreed to be the value delivered to Somerset Council if the operational performance sustains at this level. For example, we have achieved a 30% increase in the number of people accessing the reablement service compared to our baseline period, meaning more people have access to short-term support that helps them live safely and independently in their own home for longer.

As at 23rd September 2024, operational performance across all workstreams equates to an annualised “run rate” of over the target £14.2m. In particular, the two workstreams related to our Learning Disability cohorts are delivering over the target benefits set out at the beginning of the programme.

A report on the My Life, My Future transformation programme will be going to the next Adults & Health Scrutiny Committee on the 10th October.