

Executive Committee 26th February 2025 – Public Questions

Annexe A – Public Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question
Ray Moore	<p>PETITION – 5000+ signatures</p> <p>Eastwick Road Through the Chicanes</p> <p>This is a petition to reduce speed to 20mph with pedestrian crossings, speed platforms. For the children, parents, and elderly and disabled who don't stand a chance at present it is a rat race between drivers plus all the heavy goods vehicles also speeding with three bollards placed outside 201 footpath.</p>
Written response	<p>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Waste</p> <p>Somerset Council commends the effort of the organiser to obtain the volume of signatures that clearly demonstrates the feeling within the community on the issues raised.</p> <p>We are always happy to investigate concerns raised by the community and have already discussed this location with local Council Members. Our team will work alongside the Town Council if they wish to fund investigations and provision of crossings, traffic calming measures and 20mph speed limits, as we have done in many communities across Somerset.</p> <p>In specific reference to the footpath outside of no 201, we will be installing an additional barrier to address vehicles mounting the footway at this location.</p>
Mr David Orr	<p>It usually pays to listen to one's peers. The recent LGA Peer Review report has stated:</p> <p>“Ensuring that there is a clear plan and appropriate corporate capacity in place to support transformation delivery will be key. However, for these technology opportunities to be fully realised, the council must ensure legacy system integration and harmonisation is equally prioritised – there are examples of services unable to produce statutory reports because they are working on multiple IT systems and relying on poor quality data. Significant investment will be needed to address these issues and at pace given the reduction in workforce capacity.</p>

Executive Committee 26th February 2025 – Public Questions

Ensuring this work is completed at the earliest opportunity will give the council the best chance to deliver their ambitions. Design skills are an important capability for any Council and their value has already been proven in the council's approach to service and process redesign with Adult's Social Care. Consideration should be given to securing design and continuous improvement skills for broader corporate benefit."

The year before vesting day should have been used to assess line of business applications, particularly in Districts, as duplication was inevitable. On vesting day, you should have had a list of applications where you would either transfer to one existing system as best-of-breed, or plan to go to market to commission a new application. Two years in on Day 665, this not-so-new council is still implementing one line of business application in Revs and Bens only, which is not an "at pace" plan. This work isn't "transformation" but is typical business-as-usual work post a merger of multiple organisations into one.

IT is an enabling service and is vital to delivering unitary line-of-business systems, with just one set of processes for efficient service delivery and management control, using reliable and consistent data. Efficiency savings through "transformation" also requires IT to enable it. Adult Social Care got this Invest to Save treatment, so why not IT?

IT needs to be given, on an Invest to Save basis (with 2-year payback business cases as with funding post reductions), additional capacity and capability, so they can do the "day job" but also consolidate inherited IT systems and enable "transformation" for efficiency savings. There should be sufficient business and process analysis resources within IT and change management resources within the business to create "intelligent clients" for every system consolidation. Commissioned IT system suppliers should do the bulk of the consolidation work including legacy data cleansing and loading.

Has the consolidation of Executive Directors, ahead of posts being lost and enabling systems being in place, created a leadership capacity issue at the top?

Should you consider an Interim Director for Transformation (with a delivery track record) for 1-2 years to drive transformation efficiency savings "at pace and scale"?

Every year of delay means more distressed sales of investment assets and/or increased borrowing of at least £40m a year

Executive Committee 26th February 2025 – Public Questions

<p>Written response</p>	<p>Response from Lead Member for Transformation, Human Resources and Localities</p> <p>Somerset Council requested the LGA Peer Review precisely because we wish to hear from and listen to our peers. It is very important that we take advice from the right people and I believe the Peers the LGA sent were very well positioned to advise us.</p> <p>As I have previously stated, the IT element of the transformation programme has been designed to deliver application consolidation. Our programme of IT systems and application consolidation is ongoing ranging from moving to a single Revenues and Benefits application, improving the functionality of MS Dynamics and developing our SAP HR system.</p> <p>Our financial position has meant that the Council has had to work at pace to redesign its structure to support its financial sustainability and continue to deliver service to the residents of Somerset. We have deployed, enabling projects utilising IT system improvements and AI have been running alongside the workforce transformation programme. We are not able to comment on specific investments in services at this stage, however, as we develop the Council Transformation Programme we will consider where best to deploy our resources to ensure that we deliver the objectives of the Council, this includes ensuring that the Council is financially sustainable.</p> <p>In response to your question regarding appointing an interim Director for Transformation, I do not believe we should be looking to increase the number of Executive Directors, however ensuring sufficient capacity to deliver transformation is a key focus.</p>
<p>Mr David Preece</p>	<p>Mr Preece made a statement at the meeting, raising a number of points including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unitary and Transformation was supposed to cost £19m and pay for itself within three years • The proposals of 555 redundancies out of 4555 staff, half of those should have gone before 2023, but there is still no agreement with unions • The jobs rather than the people need to be made redundant • IT transformation has a poor track record in Somerset with South West One creating no savings • The proposal to link us to a Super Wessex Unitary has been deferred and this is a positive.
<p>Response</p>	<p>The Leader of the Council thanked Mr Preece.</p>

Executive Committee 26th February 2025 – Public Questions

Mr Nigel Behan	<p>Q1 relates to Item 6 2024-25 GF Revenue Capital Budget Monitoring Executive Report - Quarter 3 Final.pdf and Item 10 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Final Report</p> <p>In a recent response to the government consultation on local government funding CIPFA commented:</p> <p>“CIPFA is deeply concerned by the ongoing reliance on exceptional financial support (EFS) within the sector. Its prevalence within the sector (19 councils approved to receive EFS, with that number likely to rise dramatically in 2025/26 and 2026/27) means that it can no longer be considered exceptional. Covering recurring day-to-day revenue expenditure through capitalisation directions is unsustainable and represents poor financial management and most significantly poor value for money to the taxpayer. Our experience with the sector shows that this is leading to increased borrowing and consequently greater instability within the sector, and the government must urgently rethink its current position.”</p> <p>“Local authorities are also facing significant financial pressures relating to delivery of services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including provision of home-to-school transport. Research has identified a nationwide SEND deficit currently exceeding £3bn across English councils and this is projected to rise to £8bn in 2026/27. These deficits are not accounted for in the government’s £22bn budget gap due to the use of a statutory override. This is further complicated as it results in local authorities experiencing cash flow difficulties, putting them in the position where they are having to borrow to cover day-to-day spending.”</p> <p>The Peer Challenge report noted: “The work on values and behaviours carried out prior to the financial emergency being declared was well received by staff, however, there is now a sense that these have been undermined by actions subsequently taken especially in relation to the workforce reduction programme. As a priority, the council should focus effort on rebuilding trust with staff and demonstrating and recognising their value in order to secure their commitment and good will moving forward.”</p> <p>As Somerset Council is now entering a second financial year requiring EFS, putting up Council Tax by 7.5%, cutting hundreds of jobs and cutting services, do you accept that the forecast underspend should be used to minimise compulsory redundancies and service reductions?</p>
-----------------------	---

Executive Committee 26th February 2025 – Public Questions

Written response	Response from Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance or Lead Member for Transformation, Human Resources and Localities The forecast underspend for 2024/25 is reducing the amount of budget that has to be taken from Council reserves, which were allocated to set a balanced budget for the current financial year. It is essential that we reduce our call on reserves to protect our financial position, as any use of them is one off funding that cannot be replaced.
-------------------------	---