

## Full Council – 22 February 2023 – Public and Member Questions

Annexe A – Public Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question
<b>David Redgewell</b>	<p>Question 1</p> <p>What safeguards are the budget to take over and manage the advertising bus shelters in Yeovil and South Somerset council area, Somerset West and Taunton Council area and Bridgwater.</p> <p>The present contracts are not well managed with the advertising concession holders not repairing the shelters or cleaning them and putting up timetables across the county.</p> <p>It should not be up to citizen armies to clean and repair bus shelters in the Somerset major towns.</p> <p>Do the council have a budget for bus stops and shelters maintenance when the assets are transferred to the unity council?</p> <p>Questions 2</p> <p>Is there a budget held to maintain bus and coach stations on transfer to Somerset Unitary Council for the bus and coach stations at Frome, Wincanton, Yeovil, Bridgwater, Wells, Taunton, Shepton Mallet, Glastonbury, Street and Wellington.</p> <p>Questions 3</p> <p>With uncertainty over the Department for Transport Bus Service Recovery Grant, what plans are being taken to retain the following services for weekdays, evening and Sunday services from June 2023 when the West of England mayoral combined transport Authority and Banes Council money is withdrawn.:-</p> <p>126 Wells, Westbury Sub Mendip Draycott Cheddar, Axbridge, Winscombe, Banwell Locking and Weston bus and coach stations, Service D2 Bath Spa bus and coach station to Midford Norton St Phillips, Rode Beckington and Frome, Service 172 Bath Spa bus and coach station to Peasdown St John Radstock Westfield Midsomer Norton</p>

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Paulton and Wells bus and coach station, 173, 174 Bath Spa bus and coach station to Peasdown St John Radstock Westfield Midsomer Norton Chilcompton or Shepton Mallet interchanges and Wells bus and coach station.

Are these issues being budgeted for and any bus service improvements in Yeovil and Bridgwater.

David Redgewell Southwest transport Network and Railfuture Severnside

*Response from Cllr Mike Rigby, Lead Member for Transport and Digital*

*Officers drafting response Mike 'Dowd-Jones*

*Q1: At present there are a range of approaches to managing and maintaining bus stops and shelters across the districts. These will be reviewed as part of the work we need to do to transform services once the unitary authority has been created, to achieve more consistent levels of service. There are many such issues to consider so we are not able to specify a timescale for this work. There is currently no intention to move away from advertising concession arrangements where these are in place, but we will review the effectiveness of contracts where concerns are reported. Any existing budgets held by the district councils for maintenance of bus stops and shelters will transfer into the new unitary authority. We welcome the support that the Somerset Bus Partnership have already provided in terms of bus stop audits as part of our work in this area.*

*Q2: There are existing budgets held by the district councils for maintenance of bus and coach stations, and these will transfer into the new unitary authority.*

*Q3: Following representations from this Council and others to Government, we are pleased to note that Bus Recovery Grant funding will be continued until 30 June 2023, and we will continue to seek longer-term support from Government as necessary. We continue to work-hard with bus operators to minimise the impact of any*

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	<p><i>changes to services that they propose due to commercial viability. We are also pleased to have been able to secure additional funds to enhance bus services in Somerset through the Bus Service Improvement Plan, which many other authorities in the Country have not been able to do. In proposing the budget for 23/24 the Council has considered the full range of services that it has a duty to provide, and funds required to manage competing risks across the authority within a challenging financial climate. The proposed public transport budget will ensure that we can continue to support those services that the Council considers are currently most essential in meeting transport needs that would otherwise be unmet by the commercial market.</i></p>
<b>Pip Donovan</b>	<p>My questions relate to the unregulated and dangerous Boxing Day Hunt meets that continue to happen in Somerset every year. We have been campaigning since the start of 2021, pointing out the dangers and engaging with all the relevant authorities, including SCC Highways Department.</p> <p>As you know, in 2021, despite promises from SCC and our campaign, all the hunts met in the usual places, without closing any roads. The public was put at risk, and we collected evidence to prove it.</p> <p>Anxious to avoid a repeat of this in 2022, we continued our campaign. From early autumn, we had several meetings with the Highways Dept and were told that they were trying to engage with the hunts to ask them to apply for road closures. However, 12 months later, and a fortnight before Christmas, the Highways Department said that as no hunt had in fact complied with the request, they'd be closing the road for them using emergency procedures. Make no mistake – that was absolutely what was said in the meeting. We'd been banging on about it for 12 months – plenty of time to take action. We were of course horrified by this and, with help from Protect the Wild began an email campaign. Then, SCC issued this statement:</p> <p>“The council is not using any powers to close roads for hunt meets this year. We have spoken to the hunts identified by AAF and two have confirmed that they will meet on private land and the third will not be closing the road.”</p> <p>So what actually happened in the towns on Boxing Day 2022?</p> <p>AGAIN - hunts met in the usual places without closing the roads</p> <p>AGAIN - the public was put at risk, and AGAIN we collected evidence to prove it.</p>

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	<p>Two of the three hunts repeated their law-breaking activities from 2021. And the third still managed to cause traffic chaos in a different area.</p> <p>The worst of all was the Cotley Hunt in Chard. My colleague will tell you more about this. We know that the Cotley did not make any road closure applications to either the District Council or the County Council. We suspect that they were relying on the “Emergency Road Closures” suggested by the Highways Department (and then quickly withdrawn after our email campaign). So instead of taking responsibility for their failure to apply for a road closure in the usual way, they allowed the Countryside Alliance to publish an article clearly blaming YOU for the fiasco, and threatening to take legal action against you. This fabrication was repeated by Somerset Live.</p> <p>These are my questions:</p> <p>Why has Somerset County Council not refuted the accusations made by the Cotley Hunt (via CA and Somerset Live) and put the record straight by telling the actual truth?</p> <p>Why was AAF misled with vague promises of action by SCC Highways Department in 2022 when it became apparent in the run up to Boxing Day that they had no real intention of doing anything at all?</p> <p>Why do we need to campaign to get SCC to treat the hunts in the same way as everyone else? Why is this not happening anyway?</p> <p><i>Response from Cllr Mike Rigby, Lead Member for Transport and Digital</i></p> <p><i>Officers drafting response Bev Norman</i></p> <p><i>Thank you for your questions. I appreciate that this is an emotive subject and note your concerns regarding the hunt and road closures. It is simply not true that we made promises of action whilst having the intent of not doing anything at all. The hunts are being treated in the same way as any other event organiser.</i></p>
<b>Alyson Rogers</b>	<u>Cotley hunt – Council Meeting 22 February 2023</u>

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Action Against Foxhunting brought The Coltey Harriers Limited to the councils attention in 2021 and 2022, as my friend has explained.

The Hunt said that they would not be closing the road on Boxing Day 2022.

Cotley Harriers publicly blamed you the council, saying they did apply for road closure and that the council mismanaged their paperwork.

I was at the Boxing Day event, I have photo and film evidence of the event and Chard Town cctv will also show clearly, that the roads around Chard, used by the hunt were obstructed on several occasions and hunt staff in hi viz marked with 'Steward' were directing and stopping traffic to allow the hunt to go through, not on the left hand side, but across both lanes of the roads.

The hunt ignored and rode through a red light on a pelican crossing.

Hunt dogs were out of control and running around and in front of traffic.

The public were spilling onto, standing on and walking down the roads following the hunt with traffic trying to go about its business.

The level of aggression and violence at the meet by hunt staff in hi viz, towards me was unbelievable.

Last year the hunt staff threatened me, tripped me up, pushed me around, verbally abused me and after the event one of their staff made a threat to me regarding the safety of my dogs.

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This year, hunt staff in hi viz, surrounded me, tethered me with ropes and tape, moved me around against my will using the ropes, making it impossible for me to move freely or escape.

Not once, but twice, The first assault with two male hunt staff and the second assault with five male hunt staff.

The level of physical and verbal abuse thrown at me by members of the hunt and their staff makes it laughable that, if given a road closure, these same people would be used by the hunt to look after traffic management, security and the safety of the public.

Why does the hunt need to use Chard for their event? why can't they move it to the private land where they hold their point to point? People of Chard do not support the hunt, Why do Chard residents have to put up with this disruption?

The hunt and their staff have used threats, aggression and lies to shut me up. They are victimising me as a member of AAF to discredit me and the organisation I belong to.

Could you tell me:

1. Will you be taking action against the Cotley Harriers Limited in view of their multiple breeches of the law?
2. What will you be doing this year if the hunt do or don't apply for road closure?
3. What is the timescale for these actions?

*Response from Cllr Mike Rigby, Lead Member for Transport and Digital*

*Officers drafting response Bev Norman*

*Thank you for your further questions on this matter. I would expect the police to enforce the law and address concerns at events where they are present. I am confident that they would take appropriate action if any*

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	<p><i>breeches were brought to their attention. The council will continue to liaise with any event organiser who considers that they need a road closure to safely run their event.</i></p>
<p><b>Alan Debenham</b></p>	<p>Here are my three questions :-</p> <p>(1) For the new Taunton Town Council's area, including the proposed new town's precept at over a hundred pounds, and including all the other contributing precept parts to the FULL COUNCIL TAX bills for residents ( e.g. police, fire services ), what is the forecasted percentage increase in the household bills from last year to this ? How unreasonable do you think this increase is at a time when the staff and services are being cut and put under more severe strain : this "pay more for less" yet another old Tory government repeated mantra for yet more austerity for local government public services, making the current cost-of-living crisis even worse and increasing Council Tax, a most unfair and regressive one ?</p> <p>(2) Many Somerset residents like me were strongly against the local and national Tory party push for more centralised "unitary" County and "joined together" Regional local government authorities, mainly on the basis of the serious diminution in democracy from the bottom-up, which my Green Party boldly advocates, and because it also follows Tory party ideology of big cuts in administration services to achieve big savings and cuts in public spending. Now we have Liberal Democrats running Somerset Unitary Council, we still see hardline sackings of staff and millions of pounds of cuts in services having to be made ( 'efficiency savings' to some Tories ) ? Are we ever going to see in Somerset the so-called promised land, especially promoted by the previous Tory administration, of how bigger can be better and cost less ? And, if so, when, and particularly when will we see the 18 Local Community Networks working democratically and administratively at top efficiency level ?</p> <p>(3) What in particular is our new Somerset Council going to be doing on the promotion and provision of Community Renewable Energy schemes and projects to bring down the control and cost of household energy and in combating our cost-of-living, climate change and ecological emergencies, plus combating Tory government</p>

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myth that there is some sort of salvation in more nuclear power, which we all know is both a horrendous unaffordable expense and a radioactive waste disposal nightmare ?

*Q1 Response from Cllr Val Keitch, Lead Member Local Government Reorganisation and Prosperity*

*Thank you for your questions Mr Debenham. In response to your first question; appendix 15 of the Budget Report sets out details of the council tax for all the precepting bodies. The budget for the Taunton Town Council draws together cost estimates for services that are to be transferred which are currently provided by the district council and the affected neighbouring parish councils, special expenses for the current unparished area of Taunton, the Taunton Charter Trustees, and core running costs of a new local council. It is my understanding that the proposed budget also includes funding to provide the new council with spending power for betterment reflecting the determination that the new Town Council will make an impact with improvements for Taunton.*

*Q2 Response from Cllr Bill Revans, Leader of the Council / Cllr Val Keitch, Lead Member Local Government Reorganisation and Prosperity*

*Turning now to your second question - The Government decided that a single unitary council should be set up for Somerset – we are committed to making it work. Our communities want good jobs, good care services, good infrastructure and action to protect our environment – that’s what we’re focused on.*

*A unitary council will free up resources by reducing duplication, having just one Chief Executive and senior management team will save close to £3million alone. We will use this to protect front-line services at a time when all local authorities face unprecedented pressures, and councils elsewhere are in effect bankrupt, having declared Section 114 notices, I cannot see how we would have been able to produce a stable MTFP without those savings.*

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*Local Community Networks (LCNs) have a crucial role in helping this big council stay responsive to local needs. They will take time to mobilise, we expect formal meetings to begin in the Summer and there will be a period of rapid development as communities refine their own priorities.*

*Q3 – Response from Cllr Sarah Dyke, Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change*

*A.3 We are absolutely clear that locally generated and consumed electricity is a key element of our journey to net-zero and Community Energy and Community Energy collectives will play an extremely important part in us attaining these ambitions.*

*We have now started to make some progress and I will attempt to outline two key actions that we currently have underway.*

*Firstly, collectively, the 5 Somerset Councils have pooled some of our limited funding to commission a piece of work to map the Renewable Energy opportunities across the county. This will be akin to a Somerset version of a Local Area Energy Plan.*

*From this work, Renewable Energy opportunities will be able to be identified across Somerset and we can start to have conversations with communities and others around how we can bring these opportunities forward into properly costed, deliverable projects.*

*Secondly, I have convened a meeting with colleagues from Somerset to meet with Councils from across the region and from the Southwest Energy Hub to understand how they have been working with residents to successfully bring forward Community Energy projects across the South-West. This includes officers from Bath and Northeast Somerset, Plymouth and Cornwall. The aim of this meeting is to share expertise, best practice and*

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	<p><i>knowledge and to help shape our thinking in the prioritisation of key projects and where the best opportunities lie - this will also be informed by the Local Area Energy Planning work mentioned earlier.</i></p> <p><i>The meeting is scheduled for early March.</i></p> <p><i>Once we have had these initial discussions we will be in a better position to fully engage with the existing community energy groups across Somerset in a more informed and focused manner.</i></p> <p><i>Officers drafting responses:</i></p> <p><i>Q1 – Alyn Jones / Alastair Higton in liaison with Alison North and Paul Fitzgerald at SWT</i></p> <p><i>Q2 – Alyn Jones / Alastair Higton</i></p> <p><i>Q3 – Abi Lamberti / Jon Doyle / Michele Cusack</i></p>
<p><b>David Preece</b></p>	<p><b>Budget – awaiting his submission</b></p> <p>Mr Preece has been advised of the question submission deadline, but has failed to meet this.</p> <p>Cllr Mike Best has asked for sight of the question (when submitted) before making a decision regarding using his Chair discretion to allow or not.</p>

Annexe B – Member Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question

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<b>Cllr Susannah Hart</b>	<p>I note that on the capital expenditure papers currently before us there is a sum of £108,000 for ‘gypsy site’, for clarity I may add that this is the report’s chosen terminology rather than mine. Please could I have more detail regarding exactly what this money will be spent on, as I have a large number of residents in Glastonbury contacting me about this matter. I would like to formally request a meeting with the Portfolio Holder and Officers concerned in order to be updated on these plans moving forward and trust that there will also be a written response to this question.</p> <p><i>Response from Cllr Liz Leyshon, Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member on Finance and Human Resources</i></p> <p><i>The capital budget was held within Somerset West and Taunton for the provision of new sites and refurbish existing sites. There is currently no specific site/s earmarked for this allocation. The budget will transfer over to Somerset Council on the 1st April 2023.</i></p> <p><i>The whole Capital Programme will be reviewed following the 2022/23 outturn.</i></p>
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