

Full Council – 1 March 2023 – Public and Member Questions

	Annexe A – Public Questions
Name of person submitting	Question
Adam Thomas	<p>I would very much like to put forward a question for you to consider at the next full council meeting, later this month.</p> <p>The advent of the new unitary authority, creates a great opportunity to correct at least one injustice done to Somerset since the mid-70s. That of course is the council signage along the northern boundary of the council. At the moment it welcomes people to Somerset, which is inaccurate and incorrect. A different council area you ARE entering, a different county you are NOT.</p> <p>So, my question is as follows;</p> <p>Please can the new Somerset Council replace the signs along its northern border with both North Somerset and Bath & North Somerset Council, with something more sympathetic that recognises that all these councils together form the historic county of Somerset?</p> <p>The transient nature of local government set-ups has played havoc with our historic counties, Somerset more than most. Now though is the perfect time to help correct this, and YOUR generation of councillors can go a long way towards this.</p> <p><i>Response from Cllr Mike Rigby, Lead Member for Transport and Digital</i></p> <p><i>Officers drafting response David Carter</i></p>

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	<p><i>At a time when resources are tight, the new Council is taking a low cost approach to the roll out of the new Council brand, largely replacing current materials when required by wear and tear.</i></p> <p><i>We therefor intend to progressively replace the old Somerset County Council boundary signs as and when they reach the end of their functional life or when we are carrying out major works.</i></p> <p><i>We will remove the existing District Council Boundary signs over the first year of the New Somerset Council and where they mark the external boundary of the New Council Area will install:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome to Somerset for all boundaries with Wilts, Dorset and Devon, and• ‘Somerset Council welcomes you’ for all boundaries with North Somerset and BaNES <p><i>The sign on the M5 can be changed but we would need to organise it with National Highways. Costs are currently unknown.</i></p>
David Redgewell	<p>Question 1.</p> <p>With Somerset County Council owning the West Somerset Railway line and lease the infrastructure to the West Somerset Railway Plc, what action is the County Council Transport Department taking to make sure this vital tourist link to West Somerset is open from this spring to passenger services.</p> <p>With the landslide at Tribble Bridge on the A358 near Combe Florey which also effected the highway, a large part of the line was covered in mud and potatoes, has discussion and action be taken with the farmer to make sure this does not happen again.</p> <p>With experts including Network Rail Western being brought in to assess the situation what progress is being made to get line reopened.</p> <p>Question 2</p>

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What progress is being made on reopening the West Somerset Railway to through trains with First Group Plc, Great Western Railway, Network Rail Western, Heart of the Southwest Local Enterprises partnership and Southwest Peninsula Transport Board for train services between Taunton and Bishop Lydeard.

Question 3

With the importance of the First Group Southwest of England Buses of Somerset Service 28 from Taunton town centre, hopefully Taunton Transport Hub soon to Watchet and Minehead to work with First Group Great Western Railway to promote bus rail integration improvements to bus shelters along the route including improvement to bus interchanges at Bishops Lydeard Station, Watchet Station, Minehead town centre and bus shelters at Minehead Railway Station including bus branding with Rail Link on the side.

Minehead is also a bus interchange for Lynmouth and Ilfracombe via Porlock and the town bus service.

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

Officers drafting response Mike O'Dowd-Jones

Question 1

We have been in contact with WSR since the partial collapse and are monitoring the situation with regard to the Railway re-opening in the spring and will assist if requested and where we can act to support WSR. We would point out that the maintenance of the physical rail infrastructure is the responsibility of WSR.

Our Area Highways team have been dealing with the runoff issues from the field and working with the Farmer to prevent any re-occurrence. Once the field is returned to pasture this spring this should prevent any future incidents,

Question 2

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	<p><i>The parties are meeting regularly to move this project forward. An initial draft of a business case including the strategic and economic benefits of the proposals has been prepared by the Council’s engineering consultancy working with the LEP transport advisor. Cost and value for money of capital works are currently being refined and further work is needed before completion A stakeholder engagement process is being developed.</i></p> <p><i>Questions 3</i></p> <p><i>Service 28 is a commercial service that provides a vital link between Minehead and Taunton serving Taunton railway station to facilitate greater integration between bus and rail. The responsibility for management and maintenance of bus shelters currently sits with the District Councils but this will be reviewed as part of the move to unitary to determine how this will be managed going forwards and to develop a strategy for future delivery.</i></p>
Sarah Little	<p>Good afternoon and thank you for listening.</p> <p>My colleagues from AAF spoke to you last week on the subject of three of the local hunts which were brought to the Council’s attention for not having had the required TTROs in place for their Boxing Day Events in our towns last year. These hunts went on to insist either, or both, to have had permission (from the police - not the issuing authority) and/ or to lay at the Council’s door the blame for them not having had these secured in time. My part in our campaign focussed on the Seavington Hunt's Boxing Day Event in Crewkerne.</p> <p>AAF had understood (as was wholly reasonable and so we assume the Council did also), that when the Council put out its statement of 20th December 2022 regarding Boxing Day hunt parades to say: “two have confirmed they will meet on private land and the third will not be closing the road” (and that third being the Cotley Hunt), that both the Seavington Hunt and the Blackmore and Sparkford Vale would not be entering the towns of Crewkerne and Castle Cary respectively.</p> <p>While the BSV did stay away, the Seavington did not.</p> <p>We imagine the Council will agree this shows a blatant disregard for any authority, for the law, and for the health and safety of the public.</p>

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	<p>AAF understands the Council and the Police are this year to write a joint letter to the local hunts explaining that they should apply for an order to temporarily close the road if they intend to meet and gather in any of our village- or town-centres on Boxing Day 2023.</p> <p>MY QUESTIONS:-</p> <p>Please can you confirm that this is the case and that these Orders will be TTROs?</p> <p>Please will you put this to a timescale for first contact and any follow-ups in the event of no initial reply?</p> <p>Please will you confirm that costs are to be charged to each Hunt individually, and not shared?</p> <p>Please can you confirm that “the local hunts” means all Hunts local to Somerset County which hold Boxing Day Events, these being: the BSV, Cotley, Seavington; the Mendip Farmers’ Hunt, the Weston & Barnwell and the Taunton Vale?”</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. Officers have already engaged with a number of these hunt groups about their Boxing Day events and will be writing to those they are not already engaged within the next few months. If road closures are required, the appropriate legislation will be used and the costs for processing any closures will be fully recovered from the event organisers.</i></p>
<p>Nigel Behan</p>	<p>The Budget Monitoring report for February and (December) noted:</p> <p>“90% of the ASC budget is spent on individual placements purchased through the market via block and spot placements. Therefore, there is a significant risk that this budget will continue to overspend. This is due to increase</p>

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demand, the cost-of[1]living rise, particularly the increase in petrol, gas, electric, and food. Alongside this our neighbouring authorities, due to lack of supply in their areas, are wanting to purchase additional beds in Somerset at significantly higher cost than we currently purchase these beds.”

“We have therefore built into this budget £5.4m amount to stabilise and have sufficiency in the market.”
(December)

(Whilst the October report noted: “**Competitive Market failure** – As an organisation we commission a large amount of our services and that has been a good way of keeping our costs down. We are now seeing a failure of the competitive market across a range of areas but with a particular high impact in social care, with very significant cost increases in Children’s external placements and Adults residential & nursing care. The spiralling costs in these areas are putting the councils’ budgets under significant pressure.”)

- a) Does this indicate a (more than) significant problem in the so called “care market” that some eulogise at length in some Local Authority “commissioning” circles – should Local Authorities have to manage, for people who require Social Care, according to what other Councils are willing to “offer” “financially”?
- b) What other models of Adult (and Children’s) Social Care will the new Unitary Council explore rather than commissioning (procurement and contract management etc.) and the vagaries of the “care market”?
- c) What amount of (spreadsheet) cash is “built” into the (ASC) budget for these scenarios, in the new Unitary Authority budget for 2023/2024 – and what discussions are taking place with the Local Government Association (LGA) to avoid Local Authorities appearing to “compete” in this less than “joined up” manner?

Cllr Heather Shearer, Lead Member for Adult Social Care

Question a

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	<p><i>With the increase demand on social care and where supply of certain types of care delivery are limited, local authorities are having to look outside of their area boundaries to be able to secure and meet the needs of their population. This does cause additional pressures for host authorities and can lead to a competitive approach to the delivery of care, impacting on supply and cost of care provision.</i></p> <p><i>Question b</i></p> <p><i>Adult Social Care commissioners under the Care Act (2014) have legislative responsibilities for the sustainability and growth of the social care market. Commissioners are currently investigating a number of different models of care delivery, including partnership approaches, local alliances and whether providing services directly would enable better outcomes for the users of services. The critical element is to ensure sufficient high quality services that are able to adapt to the changing needs of the Somerset population.</i></p> <p><i>Question c</i></p> <p><i>As part of the overall adults budget, £17million has been allocated to support the phased implementation of the ‘Cost of Care’ exercise. This funding will support the social care market’s sustainability and growth, enabling the sector to develop to meet the needs of those people supported via Adult Social Care. With support from ADASS Southwest, commissioners from Somerset are working in conjunction with neighbouring authorities to understand areas within the market where a combined commissioning approach will enable efficiency, manage fee expectations and prevent the need to commission services outside of designated area boundaries.</i></p>
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Annexe B – Member Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question

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Cllr Leigh Redman

Support for Councillors.

I am proud that Somerset County Council works very hard to support our staff when they are in need, from workplace assessments while home working through to medical support to return to work following an illness, we have 110 councillors in the new council, often they are in similar circumstances and, I feel, are as much a part of the council, in some cases working many hours in their role supporting council and their constituents.

Can the Executive member confirm if this support extends to Councillors, and if this is in place, can the executive member confirm how members might access this essential support?

Thank you and Stay safe

Response from Cllr Liz Leyshon, Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member on Finance and Human Resources

Officers drafting response Chris Squire / Clive Mallon / Andrew Melhuish

Thank you for the question, I can confirm that County Councillors are included with our contracts for Rapid Access to Physio, Employee Assistance Programme (Counselling service) and Occupational Health provision and can access the Working Well Together site on the intranet, which hosts a series of useful wellbeing resources. We also have the Learning Centre that has a range of training such as Health and Safety, H&S building induction etc. Internal support and resources also exist, such as our trained Mental Health First Aiders, again, each of these support mechanisms are available for elected members to access.

The Council's health and safety team are currently developing 'Personal Safety and Handling Intimidation' guidance for elected members, the guidance provides practical advice that can be taken in situations where elected members feel intimidated or threatened in the undertaking of their duties. In May, the safety team intend on introducing the guidance while also delivering a presentation to ensure members have an appropriate awareness of

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arrangements for managing health and safety in the council. The safety team are also on hand to support Democratic Services with advice, guidance, and development of risk assessments pertaining to member activities.

The Scheme of Members Allowances also sets out provisions around sickness absence and Statutory Sick Pay, where members are unwell and unable to attend scheduled meetings. The scheme also provides for members who wish to take parental leave following the birth or adoption of a child, along with offering a carers' allowance to support members to undertake approved duties.

Details are available on the Council's Intranet page and Member Resource Site and officers from the Democratic Services Team will arrange to issue a Member Information Sheet setting out how councillors can access this information. This will also include an article in the Members Core Brief setting out the services available to members.