

Budget Full Council – 20 February 2024 – Public and Member Questions

Annexe A – Public Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question
David Preece	<p>Question 1a - How can this Council accept and adopt this 2024/25 BUDGET SET - As Balanced and Achievable?? Where are the Authority Administration STAFF Cost SAVINGS? (I note in Report)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GENERAL Revenue Funding! 2023 Page 9/40 HR Implications -! Whatever that is SUPPOSED TO IMPLY £££££ EXCESS COSTS NO DOUBT! For Staff continuing to work from Home! WHY - Are they still? - THAT WAS EMERGENCY Covid Measures! <p>Where is the REDUCTION IN 2024 /25 - I see there is a Proposed reduction, in Administration - But No detail for 2025/26! On actual Savings / Costs!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AS NORMAL THERE IS NO MEAT ON THE BONE!! FACTS AND FIGURES THE FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS! (Just Proposed outcomes & Projections!) So as can be chewed over! And see just where wastage is! where SAVINGS CAN BE ACHIEVED! LIKE THE CHIEF EXEC OFFICE AND STAFFING LEVELS - @ What Cost Annually to Administer these CIVIL SERVANTS Salaries / Pensions - Office Staffing Levels (Those who still come to SC HQ More than 2 Days a week!! DO WE REALLY NEED THEM ALL!! And also, the ANNUAL COSTS OF - ARMINGTON MANAGEMENT Auditors & James Laing La Saville! When we EMPLOY such in-house Professional experienced staff!! Surely the Auditors are required only oversee & to sign off the Accounts for the Government to ensure Compliance! It's Like the Council marking its own Homework - giving 95/100 -BUT SHOULD & Could Do better! UNITARY COUNCILLORS - You are Just Kicking the Can!! So, to speak! THE FINAL DEBT - Down the Road - until 2027/28! LEAVING US THE SOMERSET RESIDENTS TO FOOT THE BILL FOR YOUR FAILURES for NOT CHALLENGING These Projections by Officers!

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Or an incoming Future Administration!! 2028/ 09 after next UNITARY ELECTIONS

NOTE - (Background Context from your Document - WITH THE BUDGET SHORTFALLS FORECAST AS FOLLOWS -

2024/25 - £36.7 m

2025-26 - £67.3m

2026/27 - £ £43.9m ESTIMATES -! MOST LIKELY EVEN HIGHER!

With The Somerset 'Unitary Council 'BORROWING requirements ANNUALLY proposed @ OVER NEXT 4 YEARS -

2024/25 - £777.095 MILLION POUNDS

2025/26 - £ 820.m

2026/27 - £ 810m

Increased from - The 2023/24 £733m WHICH HAS LED THIS COUNCIL TO NEAR financial BANKRUPTCY NOW!! AN INCREASE OF

£47.9m

AS WAS WARNED BY YOUR own 151 Financial Officer - in this very room 12 months ago!

YET YOU STILL CARRIED ON WITH YOUR planned EXPENDITURE.

SPENDING - ARE YOU SERIOUS??

You have the Task to Present a Balanced Budget?? Not a SPREAD SHEET OF unattainable! OUTCOMES! & MAYBE's!! POSSIBLE HOPES!!

When like the 2023/24 passed BUDGET SET! IT WAS NOT APPROVED By your OWN 151 FINANCE Officer -who WARNED last year that it was not achievable - Resulting in POSSIBLE SECTION BANKRUPTCY NOTICE!! Council in DEBT -

NOT A BALANCED BUDGET! AS REQUIRED BY LAW.

Just hopeful that you can sell enough Of FAMILY SILVER - Ei Former DISTRICT COUNCIL Property! (When the Market is FLAT?)

YOU HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO GET BEST VALUE! For Us THE SOMERSET Residents! Not just a FIRE SALE!!

TO BALANCE YOUR FAILURES!!

Likewise-

How Can you present 2025/26 and 2026/27 Forecast with?

NO EMERGENCY RESERVES ALLOCATED - Listed as £ ZERO - WITHIN THE published FIGURES!

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Question 1b - / Appendix C -

DETAILS OF MAJOR CAPITAL PROJECTS!

First Announced 2021/22 - How many more times is this FIGURE GOING TO BE ANNOUNCED? £23.2 m CONSERVATIVE CENTRAL - Government Grant Levelling Up Funding

For BRIDGWATER (Without the EXTRA 'e' as in the TEXT CONTENT

DIVERSIFYING! 'CELEBRATION MILE' from the Station to the Docks!

Total WASTE OF MONEY! - £ (8) EIGHT MILLION POUNDS

DIVIDING BRIDGWATER - Rather than DIVERSIFYING! To make EASTOVER Into

One Way ONLY! Narrowing the Paved area either side - Road to SINGLE CARRIAGEWAY - NO UNLOADING FOR HGV's 40-44 Tonne Delivering to Retail Shops - with NO REAR ACCESS THEREFORE BLOCKING THE ROAD DAILY DELIVERIES TO CONTINENTAL SUPERMARKETS LOCATED THERE.....

BUT GREAT More places Street Furniture for the Town Bridge DRUNKS TO LOITER ON "Shouting and Swearing All Day....."

But this was PLANNED DURING EMERGENCY COVID - By SCC to IMPLEMENT WITHOUT ANY CONSULTATION WITH RESIDENTS - As the Presentation was only Arranged in Last 3 Months -

The SCHEME & CONTRACT - out for Tender and Awarded to a Firm! On the other side of Country to do the work! BEFORE BTC had its SO-CALLED PUBLIC CONSULTATION - Called by Cllr Smedley - as usual too late in the day!

DEMOCRACY @ its worst under SC and BTC....

Question 1c - SO WHERE - is the NEW HIGHWAY SPENDING - FOR BRIDGWATER IN THIS YEAR'S BUDGET??

NEW ROUNDABOUTS-

Highways Pothole repairs in and around BRIDGWATER-

Replacement of Highway - Road Safety Barriers St John's School - Westonzoyland Rd. Weed Removal etc - A GREAT LOOK- Not!

ON APPROACHING FROM Westonzoyland / Langport. EAST BOWER ...DUNWEAR LANE-

With 530 new homes FOLLETT'S Farm! proposed - yet 106 monies £600k allocated to DUNBALL ROUNDABOUT UPGRADE?? How is that going to relieve TRAFFIC On Westonzoyland Rd ...into BRIDGWATER.

OBVIOUSLY, IT WILL NOT!!

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Then your OWN PLANNED 750 housing UNITS OFF BOWER LANE SC Land holdings former Tenanted Farm - exiting from the internal Development Spine Rd into Bower Lane - By Penrose School & BRIDGWATER COMMUNITY HOSPITAL - adjoining existing BOWER ESTATE HOUSING RESIDENTIAL NOW GRIDLOCKED TRAFFIC!!

PROPOSED 400 more than THE 20Yr SEDGEMOOR Forward Plan We Approved -As we the then SDC Councillors & Executive passed, then in SDC Planning back in 2004-5. APPROVED For 1200 in TOTAL EAST BOWER -

NOW with SC 400 plus EXTRA TAKING IT To 1500-1600 - which through your OWN NOW SC / North Planning COMMITTEE - your DELEGATED Planning Officers will force through for Councillors to approve!

TOTAL DISREGARDING OF LOCAL EXISTING RESIDENTS' VIEWS & CONCERNS!

DISMISSING US - The Residents LEGITIMATE OBJECTIONS - AS WITH FOLLETT'S FARM PLANNING LAST YEAR - & It's NUMBERS / TRAFFIC IMPLICATIONS On EXISTING RESIDENTS (Contrary to NEW LEVELLING UP RULES ON IMPACT!

Despite it adding (Your SC Highways Figures 2300 DAILY VEHICLE MOVEMENTS IN AND OUT OF THE DEVELOPMENT) Onto an ALREADY HEAVILY BURDENED Westonzoyland - To Bridgwater MAIN Road INTO BRIDGWATER Town Centre. AGAIN, BY ANOTHER SCHOOL St John's Primary @ 20 mph SPEED RESTRICTIONS AND school patrol crossing "Lollipop PERSON "Twice a day holding up Traffic @ School Times!!

YOU @ SC DO NOT LISTEN - Nor ACT - CHANGE YOUR FIXED NOTIONS!! WHY? Not!!

Because you know BEST!! For us in Somerset!!

(Cynically Yours David L PREECE.)

That's 7000 EXTRA Residents EAST BRIDGWATER - And VEHICLES ON OUR GRIDLOCKED ROADS INTO TOWN ROADS! NO PLANNED INCREASE TO BUS SERVICE >> into BRIDGWATER - @ Present. One Langport Bus every 2 Hours - to and from the Central Town ASDA STORE

One Now after 12 months Delayed under Construction - Yet 3 more DEFERRED Roundabouts - The Canon A39 BATH / A38 BRISTOL ROADS JUNCTION - AGAIN THIS WAS PROPOSED! 2003/2011 when I sat on SDC PLANNING - Delayed again after 15 plus YEARS!! Not ACCEPTABLE -

Whilst other TOWNS ACROSS SOMERSET HAVE MULTIMILLION HIGHWAY SCHEMES APPROVED AND BUILT - What DID YOU SCC - same Admin! DO WITH All the MILLIONS from HINKLEY C. HIGHWAY MITIGATION FUNDING -!! Squandered across

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	<p>Somerset - Certainly NOT WHERE HEAVIEST IMPACTS OF NEW NUCLEAR TRAFFIC HGV / PSV WOULD IMPACT - our roads ~ STILL!!</p> <p>- No New RELIEF ROADS! Or By- Passes / Ring Roads for BRISGWATER. JUST DEFERRED OR DELAYED - or CANCELLED. 70 YEARS - since 1948-9 post War.</p> <p>A39 Bath Rd Woolavington Junction - For Access Housing and Former ROF Site.</p> <p>YET PLENTY ££££££££££ SPENDING ACROSS THE COUNTY ELSEWHERE</p> <p>Yet CYCLE (routes for the few! To abuse! Not use! Whilst holding up main rd Traffic elsewhere -</p> <p>With the TIME RESTRAINT TO 3 Questions - per Speaker / 3 Minutes - no right of reply! to FOLLOW UP- When the Answers not given!!</p> <p>Response from the (Q1) Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon, (Q2) Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke and (Q3) Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Cllr Richard Wilkins</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>Liz Leyshon 1a – Thank you Mr Preece for your questions. I will respond to your first question on the financial sustainability of Somerset Council. You may have had the benefit of reading the report from the cross-party Levelling Up, Housing & Communities Committee that was published recently under the title “Financial Distress in local authorities”. Our Section 151 officer refers to that report in his Section 25 report which is item 6 on our Agenda today, and I hope that you will be able to remain with us for that item this morning if not for the entire Agenda.</p> <p>It is very clear that Somerset Council is not an outlier amongst upper tier Councils and the report includes many quotes that make it clear that the funding model is broken, that Council Tax does not work as a funding mechanism for social care, and that we need a cross party, national conversation on the future of social care services and funding. That conversation needs to commence before, and continue after, the General Election this year, and also include the pressures on Children’s Services, including SEND and transport, and housing and homelessness.</p>

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We may be one of the first councils to undergo this level of very significant transformation. You can be sure that we will not be the last, and I can assure you that the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees and the Chair of Audit Committee will be giving their full attention to the Council's progress on transformation.

In his Section 25 report, the Section 151 officer has committed to regular updates for Members with regard to the ongoing risk of a Section 114 notice.

Ros Wyke 1b

- The former Sedgemoor District Council identified the Celebration Mile as a transformational project in the Bridgwater Vision, which underwent consultation and was subsequently agreed and adopted by the Council in 2009.
- The Vision was subsequently included in the Sedgemoor District Council Local Plan 2011-2032 which specifically developed further the policies to amplify and explain the transformational projects, specifically in this case the Celebration Mile. The Local Plan was subject to extensive consultation and independent examination by the Planning Inspector.
- Further work on the project was produced in the Eastover Supplementary Planning Document which examined the different options available for re-ordering the traffic circulation and again underwent extensive public consultation. It was approved and adopted by Sedgemoor District Council in 2014.
- The Bridgwater Vision went through a refresh in 2015.
- The Council received pro bono highways consultant advice where a workshop was conducted which included; local businesses, community groups, SDC and Town Council Members. This kept the project in peoples mind and, also provided the opportunity to refine the ideas that were developed as part the Eastover SPD and included within a report in December 2017. Other extensive public consultations were held at Bridgwater Station and Angel Place and meetings with many community groups undertaken such as Civic Society and Older Persons Forum.
- The Bridgwater Town Investment Plan was produced in 2021 and which resulted in the Council successfully securing £23m in Towns Fund grant from central Government, it included the Celebration Mile elements about to be delivered. This plan was

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extensively consulted upon within the community and included specifically the Celebration Mile project for delivery. (**Stuart Martin**)

Richard Wilkins 1c With reference to the comments relating to the East Bridgwater strategic housing allocation (Policy B3 of the adopted Sedgemoor Local Plan) it should be noted that the associated adopted development and design guide suggests 1,350 new homes in this location. Housing targets are also expressed as minimums in the local plan with the final scale of dependant informed by detailed assessments through the planning application process.

The allocation always envisaged a new spine road connecting Westonzoyland Road to the A39 as well as additional traffic mitigation based on detailed traffic impact assessments. Contributions towards additional off-site highway works are to be secured through S.106 agreement along with funding for travel planning. In addition to this, contributions are also secured for the improvement to Dunball roundabout. This is necessary to address wider concerns raised by National Highways in respect of impacts on the strategic route network (M5 and Junction 23) and is consistent with the approach applied to other housing developments in and around Bridgwater.

The planning process provides the appropriate mechanism for consideration of objections and with respect to the Folletts Farm application, all objections were carefully considered and reported to the Development Committee. The application was deferred to enable additional information to be presented that addressed concerns around traffic, scale of development and noise mitigation. Local objections were not therefore ignored or dismissed, however the issues raised were mitigated through changes to the planning proposal.

With regard to the current application for up to 750 dwellings and the new spine road on the remainder of the allocated land, this has yet to be presented to the Development Committee and therefore no decision has yet been made on this. It would therefore be premature to speculate on the outcome of the current planning process.

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Martin Pakes	<p>General Statement on the 2024-25 budget</p> <p>Question 2a - What are the consequences if the Council fails to bridge the financial gap of £104 million in the 2025-2026 budget?</p> <p>Response from the Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon</p>
Full written response	<p>Response from Liz Leyshon</p> <p>The legal position is that a section 114 report is issued by the Council's section 151 officer, having informed the Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer. The Department of Levelling up, Housing & Communities, and Grant Thornton as the Council External auditors, would also be informed. There would then need to be a special meeting of Council within 21 days to consider the report and agree an action plan.</p> <p>The Secretary of State would then consider what actions he would take which is usually the appointment of Commissioners.</p> <p>As an Administration we are aware of the experiences of other Councils where Government has appointed Commissioners. We have asked officers to ensure this Council has taken every action possible to keep the Council in local control. We do not wish to spend a single penny of Somerset people's money paying Commissioners high fees and expenses when we know they will take decisions without local knowledge, without love for and commitment to the County of Somerset. We will continue to exercise that determination as we move into 2024/25 (pending the vote on the budget today, of course), with full knowledge and understanding of the scale of the challenge ahead.</p>
Estelle Smillie	<p>Budget Cuts</p> <p>Question 3a - * Please don't reduce or close any recycling or waste sites; it's false economy as fly tipping will be the inevitable outcome</p> <p>* Voluntary Organisations: you get such a bang for your buck supporting this sector. Highlighting just a couple : Citizens Advice is so critical for people in crisis both financial and emotional;</p>

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	<p>YMCAs do so much for young people and their communities and with the shocking demise of youth services in particular, prevention is better and cheaper than cure.</p> <p>*Tourist Information Centre. Cutting their funding would be cutting your nose off to spite your face. In Taunton, put it back in the library or explore siting them in a store eg WHSmith alongside the Post Office.</p> <p>So how can you generate income?</p> <p>* Please negotiate with the national government about extending Council Tax beyond band H so those with the broadest shoulders help out more. Those who are capital rich but revenue poor, can still attract tax rebates.</p> <p>* Get our friendly traffic wardens to warn then fine people for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- parking on pavements-dropping litter- dog fouling <p>* Have a real drive to promote adoption and fostering in Somerset. This would reduce costs dramatically and be a much better outcome for young people and the families who take them on.</p> <p>Response from the Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon</p>
Full written response	<p>We fully recognise that the current system for funding local government is broken and will actively continue to campaign for reform. We fully support the findings of the recent report from the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee on ‘Financial distress in local authorities’. The report highlights the significant financial challenges faced by the sector. In its summary it says:</p> <p><i>“It is no surprise that the financial crisis that local authorities are encountering comes after significant reductions in local authorities’ spending power which has itself coincided with increasing demand for their services and inflationary pressures driving up costs. Ultimately, the levels of funding available to local authorities, through council tax, retained</i></p>

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business rates, and government grants have not kept pace with these pressures, leading to a funding gap which is already estimated at £4 billion over the next two years.”

It also highlights the problems with the current funding system, with the fair funding reviews promised but the anticipated reforms not materialising and now deferred into the next parliament.

“This has meant that local authorities are increasingly reliant on income from council tax to fund service delivery. However, council tax is regressive, long overdue for reform, and is contributing to a disproportionately negative impact on funding levels of local authorities in the most deprived areas of the country. Furthermore, the business rates retention scheme is increasingly misaligned with local authorities’ current spending needs and the government has not delivered on its earlier commitments to review and reform the scheme. The Government must urgently reform these core funding mechanisms to ensure that the levels of demand and cost pressures faced by local authorities are adequately considered in determining their funding levels.”

The report recognises that the current financing system for local authorities is both broken and the sector is significantly underfunded by saying:

“In the short term the Government must ensure that local authorities receive sufficient financial support to enable them to continue delivering the services that people need.”

In the longer term, I agree with your thoughts about reform of Council Tax. I wholly support your creative ideas on delivery of services as well as giving more local control on such things as fees and charges. I also pay tribute to the bold and capable Parish, Town and City Councils that have stepped up on devolution of assets and services. How quickly we are able to move this work


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	<p>forward will be of critical importance and we are looking to ensure effective and efficient use of resources in that important strand of work.</p> <p>I would encourage you, and everyone else, to ensure that Parliamentary candidates of all political colours understand the challenges for local councils, so that the next Parliament and Government is full of people who understand what local authorities do, why they are so important and have already thought about possible solutions. Thank you.</p> <p>Heather Shearer: We recognise the need to increase the number of foster carers we have for our children and have been running a national award winning campaign called “Change a child’s story” on social media, television and radio for over a year. We also have stands at local events, such as Taunton Pride and meet people in the community to raise the profile of fostering. This is starting to bear fruit with an anticipated increase of 5 foster carers by the end of this financial year. This may sound like a small number – however in the context of a national fostering recruitment crisis this is a real gain. We always need more foster carers so anything you can do to encourage people to apply would be helpful too.</p> <p>In relation to adoption, in 2017 the government required Local authorities to become part of regional adoption agencies. This meant that recruitment and support of adopters became regionalised. The adoption agency we are part of is led by Devon County Council. We work hard together to recruit adopters and we are able to place children with adopters where that is the best plan for them. However, in common with fostering, there is a national decrease in people coming forward to adopt. We would be grateful to hear any ideas that you have that may help the regional agency in this area</p>
<p>Karuna Tharmananthar</p>	<p>Climate Action Taunton</p> <p>Question 4a - My question relates to Item 11 MTFP for 2024-25. The report states in unequivocal terms the financial pressures the council is under not only for this year but also in future years with the risk of a S114 notice being issued for 2025/26. My question relates to 'Other Implications', as set out in paragraphs 31 to 36, where under each of these items the report states that there are no 'direct impact' arising from the financial pressures the council is under and the actions proposed.</p>


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	<p>As a resident who is a community volunteer I come across many instances where peoples lives are being adversely affected by the Council services in housing, transport, health & social care not being inadequate. It is clear that the resources afforded to these services are insufficient to the demands being made. Given this context please explain to why there are no direct impact arising from the decisions set out in this report?</p> <p>I feel that it is so important to be direct and accurate with the community about the difficult issues the council is having to deal with.</p> <p>Thank you</p> <p>Response from the Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon</p>
Full written response	<p>Liz Leyshon: Thank you very much for your considered and valuable question. Having worked in the arts in Somerset for more than thirty years, I entirely understand your concern and am pleased to say that last November the Executive of this Council committed to multiple year funding agreements for Citizens Advice and Spark in order to ensure ongoing support for the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector of Somerset. I will ensure that the link to that paper is included in my written response to your question.</p> <p>https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/b21397/Supplement%202%20-%20Voluntary%20Community%20Faith%20and%20Social%20Enterprise%20Strategic%20Funding%2008th-Nov-2023%2010.pdf?T=9</p> <p>The implications of all budget savings are set out in the individual Savings Proposals (Appendix 7 on Item 11) and listed as the supporting documents to the reports being considered by Council today.</p> <p>The individual Equality Impact Assessment forms can be found by following the link to supporting documents on page 6 of the pack:</p>

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	<p>https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/eccatdisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=13332&path=13332&libraryview=list</p> <p>The Medium Term Financial Plan Cumulative Impact report for 2024/25 is Appendix No 15 to Item 11 (page 445 of the pack): https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s25591/Appendix%2015%20-%20MTFP%20Cumulative%20Impact%20Report%2024.25.pdf</p> <p>My thanks are due to the officers who have worked on all these supporting documents, which are extremely important to all Members voting on the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2024/25 today.</p>
Alison Morgan	<p>Aztec West</p> <p>Question 5a -</p> <p> SC 20 Feb 2024_AM.pdf</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke</p>
Full written response	<p>Thank you for your question regarding Aztec West 600. This is a legacy commercial investment agreed by the previous administration at Sedgemoor District Council. Please note that when I was an opposition member at Sedgemoor District Council I was against this investment.</p> <p>I made enquiries about the position of this investment shortly after vesting day of Somerset Council in April 2023, when we inherited this legacy position. The answer was and remains that Elbit Systems UK Limited has a lease term which runs until March 2029 with no break options for either party.</p>

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	<p>Unfortunately, this being the case the lease as a contract between the parties and under the appropriate landlord and tenant legislation provides no power for Somerset Council, as landlord, to terminate, except in the event of default. The current use is in accordance with the permitted use as offices and there are no other grounds to seek termination. There is, therefore, no legal route for us to terminate the lease.</p> <p>In conclusion, based on this legal position, we are unable to terminate this lease, as you would like. I understand that there has been an offer of a discussion of alternative legal advice and Somerset Council officers have kindly agreed to meet with you to discuss this.</p> <p>Somerset Council has started a programme of disposal of our commercial assets. This property is allocated in the first wave. We also have a legal duty to get the best value for this property on behalf our residents.</p>
<p>Helen from The Future of Somerset</p>	<p>Climate and other initiatives Question 6a –</p> <div data-bbox="297 879 499 1007" style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;">  <p>Presentation for full council by Helen on b</p> </div> <p>Response from Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Dixie Darch and Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Cllr Richard Wilkins</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>Dixie Darch</p> <p>Climate change is a scientific fact that is supported by multiple numerous sources of credible evidence. Climate Change, and its impacts on the world we live in, is one of the most significant issues facing us all today. The human effects on global warming are well publicised and understood and pressure is mounting for Governments around the world to take immediate action. In response</p>

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	<p>to the overwhelming evidence, and growing concern from local communities and residents for urgent action, all five of the former district and county councils in Somerset passed resolutions declaring or recognising a Climate Emergency. Building a greener, more sustainable Somerset remains one of our four key priorities agreed in our Council Plan.</p> <p>Richard Wilkins</p> <p>In terms of your specific questions, I can confirm that the council is not planning to use technology such as numberplate recognition to restrict people’s right to move between places. Such technology is of course used regularly in a wide range of situations for routine enforcement matters such as for parking management and bus gates etc and will continue to be used. I can confirm that the flower planters outside Prezzo are not part of a low traffic neighbourhood scheme.</p> <p>Details of the celebration mile consultation were covered in the response to an earlier question.</p>
<p>Drew Thompson</p>	<p>Petition to save Castle Cary HWRC</p> <p>This petition is in response to MTFP 2024/25 – 2028/29 Savings Proposal – CAP010, to close 5 Household Waste Recycling Centres, and specifically Castle Cary - Dimmer. We request that Somerset Council keep Castle Cary - Dimmer open and not included in the closures.</p> <p>This petition was created and administered on change.org with URL: https://www.change.org/SayNoToDimmer</p> <p>Say No! to Somerset Council’s plan to close our recycling site at Castle Cary – Dimmer</p> <p>Why this petition matters:</p> <p><i>In an attempt to gain control of the budget Somerset Council has a proposal, Somerset Council MTFP 2024/25 – 2028/29 Savings Proposal – CAP010, to close 5 recycling sites. One of the sites target for closure is Castle Cary - Dimmer.</i></p> <p><i>We believe that this is not in the best interest of "A Greener, More Sustainable Somerset" and is not “reasonably accessible” as proposed by the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and further documented by Waste Resources and Action Programme (WRAP) guide "HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRE (HWRC) GUIDE".</i></p> <p>We oppose Savings Proposal – CAP010, to close 5 Household Waste Recycling Centres and specifically Castle Cary – Dimmer which we believe is detrimental to "A Greener, More Sustainable Somerset". The comments of the petitioners are included after the signatures in this petition. The following word cloud was created from the comments, and the noticeable theme is that</p>

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the petitioners believe that the closure will increase **fly tipping** in our beautiful Somerset countryside. This directly contradicts the councils goal of a “**Greener, More Sustainable Somerset**”. As concerned residents, we cherish Somerset’s scenic landscapes. Keeping Castle Cary – Dimmer Recycling Centre open aligns with our commitment to maintaining the county’s natural beauty.

The proposal states fly tipping may happen:

Question 7a - *What is the anticipated impact on service delivery to residents or business?*

Residents from those areas where site closures occur would need to travel further to their nearest operational site, would likely encounter longer queues to enter the sites caused by the condensing of the site network and may choose to fly tip as a result of either the further commute or access congestion

And the proposal has allocated a budget for picking up the trash:

Withhold 10% of the savings to provide additional funding should there be an increase in flytipping.

This funding does not help citizens when fly tipping occurs on private land, where the landowner is responsible for cleaning it up.

We oppose Savings Proposal – CAP010, to close 5 Household Waste Recycling Centres and specifically Castle Cary – Dimmer which we believe is NOT “**reasonably accessible**”, as defined by the Environmental Protection Act 1990 section 51. According to the Waste Resources and Action Programme (WRAP) guide “HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRE (HWRC) GUIDE,” the maximum catchment radii for a large proportion of the population should be 3 to 5 miles, with an extension to 7 miles in very rural areas. Assuming that most of Somerset is considered very rural, the maximum catchment radii should be 7 miles. The proposed closure of Castle Cary – Dimmer Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) breaches this guideline. The “CAP010 Equality Impact Assessment Closing 5 Recycling Sites” primarily focuses on costs and savings. We urge the council to consider the holistic impact of this decision, including its effects on the local environment, community well-being, and sustainable waste management. This diagram shows the 16 HWRC and a 7 mile catchment area. The yellow circles are HWRC that are to remain open and the red circles are the HWRC that are proposed for closure:

The proposed removal of HWRCs, as outlined in CAP010, creates a concerning gap in waste disposal accessibility. Specifically, the following diagram highlights a substantial catchment area in the eastern part of the council that lacks coverage within a “reasonably accessible” distance. This situation directly contradicts the guidance provided by the Waste Resources and Action Programme (WRAP) and the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Both emphasize the importance of ensuring that waste facilities

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	<p>remain accessible to residents. We urge the council to consider the holistic impact of this decision, not only in terms of cost savings but also in preserving the well-being of our community and the natural environment.</p> <p>Upon analysing <i>Map 1 – All HWRC in Somerset</i>, we have identified three areas with overlapping catchment zones: Street, Bridgwater, and Crewkerne. These sites should be considered for closure because the impact to the residents will be minimal. In contrast, Castle Cary – Dimmer, which clearly serves the eastern border of the council, should be retained. We urge the council to reconsider its approach and ensure that our waste management decisions align with the best interests of our community and environment.</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Dixie Darch</p>
Full written response	<p>Thank you for the question Mr Thompson. I understand your concerns and appreciate how much communities value their recycling sites as is shown by your petition.</p> <p>I would start by saying that Somerset’s current network of 16 sites gives us the best site per household/population ratio in the South West, apart from the Isles of Scilly. Given the massive pressures on the council’s finances, we have to look at savings from all services and our recycling site network has to be part of that.</p> <p>The closure of any sites would have an impact on the communities they serve, but we are faced with many unpalatable decisions. It’s worth noting that a third of authorities are understood to be considering site closures – lots of councils are in a difficult position on this.</p> <p>It’s helpful to update on the latest position: An initial proposal was modelled on the closure of five sites based on usage, tonnage and costs; and Castle Cary was among those identified as ‘at risk’. But, as we have been clear all along, this was always subject to complicated, commercial negotiations with our contractor.</p> <p>Those negotiations are ongoing and reaching a critical stage. To reflect that the proposal has been updated and is now to ‘make savings from the recycling centres contract’. This gives us flexibility to try and achieve a more favourable outcome.</p>

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	<p>Until negotiations are complete we can't rule in or rule out the need to consider the closure of recycling sites. If final proposals include the closure of sites there would be consultation with the public before any decision is taken. That would, of course, include opportunities for everyone to share their views and concerns.</p> <p>A few words on fly-tipping. Experience shows that householders rarely fly tip. It tends to be rogue traders trying to avoid commercial charges. For them the proximity of a recycling site makes no difference.</p> <p>When we have closed sites in the past we saw some limited fly-tipping at the gates to sites but this was short-lived. If we reach the stage of closing any site, this would be well advertised and alternatives publicised, along with the consequences of fly-tipping. There would be focussed monitoring to make sure any fly-tipped waste is picked up and, where possible enforcement action taken. As you would expect, the savings option includes some contingency to cover the cost of dealing with a certain degree of increased fly tipping, though we very much hope and expect this will not be needed</p>
<p>Cllr Steve Ashton to present on behalf of resident</p>	<p>Petition to save Crewkerne HWRC</p> <p>Question 8a - We the residents of Crewkerne wish to make known our opposition to the closure of the Crewkerne Recycling Centre. It is a well-used facility and without it being open people will have to travel further to dispose of their waste. This in turn could lead to fly tipping in our beautiful rural landscape and cause more expense to the council.</p> <p>We are being asked to recycle more to help the environment but shutting these recycling facilities would be making that more difficult not easier .</p> <p>Please rethink this plan</p> <p>Thankyou</p> <p>Response from the Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Dixie Darch</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>Again, we understand the concerns and thank Cllr Ashton for the questions.</p> <p>As I have covered in the previous question, savings from our recycling site network have to be considered to help manage the current financial emergency.</p> <p>The Somerset network is extensive, but we know the closure of any sites would be unpalatable and would undoubtedly affect the communities they serve. Our challenge is to find the necessary savings and keep the impact to a minimum. Make no mistake this will be very difficult.</p>

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	<p>Until commercial negotiations are complete we cannot rule in or rule out the need to consider any closures, but please be assured that if a final proposal includes the closure of sites there would be consultation with the public before any decision is taken.</p>
<p>Robert Holmes</p>	<p>Closure of HWRC</p> <p>Question 9a - We are all aware of the financial problems that many counties are facing and the reasons. However, I doubt that money can be saved in this way because if the centres are closed people will dump anywhere they can in fields ,hedges ,layby etc and the County will have to collect it.</p> <p>Secondly how green is it for me to drive 20 miles to and from the nearest facility</p> <p>I would simply say that although economies are necessary, this measure could backfire in that not a few people will throw their rubbish into hedges , laybys and elsewhere thus needing a recycling crew to remove it. Secondly ,a trip to a the nearest centre is a 20 mile round trip.</p> <p>Hardly a greening measure</p> <p>Response from the Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Dixie Darch</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>Thank you for the question Mr Holmes.</p> <p>I've hopefully updated on the current position with the savings option relating to recycling sites – the saving still needs to be made but we await the outcome of commercial negotiations before we can pull a firm proposal together, so we cannot rule in or rule out a need to consider site closures. If any closure is eventually proposed, there would be public consultation before a decision is made.</p> <p>I've also covered the concern around fly tipping – experience suggests this would be relatively limited. There will be a degree of contingency funding set aside to cover the costs of dealing with some increase, but we very much hope it would not be needed.</p> <p>Longer journeys to a recycling site would be an inevitable consequence of any closure, were that to happen. That's the harsh reality and that is why any closure would be deeply unpalatable.</p> <p>Somerset is well-served by recycling sites at the moment, even now there are some parts of the county where people have to travel some distance to a site. Providing services equitably across a very large, rural county is very difficult and, crucially, very expensive.</p>

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Rachel
Binns –
Cllr John
Bailey to
present

Petition to save Bus 54

I would not have imagined in 2024 we would be making a statement and raising questions about the loss of access to basic services. But that is what the removal of the 54 service will mean to many people.

I have been to more isolated communities which still have public transport access. What we are talking about is the impact on Ilchester (population over 2000) and surroundings, 5 miles from Yeovil and Somerton, former County town of Somerset. I wish to present a number of items in support of the continuation of the 54 bus service

You will have seen by the petition with nearly 1100 signatures on line and on paper that people need access to to Jobs in Yeovil and Taunton, Education in Yeovil and Taunton and medical help in Yeovil, Somerton and Taunton.

All of the Ilchester, and surroundings, GP patients are now required to travel to Somerton and you will see the supportive letter from the MD of NHS Symphony pleading for the continuation of the 54 bus. Many of these people could be vulnerable and without access could lead to significant care costs further down the line

I have been told that at some times there is standing room only on the bus.

So we can quite clearly see there is a need what about the future, how can we make the 54 viable.

A group has been meeting to extend the 54 to Yeovilton and tap into the potential business of 4000+ people on the Base. You will see from the attached letter from the CO of Yeovilton that a small extension to the 54 route would help ;

- to bring people to and from work on the Base,
- Engineers who work closely with Leonardo/Westlands moving in both directions
- to improve access for visitors to the RNAS Museum
- to make a market of 4000+ people available to the local economy.

It would also reduce the number of car journeys, currently estimated at about 1 million Per Year

The Group which has been meeting to make this happen involves the Base, Chamber of Commerce, Somerset Council, First Bus and the Bus Support Partnership.

So the future looks bright for the 54 both as a local public service and as a commercial viable public transport system for the future.

In looking at the way forward we have the following questions;

Question 10a - How can the 54 be continued to provide a vital local service give the time to build while the commercial viability?

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	<p>Question 10b - How can we build a sustainable transport network for Ilchester and surroundings including a mix, as in other areas, of eg; DRT and volunteer cars?</p> <p>We look forward to a positive response and to the continuation of the 54 bus service</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Cllr Richard Wilkins</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>Richard Wilkins Question 10a: Thank you for your comments and your support for this important bus services. Like you I am extremely concerned about the potential impact on the people of Somerset if the service ceases. I have been working closely with the bus operator to consider the best way of keeping services going, given that they are proving difficult to run on a wholly commercial basis. We have been running a campaign over the last year with the support of the Somerset Bus Partnership who have worked tirelessly to encourage more people to use the bus and help it become financially sustainable. Unfortunately, patronage is still falling short of that needed for a self-sustaining service. It is good to see conversations happening with local business for possible extensions to the route, and I am urging the operator to aim to serve more people and grow their passenger base, rather than retract services in response to commercial challenges. We are working rapidly with the operator on detailed proposals for the 54 including considering how we can provide support from our limited grants from Government.</p> <p>Richard Wilkins Question 10b: We will be undertaking a review of bus services across the County with the bus operators during the coming year and will consider this issue as part of that work.</p>
<p>Eva Bryczkows ki</p>	<p>LEARNING FROM HISTORY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Councillors and officers, why are you refusing to fight back regarding the starvation of funding since 2010? *At the executive committee meeting last year, I suggested a whole variety of dynamic actions the council could take, but you didn't seem to engage with this line of thinking, instead you just banged on about lobbying alongside other cash strapped councils. *Legally, you have to balance the books in order to avoid bankruptcy and a 114 notice, I get that. *At the same time, all this lobbying by councils of the Conservative government has patently failed for over thirteen years. *So for goodness sake move forward. *If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get the same result.

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*If that you are doing isn't working, do anything else at all.

*Instead of reluctantly inflicting suffering, (similar to what the Liberal Democrats did during the coalition, because Cleggy wanted his feet under the table),

*Instead of slashing vital services, making swathes of staff redundant and colliding with three different trade unions,

*STOP relying solely on lobbying this uncaring government, which has only ever given peanuts to struggling councils.

Question 11a - Who among you will take a principled stand and resign, rather than implement CUTS, and

***FIGHT?

*It's the only way forward.

Question 11b

EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF NOTTINGHAM HAVE TAKEN A PRINCIPLED STAND AGAINST SAVAGE CUTS - PLEASE JOIN THEM

*Councillors, you could join with, and suggest this option to other councils up and down the country.

*Generate crowdfunding, join together and take the government to court for deliberate asset stripping of community resources and infrastructure!

*Lobbying the Conservative government has been unsuccessful and will fail again.

*Trying to make things "less worse" locally, just like the Liberal Democrats decided to do nationally in coalition with the Tories in 2010, you introduced savage austerity, leading up to what is happening now.

*Your party could have stopped this, but it didn't, with dismal results electorally as a result.

*The chickens have come home to roost.

QUESTION:

*Will you join in mass action, with principled councillors in every part of the country, in order to avoid further austerity?

Response from the Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon

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Full written response	<p>Liz Leyshon: Thank you Eva for your questions, and for your challenge to us as Councillors.</p> <p>We do have to comply with law and set a balanced budget for 2024/25 but we will continue to actively campaign for additional funding and the reform of the current funding system.</p> <p>We fully support the findings of the recent report from the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee on ‘Financial distress in local authorities’ and hope that the next government, whatever its political colour, implements the reforms highlighted in the report.</p> <p>I believe that the Leader of Council, Cllr Bill Revans, has achieved remarkable results in raising the profile and understanding of the difficult position of Councils now and for at least the next few years. He has spoken on television and radio, he has completed interviews with print journalists, and he has told it as it is. That is what residents tell us they want – politicians who address the questions, give straight answers and don’t shy away from difficult decisions.</p> <p>As Lead Member for Resources and Performance, I have committed my time to this Council, as Somerset has been my home and workplace for more decades than I care to mention. Finding creative and different ways to work has been my personal style of work and I will continue in my efforts for as long as my colleagues, and the electorate of Street, wish me to do so.</p>
David Orr	<p>Question 12a - I didn’t want a unitary based on the old County Council, nor did I think that most of the old County Council Directors would be retained, without a national, competitive recruitment process. Quite how things will change for the better, when they stay the same, eludes me,</p> <p>This administration had a year to prepare for the unitary and now almost one year running it. There was already a forecast £40m deficit. The people of Somerset will have expected you to make all of the internal efficiency savings before you start offering fewer services for more money.</p>

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You inherited staff from five councils and all of their non-investment property portfolios and some £40m of reserves from the four district councils. In the private sector, there would have been rapid management de-layering and rationalisation, allowing for a reduction of 20% in staffing costs, which are £40m a year in Somerset.

The pace of internal efficiency savings in this new council is clearly well behind the curve.

Last October, the current Finance Director memorably announced that the “iceberg of bankruptcy” had been spotted and was a lot closer than he had previously thought!

I do not now have confidence in the financial management and budget forecasting at this council. The public needs to have confidence in the budgeting forecasting and the financial assurances given here today. Based on recent performance, I think they will be very sceptical. I am. You should be too.

A huge £70m gross “black hole” appeared in Adult Social Care within months of a new financial year, triggering a “financial emergency” and threatening bankruptcy within weeks.

This failure of financial control and demand management in adult social care now threatens every other non-statutory service, many of which are valued by communities and the vulnerable.

Somerset is now leading the bankruptcy pack, when other west country authorities, while under pressure, can survive another year.

What has gone so wrong, so quickly? Where are all of the promised efficiencies of a new unitary super council?

However, Wiltshire are doing much better than Somerset, with a balanced budget and no miserly cuts to bus services, CCTV, loos and opening park gates! Wiltshire are 12% smaller in population than Somerset and have 2% fewer pensioners in their population makeup. Modest differences.

By the end of 2026/27, Somerset’s adult social care is forecasting an annual spend which will be a massive £134m higher than Wiltshire’s adult social care’s spend; that is a staggering 72% more than Wiltshire! How can that be right?

I have accordingly asked the external auditors to conduct an independent audit in adult social care, to assure the taxpayers of Somerset that these massive budget shortfalls are credible, before the budget is passed by the 28th of February.

Response from the Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon

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Full written response	<p>Response from Cllr Liz Leyshon</p> <p>Thank you, Mr Orr, for your comments and observations.</p> <p>The decision to create the new unitary council was that of Government and so was the start date for the new council. Some of us requested that the consultation on Local Government Reorganisation, and therefore date of Vesting, be deferred because of the impact of Covid on councils and to allow more time but that proposal was voted down on 18th November 2020.</p> <p>It is simply not correct to say that we haven't delivered on LGR Savings. Local Government Reorganisation was all about reducing duplication and waste to save money. We have completed good work on those aims, and the Section 151 officer reported to Audit Committee on 25th January that the LGR savings are “broadly on track”. Further detail can be found on page 680 of the pack, in the report of the Lead Member for Transformation & HR.</p> <p>But this is completely missing the point. Since the One Somerset business case was written and submitted to Government, we've seen soaring inflation, interest rate rises and spiralling costs nationally, particularly for social care placements where Somerset is impacted more than other unitary councils in the south west.</p> <p>This means the original LGR business case is no longer fit for purpose. The programme we are now delivering will go much further and at a faster pace than LGR ever intended. Making the comparison between Wiltshire and Somerset only helps to illustrate the point that the relatively low, and sustained, level of Council Tax in Somerset is contributing to financial challenges we must now address. I have requested some further information on Wiltshire Council's Adult Social Care demand and costs, and would refer you to Cornwall Council as well as other unitary councils in the south west such as Dorset Council.</p> <p>Although you reference people of 'pension age', it's important to look at older age groups, particularly those aged 85 and over when considering demand on services and so increased costs. The Council Tax base and rate (due to historical factors) are of critical importance, so is the value of homes, in any council area, as people fund their own care or need the Council to fund the care on their behalf. I will address comparative Council Tax income in my introduction to the budget papers at the meeting.</p>
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With regard to your lack of faith in the budget setting process, particularly on Adults, I refer you to the Section 151 officer's Section 15 report that is Item 6 of our papers today. He references the experts who have considered the re-base of the Adults budget, and I regret only that a re-base of this largest Directorate has not happened for something like ten years.

I believe that our external auditors, Grant Thornton, will respond to you either directly or through the 151 officer. As you would expect, the Chair of Audit also expresses his concern about evidence-based budget setting and I am listening to all comments and criticisms as I believe we all want the same thing – a viable Somerset Council.

The recent report from the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee on Financial distress in local authorities which was published on 29 January 2024 highlights the significant financial challenges faced by the sector. In its summary it says:

“It is no surprise that the financial crisis that local authorities are encountering comes after significant reductions in local authorities’ spending power which has itself coincided with increasing demand for their services and inflationary pressures driving up costs. Ultimately, the levels of funding available to local authorities, through council tax, retained business rates, and government grants have not kept pace with these pressures, leading to a funding gap which is already estimated at £4 billion over the next two years.”

It also highlights the problems with the current funding system, with the fair funding reviews promised but the anticipated reforms not materialising and now deferred into the next parliament.

“This has meant that local authorities are increasingly reliant on income from council tax to fund service delivery. However, council tax is regressive, long overdue for reform, and is contributing to a disproportionately negative impact on funding levels of local authorities in the most deprived areas of the country. Furthermore, the business rates

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	<p><i>retention scheme is increasingly misaligned with local authorities' current spending needs and the government has not delivered on its earlier commitments to review and reform the scheme. The Government must urgently reform these core funding mechanisms to ensure that the levels of demand and cost pressures faced by local authorities are adequately considered in determining their funding levels.”</i></p> <p>The report recognises that the current financing system for local authorities is both broken and the sector is significantly underfunded by saying:</p> <p><i>“In the short term the Government must ensure that local authorities receive sufficient financial support to enable them to continue delivering the services that people need.”</i></p>
Nigel Behan	<p>Question 13a - As Public Finance reported (13th February) Somerset asks for more help following council tax snub (reasonably verbatim on the net effect of the increase in the capitalisation request because the Council Tax has been limited to 4.99% increase – without a referendum!)</p> <p>Last October the Director of Finance (the S151 Officer) noted “we can see the iceberg” in respect of issuing a S114 Notice – some other councils have already issued a S114 notice and others forewarn that it is sooner rather than later!</p> <p>Even though SC became unitary last April (and local government reorganisation was and is taking place) – the council is seeking up to 26% of the workforce to be removed (by way of, initially, VR). But aren't the services staff provide still required even after the implementation of economies of scale, rationalisation etc?</p> <p>Question 13b - In the S151 Officer Section 25 Report (on the 2024/25 budget in respect of the robustness of the budget estimates and adequacy of reserves) it is stated: “It is likely that a Section 114 Notice will need to be issued in respect of 2025/26 as the forecast budget gap exceeds the estimated level of reserves unless there is a significant change to the current funding regime or continued and on-going government support is provided.” (kicking the can down the road etc)</p>

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	<p>Which corresponds to removing up to a quarter of the workforce, further capitalisation directions, transferring functions to town and parish councils with increased local CTAX liabilities (badged as devolution), reducing services, increasing fees and charges etc. The local government press and journals etc comment frequently (as has this Council and the recent Select Committee report Financial distress in local authorities which is quoted in the paper), that the system requires a shake up at the very least. Surely witnessing a slow crash (and, in effect, participating in it) is tantamount to passive acceptance (and merely observing the potential impacts) within the given framework which emerged as a consequence of rate capping, the poll tax-no comment required! - and the regressive council tax. Is thinking outside the box by proposing (radical) alternatives e.g. as a minimum, if a number of S151 Officers had the foresight to act together (of course, adopting their respective professional hats) by issuing – what may be considered to be – co-ordinated S114 Notices then the government has a problem?</p> <p>Question 13c - In some policy working circles, “Organisational Design” and “Transformation” (including AI) will come to the rescue. Rather ironically, the underspending parts of the Somerset Unitary Council may probably lose more posts proportionately than the overspending parts (Childrens and Adults Social Care.)</p> <p>If the national market in Childrens Services and the Local Market in Adult Social Care (as reported recently) are contributing to the financial emergency does the Council have more meaningful solutions, than manipulating these markets in care (sic), that could include significant restructures (e.g. insourcing and having direct democratic control of these services). The S151 Officer noted in late 2022 there is [a]“competitive market failure”?</p> <p>Response from the Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>Liz Leyshon 13a: Thank you for your questions. The scale of the financial emergency facing the council requires a change in thinking around the pace, size, and structure of transformation to deliver a radically different way of working as a Council.</p> <p>A new transformation programme for the council is therefore being developed. It will bring together transformation and change across the entire organisation to ensure whole council oversight and prioritisation of resources and investment. It will play a</p>

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significant role in creating a sustainable council for the future, including redesigning the council, the services it delivers and how it operates.

All councillors understand the stress this places on all staff and we thank the officers for their work on clearly explaining the process, ensuring that Voluntary Redundancy comes first, that TUPE and vacancies are also considered in the early stages of the transformation. This is a particularly challenging time in the long history of local government in Somerset, and due process has never been more important.

Liz Leyshon Q13b

As you reference in your question, it is recognised that local government is underfunded for the services that it has to provide. The DLUHC select committee report that you reference said in its conclusion *“the levels of funding available to local authorities, through council tax, retained business rates, and government grants have not kept pace with these pressures, leading to a funding gap which is already estimated at £4 billion over the next two years.”*

As you identify, this is causing widespread problems across the whole sector with an ever-increasing number of councils requiring Exceptional Financial Support from DLUHC.

The legal duty around a section 114 notice falls upon the Section 151 to make at the appropriate time for their council based upon their circumstances. What is clear however is that unless there is fundamental change to the current funding system then there will continue to be more section 114 notices issued by councils. It would not be for me to suggest to any 151 officer how they might act, their independence with regard to potential S114 notice is both a legal duty and extremely important. The fact that S114 notices are now being used for purposes for which it was not designed – councils running out of money – is a marker of the worrying situation across the whole country.

Heather Shearer Q13c: Children’s services does provide some services directly within the accommodation sector for children in our care. We have a longstanding inhouse fostering service and since 2023 have developed with the Shaw Trust a strategic

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	<p>partnership to provide residential care in Somerset for some of our most complex children, where the capital for premises has been provided by the Council. Due to the differing needs of children and therefore the wide range of expertise required to provide high quality residential and foster homes we continue to believe that a mixed market will best meet the needs of local children. That said, you will see from the recent developments I have described, and which are within our sufficiency strategy, that the Council is implementing a proactive approach in order to be able to provide more care directly and locally for our children.</p> <p>Bill Revans Q13c: Adult services</p> <p>Although Adult Services does not directly deliver any inhouse services we do work closely with the market. 70% of the cost within this market is driven by the living wage. The development of micro providers and the use of community solutions along with the recommissioning of the carers services supports those that draw on our services to remain in their own home longer. Joint commissioning and joint funding arrangements with the NHS, along with the ASC transformation programme, the continued development of assistive technology will ensure the service is fit for the future.</p>
<p>Alan Debenham</p>	<p>Executive Meeting 7/2/24 Council Press Release . . . Councillors were given a stark warning that the broken model for funding local government and the Government’s refusal to allow a 9.99% Council Tax increase undermines the authority’s immediate sustainability after 2024/25. Last month it was announced the Council would need to apply to the Government for emergency financial support, while also considering “unprecedented” and “heart-breaking” steps to bridge a £100m funding gap, including reductions to services. . . .</p> <p>Cllr Bill Revans, Leader of Somerset Council, said:</p> <p>It is clear the current model of funding local government is broken, and this means we have had to consider heart-breaking and unpalatable cuts to services we greatly value but simply cannot afford. We vowed to do everything in our power to find alternative ways of funding these and I have to thank our city, town and parish councils for the way they have stepped up. We’ll continue to explore all options to minimise impacts on our communities.</p> <p>Question 14a Part of the Council’s latest press release above shows great agreement with my previous comments and questions, put repeatedly over past decades, about our rotten local government funding model, often with reference to how big</p>

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	<p>change for much more local autonomy, could best return to the recommendations in the Layfield Report of 1976 ; to be achieved mainly through a new Local Income Tax, aided by Local Sales, Property and Site Value Taxes as proved appropriate. In fact old Somerset Liberal Democrat protesters were Layfield obsessed and, also when Chris Clarke was Leader, they were full frontal on-street marchers and rallyers.</p> <p>Can we please see repeat of all this and, if not, why not, AND what does today’s Leader and LibDems see as the best reformed model of Local Government Finance to fight for in this election year ahead ??</p> <p>Question 14b And what is this Council doing in present active campaigning for Councils’ funding reform in collaboration with other Councils, the LGA, and the public, in creating a really big protest fight-back which can succeed against Tory government intransigence, incompetence, and ignorance of how national government and Bank of England treasuries actually work ??</p> <p><i>(Note re the last sentence I recommend all Councillors to become followers of Professor Richard Murphy- www.richard.murphy@taxresearch.org.uk of Sheffield University, Public Accountant Lecturer & Consultant who supplies an excellent free daily/ weekly newsletter)</i></p> <p>Response from the Leader and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>Questions 14a & 14b</p> <p>Bill Revans: Responding to both questions, we have been clear with our community, our Somerset MPs and Government about the circumstances we are currently facing and have campaigned tirelessly to raise the profile of the issues.</p> <p>We fully support the findings of the recent report from the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee on ‘Financial distress in local authorities’. The report highlights the significant financial challenges faced by the sector. In its summary it says:</p> <p><i>“It is no surprise that the financial crisis that local authorities are encountering comes after significant reductions in local authorities’ spending power which has itself coincided with increasing demand for their services and inflationary pressures driving up costs. Ultimately, the levels of funding available to local authorities, through council tax, retained</i></p>

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business rates, and government grants have not kept pace with these pressures, leading to a funding gap which is already estimated at £4 billion over the next two years.”

It also highlights the problems with the current funding system, with the fair funding reviews promised but the anticipated reforms not materialising and now deferred into the next parliament.

“This has meant that local authorities are increasingly reliant on income from council tax to fund service delivery. However, council tax is regressive, long overdue for reform, and is contributing to a disproportionately negative impact on funding levels of local authorities in the most deprived areas of the country. Furthermore, the business rates retention scheme is increasingly misaligned with local authorities’ current spending needs and the government has not delivered on its earlier commitments to review and reform the scheme. The Government must urgently reform these core funding mechanisms to ensure that the levels of demand and cost pressures faced by local authorities are adequately considered in determining their funding levels.”


The report recognises that the current financing system for local authorities is both broken and the sector is significantly underfunded by saying:

“In the short term the Government must ensure that local authorities receive sufficient financial support to enable them to continue delivering the services that people need.”


The report and its summary is recommended reading and can be found here:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmcomloc/56/summary.html>

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Michelle Francis – Williton Parish Council	<p>Sending in letters re HWRC closures</p> <p>Question 15a -</p> <div data-bbox="300 338 501 466"><p>Letter from Williton Parish Council.pdf</p></div> <p>Response from the Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Dixie Darch</p>
Full written response	<p>Cllr Dixie Darch: I've updated on the current position with the savings option relating to recycling sites – the saving still needs to be made but we await the outcome of commercial negotiations before we can pull a firm proposal together, so we cannot rule in or rule out a need to consider site closures. If any closure is eventually proposed, there would be public consultation before a decision is made.</p> <p>I've also covered the concern around fly tipping – experience suggests this would be relatively limited. There will be a degree of contingency funding set aside to cover the costs of dealing with some increase, but we very much hope it would not be needed. Longer journeys to a recycling site would be an inevitable consequence of any closure, were that to happen. That's the harsh reality and that is why any closure would be deeply unpalatable.</p> <p>Somerset is well-served by recycling sites at the moment, even now there are some parts of the county where people have to travel some distance to a site. Providing services equitably across a very large, rural county is very difficult and, crucially, very expensive.</p> <p>Letter to be sent out:</p> <p>I appreciate your concerns regarding the potential closures of the recycling centre at Williton. As you'll know, Somerset Council finds itself under significant pressure to balance its budget, largely as a result of the dramatic increase in costs of care services. The council must make tough decisions, including reducing public services and implementing redundancies, if it is to avoid issuing a 114 Notice and the involvement of Government Commissioners.</p>

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	<p>Somerset’s current network of 16 sites gives us the best site per household/population ratio in the South West, apart from the Isles of Scilly. Given the massive pressures on the council’s finances, we have to look at savings from all services and our recycling site network has to be part of that.</p> <p>While we explored options such as reducing operating hours, they did not meet our savings targets. An initial proposal was modelled on the closure of five sites based on usage, tonnage and costs and Williton was among those identified as ‘at risk’. But, as we have been clear all along, this was always subject to complicated, commercial negotiations with our contractor.</p> <p>Those negotiations are ongoing and critical. Therefore, the proposal has been updated to focus on "making savings from the recycling centres contract" giving us flexibility to pursue more favourable outcomes.</p> <p>Until negotiations are complete we cannot rule in or rule out the need to consider the closure of recycling sites. If final proposals include the closure of sites we can assure you there would be consultation with the public before any decision is taken. That would, of course, include opportunities for everyone to share their views and concerns. Your insights would be invaluable in understanding the community's perspective.</p> <p>It's worth noting that householders rarely fly-tip; it's typically rogue traders evading commercial charges. Closure of sites in the past has resulted in limited fly-tipping, but it was short-lived. Should any site closures occur, we will extensively advertise alternatives and consequences of fly-tipping. We will closely monitor for fly-tipped waste and take enforcement action where necessary. The savings plan includes contingencies to address any increase in fly-tipping, though we hope such measures will not be required.</p>
Michelle Francis - Joint submission from other	<p>Sending in letters re HWRC closures</p> <p>Question 16a -</p> <div data-bbox="297 1241 501 1374"><p>Signed Joint Parish Letter.pdf</p></div>

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Parish Councils	Response from the Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Dixie Darch
Full written response	<p>Cllr Dixie Darch: I've updated on the current position with the savings option relating to recycling sites – the saving still needs to be made but we await the outcome of commercial negotiations before we can pull a firm proposal together, so we cannot rule in or rule out a need to consider site closures. If any closure is eventually proposed, there would be public consultation before a decision is made.</p> <p>I've also covered the concern around fly tipping – experience suggests this would be relatively limited. There will be a degree of contingency funding set aside to cover the costs of dealing with some increase, but we very much hope it would not be needed. Longer journeys to a recycling site would be an inevitable consequence of any closure, were that to happen. That's the harsh reality and that is why any closure would be deeply unpalatable.</p> <p>Somerset is well-served by recycling sites at the moment, even now there are some parts of the county where people have to travel some distance to a site. Providing services equitably across a very large, rural county is very difficult and, crucially, very expensive.</p> <p>Letter to be sent out:</p> <p>I appreciate your concerns regarding the potential closures of the recycling centre at Williton. As you'll know, Somerset Council finds itself under significant pressure to balance its budget, largely as a result of the dramatic increase in costs of care services. The council must make tough decisions, including reducing public services and implementing redundancies, if it is to avoid issuing a 114 Notice and the involvement of Government Commissioners.</p> <p>Somerset's current network of 16 sites gives us the best site per household/population ratio in the South West, apart from the Isles of Scilly. Given the massive pressures on the council's finances, we have to look at savings from all services and our recycling site network has to be part of that.</p>

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	<p>While we explored options such as reducing operating hours, they did not meet our savings targets. An initial proposal was modelled on the closure of five sites based on usage, tonnage and costs and Williton was among those identified as ‘at risk’. But, as we have been clear all along, this was always subject to complicated, commercial negotiations with our contractor.</p> <p>Those negotiations are ongoing and critical. Therefore, the proposal has been updated to focus on "making savings from the recycling centres contract" giving us flexibility to pursue more favourable outcomes.</p> <p>Until negotiations are complete we cannot rule in or rule out the need to consider the closure of recycling sites. If final proposals include the closure of sites we can assure you there would be consultation with the public before any decision is taken. That would, of course, include opportunities for everyone to share their views and concerns. Your insights would be invaluable in understanding the community's perspective.</p> <p>It's worth noting that householders rarely fly-tip; it's typically rogue traders evading commercial charges. Closure of sites in the past has resulted in limited fly-tipping, but it was short-lived. Should any site closures occur, we will extensively advertise alternatives and consequences of fly-tipping. We will closely monitor for fly-tipped waste and take enforcement action where necessary. The savings plan includes contingencies to address any increase in fly-tipping, though we hope such measures will not be required.</p>
Brenda Orr	<p>Question 18a - I was born in Somerset and have worked here for many years as a teacher of modern foreign languages. I had my milestone 70th birthday on Christmas Eve which is a reflective moment. I was already concerned about growing old in Britain and the failure of successive governments of all colours to reform the adult social care system.</p> <p>My NHS dentist is leaving my surgery and then it will be private only, which will probably quadruple my dental charges. To add to that concern, I now find that my own council is at risk of bankruptcy and appears to be failing. This not only adds to my “growing old safely” concerns here in Somerset, but has added a very large increase in my Taunton Town precept. This appears to be an increase on your behalf, where you carry on supplying basic public services like CCTV, loos and accessible parks, but the town council pays you for them. I pay more council tax for less or the same.</p>

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	<p>Looking around many of our public services right now there is a pervading sense of “Broken Britain”. Now you are adding “Sinking Somerset”.</p> <p>Right now, I don’t see the same professionalism that I brought to my teaching career, in far too many public services. Where is the leadership and why aren’t there better public service cultures?</p> <p>Post-covid, in the private sector there is a move to hybrid working part home and part office, so that team working and performance can be monitored. I am told that council staff with office roles can work from home all of the time without ever coming into an office. If that is the case, I think there will be widespread scepticism amongst the public, as to whether the council is currently being run efficiently.</p> <p>I did everything that my parents, school and society asked of me, by passing my exams, getting a degree and teaching for 40 years, most of that full time. Why now am I faced with a failing care system plus a failing council?</p> <p>It’s not as if I haven’t paid in all of my working life, yet I am paying more now for worse or less.</p> <p>I have taken the right to vote as a hard-won right by the campaigning and efforts of previous generations. I have always voted in all elections, but I am now so disillusioned that it is very likely I won’t vote in any coming election.</p> <p>Typically, 70% of people don’t vote in local elections because they say “nothing changes” and the mess in this new council simply makes them look right.</p> <p>My teacher’s report for this new council at the end of Year 1 is “A poor start, must try harder, must do better. Attention to detail is needed. Extra homework required.”</p> <p>Response from the Lead Member for Transformation and HR, Cllr Theo Butt Philip</p>
Full written response	<p>Theo Butt Philip</p> <p>Thank you for sharing your views and observations. Delivering the benefits of the new unitary council did not end on Vesting Day. As well as beginning to embed a new council in extremely challenging financial and economic circumstances, noted progress has included:</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formation of the senior officer leadership team of the council. All services now have Executive and Service Directors in-post, which has provided leadership capability and delivered management savings in the region of £2.6m.• Restructures both interim and permanent across a number of services have been continuing including additional senior management recruitment and rationalisation of posts, to release additional savings. To focus on the council's financial emergency and deliver a consistent approach to future changes, other restructures will now be part of the organisation redesign and workforce downsizing aspects of the council's new transformation programme. <p>Delivering the savings calculated in the business case for a single unitary council. £18.5m were anticipated per year after two years of operation of the new council. So far, and subject to final validation, we will have delivered £7m of savings by the 31st March 2024. Another £9.7m has already been committed for delivery by 1st April 2025. A further £3.9m of LGR enabled savings have been identified (subject to decision making through the current budget setting process). Cumulatively this means we are on track to deliver savings of at least £20m by 1st April 2025. Clearly there is a need to go further and faster than first envisaged.</p>
Natasha Tremelling	<p>Union Submission</p> <p>Please see the below questions asked on behalf of almost 2,000 UNISON members from Somerset Council. It is our hope that we can support this Council's transformational process to be a viable change, but we do have concerns on behalf of our members, who are feeling particularly anxious at this time of change due to the financial emergency.</p> <p>Question 19a - The Council's transformation will result in fewer staff and those remaining staff members will be responsible for greater scopes of work within the Council. This will erode current standards of delivery and be deeply felt by service users and communities. What is an acceptable erosion of standards that councillors are prepared to accept on behalf of residents and staff and how is the Council going to convey that message to staff and communities?</p> <p>Question 19b - There were a number of embedded issues with staffing and recruitment inherited from predecessor councils when Somerset Council formed. These issues included a high number of vacancies, especially in specialist roles, and a reliance on temporary and locum staff. How will the transformed Council ensure that it is able to attract and retain staff while at the same time</p>

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	<p>addressing current workforce issues with pay and grading at the Council, without this resulting in a race to the bottom on terms and conditions?</p> <p>Question 19c - While engagement with the Trade Unions has improved somewhat around the financial crisis, what does 'meaningful engagement' with the Trade Unions look like to Councillors and how will you ensure Trade Unions are involved in decisions from now on and not just told of outcomes of decisions at the last minute?</p> <p>Response from the Lead Member for Transformation and HR, Cllr Theo Butt Philip</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>Theo Butt Philip</p> <p>19a – Somerset Council will become smaller and employ fewer staff. The Council is being redesigned and resized. As part of this work, we will need to consider effective spans and layers of control across the whole organisation and how we do less with less. This will mean a change to service levels across many services, and this will be communicated internally and externally through the most appropriate communication and engagement channels as soon as any impact is known. We will continue our ongoing fortnightly Trade Union engagement and consultation sessions throughout this period of change.</p> <p>19b - We will remove non-essential vacancies and reduce our spend on agency, interims, and consultants as part of the workforce reduction programme. Whilst we are reviewing the root causes of our legacy staffing issues we have implemented robust establishment and recruitment controls. Going forward we will reintroduce effective workforce planning alongside insightful workforce data. We will develop a new Pay and Grading structure for Somerset Council to ensure the Council continues to deliver equal pay for work of equal value, and so that we can offer 'market-right' salaries. We will have a smaller and better paid workforce (reducing the need for recruitment and retention allowances), but this will take time over the next couple of years to implement well. In the meantime, we are developing a new People Strategy for Somerset Council, informed by a new set of Values and Behaviours. To attract and retain talent we will ensure best practice basics are in place across the whole employee lifecycle from recruitment to retirement and be more innovative in how we communicate our employer value proposition externally and internally. We will develop a compelling employer offer that attracts and retains the best talent to Somerset Council. We will maintain a</p>

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	<p>strong focus on people development and growing our own talent through career pathways, apprenticeships, and investing in new skills to enable managers to manage and lead effectively.</p> <p>19c – We are glad to hear that you feel engagement with Trade Unions has improved. Meaningful engagement means that we will involve our Trade Union colleagues in proposals for change at the outset and provide opportunities for partnership working to develop workforce solutions that minimise, where practicable, negative impacts on our staff. We are committed to maintaining our regular TU engagement and consultation meetings and senior leadership will continue to attend these as required to provide timely updates on the Councils financial position and our new approach to transformation.</p>
<p>Raymond Rose</p>	<p>Question 20a - Why does Somerset Council won't Taunton Town Council to pay for CCTV that is controlled in Bridgwater. It should be Bridgwater Town Council.</p> <p>Question 20b - I make this promise. I will pay 5% more Council Tax to Somerset Council and pay 5% to Taunton Town Council. not a penny more. See you there, the best</p> <p>Response from (Q17a) the Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts and (Q17b) the Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>Federica Smith-Roberts</p> <p>Somerset Council initially put forward a closure of the CCTV service as a cost saving proposal. During the last few weeks officers have been in discussion with a range of city, town and parish councils over retaining the service through contributions provided by them. On 13th February TTC took a decision on their budget to support the cost of CCTV with the Taunton area. Similarly other towns and parishes have offered a contribution for their area meaning that the service can continue. The service is proved across Somerset through a centralised control room in Bridgwater, the costs of which is to be shared amongst the communities that benefit from the service.</p>

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	<p>Somerset Council as the Council Tax Collection authority will be processing and collecting the appropriate tax based on the levels approved by this and the City Town and Parish Councils, along with other precepting bodies. We have a responsibility to all taxpayers to collect the correct rates and we hope that Mr Rose will reconsider his position on this matter to prevent enforcement action being taken.</p>
<p>Chris Hocking</p>	<p>Bridgwater Carnival</p> <p>Question 21a - Agenda item: COMMUNITIES</p> <p>Bridgwater Guy Fawkes Carnival is not only the oldest carnival in the UK but it is also recognised as being the largest illuminated parade in Europe. We regularly attract 150,000 visitors to our annual parade, the vast majority travelling to the town from South Wales, southern England, Devon, Cornwall and throughout the rest of the country. A further 50,000 across the globe view the carnival day events courtesy of live-streaming.</p> <p>Many visitors stay overnight, or longer, throughout the Somerset area boosting trade for the hospitality industry and retailers at a time of year when trade is at its lowest. Indeed, a survey conducted some 20 years ago by the former Somerset County Council informed that carnivals in the county increased the economy by £40m during the autumn carnival season.</p> <p>With such a massive increase in revenue for so many Somerset businesses, we were extremely disappointed to learn that Somerset Council intends to remove, in its entirety, the very small annual grant which we previously received from the former Sedgemoor District Council. This grant enabled us to provide portable toilets and barriers for the comfort and safety of the visitors and, of course, residents in the area.</p> <p>At the present time, there are no public conveniences operational in the town. Without the additional portaloos which we spread across various locations along the parade route, the general public would be obliged to seek the goodwill of public house landlords and/or restaurants for use of their facilities. This is not always forthcoming and therefore the portaloos play an important and essential role in the comfort of the vast crowd whilst ensuring that the environment is not damaged in any manner.</p> <p>Likewise, barriers play an important role in maintaining safety and comfort for our many visitors. With crowds standing 10 or 12 deep in places to view the parade, the barriers maintain a safe distance between them and the massive spectacular carnival carts taking part in the parade. Barriers assist our marshals in delivering a very safe environment for the benefit of the public and participants.</p>

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	<p>Bridgwater Guy Fawkes Carnival is a non-profit making organisation and a registered charity and we have a duty of care to visitors and participants at our annual event. Removing the grant will make it extremely difficult for us to maintain our obligations and this would be to the detriment of our future events.</p> <p>Somerset is a beautiful county and we are delighted that, during our carnival season, so many thousands of people are able to see for themselves what a wonderful region this is to visit, work and live. It would be a great disappointment if visitors were given the impression that the local authority cared little for the safety and comfort of the community through their lack of funding for such essential equipment.</p> <p>The grant we are seeking is extremely small within the context of Somerset Council’s annual budget. Yet the rewards would be high in terms of tourism and community engagement. For all these reasons I would therefore ask that the small grant be re-instated forthwith.</p> <p>Thank you.</p> <p>Response from the Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts</p>
<p>Full written response</p>	<p>Federica Smith-Roberts</p> <p>It is very disappointing that we are having to consider savings such as these, and especially where there has been such a long history of council support.</p> <p>We are however required to consider any and all options that help the council meet its statutory obligations for the most vulnerable in our communities.</p>
<p>David Redgewell</p>	<p>Question 22a - Firstly, we are pleased to see the progress being made on partnership working with the city Town and Parish councils in Somerset on the provision of services for the community in Somerset,</p> <p>So, on Partnership working with the issue of the possible withdraw of public bus services in the county and into neighbouring Dorset council and Devon County Council,</p> <p>What discussion have taken Place with Devon County Council and Exmoor National Park Authority and councillor Anda Davies chair of Transport of peninsula Transport Board and Executive member for Transport on funding the vital rural life bus link 25 from</p>

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Taunton Town centre, Taunton Railway station, To Dulverton via Wiveliscombe and Bampton Devon, First Group plc South buses service, Services 28 Taunton Town centre, Taunton Railway station, Bishop Lydeard Railway Station, Watchet railway station Minehead Town Centre Bank Street Minehead railway station and Butlins, Including bus rail Interchange facilities with first group plc First Group plc Great Western Railway company Arriva Inter city cross country train Arriva 1sq capital, And National Express coaches limited and the west Somerset railway company Ltd about these important bus service to Minehead west Somerset and Exmoor National Park, Service 28 is First group plc South buses service, Service 58 ,58 a Yeovil bus and coach station to Yeovil pen mill station Sherborne Town centre Sherborne Railway station, Templecombe station, Wincanton bus and coach station, With Railway connections at by First group plc Great Western Railway company limited at Yeovil pen mill station and First group plc MTR Southwestern Railway company at Yeovil pen mill, Sherborne Railway station Templecombe Station,

What discussion have taken place with councillors Ray Bryan and Noc lacey-clerk Transport executives at Dorset Council about retaining these vital Somerset and Dorset bus services, Sherborne Town Council, Wincanton and Yeovil Town Councils First Group plc South buses service, Service 54 Taunton Town centre, Langport Somerton Ilchester and Yeovil bus and coach station, as these service along with service 1 Yeovil bus and coach station to Castle Cary Town and Castle Cary Railway station, Bath and west showground and Shepton mallet interchange, Southwest coaches Service.

What progress is being made on theses support bus services in Negotiations with First group plc South buses, or through the complete Tendering on with other Transport companies such as Southwest coaches, Hatch Green, Stagecoach Southwest, go head group Southwest, Transpora buses of Dorset.

The retaining of these vital public transport bus links across Somerset and into Dorset and Devon, Please can you give an update as theses service finish on 15th April 2024.

Question 22b - With First group plc South buses is wanting to close and redevelop Reckleford bus Depot former Neutilus works, With the planning application to demolish the building and First group plc South buses needing to retain a bus and coach Depot in Yeovil for its Somerset and Dorset bus network of bus services contracted to Somerset and Dorset Councils, What 106 agreement is Somerset Council seeking for a new modern outstation bus and coach Depot in the Town, With Maintenance facilities, cleaning facilities Bus washing facilities staff accommodation and supervisor managers offices, In the way Bristol city council, Bath and Northeast Somerset council, North Somerset council did when First Group plc moved Depots in weston super mare, Bath and Bristol,

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Yeovil needs a modern bus and coach Depot,

Question 22c - Bus and coach station and infrastructure in the bus station

With the submission of new Somerset bus service improvement plan on 12th June 2024 to the secretary of state for Transport Mark Harper MP and the Department for transport, with new chapters on community safety and cctv at bus and coach station and interchanges, improvement for passengers travelling with reduced mobility and partly sighted passengers, better lighting and passenger information real-time information systems, Interchange facilities with buses and coaches and Railway stations

What discussion are taking place on improvement in the budgets or bids?

To the Department for transport

To improve bus and coach stations in Bridgwater bus and coach station Yeovil bus and coach station Wincanton bus and coach station, Frome Cork Street coach station Shepton Mallet interchange, Chard interchange, Minehead Bank Street Minehead railway station,

With Taunton bus and coach station due to reopen with Department for transport funding as a Transport hub can the council, please advise on the start date on public consultation and start to works rebuilding the bus and coach Transport including Termining and Removing Somerset NHS offices from the building not the covid 19 vaccination centre is closed.

By Termining the lease urgently in the interest of passengers and stakeholders so public money is not returned to the Department for transport for failing to start construction of the bus and coach station Transport hub.

Taunton urgently as a Regional Transport centre needs a modern bus and coach station Transport hub.

On Yeovil bus and coach station.

Fernbank Advertising have control of the bus and coach shelters in the Town and in the Town bus and coach station with the company advertising campaign for my posters on bus and coaches' shelters.

Why is council with its maintenance contract and control of the advertising franchise not making sure bus shelters Glass and plastic panels including shelter roofs in Yeovil bus and coach station are being repaired and maintained,

Is there a bus and coach infrastructure maintenance budgets available in 2024 2025. Budget,

Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Cllr Richard Wilkins

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Full written response	<p>Richard Wilkins</p> <p>Q22a – As I've already mentioned in my response to Rachel Binns, I am extremely concerned about the potential impacts to vital services set out by Buses of Somerset last week. However, the Council and Buses of Somerset continue to have positive discussions over the future of the routes mentioned. We are exploring all opportunities and are now looking at detailed proposals. We understand the concerns of the community and we're working hard to find a way forward. We hope to provide an update as soon as possible.</p> <p>Q22b – The Council does not get involved in the detailed operational matters of transport operators; it is for them to determine their requirements to best deliver their services. Should the Council receive a planning application for the site in the future it will be determined by the Planning Authority on its merits and any S106 requirement will relate to the uses set out in that application.</p> <p>Q22c – The Council is working on updates to Bus Service Improvement Plan which will be shared with stakeholders when ready, at this point it is too early to say what specific infrastructure funding requests will be included. With regards to Taunton Mobility Hub, we are undertaking design work and will engage when we have the right information to ensure that the consultation is meaningful.</p> <p>I've noted your comments regarding the bus shelters at Yeovil bus station and will ask officers bring this up with the contractor.</p> <p>On your final point regarding maintenance budgets, you will appreciate some of the incredibly difficult decisions that the Council is having to take today in order to set a balanced budget for next year so there is a small budget available to ensure repairs are carried to keep infrastructure is safe to use.</p>
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Annexe B – Member Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question
Cllr Sue Osborne	<p>There is a newly created fund in the 24/25 budget for £600k to cover the 'overhead costs' of Asset and Service devolution to City Town and Parish Councils.</p> <p>There is concern that this fund will predominantly benefit the larger towns and that smaller Towns and Parish who also face increased costs may well miss out to the largest towns.</p> <p>*How do you define an 'overhead' for the purposes of accessing this fund?</p> <p>*What is the proposed process for any City/Town and Parish Council to follow should they wish to apply to this fund for support and what steps will be taken to ensure equality of access?</p> <p>*What 'due diligence' is being undertaken by this council to ensure that the receiving City/Town and Parish council is sufficiently sound enough regarding financial and governance matters for a safe devolution of what are public assets and services?</p> <p>*What requirement will be placed on City/Town and Parish Councils to undertake their own due diligence of the assets/services they are proposing to take on?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Response from the Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon and the Lead Member for Transformation and HR, Cllr Theo Butt Philip</p>
Full written response	<p>Liz Leyshon: The £600k reserve proposed by Executive for overhead costs of devolution is intended to provide capacity within Somerset Council to progress agreed devolution priorities at pace, whilst enabling services to continue to deliver their existing responsibilities. This capacity is likely to include legal advice, specific assets-related input and, where relevant to the devolution agreement, HR advice. It is not envisaged as a fund to which local councils could apply.</p> <p>The recently agreed Assets and Service Devolution Framework provides a process and governance framework for the Council and for the receiving City, Town and Parish Councils. Risks and respective obligations form a key part of devolution-related discussions and negotiations. We are in dialogue with representatives of the City, Town and Parish Sector to see if there is a way</p>

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	<p>for them to support local councils to access specialist legal advice. Whilst we will do all we can to work in partnership with the sector to ensure that any devolution agreement has the best chance of delivering sustainable outcomes, it is ultimately for each party to undertake its own due diligence.</p> <p>We would welcome Corporate and Resources Scrutiny attention on this intervention to ensure that it is used effectively and efficiently. I hope that you will support this essential initiative, through budget setting today and through Scrutiny in the future.</p>
Cllr Dave Mansell	<p>The EIA for the removal of community grants (SWL013) notes that the removal of funding to Wiveliscombe Area Partnership for community transport has potential negative impacts in relation to the protected characteristics of age, disability and rurality/isolation. The EIA also records that required mitigation actions are ongoing and so not yet concluded. Please confirm what outcome is expected from the mitigation actions being taken and whether Wiveliscombe Area Partnership will continue to be funded to provide transport for people with eligible needs under the Care Act 2014.</p> <p>Response from the Lead Member for Adult Services, Cllr Bill Revans and the Lead Member for Transformation and HR, Cllr Theo Butt Philip</p>
Full written response	<p>Theo Butt Philip</p> <p>Wiveliscombe Area Partnership received funding from Somerset Council in 2023/24 as part of the legacy arrangements from Somerset West and Taunton. This funding was not specifically related to the provision of people with eligible needs under the Care Act 2014. It has long been envisaged that a review of how Somerset Council delivers community grants would be undertaken, however in response to the financial emergency the savings option has been put forward to remove the community grants budget. Conversations are on-going as to how best Somerset Council can support the important work of Wiveliscombe Area Partnership in the future – these include looking for any possible other sources of funding within the Council and the provision of stepdown funding for 2024/25 whilst Wiveliscombe Area Partnership seeks access to alternative sources of funding.</p>