

Working Together on our budget, our plans and our communities

Budget Q&As 2018

Chew Valley Forum

Date: 26th November 2018

Venue: The Library Chew Valley School

No of attendees: 16

Presenters: Mike Bowden introduction, Cllr Charles Gerrish. The presentation given can be found [here](#). Following the presentation a question and answer session was held.

Question 1:	Assuming it were to go through will the Bath Clean Air Zone (CAZ) affect revenue?
Answer 1:	Any revenue raised from charges would first go towards the zone's on-going operating costs. Any surplus revenue would have to be re-invested in projects that encourage cleaner transport and travel in and around Bath.
Question 2:	Might the Clean Air Zone also come with bigger costs?
Answer 2:	The costs for implementing the Clean Air Zone are being met from central government funding.
Question 3:	What modelling has been done for Brexit given the income from tourism?
Answer 3:	The Local Government Association are providing advice to local councils. The fall in the pound has led to an increase in visitors from abroad and from UK visitors staying in the UK.
Question 4:	A significant number of carers come from overseas – are you concerned that the care sector could implode as a result of Brexit?
Answer 4:	We do share these concerns and lobbying has taken place through the LGA. It is recognised that caring should not be seen as a low-skill profession.
Comment 1:	Carers may have qualifications that may not be recognised here in future.
Comment 2:	There has been a massive increase in people with mental health needs but not all organisations can cope or are qualified to address these.
Response 2:	We are dependent on external funding to deliver services and work closely with organisations such as DHI (Developing Health and Independence). There is some funding from the Government to assist but demand is outstripping supply.
Question 5:	You mentioned a 40% increase in looked after children – this seems high – why the increase?
Answer 5:	There are a number of factors, including unaccompanied asylum seeking children and an increase in children with significant health conditions. our numbers were low to start with, but the increase has now brought us up to the national average. it is hard to pinpoint a single factor but we are a small population so one or two large families can impact the percentages.
Comment 3:	You said that 82p in the pound is spend on adult and children's social care but need to make a £50m saving over the next 5 years. By the time you get to this, you will only be delivering care and tiny bit of something else.
Response 3:	We hope not – we hope to generate more income, for example through our housing company. We are being very pro-active in this respect.
Comment 4:	The Wigan Deal was presented to the Clinical Commissioning Group and is a powerful story. Getting communities to work better together and the 'invest to

	save' model are critical.
Response 4:	Yes adult social care in particular is a national problem. We understand that the Government is preparing a green paper on this issue. We are still waiting for this but it could change things.

Somer Valley Forum

Date: 29th November 2018

Venue: Midsomer Norton Town Hall

No of attendees: 15

Presenters: Martin Shields introduction, Cllr Charles Gerrish and Ashley Ayre. The presentation given can be found [here](#). Following the presentation a question and answer session was held.

Question 1:	There needs to be a level playing field for businesses in the High Street. There are too many charity shops – can we do anything about this?
Answer 1:	There have been some recent changes for smaller shops in respect of business rates. Cllr Myers has also secured investment in Bath and Midsomer Norton High Streets from a WECA fund of up to £10m.
Question 2:	I'm very disappointed that the arts have been cut, especially in the light of escalating mental health issues – they can be very helpful with this. Is it worth cutting in light of this?
Answer 2:	If we continued to fund this service, we would have to cut something else. We don't want to cut services but we do need to balance the books.
Question 3:	The figure of £100 income for every lorry of recycling has been around for some time but the Chinese are becoming more discriminating on what they will accept. Will this figure change?
Answer 3:	We do not send our recycling materials to China - it is dealt with more locally. However, the costs of disposal of waste will increase so we do need people to recycle more. We can interest organisations in buying recyclable items that they can re-use and officers are currently looking at how to maximise these opportunities.
Question 4:	In terms of the Capital Programme Review, we know about Bath Central Library – are there any others?
Answer 4:	Some projects have been taken out of the programme as they have been completed. Other schemes have been reviewed so spend figures and profiles may be updated.
Comment 1:	Reporting via Fix My Street has been very successful. I reported a broken manhole cover at 8.45am and it was fixed by 11am the same day. It is easy to moan but many things do get done.

Keynsham Area Forum

Date: 3rd December 2018

Venue: Keynsham Community Space

No of attendees: 28

Presenters: Martin Shields introduction, Cllr Charles Gerrish and Ashley Ayre. The presentation given can be found [here](#). Following the presentation a question and answer session was held.

Question 1:	The media have led us to believe the Council will make an extra contribution to Policing – is this true?
Answer 1:	The Council collects the precept for a number of organisations including the Police. They set their own precept. The Council does not fund the Police directly – the precept comes from Council Taxpayers.

Question 2:	There is a budget line of £250k for Saltford Station. The Leader of the Council has been quoted as saying that no trains will stop there, so will this budget item be dropped?
Answer 2:	The Council continues to support the proposal.
Comment 1:	Saltford Parish Council has had a letter from Network Rail contradicting what the Council has said regarding a station's viability.
Response 1:	The proposal for a station at Saltford is now the responsibility of the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) and the Council has agreed to allocate a budget line. However, WECA is proposing a light rail which will include more stops with such a system.
Question 3:	Where will the traffic go if there is light rail on the road?
Answer 3:	The light rail would run alongside the existing rail line, not on the road.
Question 4:	I appreciate the work that Councillors and officers do to produce these budgets. I am dismayed at the £50m cuts over the next 4 – 5 years. The Government has been condemned by the United Nations. I am impressed that Cllr Gerrish is on top of his brief. However, I would have liked to see this information in a booklet beforehand. I propose that a meeting of the citizens of Keynsham be arranged so we can go through the budget and come up with suggestions. There are public loan boards – have we got anything like that? Do we fine bad landlords?
Answer 4:	<p>Yes we do fine bad landlords and there have been articles in the press about this. The Council does not have any PFI commitments and has reviewed its borrowing but the penalties of paying off loans sometimes outweigh the savings. The last borrowing in October was at a cheaper rate than a loan taken out in April due to the diligent work of officers.</p> <p>This Forum is not solely for the citizens of Keynsham but a wider geographic area. The whole point of the Forum meetings is to reach out to the community and there is a limit to what we can resource in terms of organising and holding further meetings. The Forum meetings are also non-political. The budget presentation will be circulated to the Forum and if you have any further questions or suggestions, these can be passed to officers. We will look at how we engage in the future.</p>
Question 5:	Is it correct that Business Rates go to Central Government?
Answer 5:	They did, with a proportion coming back to the Council – around 46% with the rest shared amongst other Local Authorities. When the Council joined WECA we were able to retain them which gave us £2m income. However, there is a review by the Government on the amount of business rates that local councils will be able to retain which has not yet been confirmed.
Question 6:	So, if we could retain 100% of Business Rates, we wouldn't have a deficit issue?
Answer 6:	The budget pressures continue, an example being that the law changed which required Council's to continue to support young people with Special Educational Needs until they are 25, not 18. There are no funds from Government to support this and we do not have the necessary educational facilities within our district. Therefore, we have to pay to transport such students to suitable colleges outside the area.
Comment 2:	There has been a reduction in Youth Services annually for years. Keynsham Town Council has taken them over here. It is good to hear about the staff mutual but you haven't told us how this works.
Response 2:	The staff mutual will be able to access external funding that the Council cannot. The staff will no longer be employed by the Council and the youth centre buildings the Council own will be run differently – this is how savings will be made. The Council will make a £500k provision to support the mutual.

Question 7:	So it is being done on a wing and a prayer?
Answer 7:	No – a business case has been prepared and will be ratified by the Council.
Comment 3:	Charities such as the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) get a grant to help the most vulnerable which you say is one of your priorities. However, if you cut their £5m grant by 10%, there will be a reduction in their services. I have volunteered with them for 12 years and they help a lot of people.
Response 3:	<p>We have no plans to re-negotiate our contract with the CAB as part of this budget.</p> <p>The Government recently announced that the CAB nationally will take on the advisory service for Universal Credit, so they will get funds from central Government. We commission £130m worth of services a year from the third sector and community groups and need to keep this under review but have not reduced the grant to the CAB. However, balancing the books does mean cuts elsewhere. With just over 81p in the pound going on vulnerable children and adults, this is a challenge.</p> <p>We have just signed with the CAB for the next year and as well as funding, we give them free access to our premises including office space.</p>
Comment 4:	The Keynsham Winter Festival took place last week and volunteers from Keynsham Wombles collected just 7 bags of litter. This is astonishing for an event that attracted 6,000 people. In previous years, they have collected 30 bags of litter so the messages around this are filtering through.

Joint 3SG Bath City, Cam Valley and Bathavon Forum

Date: 10th December 2018

Venue: Brunswick Room, Guildhall, Bath

No of Attendees: 32

Presenters: Ashley Ayre introduction and Cllr Charles Gerrish. The presentation given can be found [here](#). Following the presentation a question and answer session was held.

Question 1:	When Ben Howlett was MP the estimated no of jobs created from Bath Quay's site was 5,000 jobs and now you state that there will be 9,000 jobs created. How can you achieve those numbers?
Answer 1:	It is important that we create jobs locally particularly highly skilled jobs. There are a vast amount of people who travel out of the area for work and those travelling in. This will help reduce in and out commuting.
Question 2:	There are 43 empty shops in Bath what type of employment space will be created.
Answer 2:	We are looking at creating more office accommodation to attract new businesses into the area.
Question 3:	You talked about building affordable homes, can you confirm that there will be an increase and not a net decrease?
Answer 3:	I am unable to give the exact figures regarding housing growth numbers but it's important that we identified sites and current constraints such as lobby government about Air BnB and HMOs. Although it's not that straight forward, as HMOs are not always taken up as student houses, they are also used by young professionals.
Question 4:	Explain the thinking behind the housing company.
Answer 4:	The Council used to provide social housing. In early 2000, the Council took a decision to pass its housing stock to the social housing provider, which was Somer Housing, now known as Curo. From that point the Council ceased to have a housing revenue account. The property company is at arms length, although the Council is the sole shareholder. The company is converting a number of empty premises above the shops. These have remained empty for a number of years. This is an opportunity to convert them into residential uses. We are also converting our former

	Council offices in Keynsham into 95 new homes, some will be available for sale and some rented. The income will come back to the Council.
Question 5:	I understand the principle, but why can't the Council just deliver them?
Answer 5:	We cannot compete with the social housing provider. The property company can bring forward sites that wouldn't have happened otherwise. There is a site in lower Weston that we are working with the Duchy. It's a unique site and we are looking at developing sustainable properties.
Question 6:	Clearly there is a growing expectation for volunteers to step forward, is there evidence that there are enough volunteers to take up the slack
Answer 6:	There are never enough volunteers. Good neighbours and being neighbourly is different from volunteering.
Question 7:	There is advice that 15% of the transport budget should be allocated to cycling and walking, will you ensure that the transport budget is adequately split to fund cycling and walking initiatives?
Answer 7:	I suggest we take this away and find out more.
Question 8:	There is a shortfall in the budget of £6million before Council tax increases. What would 1% Council tax rise be?
Answer 8:	1% raises about £800k. Council tax rises are capped.
Comment 6:	There is often confusion between volunteering and the voluntary sector. Many voluntary organisations are quite sizeable and have paid professionals. It is very different.
Comment:7	There are many young professional and young vulnerable people who need housing to rent particularly those under 25.
Response: 7	We are working with the YMCA on a housing project.
Question 9:	In terms of working together, placed based commissions, health and education, what are you doing to help those young people who are excluded from school.
Answer 9:	The majority of schools in B&NES are now Academies. We commission alternative provision working with and involving schools and other partners. The education service is shrinking. We do monitor exclusions and challenge them.
Question 10:	Within the presentation you highlight the negative impact of the Universities on the Council tax and the loss of HMOs, what are you doing to ensure they pay their way?
Answer 10:	We are having conversations with both universities. There is a degree of engagement and we hope to reach a degree of understanding.
Question 11:	The average salary is £27.5k, how many properties in the Keynsham development will be within their price range?
Answer 11:	We are developing 95 new homes, some will be under £150k and will be available for local people. We will go back to the Board and ask for more information.
Question 12:	One good thing that has happened is the waste collection which must have saved money and is also good for the environment. Have you got other ideas to make improvements, such as encouraging businesses to recycle?
Answer 12:	This is a very good point. Our enforcement teams are very proactive and take action against businesses.
Question 13:	How do you guarantee that affordable housing doesn't get taken over by investment?
Answer 13:	This is a decision for the Company Board and it is an issue that we will be addressing with them.

Question 14:	In your presentation you refer to the Wigan Deal. They ask citizens to commit to doing their bit. Are you planning to roll out something similar? How can we help you with developing ideas and work with you?
Answer 14:	We are using the basis of the Wigan Deal. A meeting last month of the voluntary sector focussed on how we can work together and promote the services that are available locally. An example given was the Frome Model, there is an opportunity to create something similar in Banes. We are keen to hear new ideas.
Question 15:	In relation to your acquisitions for commercial property with another local authority are you also looking at property for housing and what is the % debt to the value of the property?
Answer 15:	The Council owns a number of commercial properties throughout the city, most of which are within retail. The retail sector is not very buoyant and therefore it's important to diversify our holdings. Rather than dispose of property we are acquiring additional property. The level of debt is lower than the private sector. The previous administration agreed to purchase an old bank building on Milson Street. The overall proportion of debt is 30% of the property value.
Question 16:	Does the Council subsidise refugees and can we accept further refugees? There is a family who is in unsuitable housing.
Answer 16:	The families accepted under the Government's scheme come with a funding package. Some of the grant is to help set up their accommodation. With regard to additional families this will be subject to suitable accommodation. We currently have 18 unaccompanied children in the resettlement scheme. With regard to the specific case you mention we should talk after the meeting about this.
Question 17:	There are more cuts that need to be found, at what point will we no longer be able to achieve the cuts?
Answer 17:	The Fair Funding review will be announced in the Spring. This may give us some answers. The model is currently unsustainable. We have first class special schools and therefore we do attract people from outside the area to relocate. The additional pressure to fund SEN up to the age of 25 have added further pressure on local authority budgets as there was no additional funding available.