

Annual Report of the Leader of the Council

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Division and Local Member: All

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1. Summary

- 1.1. This is my final Leader's Annual Report to Council of this quadrennium. Before discussing the work and achievements of the Council over the last year I would like to take this opportunity to thank Cabinet, council Members, officers and the Council's partners for the all work they have done over the last 12 months.
- 1.2. There are many highlights and achievements to be celebrated:
 - **Improving adult social care** so it helps people to stay independent for longer;
 - The improvement of **our children's services over the last 3 years** so our young people get the support they need;
 - 91% of our **schools at Ofsted 'good' or 'outstanding'** level, and **excellent achievement by pupils and students**;
 - More and more premises being able to access **superfast broadband**;
 - **More enterprise and incubation space** for businesses and entrepreneurs;
 - **Solid partnership working** across Somerset and the Heart of the South West, including on health, economic growth and flood resilience;
 - The crucial announcement last year giving the green light to construct **Hinkley Point C**; and most recently
 - Somerset winning a disproportionately high share of the Government's **Growth Deal 3 award** - over £27m of the £43.57m allocated to the Heart of the South West.
 - **Somerset Rivers Authority**
 - **Heath of the South West Devolution**
- 1.3. All this has been accomplished despite having to keep pace with continuing national austerity. We have set a net revenue budget requirement of £311.772m for 2017-18, alongside capital investment of £107.599m. This includes using new freedoms to raise additional Council Tax to support the essential work of Adult Social Care.

The council continues to modernise and reform its services in the face of demographic and financial pressures. The Core Council Programme continues to drive transformation: economic growth, adult services modernisation, children's improvement and delivering a modern council through the '2020 vision.'

The new Somerset County Plan has been in place for slightly over a year and outlines the priorities for the council. My report will mirror its broad themes.

2. Our Council

Listening Learning Changing

In this year's Listening Learning Changing roadshows more than 6,000 people were asked about which council priorities they valued most as well as other key issues. For the fourth year running, 'helping vulnerable and elderly people' was voted the highest of the Council's priorities followed by 'investing in Somerset's economy and infrastructure' and 'attracting jobs and apprenticeships.'

We have heard/will hear shortly the report from Customers and communities so I will move on to other issues.

Vision projects

The new County Plan included a commitment to four major new projects for the council: a new university, a new Garden Town, energy initiatives and more business parks. This work is being carried out using an innovative 'vision volunteer' method where staff are encouraged to join and lead the projects from inception through to completion, with support from senior managers.

Collocating public services in the community

In order to provide services where they are needed and take advantage of new technology, a project to develop new 'hubs' has been under way to collocate a wide range of public services where communities need them. The new hub at Orchard Court in Glastonbury brings together the Library, Registration Services, Getset Children's Centre, health visitors and midwives, Mendip District Council's Access Point, Citizen's Advice, Health Connections Mendip and a children's nursery. Work on further hubs continues and this initiative will also help the council rationalise its property holdings and save money.

Our staff

It is important to me that everyone who works for the council knows that what they do is appreciated, and that without their dedication neither quality services nor necessary improvements could be delivered.

At the beginning of February the Council held its annual staff awards ceremony which recognised the continuing excellence and hard work of staff across the council. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank those who were nominated and who won: it is clear that all staff are working hard to deliver the best services they possibly can.

Our Human Resources and Organisational Development team is also working on how to harness the potential of all members of staff and develop the culture of the organisation.

We are also committed to employing apprentices at Somerset County Council. We employ 37 apprentices across a number of services and aim to increase that number to approximately 150 apprentices and trainees per year.

Somerset County Council was awarded runner up in the 'Employer of People with Disability' category at the 2016 National Learning Disabilities and Autism Awards. This award recognised the employment support the Council provides to people with learning disabilities.

Information and Communications Technology

In November the council's contract with SouthWest One came to an end. After a smooth transfer of services and systems back into the council a new programme of ICT transformation is focussing on productivity, resilience and compliance.

The Smart Programme of changes to the way that the council uses its buildings has now been completed and has delivered savings as well as improved working practices. Building on that work is the new Technology and People Programme which will roll-out the next generation of digital technology, further modernise ways of working and improve productivity.

Performance management

It is essential that the Council monitors and manages its activity and to this end we have refreshed our performance reporting to ensure that it continues to reflect the Council's plans. We have continued to embed and develop this as part of our Performance Management Framework.

2.1. Improving Adult Social Care

The demographic realities of Somerset – an aging population meaning increased demand – coupled with long-term reductions in Government funding have made it imperative to look at the way that adult social care works.

The maxim that 'most people would rather be able to look after themselves than rely on Council or other help providers' is central to the council's approach: promoting independence, early intervention, and prevention. For example the Innovation Site in West Somerset has been operational for ten months and instead of a traditional 'paternalistic' approach to care it is based on promoting independence and staying healthier for longer.

There is still a lot of work to do however over the last year a huge amount has been done to prepare the ground, challenge culture and practices, and work more effectively with partners in health, housing and elsewhere.

It is important to note that whilst the 2017 Spring Budget announcement of £12m of additional funding for Adult Social Care is very welcome, reforming our service is still essential in order to make it sustainable in the long term. This is a step forward but still a huge way to go to establish the fair funding for Somerset that our residents deserve and I know that all sides will support the new Leader in the next Administration to fight the good fight for this cause.

2.2. Health and Wellbeing

Sustainability and Transformation Plans

Many financial and service challenges across health and social care require a radical and joined up response. Launched in November 2016 the Somerset Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) has been developed jointly by Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group, Somerset County Council, Somerset Partnership and the county's two large hospitals.

It sets out a shared vision for reforming health and social care to address the changing demographics of our county, tackle increasing demand and modernise

the service through integration and cooperation. The STP is the key document that will drive our partnership with the NHS in the coming years and will focus on prevention, early intervention, reducing bed-blocking, moving services away from hospital and closer to people's homes, mental health and making the system more transparent and financially sustainable. I am delighted that our own Chief Executive is leading the STP and looking to deliver for Somerset.

Mental health

Since October 2016 Somerset County Council has been responsible for delivering mental health social care. A new Mental Health Social Care offer launched at that time focuses on social needs rather than a purely medical approach and will help people to access the support and care they need.

As well as developing mental health services across the Somerset, the STP will also ensure parity of esteem between physical and mental health.

Public health

The 2016 Joint Strategic Need Assessment was published last year and focused on informing the new Children and Young People's Plan. More widely the Public Health team and Health and Wellbeing Board continue to promote and support initiatives to prevent illness and promote healthier lifestyles, including programmes to tackle smoking, reduce falls amongst older people, promote healthy eating, and encourage physical activity and good health in people of all ages.

2.3. Children's Services

Children's Improvement

The hard work being carried out by our children's services is bearing fruit and is being recognised both by the Department of Education and Ofsted.

The Minister wrote to in December 2016 praising the commitment of the Council and recognising that there has been 'significant improvement'.

In addition Ofsted have carried out two monitoring visits in December 2016 and February 2017. Visiting teams in different parts of the County, inspectors found high morale amongst children's social workers, a commitment to Somerset, and evidence of continuous improvement..

We know that more needs to be done and the inspectors highlighted areas in need of additional attention so that good examples become the norm.

Having completed the 'nine priorities' action plan a new 2016-19 Children and Young People's Plan comprises seven Improvement Programmes:

1. Supporting children, families and communities to become more resilient;
 2. Promoting healthy outcomes and giving children the best start in life;
 3. Improving emotional health and wellbeing;
 4. Building skills for life;
 5. Providing help early and effectively;
 6. Achieving effective multi-agency support for more vulnerable children and young people and developing an excellent children's social work service;
- and

7. Embedding a think family approach across the workforce.

Importantly, the Plan is a multi-agency document that involved input from young people, children looked after, and care leavers.

Achievements across the service so far include:

- Reduced numbers of 'children looked after';
- Reducing caseloads to 14, one of the lowest in the country and an improving ratio of permanent to locum staff;
- Somerset is leading a partnership of South West local authorities to deliver the Step Up to Social work programme which encourages graduates to choose a career in social work;
- Last year saw a record 96% of newly qualified social workers choosing to stay with the County Council after finishing their first year in the role;
- Improved management practices including new permanent managers;
- West Somerset Opportunity Area plans for improving social mobility are under development; and
- A new Regional Adoption Agency in partnership with Devon, Plymouth and Torbay is progressing.

Corporate Parenting

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2016-19 was approved by Cabinet in April 2016 and endorsed by Full Council the following month. The five priorities in the strategy and work under way focus on:

- The voice of the child;
- Care leavers;
- Health of children looked after and care leavers;
- Education; and
- Fostering and adoption.

Education

The new strategic vision for education in Somerset 'Achieving Excellence for All' went live in April 2016 and is an ambitious partnership programme of work to improve outcomes for all children. The focus for the first year was support for vulnerable children and young people including the most able - schools are active partners in this work.

Educational achievement of our children and young people is also encouraging

- 68.7% of Somerset children achieved a 'good level of development' in 2016, 2 percentage points higher than in 2015;
- 62% of children at Key Stage 4 achieved GCSE grades of A* to C in English and Maths, precisely in line with the national average; and
- 91% of schools are rated by Ofsted as 'good' or 'outstanding' – a tribute to the hard work of headteachers up and down the county.

Schools, whether academies or maintained schools have increasing autonomy from local authorities. The County Council therefore works with schools to maximise that autonomy and increase their effectiveness, and new initiatives include:

- Appointment of Somerset Education Partners to support every school to improve;
- A new Somerset Education Partnership Board to hold schools, the council and partners to account for the impact on pupil outcomes of the available funding; and
- New core standards for Special Education Needs.

2.4. Economy

Growth Deal 3

The Government's announcement of Growth Deal 3 on 23 February 2017 has been very positive for Somerset. The county received over £27m of the £43.57m allocated to the Heart of the South West, and supports a number of our priority schemes:

- Phase 3 of the Somerset Innovation Centre in Bridgwater;
- Expansion of the Connecting Devon and Somerset broadband and mobile project to target more unserved areas and increase 4G coverage;
- Construction of the iAero (South) Centre in Yeovil;
- Next generation ICT training project 'Blue Screen IT – PROJECT X', a LEP-wide hub and spoke training for cyber security, big data and social media;
- Improving the M5 Junction 25 and Toneyway in Taunton between the motorway and Creech Castle; and
- New road links to employment sites at Huntspill Energy Park.

Hinkley Point C

In September last year contracts to begin construction of Hinkley C were signed. After a period of uncertainty when the Government chose to review the project this is excellent news for the County and its economic future, and will deliver billions of Pounds of benefit to the regional economy over the lifetime of the project and help kickstart a national nuclear renaissance that Somerset will be part of.

Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS)

Access to the internet has significant public and economic benefit and Somerset's residents and businesses are very clear that superfast broadband is of crucial importance to them. It is therefore excellent news that Growth Deal 3 has expanded the CDS programme as well as increasing mobile coverage. I am also pleased that despite some delays by the in March 2017 the CDS partnership announced that the programme's £94 million contract has achieved, and is now expected to exceed, its major target of making superfast fibre broadband available to 278,000 households and businesses across the two counties. Approximately 104,000 of these are in Somerset and it is encouraging that one-in-three businesses and households with access to this technology have now taken it up – around double the figure of only 18 months ago.

As well as a new 'Airband' system for parts of Exmoor, the CDS partnership has also signed a contract to deliver parts of phase two of the programme outside the National Parks. Four of the six lots on offer have been awarded and will deliver a total investment of £54.3m, two thirds coming from the private sector, which far exceeds the levels seen in phase 1. When complete in December 2019, these contracts will have delivered an ultrafast broadband network, offering speeds of

1000mbps to 35,225 of the hardest to reach homes and businesses.

Enterprise and incubation space

As well as Growth Deal 3 funding for the Toneway and Junction 25, £4million funding from Highways England's Growth and Housing Fund was announced for further improvements at the motorway junction and to help unlock access to a new 35-hectare development site which could deliver up to 2,400 jobs. This is a partnership project, being delivered by Somerset County Council with additional funding from Taunton Deane Borough Council and the LEP.

More enterprise centres have been given the green light, been complete or expanded in the last year. These include:

- Expansion of the popular Minehead Enterprise Centre;
- Planning permission for Enterprise Centre in Wiveliscombe, a new mixed office/light industrial space;
- Planning permission for Wells Technology Enterprise Centre, a new business space designed to provide more office space and to support small to medium-size business growth in the area.

2.5. Partnerships

Partnership is becoming increasingly important for the public sector and Somerset County Council and many of the achievements I have discussed in this report would not have been possible without close working with our partners.

The County Council continued to be involved in a wide range of strategic conversations and relationships across Somerset and the Heart of the South West has, including:

- The Somerset Rivers Authority;
- The Somerset Growth Board;
- Connecting Devon and Somerset;
- The Heart of the South West Leader's Group, focussing on a new Productivity Plan, devolution, and the challenges and opportunities presented by Brexit; and
- Looking at the potential of a Strategic Board for Somerset to take advantage of growing levels of collaboration across the county.

I would like to finish my report by restating my gratitude to Cabinet, Members and officers who continue to work tirelessly to deliver such a wide variety of projects in what continue to be difficult financial times nationally. In a complex and uncertain world it is to be celebrated that the challenging issues for our County are not only being identified, but also addressed.

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3. Background papers

Budget

- County Council meeting 15 February 2017:
<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=137&MId=208&Ver=4>

Adult Social Care

- Annual Report of the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care 30 November 2016:
<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s1258/2016%20November%2030%20Item%2016%20Annual%20Report%20of%20the%20Cabinet%20Member%20for%20Adult%20Social%20Care.pdf>
- Adult Social Care Performance Update 1 March 2017:
<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s2455/2017%2001%20March%20-%20Item%209%20-%20Adult%20Social%20Care%20Performance%20Update.pdf>

Health and wellbeing

- Somerset Sustainability and Transformation Plan:
<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/stp/>
- Somerset Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2012-18:
<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing/somerset-health-and-wellbeing-board/>
- Mental Health Services Update: 1 March 2017:
<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s2411/2017%2001%20March%20-%20Item%206%20-%20Mental%20Health%20Services%20Update.pdf>

Children's Services

- Somerset Children's and Young People's Plan 2016-19:
<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=42521>
- Somerset School Performance 2016:
<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s2687/School%20Performance.pdf>
- Children's Service update 20 February 2017:
<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s2427/Childrens%20Services%20Update%20v2.pdf>
- Annual Report of the Cabinet Member for Children and Families 15 February 2017; <http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s1936/Item%2013%20-%20Annual%20Report%20of%20the%20Cabinet%20Member%20for%20Children%20and%20Families.pdf>
- Report on Corporate Parenting 6 September 2016:
<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/q268/Public%20reports%20pack%2026th-Sep-2016%2010.00%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>
- Strategy for Achieving Excellence for all 2016-20:
<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/policies-and-plans/strategies/somerset-strategic-vision-for-education/>

Economy

- Connecting Devon and Somerset update 20 January 2017:
<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s1733/2017%20Jan%2031%20-%20Item%206%20Connecting%20Devon%20and%20Somerset.pdf>

- Growth Deal 3 update 21 March 2017: <http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s2823/LEP%20scrutiny.pdf>
- Somerset Growth Plan 2014-20: <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/policies-and-plans/plans/somerset-growth-plan/>

Note: For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author