

Annual Report of the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Community Infrastructure

Cabinet Member: Cllr D Hall - Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Community Infrastructure

Division and Local Member: N/A

Lead Officers: Paula Hewitt – Lead Director for Economic and Community Infrastructure & Director of Commissioning

Michele Cusack – Director of Economic and Community Infrastructure - Commissioning

Alyn Jones - Director of Economic and Community Infrastructure - Operations

Author: Paul Hickson - Strategic Commissioning Manager, Economy and Planning

Contact Details: 07977 400838

1. Summary

- 1.1. I will use this report to set out progress and achievements from the last year in the services that fall under my Cabinet responsibilities for business, inward investment and policy, as well as looking forward to what the next year has in store.
- 1.2. This report focusses on the key highlights from this service area from the past year. Beyond this it is also important to recognise the importance of on-going service activity and the tremendous contributions our staff make to businesses and communities.

2. Business, Inward Investment and Policy – the last 12 months

2.1. Economic Development

Economic prosperity and growth is a key driver of health and wellbeing within the county. Evidence indicates that people in work are generally healthier and less reliant on public services. In addition, businesses within the county make a valuable contribution in terms of business rates which will increasingly sustain this council and public services more widely.

2.1.1 Heart of the South West (HotSW) Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

The LEP is crucial to creating the climate for growth and enabling delivery of the economic priorities from our County Plan. SCC is a key partner in the Heart of the South West LEP and in the past year we have continued to work effectively with the LEP and its wider partners to promote growth in the Heart of the South West area. The LEP concluded negotiating its third Growth Deal with Government in 2015. The LEP and its partner local authorities worked closely with local MPs to encourage Government to agree a significant deal for the Heart of the South West, resulting in £43.57 million being committed to the area.

For Somerset this includes investment in:

- The Somerset Energy Innovation Centre in Bridgwater
- The iAero centre in Yeovil
- Improvements to the Toneway in Taunton
- Access infrastructure for the Huntspill Enterprise Zone
- Funds for the Connecting Devon and Somerset programme

These schemes combined, account for £27 million of the LEP's Growth Deal 3 award – a favourable outcome for Somerset.

Overall the LEP has secured £223 million from its three Growth Deals and schemes benefitting Somerset account for £100 million of these funds. SCC has also worked with the LEP and its local partners (including local authorities, national parks, Clinical Commissioning Groups, private and third sector organisations) to develop a Heart of the South West Productivity Strategy to supersede the previous Strategic Economic Plan (2014). This was formally adopted by the newly formed Joint Committee in March 2018 and work is well underway developing the Delivery Plan.

The strategy will provide a basis for engagement with central government on the UK National Industrial Strategy and forthcoming HotSW Local Industrial Strategy, which the partnership has now been invited by Government to develop, as well as help to secure valuable future investment for the area, such as from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

2.1.2 Heart of the South West Productivity Strategy/Local Industrial Strategy

SCC has worked with the LEP and local authorities across the Heart of the South West to develop a strategy for improving business productivity in the area. The strategy focusses on a set of key opportunities for the area and identifies three broad themes for developing the area's general economic performance. The strategy has been endorsed by the LEP Board and the Heart of the South West Joint Committee in the summer of 2018 and a delivery plan is now being developed. In September 2018 the Government announced that the Heart of the South West would be a "wave 2" area for negotiation between the LEP and Central Government departments of a Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) for the area. This will identify the nationally important economic opportunities for the area and provide a mechanism to secure future funding for key projects from sources such as the Government proposed UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The Productivity Strategy will provide an evidence base for this process and SCC will be actively involved to ensure that Somerset priorities are highlighted in the LIS.

2.1.3 Skills and Employment

There is considerable evidence that availability and retention of suitably skilled workers is one of the key barriers to growth facing Somerset businesses. Equally the potential of career pathways and apprenticeship opportunities in sectors such as engineering and construction is often under-estimated by young people and their advisors at home and in schools. During the past year we have made significant progress in addressing these issues. Following a successful application to the Hinkley Point C community impact mitigation fund and the agreement of local authority matching funding, the Somerset Education Business Partnership (EBP) has been established as a mechanism to improve connections between employers, schools, colleges and providers throughout

the county. The team has been recruited and is hosted by the Somerset Chamber of Commerce & Industry. I was delighted to participate in a successful public launch event for the EBP on 24 October at the Canalside Centre in Bridgwater. SCC is also part of a partnership led by the LEP and including other local authorities in the Heart of the South West area which successfully funding to establish a Careers Hub to provide careers advice to young people. SCC's economic development is also co-ordinating the business workstream of the West Somerset Opportunity Area programme, a DfE funded initiative designed to improve social mobility in this area.

2.1.4 Enterprise Zone

Working with the LEP and Sedgemoor District Council we have secured from Government Enterprise Zone status for the Huntspill Energy Park near M5 junction 23. A shadow board has been established for the Enterprise Zone and as Cabinet Lead for Economic Development I represent SCC on this body. The Enterprise Zone will accelerate the delivery of this strategic employment site and provide additional business incentives - crucial to our ambitions to secure local investment relating to the Hinkley Point C supply chain. Significant progress has been made in the past year to bring the Enterprise Zone to fruition. Late in 2017 the site was acquired by the Salamanca Group to bring forward for development. The developer is developing a master plan for the site, consistent with the energy park planning policy guidance previously adopted by Sedgemoor District Council.

2.1.5 Superfast Broadband - Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS)

Broadband connectivity is very important to businesses and residents in Somerset. The Phase 1 contract which delivered superfast broadband to 298,900 premises has been working through the contract closure process and contract closure was agreed on 31 October. Steps are being taken to introduce up to £4.7 million of clawback Gainshare for BT Openreach to deliver further superfast premises in the region.

2.1.6 The phase 2 intervention area was divided into two areas: Exmoor and Dartmoor National Parks and the remainder of the Connecting Devon and Somerset area.

2.1.7 The National Parks deployment has been built by Airband Community Internet Ltd. The network is currently going through the assurance process to confirm the number of premises which have access to a 30Mbps broadband service.

2.1.8 The remainder of the phase 2 area has been divided into 6 separate lots, 5 of which have been awarded to Gigaclear (a pure fibre network provider) and 1 to Airband (a wireless provider).

2.1.9 Airband is delivering Lot 4 (North Devon) providing a superfast fixed wireless service and this delivery is progressing well.

2.1.10 Gigaclear has encountered difficulty in delivery of its contracts. Gigaclear has recognised that additional resources are required to deliver the programme and is proposing that there will be changes to the roll out delivery to reduce delays going forward. Gigaclear is to provide a revised schedule of the roll-out and this will be carefully considered to ensure that it is acceptable and can deliver this important service to communities as quickly as possible.

Gigaclear is 32% of the CDS1 and CDS2 programme by public grant value.

2.1.11 Somerset Energy Innovation Centre (SEIC)

SCC is leading the development of the SEIC in Bridgwater as a key part of our strategy to facilitate the development of a low carbon energy business cluster in Somerset and in particular maximise supply chain business opportunities linked to the construction of Hinkley Point C. Building 1 of SEIC comprises a 3000 square metres of office building and is now fully occupied. Work commenced on building 2 in late 2017 and is now nearing completion. This has been funded in large part via grants secured from the LEP and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The full vision for SEIC involves a final building to complete the facility, with the funding strategy for this including further investment via the LEP. Design work has been undertaken on this final building, which includes a robotics facility to meet specialised needs of supply chain businesses, and a planning application is due to be submitted shortly. In the past year SCC and SWMAS (our operating partner for SEIC building 1) have developed closer working relationships with Bristol University relating to innovation and business support opportunities linked to nuclear. One example of this is the organisations working with other partners to develop an expression of interest for Innovate UK's strength in places fund.

2.1.12 Aerospace/iAero Yeovil Centre

Aerospace and advanced engineering is of particular importance to Somerset's economy as we are at the centre of the UK's rotorcraft sector, linked to the presence of Leonardo Helicopters and significant parts of its supply chain in the county. We are working closely with the industry, the LEP and other partners to sustain and develop this sector and as part of this we are developing plans for an aerospace centre in Yeovil to support innovation in the supply chain and the development of new products and processes. We have secured planning permission for the development of this centre which is due to commence construction in early 2019, once funding agreements totalling £6.5 million are signed with the LEP and ERDF for the scheme. In addition, SCC has agreed to allocate capital and revenue funding totalling £1.4 million for the scheme. In July 2018 SCC jointly with representatives from Leonardo made a presentation about the proposed scheme to delegates at the Farnborough International Air Show.

2.1.13 Supporting Businesses and the Local Economy

Our network of enterprise centres provides an infrastructure to support new-start and growing small businesses across rural Somerset. In addition to the five existing centres in the network we have made significant progress in the past year with plans for further developments. The second phase of the Highbridge enterprise centre is open for businesses and funding has been secured for new centres at Wells and Wiveliscombe via Growth Deal and ERDF sources. Work on both is due to commence in early 2019. In addition, we have recently submitted a detailed business case for ERDF funding that would enable an enterprise centre to be developed on land in SCC's ownership at Bruton and to finance a Somerset "business accelerator programme" including a package of investment grants for growth orientated small and medium sized businesses in the county. A decision on this business case is anticipated in early 2019.

2.2 New Nuclear in Somerset

- 2.2.1** Two years after Hinkley Point C was fully launched, more than 3,200 people are now at work building the new nuclear power station in Somerset. The project is on track for its next major milestone in 2019 – the completion of the 4,500-tonne concrete platform on which the reactor buildings sit. Work is advancing on reactor one with completion of its pre-stressing gallery: this structure sits below the reactor unit and will help to strengthen the main reactor building. Work on reactor two has also begun.
- 2.2.2** The Sea Wall is well on track and the first phase of dredging the location of the cooling water inlet heads is complete. The conveyor system is being installed on the jetty which is due to be operational at the end of next quarter.
- 2.2.3** The Employee Campus at Hinkley Point C opened in June and is over 75% full. The facility is managed by HOST, a newly established business consortium of local suppliers who have come together to service the campus accommodation and is in size comparable to Europe's second-largest hotel establishment (when Sedgemoor Campus also comes online later this year).
- 2.2.4** The Sedgemoor Campus, situated off Bath Road, Bridgwater is nearing completion and is expected to be operational for the duration of Hinkley Point C's construction phase. I am pleased to report that at least twenty five percent of HOST staff who will be working on the Sedgemoor Campus live locally on the Sydenham estate in Bridgwater.
- 2.2.5** In February this year, EDF Energy completed work on their new 'J23' Park and Ride facility for staff; a purpose-built facility for EDF Energy workers travelling from the north. Located just off the A38 at Dunball Roundabout, the Park and Ride will reduce traffic to and from Hinkley Point C. Workers travel to and from the Hinkley Point C site by bus and the Park and Ride is helping to reduce peak time journeys across the town. The Cannington Park and Ride (a temporary 252-space facility) has also been completed.
- 2.2.6** In addition to supporting EDF Energy in the delivery of and communications surrounding these infrastructure schemes, a key focus of the County Council has been in the development and delivery of a range of mitigation measures funded through the S106 agreement including highway improvements, rights of way (including development of the exciting Castles and Coast Way which is due to open in Spring 2019), landscape, tourism, archaeology and skills and education support.
- 2.2.7** At the end of 2017 the County Council completed a new footway/cycleway alongside the A39 between Cannington Main Road Roundabout and Sandford Hill Roundabout which will connect off-road cycle facilities that have already been provided between Cannington and Combwich, and to further off-road facilities which already extend into the Steart Marshes. On-road provision for cyclists is available through Wembdon to connect to Bridgwater where additional cycle improvements will be delivered. We are continuing to promote this and future schemes through the relaunched 'The Bridgwater Way' (TBW) programme.
- 2.2.8** The HPC Programme Obligation Board (POB) considers all applications made to the Community Impact Mitigation (CIM) Fund managed by West Somerset

Council but covers projects from the main impact zones of West Somerset (WS) and Sedgemoor, and across Somerset where appropriate. The October meeting saw the conclusion of the available funds, recommending the award of £1.48 million across 12 projects (subject to approval at WS Council 21st November). Overall, £7.2 million has been awarded through this route to over 50 projects, with Somerset County Council being the lead applicant or supporting several successful bids.

The Somerset Community Foundation holds further HPC impact mitigation funds that invites bids across a range of topics. The fund overall has a value in excess of £12.8 million, and in the first 18 months of operation, has committed £1.8million. Providers who were successful in the Community Cohesion round, have recently joined together to create the HPC e-welcome pack for workers and their families coming to Somerset. This will be developed and launched in the near future.

2.2.9 Key activities on Tourism have included the following:

- OnShore (PR Agency) has been working closely with Visit Somerset & Visit Exmoor to promote the area under the campaign umbrella 'Somerset & Exmoor 2in1'.
- Hinkley Tourism Action Partnership (HTAP) with match funding from Natural England has run a series of business support workshops to help businesses make the most of being close the Coast Path. A short film and information pack is available on Visit Somerset Website. A new leaflet promoting the Coast Path has been developed.
- Continued use of resources developed by HTAP - 'Secrets' campaign. Social media and map, Somerset e-book, interactive map on Visit Somerset.
- HTAP has agreed to support both industry bodies (Visit Somerset & Visit Exmoor) to improve their websites. Procurement of a specialist website company to build a new visitor website is currently underway.
- Increased engagement with the Hinkley C and Hinkley B workforce through internal marketing, development of the Hinkley Leisure portal and new voucher booklets.

2.2.10 The Hinkley Point C Inspire Education Programme has carried out over 1,000 activities generating 150,000 student interactions, in over 400 education institutions, since it launched in 2011. The innovative program, delivered in schools across the south-west, is helping to address national skills shortage whilst preparing young people for the wealth of opportunities at Hinkley Point C. With A 10-year construction period and a 60-year operating life expectancy, many of our future Hinkley Point C employees will be in the classrooms of today. The Inspire Programme is helping them to uncover this rare opportunity and set them up with the skills they need.

2.2.11 Currently, the percentage of local workers (those in the 90 min commute zone) exceeds the target set (49% v 34% requirement).

2.2.12 Other figures include:

- 8500 trained through the construction skills and innovation centre.
- 250 apprentices have been involved in the HPC project so far.
- 381 young people aged 16-21 have registered with the recently

launched 'Young HPC' programme and are attending skills events and site tours.

- 530 people placed into work through the HPC Job Service.
- Nearly 13,000 people have registered on the Job Service portal, 46% of which are local.
- 580 local people have received tailored Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) via the Employment Service between January and June 2018 alone.
- Over 100,000 interactions with young people in education through the Inspire Programme (these are predominantly Somerset young people).

2.2.13 New figures released by the Government show that companies in the South West have now won contracts worth more than £1.3 billion for the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station in Somerset. The updated totals show that £650m has already been spent with the region's businesses. Supplier registrations currently stand at 2,399 local suppliers and 1,700 regional suppliers.

2.2.14 Through the Hinkley Strategic Delivery Forum (HSDF) we have been working with local, regional and national partners, including the Local Enterprise Partnership. The initial focus for HSDF was on delivery of the Hinkley Deal which provided additional funding and support from Government. HSDF is now being reshaped to strengthen the link between the Government's ambitions, set out in its Industrial Strategy Green Paper, and the opportunities and challenges for Somerset and the wider the South West in particular, associated with a 'sector deal' on Nuclear.

2.2.15 National Grid's Hinkley Point C Connection Project

The project involves the construction of a new high voltage electricity connection from Bridgwater in Somerset to Seabank near Avonmouth and will connect new sources of power, including Hinkley Point C. The whole project will take around eight years to build, including reinstatement and landscaping, and the first construction work got underway this summer in Churchill to upgrade Western Power Distribution's substation.

2.2.16 National Grid is also starting to prepare for laying 8.5 km of underground cables through the Mendips. The cables will run from a new electricity compound south of the AONB to a new substation at Sandford. National Grid has appointed Balfour Beatty as the principal contractor and is working with them to develop a detailed construction programme and plan for the work. Surveys and assessments are already taking place and will continue over the autumn, including a series of archaeological trenches.

2.3 Waste

2.3.1 A major focus of both the Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) and SCC over the last 12 months has been tackling the increasing issues of the use and incorrect disposal of Single Use Plastics (SUPs). Somerset Waste Partnership define SUPs as "Plastic that is designed to be used only once before it is recycled or thrown away".

In February of 2018, the County Council passed a Resolution to make SCC a 'single-use-plastic-free' authority, specifically the phasing out of sales of SUP bottles and other SUP products across all premises and events

To do this, a strategy has been developed that sets out a number of actions intended to deliver 10 objectives that will:

- Reduce the use of plastics by SCC staff and on our estate
- Improve recycling routes to minimise residual waste disposal in SCC premises
- Influence partners, suppliers and providers to reduce their usage of plastics on the SCC estate and beyond
- Show how we will work with Somerset Waste Partnership on waste matters related to the reduction of the use of plastics locally

It is planned that the Strategy will be approved at the Full Council meeting in November 2018.

Other actions have been undertaken by the partnership to promote the use of alternatives to SUPs and to improve recycling routes, including:

- Household and food plastic pots, tubs and trays – including black plastics – are now taken at all 16 recycling sites, and plastic-lined beverage cartons at 12 sites.
- Thousands of Pledge Against Preventable Plastic cards have been distributed across Somerset with advice on avoiding single-use plastics.
- SWP has been appointed the Somerset hub for the Refill campaign to offer free water refills and thus cut plastic litter and waste.
- SWP backed Carymoor Environmental Trust to run 100 “Schools Against Waste” workshops on plastic and other issues at Somerset primary schools.
- Through social media, Somerset Waste Partnership has promoted the reduce-reuse-recycle mantra, from Somerset’s low-waste shops to action on single-use plastics.
- Somerset County Council’s reception was one of the first Refill Stations in the county, encouraging visitors to refill reusable water bottles for free via a smartphone app.

2.3.2 Improving Recycling and Reducing Residual Waste

Somerset Waste Partnership had another successful year in 2017/18, maintaining our excellent environmental performance and delivering significant financial savings to Somerset County Council:

- Tonnages of waste generated by Somerset households have continued to decline – a 1.6% (-4,080 tonnes) decrease in overall household waste arisings. The majority of this decrease occurred at the recycling sites.
- SWP’s 16 recycling sites had over 1.6 million visits last year, and their recycling rate of 77% is amongst the highest in the Country. 79% of what could be recycled stayed in Somerset and 94% stayed in the UK.
- The number of visits to recycling sites was slightly down on the previous year. This is believed to be largely due to the success of the permit scheme in reducing trade waste abuse and out-of-County usage. This was a key contributor to SWP delivering £1.1m underspend to SCC in 2017/18 (4.1% of the budget). This is in addition to the £1.3m saving SWP delivered to SCC in 2017/18 through the Energy from Waste Contract agreed with Viridor Ltd.
- SWP’s overall recycling rate at the kerbside and at recycling sites was 52.3% (down 0.4% on the previous year). The kerbside sort system meant that, even in the face of global challenges to the recycling

industry, over 90% of everything we collected was recycled in the UK. Because of how we recycle and how much we recycle, SWP remain independently ranked in the top 10% nationally in terms of our carbon saving.

- Missed collections at the kerbside have been an area of particular concern during the year. This has been driven by staff shortages (affected by the national driver shortage and the challenging labour market in Somerset), the ageing vehicle fleet and the hot weather we saw over the summer. SWP have worked closely and robustly with Kier to ensure improvement plans are put in place.
- Whilst a District Council responsibility, SWP is pleased to note that the numbers of reported flytips across Somerset fell by 4.6% (226 fewer flytips) compared to 2016-17.

2.3.3 So far in the current financial year (April 2018 – November 2018) key achievements are:

- Enabling the recycling of plastic pots, tubs and trays at all Somerset recycling sites – as part of our campaign against preventable plastic this has been a great success.
- Relaunching the Schools Against Waste service, providing 90 free half-day visits to Somerset primary schools.
- Refreshing our approach to performance reporting so that we present a joined-up view of performance which appropriately reflects the Somerset Waste Board's revised vision, with customer service and environmental impact at the heart of these.
- Agreeing a contract extension with Viridor which delivers £14.1m savings to SCC, including £300k of savings in this (18/19) financial year. This is predicated on keeping all 16 recycling sites open, amending their opening hours to better reflect need and demand (including opening all sites all weekend), and removing the £2 charge from the two Community Recycling Sites (Crewkerne and Dulverton) by April 2020.
- On track to deliver total savings of £1.3m to SCC in 2018/19 (through the Viridor contract extension, avoided disposal costs and other non-customer facing changes). Again, this is in addition to the savings to SCC realised through the Energy from Waste contract.
- Significantly increasing our reach on social media (in particular Facebook), so we can keep residents up to date and influence their behaviours.

2.3.4 Ongoing major projects and key pieces of work coming up over the next 12 months include:

- Continuing the work necessary to enable us to move away from landfill as the disposal route for residual waste by 2020. Our commitment to reuse and recycling will not be diminished by this move.
- Completing the procurement of a new collection contractor in Spring 2019, ahead of them commencing service in Spring 2020.
- Preparing for the rollout of Recycle More from 2020 onwards, including a very significant communications and marketing campaign.
- Putting in place the technology that will underpin improved customer service and is a necessary component of an efficient kerbside collection service.
- Restructuring SWP so that we have the right level of resources to realise our ambitions.
- Reviewing the van/trailer permit scheme at Recycling Sites.

- Developing a long-term strategy in line with the Central Government Resources and Waste Strategy which is expected by the end of 2018. We expect this to significantly change the policy landscape for recycling and waste.
- Focussing on behavioural change (in particular to encourage greater recycling of plastic and food) and expanding our Schools Against Waste programme so we reach all Somerset primary schools by Spring 2021.
- Enhancing reuse by working with Viridor, our new collection contractor and local partners (particularly the voluntary and community sector).
- Continuing to work with planning authorities to ensure that new developments are built with waste in mind.

2.4 Heritage

2.4.1 The South West Heritage Trust continues to build upon its reputation and over the past year has continued to develop how it meets its objectives relating to looking after our heritage assets. The work of the Trust has received recognition from Arts Council England with the Museum of Somerset, Somerset Military Museum and Somerset Rural Life Museum has all been awarded Full Accreditation under the Arts Council scheme.

2.4.2 This is a major achievement for the Trust and a credit to the Museums and the site teams.

2.4.3 The Somerset and Devon Archive Services also attained accreditation from The National Archives following a thorough assessment process. This marks the first occasion that two jointly-managed Shire-county services have been accredited under the Accreditation Scheme.

2.4.4 The South West Heritage Trust received an Excellence Award for its pioneering work in transforming Archive Services. The Archives and Records Association, the leading professional body for archivists, conservators and records managers in the United Kingdom and Ireland, was making the Excellence Awards for the first time. The South West Heritage Trust received the award for Record-Keeping Service of the Year.

2.4.5 A Roman lead ingot found in Westbury-sub-Mendip in May 2016 was acquired at auction by the South West Heritage Trust on 22 March. The ingot, known as the 'Westbury Pig' which was derived from the Roman lead mines on the Mendip Hills, is a remarkable and important discovery which can be dated to the years AD 161 to AD 169. It bears an inscription with the names of the joint emperors Antoninus (i.e. Marcus Aurelius) and Lucius Verus.

The purchase was made with charitable capital funding available solely for the purpose of acquisitions and did not depend on County Council grant funding.

The Wells and Mendip Museum have expressed their desire to purchase part or all of the item and display it at their museum. Somerset County Council has suggested that we would be agreeable to a time-limited loan agreement. We will continue to work with the South West Heritage Trust to explore ways of making that happen.

2.5 Library Services

- 2.5.1** Over 1.6 million people came through the doors of Somerset Libraries over the past year, with an additional 500,000 people accessing our digital services.
- 2.5.2** Taunton library issued a staggering 350,000 items to customers last year making it the second busiest library in the South West for borrowing (after Exeter but ahead of Bath and Bristol).
- 2.5.3** Almost 70,000 people from across the county came to libraries to attend a programme of over 6,000 events. Participation levels continue to grow year on year, supporting the delivery of key commissioned priorities around literacy, health and wellbeing, and digital inclusion.
- 2.5.4** The Libraries Service has a growing social media presence with over 10,000 followers across Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.
- 2.5.5** A new funding strategy for the service has been developed that if successful will generate a total of £875K external funding.
- 2.5.6** Over the last twelve months the Libraries Service has undergone an extensive redesign process. With the network of library buildings having remained unchanged for around 40 years the aim is to modernise library services and re-design them to meet local needs more effectively.
- 2.5.7** Consultation with groups and individuals across the county took place from January to June 2018 on a number of proposals regarding an assessment of needs, access, and equalities impact.
- 2.5.8** Over 7000 responses from across Somerset were received including nearly 13,000 comments. Following the consultation process a report was presented to the Cabinet meeting on 5 November. The recommendations were agreed and will see SCC retaining 19 existing library buildings and developing Community Library Partnerships for the remaining 15 buildings. Where Community Library Partnerships may not be established, library services will be delivered in other ways to those communities either via outreach services or mobile library services. In addition, cabinet resolved that funding would be available to all Community Library Partnerships.
- 2.5.9** As part of the consultation process the Libraries Service has carried out a major data mapping exercise and developed an online tool incorporating deprivation data and library usage statistics which has informed elements of the service redesign and will contribute to future service planning. The mapping tool enables more effective targeting of services to areas of high need or which have low uptake of library services.
- 2.5.10** A new eBook and eAudio platform was launched this year across the local authorities in the LibrariesWest Consortium. This has greatly increased the number of titles available to customers and alongside the eMagazine offer provides a wealth of content available 24/7 through www.librarieswest.org.uk. This enables customers to simultaneously search the collections of all the authorities within the consortium.

- 2.5.11** Libraries West continues to deliver library system, delivery and bibliographic services to 7 local authorities, including Somerset. Recent achievements include the automated publishing of open data from the Library Management System(LMS) <https://librarieswest.gitbook.io/librarieswest-open-data>, leadership of the public library consortia interest group within COSI EMEA ("Customers of SirsiDynix International (Europe, Middle East and Africa)", (LMS supplier user group) <http://www.cosiemea.org/>. Current projects include working with Dorset, Poole and Bournemouth authorities to support the transition process to unitary Authorities.
- 2.5.12** **Somerset Libraries is commissioned to deliver against six outcomes**
- 2.5.13** **“More people are enabled and inspired to make the most of the digital world”**
- 2.5.14** Libraries continue to act as an enabler for digital inclusion as demonstrated by the increasing upward trend in Wi-Fi and public network computer usage across the service.
- 2.5.15** By working in partnership with Taunton Deane Borough Council; business organisations and individual businesses and organisations such as UKHO, the Glass Box @Taunton Library is now established as a digital skills hub and has hosted several innovative and inspiring events. See: <https://glassboxtaunton.co.uk>
- 2.5.16** A ‘Digital Toybox’ scheme has also recently been launched. These are loanable boxes of digital equipment available to any school or library within Somerset helping to promote digital skills.
- 2.5.17** In 2018 Somerset Libraries became core members of the newly established South West Digital Skills Partnership.
- 2.5.18** **“Libraries contribute to economic growth”**
- 2.5.19** Regular business support surgeries were delivered by the Somerset Business Association at Taunton, Frome and Yeovil libraries and ad-hoc workshops and events have been a regular feature of the Glass Box calendar.
- 2.5.20** The e-resources and business-related books available at Somerset Libraries have provided a valuable source of information and research for start-up businesses and those businesses that aspire to grow or pivot.
- 2.5.21** Business organisations such as town Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Business have begun to use libraries for networking and workshop events.
- 2.5.22** **“People, in particular the most vulnerable, are enabled to make informed choices for their health and wellbeing”**
- 2.5.23** Since November 2017, a total of 2,168 health and wellbeing events were delivered which accounts for a third of all events in libraries.
- 2.5.24** 3 new health collections were added to the specialist health offer.

- 2.5.25** Wellbeing Zones were launched in Taunton and Yeovil, delivering regular events including talking cafes, health visitor talks, yoga, health-condition support groups and mindfulness.
- 2.5.26** Somerset Libraries has delivered a disability engagement project funded by the Carnegie & Wellcome Trust.
- 2.5.27** The 'Tricky Period Service' was also launched, helping to tackle period poverty in Somerset.
- 2.5.28** **"More people enjoy a vibrant and dynamic reading experience"**
- 2.5.29** Over 2 million items were borrowed by customers last year and over 30,000 people attending reading events in libraries.
- 2.5.30** To engage young people in reading Somerset Libraries was awarded a grant by Literature Works. In addition, Libraries were part of a 26-date live literature experience "Word on Tour" that took place across the south west.
- 2.5.31** The Yeovil Literary Festival continues to thrive with library support. Last year saw the festival host 44 events with the nearly 6000 tickets sold representing an increase in attendance of 27%.
- 2.5.32** **"Library services strengthen and enable communities"**
- 2.5.33** The Libraries Service is delivering several pieces of work in West Somerset to support the aims of the West Somerset Opportunity area focusing on three key areas of transition in the lives of young people.
- 2.5.34** A youth engagement project 'YouthTalk' will consult young people across the West Somerset area around accessibility of services.
- 2.5.35** Working alongside Early Years providers a book gifting project will engage young children and their families in using the library and with reading.
- 2.5.36** Digital Dens will see the creation of five pop up maker spaces in West Somerset Libraries, helping to inspire the next generation of digital makers.
- 2.5.37** **"Libraries support Children and Young People to be safe, healthy & happy; and inspire them to develop skills and be ambitious for their future"**
- 2.5.38** New children's reading groups, Chatterbooks, have launched in Frome, Minehead, Yeovil, Taunton and Wincanton. The Children's Big Read engaged almost 400 children from across the county.
- 2.5.39** This year's Summer Reading Challenge, "Mischievous Makers" celebrated 80 years of the Beano. Over 5000 children completed the challenge and through the course of the holidays over 130 young people volunteered at their local library with 6000 children attending almost 300 events across the summer.
- 2.5.40** Switch Saturdays is a new initiative within Taunton Library using gaming as a hook to engage young people in using the library.

Trading Standards

2.6

2.6.1 In a year of continued development, transition and change, the Service operated to a high standard, meeting its Key Performance Indicators. The Service achieved all its high priority premises targets – including visiting high risk and primary authority businesses and carrying out new business interventions.

2.6.2 Social media has been used throughout the year to share warnings and alerts of both local and national current scams and rogue trader activity. Working with the police the National Banking Protocol was introduced and subsequently there has been a significant increase in notifications of live incidents. The Service now has engagement and representation with the three Safeguarding Adults Boards across its area, in relation to scams and financial abuse, and they are planning to include working with us in their business plan

2.6.3 The Service is further developing its commercial offer to business whilst at the same time ensuring that accurate, easy to understand guidance in achieving regulatory compliance remains free of charge and readily accessible to local businesses.

Flood and Water Management

2.7.

2.7.1 Thankfully, another winter passed without a repeat of the awful floods of 2013-14, which cost Somerset an estimated £147.5million. It was during those floods that Somerset County Council (SCC) led the way in producing a 20 Year Flood Action Plan for the whole county. From that Plan Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) was born. The SRA is a partnership of SCC and the five district councils, the Environment Agency (EA), the Axe-Brue and Parrett-Tone Internal Drainage Boards, Natural England and Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee. The SRA is hosted by Somerset County Council. In the Corporate Peer Review of Somerset County Council, carried out by the Local Government Association and published in May 2018, the development of the SRA was picked out as the one of the two most outstanding elements of SCC's work in recent years.

2.7.2 Over the last year, the SRA has continued to make progress as a pioneering partnership in its own right and as a key player in other partnerships. For example, the SRA plays a major role in funding and encouraging Somerset's Hills to Levels initiative. More than 160 natural flood management schemes have now been approved by the SRA to slow the flow of water down through river catchments. In the first half of 2018, Hills to Levels won two national awards: the inaugural Duncan Huggett Award for the Environment and the UK River Prize.

2.7.3 Other notable successes have included the continued development of silt monitoring and water injection dredging techniques along the River Parrett. Vital Parrett maintenance work can now be done in ways that are quicker, cheaper and less disruptive to local residents and the environment. Dunster's flood relief channel has been repaired; as have parts of the river banks in Frome town centre (helping to protect 300 properties). Numerous smaller activities – such as extra cleansing of thousands of roadside gullies in high-risk areas, extra drain jetting, extra de-silting of structures and extra clearing of

road edges – have helped people to get on with their lives, and businesses to keep moving.

- 2.7.4** The SRA has funded its partners to undertake significant planning and design stages for future schemes. As a result of this work we expect significant progress in 2019 on projects such as the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier, Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements and further improvements are planned along the River Parrett, and the River Sowey and King's Sedgemoor Drain.
- 2.7.5** The Government has pledged to introduce legislation to establish the SRA as a separate legal entity when Parliamentary time allows. In the meantime, Defra has drafted a Rivers Authorities and Land Drainage Bill, currently in the hands of Somerton and Frome MP David Warburton as a Private Member's Bill.
- 2.7.6** SCC's work as Lead Local Flood Authority continues to progress, and we have delivered a number of small flood alleviation schemes, including surface water improvements at Upton Noble. We have submitted several grant applications to the SRA for potential funding in 2019/20 for projects that offer additionality to our core service. We have taken leadership and continue to lead the work stream relating to urban water management in the Flood Action Plan for the SRA. Promoting the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) is a key area of our work managing surface water flood risk. SuDS mimic natural approaches to drainage to better manage water while also creating opportunities to enhance the environment and amenity of developments.
- 2.7.7** Using SRA funding we have delivered a number of SuDS themed projects including a Review of SuDS in Somerset and a raingarden demonstration project that also attracted a contribution from Wessex Water. We have been working with planners in the district/borough councils to improve work around SUDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems) and embed the current guidance into planning practice. This contributes to our important work as a statutory planning consultee to improve the quality of drainage and water management in new major developments. We are proactively trying work to shape development in terms of drainage so that areas are more resilient, and developments do not create unwarranted flood risk. We are also seeking opportunities to secure multiple benefits through the use of high quality SuDS and are looking at how we can engage more readily with developers to negotiate better outcomes.
- 2.7.8** Work continues on our EU project Sponge 2020. Through Sponge we intend to retrofit SuDS into existing urban areas in Taunton. The aim is to raise awareness of this approach to water management while creating showcase examples of what can be achieved.
- 2.7.9** Representing SCC on the Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, (WRFCC) our region continues to be one of the most effective in terms of implementing flood management schemes. SCC is looking to work even more effectively with the WRFCC to make the most of opportunities that present themselves through accessing Flood Defence Grant in Aid to fund schemes that will help flood management in Somerset. The team has identified a number of candidate sites that will benefit from further investigation and potentially investment based on surface water flood risk. In October I hosted a meeting with the chair of the committee and senior officers from the EA at

County Hall. While noting our challenges they praised the work between the EA and SCC as Lead Local Flood Authority.

2.7.10 The Somerset Water Management Partnership brings together a wide range of stakeholders to discuss and debate the topical issues relating to flood and water management in the county. Recent meetings have been themed on particular topics, including community resilience and sustainable drainage. The Partnership has continued to develop under my Chairmanship. The partnership continues to be an important conduit for information as we move forward with the SRA.

2.7.11 From a policy perspective we have reviewed the Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment and next year we will be looking at our Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, both in an effort to solidify the framework for making bids for schemes that can both guide the direction of the service and improve our flood resilience even further. We are also developing a policy to provide a robust framework to guide the use of the council's permissive powers under the Land Drainage Act. This will set out how the council will use these powers for instances where riparian owners are not undertaking their responsibilities.

Leisure

2.8

2.8.1 On Monday 10 December 2018, the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Community Infrastructure will take a key decision based on officers' recommendations to cease commissioning community leisure services from 31 March 2019 when the County Council's contract with 1610 Limited expires.

2.8.2 The recommendation will see the leisure facilities transferred to the host schools who will need to consider what, if any, community leisure services they are able to offer, given their financial constraints and the associated safeguarding complications that come with running dual use sites. Continued community access would not be a condition of the transfer.

2.8.3 1610 will continue to work with The King Alfred School in Highbridge and Preston School in Yeovil to provide leisure facilities. The leases at these sites have been extended and services will be unaffected.

2.8.4 1610, a registered charity who were externalised from the County Council in 2009, have continued to flourish away from the auspices of the County Council. They have secured contracts to operate leisure facilities with Torridge District Council, Futures for Somerset and West Dorset District Council as well as operating a number of independent private facilities.

Registration Services

2.9

Statutory Compliance

2.9.1 During the year the service has experienced 3 separate audits from the General Register Office (GRO) Compliance and Performance officers. Two of these audits were in relation to Stock and Security Assurance - one for Somerset and one to scrutinise the systems implemented during the first 2 years of managing the North Somerset registration service. The third audit was to check overall compliance with the Public Protection and Counter Fraud

requirements. The results of all 3 audits were extremely favourable with only a couple of minor recommendations made and subsequently addressed. The work undertaken toward the Public Protection and Counter Fraud agenda has been highlighted nationally by GRO as an example of good practice.

Customer Access

- 2.9.2** Earlier in the year the service launched an online booking facility for Notice of Marriage appointments which complements the existing online options for booking birth and death registration appointments. Take-up of this new service has grown steadily since the launch and currently around 41% of these appointments are booked in this way. Demand for the service increases annually, and as there is very little opportunity to manage that demand it's critical for the service to continue to find new ways to release valuable expertise for frontline interaction with customers.

Office Relocations

- 2.9.3** We have recently moved 2 more offices into co-located sites. The first is our Clevedon office in North Somerset which relocated in December 2017 into the Castlewood site, the second is the Bridgwater office which moved into the library in June of this year. Both moves have generated positive feedback from both customers and staff who enjoy improved facilities in both new offices.

Forthcoming Legislative Changes

- 2.9.4** The Department of Health announced this year that the NHS will implement changes to the death certification process as outlined in the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. The proposed changes will involve the introduction of Medical Examiners which will provide an additional layer of scrutiny for death paperwork prior to arriving at the point of registration. The proposed changes are expected to play an important part in improving the customer journey for bereaved relatives. The expected date of the proposed change is April 2019.

- 2.9.5** The Registration Marriage Bill is being taken through the House of Commons this autumn. Changes will include the addition of mother's details to be added into the marriage register (currently only father's details are required) the creation of electronic marriage registers which will replace the current handwritten versions and the implementation of a scheduling system for the legal preliminaries to marriage. If the bill successfully becomes law, it will reform the marriage process which has seen little change since 1837.

- 2.9.6** At the end of June, the Supreme Court ruled that the Civil Partnership Act 2004, which only applies to same sex couples, is not compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. The judgement was then considered by the Government Equalities Office and the decision was made that Civil Partnerships should be made available for opposite sex couples. At the time of writing, no timescales have been made available for implementation of the new legislation.

Marketing

- 2.9.7** The ability to retain income levels in an increasingly competitive ceremony market is a key focus of the service and marketing activities are critical in achieving that priority. Somerset Registration Service's ceremony website, www.somersetweddingservice.org.uk, has seen a healthy increase in users since the launch in March 2018, with the number increasing by 50% over the last 6 months. Analytical data also demonstrates that an increasing majority of

customers are finding the website organically (i.e. via social media sites, general internet searches) rather than being re-directed from the former SCC pages. The website also provides an affordable platform for local businesses to advertise their relevant services to the target market. The online advertiser directory now features 27 local suppliers with more additions pending.

- 2.9.8** The website is complemented by an increasingly active social media presence. Twitter reach has averaged around 8000 per month over the last 6 months. This compares with an average of 3700 for the preceding quarter. Facebook engagement with service users and local wedding professionals has also increased through the year, with a total reach of 33400. The overall reach has more than tripled between the first and third quarters this year. This engagement continues to generate advertising enquiries and much positive feedback from licensed venues. The launch of an Instagram feed for the service this month has seen a lot of interest from regional suppliers and aims to further raise the profile of the service.

Civil Contingencies

2.10

Governance and Plans

- 2.10.1** The Partnership continues to serve the six local authorities of Somerset. During the last twelve months the following plans have been re-written or refreshed: SCC Corporate Business Continuity Plan, Somerset Local Authorities Civil Contingencies Partnership (SLACCP) Evacuation and Shelter Plan and the SLACCP Elected Members Handbook. The Hinkley Point Off-Site Plan is due to be updated and re-issued by the end of November 2018.

Incidents

- 2.10.2** The most significant emergency incidents over the last twelve months have been due to the extremes of weather. The very warm summer of 2018 did not cause any significant emergency issues, however, the two incidents of very heavy snow in March 2018 did. On the positive side, due to improvements in business continuity planning and access to IT, many staff were able to work very effectively from home. The main response challenges were around access to 4x4 transport. The Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU) is contributing to work with the Local Resilience Forum to develop a logistics capability. In addition, the CCU is carrying out a full update of document that details the capabilities of our voluntary sector partners.

- 2.10.3** The six local authorities have a shared joint corporate response and recovery plan (J-CERRP). This was developed following the 2013/14 Levels and Moors flooding. The joint plan was activated for the first time in March 2018 due to the severe snow.

Training and Exercises

- 2.10.4** Training is a growing priority particularly following significant restructures in three of the six partner authorities. The SLACCP training strategic makes increasing use of IT through a programme of e-learning modules, followed by webinars then class room sessions or seminars. The modules include generic “introduction to emergencies” sessions as well as more detailed, role specific topics.

2.10.5 CCU aims to deliver two major exercises per year for the six partners, one to test the joint corporate response and recovery plan and one to test the corporate business continuity plan. In late October 2017, we tested the operation of the local authority emergency centre using a location in County Hall. Exercise Electrum 2017 involved over seventy staff from all six local authorities and was a Tactical and Strategic exercise. In March 2018, Exercise Long Reach tested corporate and service level business continuity plans against a scenario of loss of IT following a cyber attack. Over sixty staff participated in the exercise, including colleagues from the Districts to ensure consistency of approach.

2.10.6 The other significant exercise was Exercise Nighthawk which was organised by CCU with EDF colleagues. Held in June 2018, Exercise Nighthawk was a 'day-long' multi-agency test of the Hinkley Point Off-Site plan. Over one hundred people were involved in the exercise, mainly at the Strategic Co-ordination Centre at Police Headquarters, Portishead and the Tactical Co-ordination Centre at Bridgwater. It was the first time that the Bridgwater facility had been exercised. Somerset County Council has the statutory responsibility for the Hinkley Point Off-Site plan and this exercise. Learning from the exercise has informed the update of the off-site plan.

Multi-agency Engagement

2.10.7 We continue to be a key partner in the Avon and Somerset Local Resilience Forum. During this twelve months, CCU staff have led on planning for community resilience, welfare of people stranded on the strategic network and information sharing.

Community Resilience

2.10.8 We continue to promote the importance of community resilience through the Somerset Prepared website. This includes quarterly newsletters to all parish and town councils and any members of the public who sign up via the website. The website is also used to encourage communities to sign up to the Places of Safety and the Somerset Emergency Community Contacts schemes. Currently, around 100 communities are signed up. Together with colleagues from the Environment Agency, Fire and Rescue Service, Police and voluntary and community contacts, the CCU organised and held the first Somerset Prepared Community Resilience Day on 25 October 2018.

Planning Policy, Control and Enforcement

2.11 Planning

2.11.1 SCC has statutory responsibilities for to maintain up to date local plans for minerals and waste across Somerset and for the determination of planning application relating to these matters and our own development. Work is continuing to review the Somerset Waste Plan; with the focus in the past year being on reviewing our evidence base and projections for the future. In addition, SCC has responded actively to a number of consultations from Government Departments and Agencies about planning policy matters of significance to Somerset – examples including consultations about revisions to planning regime for shale gas development and changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.

2.11.2

Within the last year SCC has continued to meet the Government's key

2.11.3 performance indicator for the determination of minerals and waste planning applications within the target timescale. In the past year we have also handled a number of large planning applications, including significant further mineral extraction at Halecombe Quarry on the Mendips, and improvement works at Junction 25 of the M5. We do however, in common with many other local authorities, face significant capacity challenges in our planning service meeting the volume of planning casework and maintaining our minerals and waste local plans. In recent months we have incurred a number of vacancies in our planning control team – as a result, interim arrangements have been put in place to provide continuity, including support with casework from Devon County Council. We are in the process of recruiting to re-establish internal team capacity.

2.11.4 The Somerset Ecological Service (traded arm of the SCC's ecological advice function) has significantly grown its external income generation and continues to grow its business client base, whilst maintaining its Service Level Agreement services to its District Council clients, and the in-house advisory function.

Scientific Services

2.12 Following a successful first year at new premises in Wellington, the service continues to build on its reputation as a first-class laboratory.

2.12.1

2.12.2 Generation of income, especially from the private sector is always a key focus of the service and the implementation of a marketing strategy has been critical in this process. The bespoke website www.somersetscientificservices.co.uk, which was launched during the year, showcases the full range of services provided, alongside customer testimonials and has also provided a platform for other SCC departments (e.g. Acoustic Services) to advertise their services to the external market. The new site has successfully attracted an average of a 34% increase in web traffic in comparison to the previous SCC internet pages.

2.12.3 New clients have been engaged through social media, Google advertising, articles for Parish Magazines as well as direct marketing to specific audiences such as schools, bakeries, architects, asbestos removal firms and swimming pool operators. The twitter feed alone has achieved a reach of over 106,000 during the past year.

2.12.4 Customer satisfaction remains high with an overall satisfaction rating of 9.6 out of 10. 100% of respondents said they would use the service again and would recommend to others.

2.12.5 In addition to business as usual, the Asbestos section has been heavily involved with the refurbishment work at County Hall, and the Water and Environment section has, among other things, established a revised Radon monitoring schedule alongside an increased workload across all areas.

2.12.6 Overall, the service's financial position continues to be healthy with income levels slightly above target.

A303/A358

2.13 We continued to work closely with Highways England (HE) as they develop

2.13.1 vital improvements to the A303/A358/A30 corridor. These schemes if designed correctly, will bring huge economic benefits to the area. HE has progressed development of three sections of the improvement at Stonehenge, Sparkford to Ilchester and M5 to Southfields. We have highlighted a range of issues, community concerns and potential local impacts to HE and urge them to give these matters careful consideration and undertake more technical work and community engagement on the key issues before finalising their proposals. The Development Consent Order application for the Sparkford to Ilchester scheme has now been submitted by HE to the Planning Inspectorate, with an examination likely to take place during the first half of 2019. We have brought in additional resources to provide technical input on assessing local impacts and the layout of local road connections, to meet their challenging timescales. We also anticipate the announcement of HE's preferred route for the A358 improvement shortly and have pushed-hard for improved community engagement as the scheme goes forward. We continue to work with our Local Authority partners to keep the pressure on Government to deliver the three A303/A358 schemes that have currently been allocated funding and to ensure further funds are allocated for the remaining sections in the next Road Investment Strategy period from 2020.

3.1 No background papers.

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