

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

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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 Economic Development, Planning and Community Infrastructure as well as looking forward to what the next year has in store.

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. Economic Development, Planning and Community Infrastructure – the last 12 months

Economic Development

Economic prosperity and growth are key drivers 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. Somerset businesses also face significant challenges in raising their productivity, dealing with economic uncertainties and in retaining and developing workforce skills.

Heart of the South West Local Industrial Strategy (LIS)

Government announced in July 2018 that the Heart of the South West would be one of six areas nationally in the second wave for the development of LIS documents. Local Industrial Strategies are jointly owned by Government and local areas and Government is committed to working with the LEP and Heart of the South West local authority partners to develop this strategy which will align closely with the adopted Heart of the South West Productivity Strategy. SCC has worked closely with the LEP, civil servants and local authority partners to develop the LIS. A working draft was endorsed by the LEP Board on 23rd July 2019 following consideration by the Heart of the South West Joint Committee earlier that month. It was then submitted to Government on 14th August 2019 for feedback from various Government Departments. Final amendments were made based on Government feedback and it was re-submitted to Government in September 2019 for final consideration prior to joint publication by Government and the LEP. The latter has been postponed by Government due to general election and purdah considerations. Provisional plans have been made for Cabinet to be asked to endorse the final LIS document in February 2020.

The Somerset Local Economic Assessment (LEA)

SCC has a statutory duty to maintain a Local Economic Assessment for the county. The LEA provides an evidence base to shape policy and strategy, as well as project development and bids for funding. Previous LEAs (2011, 2013 & 2016) were standard document-type publications, however, as of 2019 the format has changed, with the extensive data and analyses undertaken in recent months now being hosted on a dedicated website called 'Somerset Trends'. This format makes use of new technology and software to present data in a more attractive and interactive way, allowing users to 'drill-down' and interrogate the data, whilst being kept as 'live' as possible, with regular (and in some case automatic) updates of local, regional and national statistical data. The final touches are being made to the website before being made live early in the New Year and thereafter publicised to partners and stakeholders.

Employment and Skills

The Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Summer Business Bulletin reports that 2 of the 3 top business issues are related to people. The issues for Somerset are around a restricted labour pool, with low levels of unemployment and high levels of under-employment; attracting and retaining younger people; an ageing demographic and workforce, both of which are projected to accelerate over the next 20 years. Other issues relate to skills and training with concerns raised around finding and keeping skills locally; access to training and particularly

apprenticeships; lack of higher-level skills and poor careers, advice and guidance.

SCC working with the Somerset Employment and Skills Steering Group, are addressing some of these issues with plans afoot to extend activity. in future. Examples of some of the key activities include:

- In 2018, the Somerset Education Business Partnership (EBP) was established as a mechanism to improve connections between employers and education throughout the county. The team is hosted by the Somerset Chamber of Commerce & Industry to ensure it has a business facing presence. It held its first awards ceremony to celebrate those who have contributed most to the employment and skills agenda, in April 2019. The ceremony had 57 nominees and was a sell-out event. In its first year the EBP supported 93 businesses to contribute to careers interventions across 38 of our schools. The positive response from both businesses and schools has demonstrated the need for the service and the EBP is now working with partners to identify how the service can be sustained beyond its initial funding period

SCC's Economy and Planning team has led on the delivery of the Business Skills Workstream within the Opportunity Area programme in West Somerset, developing a comprehensive programme of interventions that encourages and supports individuals to attain skills; and working with business to encourage growth and skills investment in their workforce. Specific projects include Skill-Up West Somerset apprenticeship service; the creation of an employer forum for West Somerset businesses; the Studio Digital programme which engages young people to increase their confidence; and the Western Somerset careers fair. This is a DfE funded initiative to improve social mobility in poor performing areas. Funding will cease in 2020 and discussions are underway to ensure a positive legacy for the area.

The Skill Up (Somerset) Service has been established, following the pilot in West Somerset, to provide impartial advice and guidance to businesses and individuals on apprenticeship and skills development.

The Economy and Planning service, through the EBP, works closely with the HotSW Careers Hub Enterprise Advisor Network to support the national CEC (Careers & Enterprise Company) agenda. All Somerset Secondary and Special Schools are now part of the Careers Hub and/or Enterprise Advisor Network (EAN). Local employers are being recruited to be Enterprise

Advisors, ensuring that business can influence the strategic direction of careers delivery and help schools make meaningful employer links. In addition, SCC host a range of Careers Advisors groups and meetings. The groups are used to develop new initiatives (e.g. Study Up, STEM careers forums) and update on latest events and initiatives to support improved careers advice and guidance to young people.

Talent Academies are one of Somerset's key opportunities for young people to engage directly with employers – over 500 students are now involved in the Somerset Talent Academy programmes. These provide Year 10 & 11 students with 5 meaningful engagements and visits to local sector specific businesses. New Academy programmes include Hospitality, Construction Engineering (MEH trades at HPC), Digital, Nursing & Health (Musgrove Park). Employers involved include Numatic, Mulberry, Leonardo, Yeo Valley, Skanska, Taunton Fabrications.

Higher skills provision in Somerset was enhanced with the opening of the Somerset University Centre in Taunton, which provides additional capacity with the Yeovil University Centre, and other provision via our Further Education Colleges and Higher-Level Apprenticeships. To further enhance the higher skills offer, a new website, Study Up brings together the higher education opportunities available in Somerset into a one-stop information shop.

SCC has led on the development of two collaborative proposals and submitted applications to the European Social Fund which, if successful, will see around £4m invested in activity to reduce the risk of our young people becoming NEET (not in employment, education or training) and a programme of activity to encourage those already in work to upskill

Somerset Energy Innovation Centre (SEIC)

SCC is leading on the development of the SEIC campus of buildings in Bridgwater as a key part of our strategy to facilitate the development of a clean growth business cluster in Somerset and to maximise supply chain business opportunities linked to the construction of Hinkley Point C. Building 1 of SEIC comprises 3000 square metres of office space and is now fully occupied. Building 2, providing 2000 square metres of office and workshop space, has now been completed. Work commenced on the final building 3 in September and is on schedule for completion in Summer 2020. The 1,000 square-metre building 3 will include space to support the testing and demonstration of technologies on an industrial basis, with an expected initial focus on technologies relating to the mechanical, electrical and heating phase of the Hinkley Point C development. The campus of SEIC buildings has been funded by Somerset County Council, EDF Energy

Section 106 contributions and, in large part, grants secured from the European Regional Development Fund and the Local Enterprise Partnership's Growth Deal.

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. SCC, working closely with industry and the Local Enterprise Partnership, is leading on development of the iAero Centre in Yeovil. The Centre, located on land owned by Leonardo Helicopters, will facilitate innovation and collaboration in the local aerospace supply chain, supporting its ongoing competitiveness in a global market. Construction of the iAero (Yeovil) Centre commenced in July and is on schedule for completion in Summer 2020.

It will provide 2,400 square metres of high-quality office, workshop and collaboration space and specialist business support services. The scheme is being funded by SCC and £6.9 million of grants secured from the European Regional Development Fund and the Local Enterprise Partnership's Growth Deal

Gravity Enterprise Zone, Bridgwater

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. Enterprise Zone status will accelerate the delivery of this strategic employment site and provide additional incentives for business investment. The site will focus particularly on business activity aligned to clean energy and the wider clean growth agenda. The site was acquired in late 2017 by the Salamanca Group and has been branded as Gravity. In the past year site assembly has been completed and funding confirmed from Growth Deal 3 for the access road linking the site to the A39. Work commenced on the construction of this access road and will complete in late 2020. Funding is being arranged via the Somerset business rates retention pilot, alongside investment by the developer to establish a strategic masterplan for the site. A shadow board has been established for the Enterprise Zone and as Cabinet Lead for Economic Development I represent SCC on this body.

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 SCC has made significant progress in the past year with plans for further developments. Funding has

been secured for new centres at Wells and Wiveliscombe via Growth Deal and ERDF sources and construction of both commenced in summer 2019. Both new centres will be open for business early in 2020. SCC has also secured planning permission for an enterprise centre to be developed on land in SCC's ownership at Bruton and is at an advanced stage in finalising ERDF investment in this scheme.

In December 2018 Somerset local authorities were successful in securing agreement from Government to operate a Business Rates Retention pilot in 2019/20. As part of this pilot an economic growth and prosperity fund has been established and in practice the pilot will provide funding to invest in a programme of activity overseen by the Somerset Growth Board and spanning 2019/20 and 2020/21. Activity to be funded through the pilot includes business start-up and growth support, work to strengthen local business networks and foster innovation, an inward investment programme and work to promote apprenticeships and skills development.

In April 2019 the Somerset Growth Board hosted a workshop for Somerset businesses and other stakeholders to explore the growth potential and likely economic implications of artificial intelligence. The event was well received.

A303/A358

We continued to work closely with Highways England (HE) as they develop 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 (Amesbury to Berwick Down), Sparkford to Ilchester and M5 to Southfields.

The formal six-month public examination of the Stonehenge scheme, which is part of the Development Consent (DCO) planning process, ended on 2nd October 2019. Somerset County Council wrote to the Planning Inspectors in support of the scheme but did not comment on the detail of the proposed layout.

We participated in the DCO examination for the Sparkford to Ilchester scheme including making detailed representations, attending issue specific hearings and submitting a local impact report and statement of common ground. The examination closed on 12th June and the inspectors report has now been submitted to the Secretary of State with a decision anticipated in December. We gave clear support for the scheme in principle, with our representations focused on securing appropriate

mechanisms to enable the Council to agree detailed connections with the local road network and ensure any adverse impacts on the local community are dealt with effectively.

HE announced the preferred route for the A358 Taunton to Southfields scheme on 27th June 2019. HE responded positively to issues raised by the Council and communities through the scheme consultation processes. The preferred route is a modified version of the 'pink' consultation route which includes on-line widening of the eastern section of the existing road, a junction with the A378 at Thornfalcon, and a Henlade Bypass before linking in with Junction 25 of the M5 which will have further capacity improvements as part of the scheme. A community forum has now been convened and more detailed proposals for the proposed layout and local road connections are expected in the new year.

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.

Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF)

The Council has worked closely with Somerset West and Taunton, and Sedgemoor District Councils to finalise a business case for £95.2m Housing Infrastructure Fund 'forward funding' to Homes England which could lead to investment in new roads, schools and flooding infrastructure to support delivery of 10,000 homes across Taunton and Bridgwater. We understand that Government officials have completed their assessment of our bid and we await a decision from the new Government.

Superfast Broadband - Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS)

Broadband connectivity continues to be a priority for businesses and residents in Somerset. The Phase 1 contract delivered superfast broadband to 298,900 premises. Steps are being taken to introduce up to £6 million of clawback Gainshare for BT Openreach to deliver full fibre to a further 2000 premises across Devon and Somerset.

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.

The National Parks deployment has been built by Airband Community Internet Ltd and has served around 5,000 hard to reach properties in Exmoor and Dartmoor with access to a 30 Mbps broadband service. The

formal technical and financial assurance required by the contract closure process is now being undertaken.

Airband continues to build, providing superfast coverage in Lot 4 (North Devon) and to date a total of 7,369 premises have been covered. CDS and Airband are exploring options to include some fibre delivery in the current contracts.

Five of the Phase 2 contracts were awarded to Gigaclear, a fibre provider. As previously reported Gigaclear encountered difficulty in its delivery and incurred significant delays with its broadband roll-out due to previous failings and the collapse of Carillion in early 2018. Gigaclear was placed on notice of default because of the delays. CDS allowed the company additional time to evaluate and cost alternative methods of network construction.

Despite painstaking work by all concerned it was not possible to agree a recovery plan that CDS and the Government's Building Digital UK agency could support with confidence. CDS announced its decision to terminate all five contracts on 12th September 2019.

CDS is working closely with BDUK on a new procurement process this autumn. The procurement process is expected to take approximately 12 months.

The only payment made to Gigaclear was in September 2018 for infrastructure which was completed and serving homes and businesses. No payments have been made for partially completed infrastructure

CDS has piloted a Community Challenge Fund and will be taking this further to support a further 6-8 community solutions enabling local communities to have a hands-on say in the new networks for their areas.

CDS is working in conjunction with the LEP to develop a Digital Strategy for the Heart of the South West. This will include connectivity and infrastructure as well as considering digital skills and innovation. This will help to guide the approach for extending coverage and investing further.

Hinkley Point C and Securing the Legacy

The importance of Hinkley Point C and its transformational potential makes it key to the delivery of many of the County Council's aspirations: HPC is a clean energy project offering benefits to the economy, communities and environment. This is set against the need to ensure mitigation of any negative impacts from the development. We continue to

work closely with EDF as we head towards peak construction.

SCC continues to work with the HPC workforce development teams at both strategic and operational level. SCC is well represented at workforce pipeline groups such as Hinkley Strategic Delivery Forum, Workforce Development Implementation Group and sub groups, making significant contributions to plans and delivery in Somerset.

After 3 years of construction work more than 4,300 people are now at work on-site building the new nuclear power station. The project met its first major milestone in June 2019: the completion of the 9000m³ 'Common Raft' concrete platform on which the reactor buildings for Unit 1 will sit. This was a real achievement and landmark moment for the project.

'Big Carl', the world's largest crane, is now built on site and will begin work very soon.

Hinkley Point C's 500m-long temporary jetty took its first delivery in September 2019 and is now fully operational. It will take delivery of at least 80% of bulk materials for on-site concrete production. Each delivery is the equivalent of around 300 HGV loads and the jetty is expected to handle the equivalent of 100,000 HGV loads over the course of the construction project.

In Bridgwater, the Sedgemoor Accommodation Campus for employees working on the construction site is now open. It provides accommodation for almost 1,000 workers. Together with the Hinkley Campus located adjacent to the main site, these facilities can now accommodate almost 1,500 workers. The campuses are operated by HOST who are providing hundreds of career opportunities for local people.

Over the last year a key focus for the County Council has been to deliver – either ourselves or in partnership - a range of measures to mitigate the impact of the development and anchor a legacy for the county.

Several new or improved cycling and walking infrastructure schemes have been delivered in Bridgwater and the surrounding area to provide accessible, safe connections for pedestrians and cyclists and to remove traffic from the roads:

- A scheme to improve cycle and footway provision between the Wylds Road junction, The Drove and A39 Bath Road in Bridgwater was completed in July.
- Several pedestrian safety schemes were delivered at the end of August on A38 Taunton Road focusing on three junctions; Wills

Road, Elmwood Avenue and Rhode Lane.

- A similar safety scheme was delivered at the junction of Albert Street and Broadway in Bridgwater and completed in time for the start of Bridgwater Fair.
- Work is under way at Quantock Road Roundabout in Bridgwater. This project will install new pedestrian and cyclist crossings, improve traffic flow through the roundabout, and create a new walking and cycling link between Quantock Road and Alfoxton Road.
- Highway maintenance and verge enhancement on the C182 road between Combwich and the HPC site was completed between September and November.
- Using Community Impact Mitigation funding we have carried out improvements to walking and cycling routes into and through Cranleigh Gardens in Bridgwater and have begun to deliver a traffic calming scheme in Cannington.

A travel demand and behaviour change project is being delivered in Bridgwater to encourage and support people of all ages to walk or cycle instead of travelling by car. This work takes advantage of new infrastructure to encourage more sustainable travel and reduce traffic across the town.

Alongside this an interactive walking and cycling map has been launched under the Bridgwater Way brand, to make it easier for people to plan their journeys more sustainably and reduce reliance of car travel.

Creating a legacy of skills and jobs is a priority for the council, and much has been achieved over the last year, and over the duration of the HPC project:

- The Hinkley Point C Inspire Education Programme has carried out over 1,200 activities generating 165,000 student interactions - predominantly Somerset young people - in over 400 education institutions since it launched in 2011.
- Through the 'Young HPC' programme - launched in 2017 - schoolchildren who are a part of HPC Inspire are given a further stepping stone to accessing a career on the project. By July this year 874 young people had registered with the scheme.
- As of end of November 2019, HPC has seen 529 apprentices work on the Project, with further recruitment expected throughout 2019.
- Over 8,500 people have been trained and assessed at the specially built Construction Skills and Innovation Centre near the site.

Direct spend on HC contract within the region continues to increase against a target of £1.5 billion over the construction period. The cumulative direct expenditure with regional business now stands at £1.2 billion. The Hinkley Supply Chain Programme continues to help local businesses access this funding by supporting them to prepare successful bids for HPC contracts.

The Somerset Community Foundation holds HPC impact mitigation funds and invites bids across a range of topics. The fund has an overall value of £12.8 million. The Somerset Community Foundation recently published their report on the first full year of the fund's operation, showing that £2million has been committed since the fund was opened for bids.

Key activities by the Hinkley Tourism Action Partnership (HTAP) this year have included:

- PR support for Somerset and Exmoor activities including press trips, an event at the World Travel Market and a celebration of Somerset's food and drink at an event in London.
- Live Tourism have been commissioned to develop tourism clusters across the region. They began delivery in May and are developing two clusters around Food & Drink and Outdoor Activity and will work with interested businesses to develop 'bookable visitor experiences.
- A new website for Visit Somerset was launched in June 2019.
- Visit Exmoor have redeveloped their existing website and HTAP has provided additional support for a number of campaigns including one with the BBC's Countryfile magazine.
- Continued engagement with the Hinkley workforce through internal marketing and development of the Hinkley Leisure portal.
- Support and guidance for a number of groups bringing forward tourism projects including Brean Down Cycle Way, Burnham Evolution and development of the East Quay at Watchet.

The Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty has submitted a £2.2m bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund to support development and delivery of a Landscape Character Action Plan. This plan will deliver greater understanding of the environment, enhance restore and join up key landscape features, and promote the Manorial history of the area and its industrial heritage. £250,000 match funding from Hinkley Point C Section 106 contributions has been pledged.

The new Castles and Coast Way walking trail has also been completed. This 13-mile circular footpath runs from Nether Stowey to Stogursey and on to the Somerset coast at Shurton Bars. The route links the Coleridge

Way to the England Coast Path National Trail, which will eventually run around the entire coast of England. The trail was officially opened in August.

Work is also being done to preserve the archaeological heritage of areas affected by the HPC project. The restoration of the historic Packhorse Bridge in Cannington should be complete by the time this report is published and the Cannington Bypass archaeology book and report were both launched in March with EDF support.

Through the Hinkley Strategic Delivery Forum (HSDF) we have been working with our partners, including other local authorities, the Local Enterprise Partnership, EDF and central Government to strengthen links between national, local, and regional policy. The objective of HSDF is to deliver the greatest opportunity and benefit for Somerset and the wider South West, and deal with the challenges that we identify.

Working with EDF, the Local Enterprise Partnership, the education sector and business representatives, "Sustaining the HPC Legacy" is a new initiative which will focus on how HPC can provide a lasting economic legacy to Somerset and the South West in terms of workforce, business and place development.

National Grid 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 project was granted Development Consent in January 2016 and work commenced in June 2018. The whole project will take around eight years to build.

The project is split into 13 different geographical stages; 4 of which are within the boundary of Somerset, including underground cables through the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. National Grid's contractors have now installed construction accesses off the local highway network and are now installing an internal haul road for construction vehicles.

In 2020 the overhead line works from the Huntspill River to Loxton is due to commence. National Grid's communications team are keeping local communities up to date in respect of project programme and will be attending Parish Council meetings when works are anticipated to start in these areas.

In accordance with the Section 106 agreement, National Grid have

commenced a programme of STEM subject support for local schools within the administrative areas of the Councils affected. This year's activity has been very positive, with 187 Somerset schools benefitting from successful grant applications.

At the HPC site National Grid have been working with EDF on the design of the Shurton Substation. Details were submitted in mid-October with the intention of commencing works in January 2020.

Planning Policy, Control and Enforcement (Minerals and Waste)

Planning

SCC has statutory responsibilities for to maintain and regularly review local plans for minerals and waste across Somerset and for the determination of planning applications 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 updating our future waste needs assessment.

Within the last year SCC has continued to process a significant caseload of planning applications, including significant further mineral extraction at Halecombe Quarry on the Mendips, a new Primary School in Somerton and a range of smaller applications relating to minerals, waste and school sites. SCC does, 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. 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 a senior level post in the planning service and aim to re-establish internal team capacity. We have worked closely with our partners in Somerset's minerals and waste sectors to ensure that they are aware of the challenges we have experienced and the steps we are taking to address these.

We continue to monitor closely developments relating to the "fracking" agenda and their implications for SCC as the minerals planning authority for Somerset (outside of Exmoor National Park). The November 2019 Government announcement regarding fracking involved a moratorium on issuing further hydraulic fracturing consents until new evidence is provided that future unacceptable impacts on the local community can be ruled out. These consents are issued by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) under a separate regulatory regime from the process of obtaining planning permission.

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 all of Somerset's District Councils, and an in-house advisory function. Building on the existing strengths of the service, in recent months we have begun dialogue with Natural England about the development of a local licensing scheme for great crested newts, potentially offering better ecological outcomes and more suitable option for applicants than via the national scheme

Waste

Environmental Performance: SWP had another excellent year, with a slight decline in waste arising and a slight rise in our recycling rate (to 52.4%). Crucially 91% of all recycling stayed in the UK. The recycling of plastic pots, tubs and trays at all 16 recycling centres continues to grow. SWP remains in the top 10% nationally for carbon saving.

Moving Away from Landfill: The significant work required to move away from landfill by Spring 2020 remains on track – with construction of the Energy from Waste plant at Avonmouth and our two in-county transfer stations (at Dimmer and Walpole) on track.

Implementing Recycle More: In April 2019 the Somerset Waste Board awarded the new collection contract to SUEZ recycling and recovery UK, concluding this significant procurement process. By implementing Recycle More with SUEZ we expect to improve recycling by 20-30%, reduce residual waste by 15%, and save over £2m every year once the service is rolled out.

Delivering Savings: £1.3m of saving was delivered by SWP to SCC in 2018/19 through the Energy from Waste Contract agreed with Viridor Ltd. An extension to our core services contract (primarily our recycling centres) with Viridor will deliver £14.1m savings to SCC over the period to 2031.

Recycling Centres: SWP's 16 recycling sites had over 1.6 million visits last year (an increase of 1.6% on the previous year), and their recycling rate of 76.5% is amongst the highest in the Country. SWP agreed a contract extension with Viridor that delivers £14.1m savings to SCC, including £500k of savings in the 2019/20 financial year. This was delivered whilst keeping all 16 recycling sites open, amending their opening hours to better reflect need and demand (including opening all sites all weekend, all year round), and removing the £2 charge from the two Community Recycling Sites (Crewkerne and Dulverton) by April 2020. The continued success of the permit scheme in reducing trade waste abuse and out-of-County usage

has seen the scheme extended with no change to the terms and conditions of use.

Schools Against Waste: SWP is further enhancing its free programme of Schools Against Waste visits, reaching over 100 Somerset primary schools and 20,000 young people last year.

Influencing National Policy: SWP has worked with other local authorities to influence the emerging national policy agenda. SWP was proud to be the only public sector exemplar in Government's national Resources and Waste Strategy – in recognition of our history of innovation and our commitment to quality.

Fly Tipping

Whilst a District Council responsibility, SWP is pleased to note that the numbers of reported fly tips across Somerset fell by 521 incidents (11%) compared to 2017-18.

Performance Reporting

SWP is embedding a new approach to performance reporting to 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.

Waste Priorities in the Next 12 Months

SWP will be completing the significant number of work streams involved with the implementation of the new collection contractor (Suez) commencing service in Spring 2020. The construction of a fleet of new vehicles is on track. Mendip will be the first part of Somerset to have Recycle More rolled out – in June 2020. A comprehensive communications and engagement programme will take place ahead of the roll-out.

We are putting in place the technology that will underpin improved customer service and link with the in-cab technology in our new fleet to enable us to offer a much-improved customer service.

SWP will be delivering an effective and award-winning behavioural change campaign to tackle the 25% of food waste that is still in Somerset's bins, despite the weekly food waste collection. The 'feed my face, slim my waste' campaign is designed to encourage those that don't currently recycle their food waste to recycle it in their food waste caddy, rather than putting it in the bin.

SWP will be expanding the Schools Against Waste programme to reach all

Somerset primary schools by Spring 2021, and support schools to improve their disappointing 20% recycling rate

We will continue the work to move away from landfill as the disposal route for residual waste by April 2020. The energy produced from Somerset's waste will be used to power the UK's biggest Plastics Processing Facility, currently being developed by Viridor at Avonmouth. Once we move away from landfill our commitment to reduction, reuse and recycling will not be diminished.

SWP will be developing a long-term strategy in line with the Central Government Resources and Waste Strategy which was published toward the end of 2018 and partaking in the next phase of consultations that we expect in 2020, as well as working behind the scenes to influence policy. We expect the plans that national Government produces to significantly change the policy landscape for recycling and waste.

SWP will be enhancing reuse by working with Viridor, our new collection contractor and local partners (particularly the voluntary and community sector).

Trading Standards

SCC continues to be a partner in the innovative and highly successful joint trading standards service for Somerset, Devon and Torbay. As Cabinet Lead, I sit on the review panel for the joint service. The Joint Service has adapted and modernised to deal with market challenges. Renewed focus has been given in the past year to developing two regulatory centres of excellence around:

- the provision of a more holistic, comprehensive "Business Support" offering; and
- "Intelligence and Investigations" using modern tools and techniques to tackle the more serious criminality.

The service has continued to operate to a high standard in the part-year, meeting its key performance indicators and it achieved all its high priority targets – including visiting high risk and primary authority businesses and carrying out new business interventions.

Heritage

I continue to serve as a member of the South West Heritage Trust Board.

In recognition of the service provided by the Heritage Trust since their

inception in 2014, the Cabinet, at their meeting on 10th June approved the awarding of a further 5-year Grant Agreement, which will come into effect on 1st November 2019.

The new Grant is broadly along the same terms as the previous arrangement but with the annual funding capped at the 2018/19 levels for the duration of the agreement.

Somerset County Council looks forward to continuing to work with the Trust over the next five years as they further establish themselves as market leaders within the sector.

The new 'Describe' Archive cataloguing system went live on 5th November 2018. It sets a new national standard in digital archive preservation. The database contains 770,334 entries for Somerset archives and provides an integrated system for cataloguing and managing this extraordinary historical resource. The Trust implemented the Archivematica open-source solution for preserving electronic archives on 1st December 2018. 75,000 digital items have been uploaded on to the system and the Trust is liaising with the Council's Records Management Service to ensure the preservation of key digital archives created by the Council. An event to introduce other archive services to the capabilities of the new systems was held in March.

Leisure Service

On Monday 10th December 2018 a decision was taken to cease commissioning community leisure services, upon the expiry of the 10-year fund agreement with 1610 Limited.

This ended a contractual relationship with a business that was formed following a successful externalisation of the Leisure Service from the auspices of Somerset County Council.

The externalisation of 1610 must be seen as an extremely positive success story.

When they vested, the Somerset County Council Management fee accounted for around half of all of 1610's income. By diversifying their interests, developing their offer and gaining other contracts, according to their 31st March 2017 published accounts the Somerset County Council management fee accounted for just 12% of all income.

Library Services

Over 1.7 Million people came through the doors of our libraries during 2018/19. In addition, over 500,000 people accessed our digital services via the website. Taunton library continues to be the busiest library in the county, issuing over 328,000 items to customers last year. This equates to an impressive 128 items per hour of opening.

Almost 100,000 people from across the county came to libraries to attend a programme of over 8,000 events. Participation levels continue to grow year on year, supporting the delivery of key commissioned priorities around literacy, health and wellbeing, and digital inclusion.

As of 1st April 2019, Somerset County Council fully funds and supports the delivery of Library services through a core network of 19 libraries across the county. These include:

Bridgwater, Burnham-On-Sea, Chard, Cheddar, Crewkerne, Dulverton, Frome, Glastonbury, Ilminster, Langport, Martock, Minehead, Shepton Mallet, Taunton, Wellington, Wells, Williton, Wincanton, and Yeovil.

The network was agreed using a comprehensive range of data identifying individual library catchment areas and levels of need and demand. An interactive catchment map was created and can still be viewed online at: www.somersetlibraries.co.uk/redesign

A new Mobile Library has also recently been introduced as the old one reached its end of life (and transferred to Milborne Port – see below). 2 libraries closed at the end of 2018 at Highbridge and Sunningdale (Yeovil). 13 libraries are managed as Community Library Partnerships. SCC continues to provide infrastructure support in the form of direct grant funding (agreed for a period of 7 years), ICT systems including public access computers, and book stock (including audio books and DVDs).

Community Library Partnerships are now established at:

Bruton, Castle Cary, Milborne Port, Nether Stowey, North Petherton, Porlock, Priorswood, Somerton, South Petherton, and Watchet.

Legal agreements have been put in place and each community manages the library building and a team of volunteers to ensure library services continue to be provided. 4 CLPs are fully managed by volunteers - Bruton; Castle Cary; Porlock and Nether Stowey. Milborne Port North Petherton libraries are fully staffed (funded by the town council). Priorswood, Somerton, South Petherton and Watchet operate with a combination of trained staff and community volunteers.

Milborne Port library is currently accommodated in a decommissioned mobile library vehicle, maintaining the same opening hours and staffed by trained library staff. The arrangement is temporary pending the building

of a new community centre with provision for a library facility. If the building is not able to proceed, further discussions will take place to consider alternative arrangements, including the provision of regular mobile library visits.

New self-service technology (known as Open+) is being installed at Priorswood library, funded via a grant from the Unparished Area fund. The bid was led by members of the Taunton Library's Friends group. Currently the library is open for 16 hours a week, supported by trained staff and a team of local volunteers. The new technology will allow the library to be used 7 days a week. Hours of opening will allow registered library users who have also received an induction to the Open+ system to visit the library from 8.00am in the morning to 8.00pm in the evening Monday to Friday and from 8.00am in the morning until 5.00pm at weekends. The library will continue to be staffed for 16 hours a week but at all other times the public can visit the library using a swipe card system to enter the building with their library membership card. Access will be limited to those aged 14 and older unless children are accompanied by a parent/carer. Customers will be able to use the library's public access computers; printing service; browse and borrow; collect reservations; pay library charges either online or via a self-service kiosk. The technology is new to Somerset and this pilot will be closely monitored.

Parallel to the review of the network of library buildings a whole service review of frontline teams was undertaken. This included the creation of a new assignment and library operations structure. Previous workforce changes had reconfigured the wider libraries management team and library supervisor roles. Changes to the buildings' network meant front line staff would now need to be reorganised.

Following a formal selection process, front line staff have assumed a new role as Library & Information Officers. To facilitate community engagement a new team of Libraries Outreach Officers has also been created. The team will help to provide additional support to enable staff to maintain a thriving and exciting programme of events and activities with a focus on areas of high need. 2 other new roles have been introduced – 1 volunteer co-ordinator role and 1 Community Library Partnership role. The libraries service currently supports over 600 volunteers across all libraries and this is growing. The co-ordinator role will help to develop best practice; streamline processes and align with the wider SCC volunteering system.

The LibrariesWest Consortium continues to go from strength to strength with the introduction of new services this year. Customers can now pay

library charges online using credit or debit cards via www.librarieswest.org.uk. The new service was introduced in July 2019 and has already proved popular with library customers due to the convenience of being able to pay charges 24 hours a day. In our first 3 months £4,800 income was received on behalf of Consortium Partner Authorities via this route. Library customers can now update more of their personal details online by logging into their library accounts at www.librarieswest.org.uk.

Somerset Libraries is Commissioned to Deliver against Six Outcomes

Outcome 1. “More people are enabled and inspired to make the most of the digital world”

During 2018/19 we recorded over 120,000 hours of internet access by members of the public across the People’s Network machines in libraries. Wi-Fi usage is increasing year on year, last year libraries recorded a total of over 90,000 logons to the Wi-Fi network.

Our digital inclusion offer is going from strength to strength this year and now includes a mobile new technology offer “The Idea Box”. This is a resource that schools and community groups can borrow to use to deliver a range of digital activity e.g. Coding, Robotics, 3D printing or Virtual Reality, and comes with all the equipment required alongside start up guides and help videos.

Minehead Library has a new Digital Zone as a result of some of the work happening in the West Somerset Opportunity Area. This is a space within the library that has publicly accessible equipment like and HP Sprout computer, a 3D Printer and various bit of innovative and engaging kit like Drones, Robots and Virtual and Augmented Reality kits.

The Glass Box in Taunton Library continues to innovate and this year we delivered The Digital Skills Academy, a series of workshops for Year 9 and 10 pupils from local schools. Led by local business, library staff and partner agencies these workshops gave students the chance to get hands on with digital tech and find out about related career opportunities. Local business including web design, game design and advertising companies led sessions and there was even a live video link up with a tech giant in Silicon Valley.

Outcome 2. “Libraries Contribute to Economic Growth”

Regular business support surgeries and ‘Digital Drop-Ins’ were delivered by Cosmic at Taunton, Minehead and Yeovil libraries and ad-hoc workshops and events have been a regular feature of the Glass Box calendar. This includes a Google/Lloyds ‘Digital Know How’ event in October, with almost

60 attendees.

An innovative Tablet Lending scheme for businesses and start-ups has been launched in Minehead library whereby iPads which are pre-loaded with digital readiness tools and links to business related apps and websites can be borrowed free of charge, in the same way that customers borrow books.

With close links to Digital Taunton and as core members of the SW Digital Skills Partnership, Somerset libraries have had various opportunities to showcase the library service offer to the local business community.

Developing the skills pipeline has been a core function of the Glass Box and has even led to a nomination for the national Digital Leaders 100 awards through the delivery of the Somerset Digital Skills Talent Academy.

Outcome 3 “People, in Particular the most Vulnerable, are Enabled to make Informed Choices for their Health and Wellbeing”

2018/19 saw over 2,600 health and wellbeing events take place in libraries with over 23,000 participants. This accounts for around a third of all events in libraries.

This year we have added a Men’s Wellbeing Collection to our accessible health collections. This is an innovative collection of books and resources that aims to get more men thinking and talking about their mental health.

We worked with local charity SPARK to deliver a coordinated campaign as part of World Book Night where copies of Rio Ferdinand’s “Thinking Out Loud” were distributed to Men’s groups across the Mendip and South Somerset areas.

More recently the library service has developed a useful partnership with the Library Team over at Musgrove Park Hospital who have delivered pilot training sessions for staff and drop-in events for the public in Taunton and Bridgwater, focussing on accessing reliable health information on-line.

Outcome 4 “More People Enjoy a Vibrant and Dynamic Reading Experience”

The Yeovil Literary Festival continues to draw huge crowds and high-profile authors. Overall the festival hosted 53 events, over 4 venues with 7000 audience members, an increase of 23%.

Having previously run two successful adult Somerset Big Reads, last year the Library Service ran a Children’s Big Read for the first time. The book

chosen was "The Cat Burglar" by Somerset Author Tamsin Cooke. This scheme encouraged more children into the library, enabled more effective relationships with local schools and more children's reading groups were formed as a result.

Over the year the single title "Cat Burglar" was borrowed 724 times, with over 450 children attending a Children's Somerset Big Read event in a library.

Almost two million items were borrowed from libraries last year. Board books continually prove popular with our youngest customers with each one of a collection of 8,500 books issuing 8 times a year, contributing over 64,000 issues. Across adult fiction, crime and thrillers are the most popular sections of stock with Lee Child taking the prize for most popular adult author. We added almost 40,000 new items to stock last year.

Outcome 5 "Library Services Strengthen and Enable Communities"

As part of an ongoing initiative to shape the library service for the future, new posts were created specifically focused on community outreach; bringing in communities to libraries who would not traditionally access the library and extending the library offer to the wider community particularly in rural and areas of high need. Outreach officers have been appointed in South Somerset, Bridgwater and West Somerset with two more to be appointed in Taunton and Mendip area.

In addition, we have added a new Outreach Vehicle to our offer. This new vehicle forms a valuable part of our outreach service across the county and is being used to support local activity in both rurally isolated and more urban deprived areas.

Fun Palaces took place in Somerset Libraries again springing up across the county in a celebration of arts and sciences, supporting by local communities and volunteers to bring libraries to life for a weekend of fun.

Outcome 6 "Libraries Support Children and Young People to be Safe, Healthy and Happy; and Inspire them to Develop Skills and be Ambitious for their Future"

Somerset Libraries are helping to support the new T Level courses in partnership with Bridgwater and Taunton College. A pilot work experience project was run at Taunton Library this year with around 20 students working with library staff to learn about how to create children's books. As part of their project students created their own picture books and showcased these at a toddler event in the library in February. Students spent over 500 hours learning and creating for the event.

This year's Summer Reading Challenge, "Space Chase" celebrated the anniversary of the Moon Landing. Over 5000 children completed the challenge and through the course of the holidays over 80 people volunteered at their local library with over 11,000 children attending almost 300 events across the summer.

Working with Young Somerset, we have established new initiatives targeting library use by young people. Pilot projects have launched at Taunton and in West Somerset to promote stronger links with young people and encourage greater use of library services.

Fortnightly digital sessions have sprung up in West Somerset helping to support local children's essential life skills and digital skills at Minehead Library. From coding to 3D printing, to learning about augmented and virtual reality the sessions have been a hit with children and young people in the area.

Flood and Water Management – Lead Local Flood Authority

SCC is a Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) with responsibility to take a local overview of flooding in the county along with specific duties on flooding from "local" sources (surface water, ground water and ordinary watercourses). While we are now even further from the traumatic flooding events of 2013/14, this year has seen positive steps taken in the delivery of this service.

At a policy level the Environment Agency has come forward with a draft new National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy. The Environment Agency has a statutory duty to develop, maintain, apply and monitor a national flood and coastal erosion risk management strategy, last published in 2011. The national strategy guides the work of all flood and coastal erosion Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) who have a duty to act consistently with it when undertaking their activities – including SCC.

The draft strategy paints a stark picture of the likely impact of climate change and advocates a different approach to managing flood risk and our collective response to it. Through the Flood and Water Management Team, SCC submitted a detailed response to the consultation on the draft document set in the context of our own recent declaration on climate change. The national strategy will inform and shape a number of SCC's activities, including the statutory duty to update our own local flood risk management strategy next year.

As a LLFA the county council has a duty to keep a record of flooding that occurs in Somerset. While some may be reluctant to do so, reporting flooding can help residents and communities receive professional advice as well as provide the evidence needed to support funding applications to deliver a range of mitigation measures to reduce flood risk.

To make it easier for those affected by flooding to report information to the authorities a website has been specifically developed to make it easier for anyone to report past and current flooding incidents relating to properties, and share supporting evidence, such as videos and photographs. This website is <https://swim.geowessex.com/somerset>. We are engaging other risk management authorities and key community groups in the county to raise awareness of the tool. The help of our members to spread this message within Somerset would be gratefully received. Residents can be reassured that their data is securely stored and not made available to third parties.

SCC holds permissive powers under the Land Drainage Act regarding non-Main Rivers known as Ordinary Watercourses. Maintenance of watercourses helps to ensure the effective drainage of land and the protection of property and infrastructure from potentially avoidable flooding. Watercourses also support a variety of habitats for wildlife that may be impacted by inappropriate channel management. Landowners with watercourses on or adjacent to their land – called riparian owners – have responsibilities when it comes to watercourse management. Flood risk management authorities have a role to play to ensure maintenance of watercourses is undertaken appropriately and gives due regard to the environment. In February this year the council adopted a policy to guide its approach to land drainage enforcement under the Land Drainage Act. It sets out a framework to ensure best use of our resources and funding and provides clarity for our communities when and how the council will exercise the use of these powers.

SCC as LLFA acts as a consultee to our Local Planning Authorities on the flood risk and surface water drainage aspect of Major planning applications. Demand has steadily increased since the duty was created in April 2015, rising from an anticipated 200 applications a year in 2015 to over 500 applications in 2018. This includes significant engagement on the flood and drainage aspects of major projects such as the A303 dualling between Sparkford and Ilchester.

The LLFA has also input to the update of key planning policies influencing the delivery of the best outcomes for flood and water management from development. The Local Planning Authorities of Somerset West & Taunton

and South Somerset councils are collaborating on a review of the Strategic Flood Risk Assessments (SFRA) for their districts. The Flood Team has provided extensive feedback on these important strategic planning documents.

The service has successfully bid for SRA funding to deliver a number of SuDS themed projects that will further enhance our planning related service. This includes the development of new local SuDS guidance to support the delivery of high-quality SuDS by developers. The guidance will set a high standard of development that integrates SuDS into a design and delivers multiple benefits; environmental, amenity, and economic. The guide will also help ensure measures are taken to safeguard the long-term maintenance and operation of these drainage features – key challenges identified in the Somerset SuDS Review we completed last year.

A first stakeholder workshop was held in early October to share our ideas for the guide and gather views and comments from those involved in the planning process.

The well attended event brought together a diverse range of professional partners. Output from the workshop will shape the preparation of a draft guide.

Work continues to create showcase SuDS sites through our EU funded project, Sponge 2020. Through Sponge we have an opportunity to retrofit SuDS into existing urban areas in Taunton including retail parking. Plans to work with the former Taunton Deane Borough Council on their town centre car parks have sadly not come to fruition. We are continuing to engage with the newly formed council as Sponge could make an important contribution to Taunton's Garden Town status.

Using SRA funding we are taking the lessons from Sponge into a project looking at how we can utilise SuDS in the highway whilst not compromising our duties for highway maintenance. The LLFA and Taunton Deane Area Highways Office have been scoping candidate sites with a view to developing design proposals for a trial.

Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA)

At the June 2019 Board meeting of Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA), I was honoured to be elected Chair of the SRA, following on from John Osman. John led the SRA with passion from its launch in January 2015 until May 2019, firstly as a representative of Somerset County Council and then as a representative of Mendip District Council.

Somerset County Council is a partner in the SRA, with the four district councils of Mendip, Sedgemoor, Somerset West & Taunton, and South Somerset, plus the Axe-Brue and Parrett Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee. Many other organisations are involved with the SRA at different levels and in different ways.

The SRA is the only partnership of its kind in the country. It provides unique opportunities for tackling Somerset's flooding problems in ways that work best for Somerset. The SRA funds programmes of work across Somerset, and major projects, that advance the aims of Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan. In total, more than 100 projects were given the go-ahead in 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19, and in March 2019 the SRA Board approved a further 28 projects worth £2.759million. In essence, the SRA gives Somerset people extra protection from flooding and makes communities more resilient.

Here are a few examples from the last year, all stressing partnership working, from the five different SRA workstreams of Dredging and River Management (W1), Land Management including Natural Flood Management (W2), Urban Water Management (W3), Resilient Infrastructure (W4), and Building Local Resilience (W5):

W1 – Water Injection Dredging. In late November 2018, a five-year contract for maintenance dredging along the River Parrett was let on behalf of the SRA to water injection dredging specialists Van Oord. In a few days at the start of December, powerful jets of water then dislodged 37,500m³ of silt from Burrowbridge down past Northmoor Pumping Station, and big tides carried it away. The River Parrett is the first place in the UK where water injection dredging techniques have been used on a tidal river in combination with a long-term, sophisticated silt monitoring programme. Through partnership working and ongoing monitoring, the SRA has discovered ways of making maintenance dredging much cheaper, much quicker, and much less disruptive for local residents, farmers, nearby road users and the environment.

W2 – Online Natural Flood Management Auction. Early in 2019 the SRA funded the UK's first countywide online auction for procuring natural flood management works. SRA involvement has helped to field-test a pioneering system that cuts out paperwork, saves time and money and draws on farmers' and landowners' unrivalled knowledge of their own land. Participants can pick out bits of their land where they believe that natural flood management (NFM) activities will produce the best flood risk reductions for them and for their local communities. Farmers agreed that

the system was easy to use – and that it got results.

- The SRA provided the money for the grants that farmers and landowners bid for: 147 bids were successful across 26 different farm holdings.
- The auction software used was developed by the Environment Agency with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest (FWAG SW), Natural England's Catchment Sensitive Farming initiative and the Sylva Foundation at Oxford University.

W2 – Co-Adapt. Match funding from Somerset Rivers Authority has helped Somerset to take part in a new project called Co-Adapt. The aim of Co-Adapt is to get local people and organisations co-operating and adapting to the water-related effects of climate change. Work began early in 2019. The SRA's main interest is in flood protection and alleviation but Co-Adapt will also help to encourage greater resilience to drought on nearly 10 square miles of the Somerset Levels. In Somerset, Co-Adapt is part of the EU's Interreg 2 programme. Its main partners locally are FWAG SW, Somerset Wildlife Trust, Somerset County Council, the National Trust and Devon County Council (as the accountable body for the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership). Great emphasis is placed on what the EU calls co-creation, which means people and organisations working together.

W3 – Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) Review. This is mentioned elsewhere in my report.

W4 – Monksilver. After the SRA Board agreed in autumn 2018 to fund flood protection works in Monksilver, Somerset County Council's Highways Department then designed a scheme for the SRA, focusing on problems at the northern and southern ends of the village. Works were completed in three phases between April and June 2019.

W5 – Household Resilience. Villagers in Misterton near Crewkerne took part in a household resilience survey. This was organised and funded by the SRA in partnership with Somerset Prepared, Misterton's lively parish resilience team, and a willing bunch of local Rotary volunteers. The centre of Misterton was flooded in February 2016, and there have been various other emergencies in the past. It was therefore judged to be a good place to start exploring ways of getting people more interested in household resilience planning. After a four-page leaflet went to all households in the village, Rotary members called at every property to offer further advice about keeping safe in the event of possible emergencies, and to gather information. Following on from this pilot project, other communities across Somerset are to be visited.

Rivers Authorities & Land Drainage Bill. Somerton and Frome MP David Warburton took up a Rivers Authorities and Land Drainage Bill drafted by Defra as a Private Members' Bill. The aim of this legislation was to help put the SRA on a secure long-term footing and give it the power to raise its own share of council tax. With Government support Mr Warburton introduced his Bill to Parliament on 5th March 2018, a burst of activity in February and March 2019 saw it pass through the House of Commons with cross-party support. It went to the House of Lords and had its 2nd Reading on 16th May 2019. The Bill failed to progress to Committee Stage in the House of lords as a result of concerns raised about whether a Private Members' Bill was the correct method for creating new major precepting authorities. It was withdrawn by Mr Warburton in July 2019.

It was disappointing that the Rivers Authorities & Land Drainage Bill failed to become law, but it was heartening to hear many expressions of support for the SRA from members of different parties and from cross-benchers in the Lords. New ways forward are now being discussed. Which brings me on to -

Priorities for the next 12 months

- A key priority will be continuing to press for the necessary legislation required to put the SRA on a stable, long-term legal footing as a major precepting authority. I will continue to work with local MPs and government ministers to see the necessary provisions made so that the SRA can become established in law with the powers to raise its own funding and continue to deliver an extra level of flood risk protection and resilience.
- Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan is now more than five years old. Many of its actions have been completed. Some are no longer required. The Flood Action Plan will therefore be updated in 2020 to reflect what has been achieved, to take account of changes to local and national policies, and to priorities such as the climate emergency resolutions passed by Somerset County Council and district council partners.
- The SRA raises money locally and uses this to provide grant funding to partners to give Somerset extra protection from flooding and greater resilience. In 2020, the SRA will be reviewing its processes for providing grants to ensure that we continue to maximise the benefits of this additional funding. I want to ensure that the SRA is able to fund and deliver the right projects at the right time and this may require changes to how we allocate funding and who can apply for and deliver projects.

- HotSW LEP Growth Deal funded SRA projects must be completed by April 2021 so it will be a busy year for SRA partners completing these works. As SRA Chair I will be supporting SRA partners to drive these projects forward to completion.
- The SRA will be five years old on 31st January 2020 and now is the right time to reflect on what has been achieved and what more needs to be done.

Registration Services

Statutory Compliance

The Registration service received a stock and security assurance audit in February from the General Register Office and was able to maintain the highest possible level of compliance. This was underpinned by the Annual Performance Review in April, whereby the service was able to demonstrate positive attainment and improvement against statutory performance indicators and service deliverables.

Customer Access

With over 20,000 face to face customer appointments needing to be booked every year, the service is keen to continue expanding the customers' use of the online booking facility to reduce the level of phone calls received. A continual programme of work which has been undertaken throughout the year with key stakeholders and partners has provided increasingly positive results, with around 50% of all appointments now being booked online directly by the customer at their convenience. The most successful area has been for customers wanting to book an appointment to register a birth, with 70% of these now being booked online.

An online payment portal is also in the process of implementation. This will enable customers that have a ceremony booked with us to make their payment securely online, rather than face to face with a Registrar or over the phone. The system will also eliminate the existing administrative process involved with linking customer payments to bookings.

Forthcoming Legislative Changes

The Government introduced The Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration Etc.) Act in June 2019. The Act is the biggest change to marriage legislation since 1837 and will modernise how marriages are registered through the introduction of a marriage schedule system and registration in an electronic register.

The electronic register will be a more secure and more efficient system for keeping marriage records. It will also allow for the names of parents of the couple (mother/father/parent) to be included in the marriage entry and on marriage certificates.

The Act also provides for opposite-sex couples to enter into a civil partnership.

Implementation of the new legislation will involve major changes to processes and activities for the registration service as well as all clergy and other Approved Persons involved in marriages, as well as change for the couples involved. The service will be required to collect in around 1,000 marriage registers from churches for storage at the Heritage Centre, as well as provide training for members of the clergy.

Although the delivery date for the main marriage schedule changes has not been confirmed by the General Register Office (GRO), all local authorities are required to be prepared for the changes to come into effect by 2nd December 2019. (There is a possibility that this date will not be attained as legislation still needs to be finalised through parliament to be enacted.)

Marketing

Marketing efforts for the ceremony side of the service have shown healthy results this year. A focus on licensing new approved premises raised the total ceremony venues by 11 during the 2018-19 financial year. Allowing for older venues choosing not to renew, this is a net gain of 7, compared to just 1 in the previous financial year.

Over 20,000 new users have visited the wedding website in the last 12 months, spending a total of nearly 37,000 sessions browsing the site. The 2019 monthly average new visitor total is 2206, compared with 1301 in 2018. Couples are now using the site to download essential forms and guidance, with the More Information section being the most popular page. Social media continues to be used to raise the profile of the service and support the website. The service's Facebook page reach has exceeded 43,000 over the past year. The Instagram feed has seen a steady growth in followers since its launch last autumn. It has become an excellent vehicle for engaging with venues and regional wedding professionals, while aiming to showcase the best of the Somerset wedding industry. There are currently 38 businesses registered in the online Supplier Directory, and 128 premises listed in the Venue Directory.

The first edition of the printed Ceremony Guide has been well received by venues and couples, with 4000 copies sent out over the past year. Published at no cost to the service, a second edition print run of 5000 is due later this month, and will be again circulated to venues, tourist information centres, direct enquiries and at regional wedding fayres.

Civil Contingencies

Governance

The Somerset Local Authorities Civil Contingencies Partnership continues to serve the 5 local authorities of Somerset.

Policy, Contingency Planning and Response

During the last twelve months all key areas of emergency planning guidance have been reviewed and republished to be both clear and accessible to Officers, Elected Members and the public. These include: Emergency Planning, Response and Recovery; Evacuation and Shelter; Human Aspects; and Emergency Donations.

All key plans that underpin these functions have been maintained, along with regular updates to our supporting processes and capabilities.

Particular attention has been given to warning and informing, severe weather, public events and emergency mortuaries.

Due to a change in regulations significant work is ongoing in relation to Hinkley Point B to ensure SCC meets its new legislative duties for Off-Site emergency planning. Work to date has focused on re-determination of the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) following a Consequences Report issued by EDF. Following a public engagement exercise with communities within the DEPZ, the 3.5km radius for all current protective actions will remain unchanged.

With ongoing Brexit negotiations and subsequent guidance issued by central government it has been appropriate to review all internal Business Continuity arrangements. This began with a process of risk specific assessment within Service plans and continues into next year with a review of the overarching SCC Business Continuity Management System. This review has been supported by audits delivered by SWAP and Zurich.

Training and Exercising

Training continues to be a significant priority for all local authorities, ensuring Strategic, Tactical and Operational Officers are equipped and able to respond when required. Utilising new approaches and technology, 6

courses for those with Strategic, Tactical and Operational Roles have been developed and delivered across the partnership, comprising both e-learning and workshop delivery.

Further development is underway to add webinars as a delivery method and expand the material available into subject and capability specific training such as evacuation and shelter and loggist training.

Multi-Agency Planning

The local authorities continue to be key partners supporting the Avon and Somerset Local Resilience Forum, Local Health Resilience Partnership, Somerset Health and Social Care Emergency Planning Group and Somerset Health Protection Forum.

In addition to a review of core operating models, significant planning has been delivered for Brexit preparations, logistics planning, 4x4 transport coordination, support for stranded motorists, information sharing and voluntary agency capabilities.

Following lessons learned from previous incidents, policies developed by the CCU for the safe and effective management of spontaneous volunteers have been referenced in national guidance issued by the Cabinet Office.

Community Resilience

We continue to promote and support community resilience as Chair of the Somerset Prepared Partnership, providing advice, guidance and small grant support to Parish and Town Councils and community groups.

This includes individual support for communities, a quarterly newsletter, website and social media maintenance (www.somersetprepared.org.uk) and an annual multi-agency community resilience event, now in its second year.

In support of local initiatives, the CCU continues to maintain two schemes through which communities can work with the local authorities in an emergency: Community Places of Safety; and Emergency Community Contacts. These schemes have over 100 registrations each and have been further developed this year to make it easier for communities to get involved and receive ongoing support.

To inform targeting of future work the civil contingencies unit has developed a mapping tool to identify those communities that would be more vulnerable during an emergency. This is being used by the both the CCU and wider partnership to develop engagement strategies, prioritise

work and enhance capabilities.

Incidents

Fortunately, we have not seen widespread events such as snow and flooding, however incidents affecting local communities and our ability to deliver services have regularly arisen.

During the summer we experienced prolonged high temperatures resulting in activation of the national heatwave arrangements across the health and social care system and wider partners. These arrangements include measures to protect the health staff and those most vulnerable to prolonged temperature extremes.

Issues affecting local transport, particularly the motorway network, have resulted in stranded motorists and required a multi-agency response. When combined with wider conditions such as high temperatures, these incidents can present significant risks to those affected.

Utility failures including both power and water outages have affected residents in Somerset, again with the potential to be worst felt by the most vulnerable. In response to these we have seen excellent support provided by the responsible agencies and great examples of communities supporting one another during disruptions.

Further smaller scale issues have provided opportunities to test our standing business continuity and multi-agency arrangements, giving officers valuable experience and identifying areas for improvement.

Scientific Services

Somerset Scientific Services have now been in their new premises for 3 years and the service continues to increase its client base within other the Local Authority depts the private sector and with the general public. The reputation of the service within the industry and within its client base to offer a first-class analytical testing services and sought-after scientific advice remains high. Our services continue to be used throughout Somerset and the South-West, but we also routinely do work for clients in the Midlands and even the highlands of Scotland.

Accreditation of the services by the national inspection bodies continues to be achieved and feedback from our annual inspection visit was again complimentary. Performance in external proficiency test schemes confirm that Scientific services are within the top classifications.

Generation of income, especially from the private sector is always a key focus of the service and the implementation of a marketing strategy and use of social media sites continues to show benefits.

Potential clients have been targeting through a combination of social media, paid Google advertising and direct marketing. These include local authorities and district councils, asbestos removal firms, building contractors, surveyors, architects, estate agents, pool operators, farmers, national trust properties as well as domestic water and asbestos clients.

Website use is continuing at a steady pace. Over 2000 new users have visited the site over the past year. Users are coming from a balance of referrals, direct links, paid advertising, social media and organic search results. This will help inform the ongoing marketing strategy, with a renewed focus on SEO techniques.

Results from the customer feedback survey continue to be very positive. Around 20% of respondents have been first time customers. Our overall approval rating is just over 9.6 out of 10, with no respondents giving a score of less than 7. 100% of respondents stated they would use the service again and recommend it to others.

Scientific services were again contracted by the Glastonbury Festival to supply all their water sampling and testing requirements for the main festival and the smaller sub-festivals and signs are encouraging that our services will be required for the 50th festival in 2020.

The Asbestos section has been heavily involved with the refurbishment work within A block at County Hall. Overall, the service's financial position continues to be healthy with income levels above target.

Climate Change

At SCC's Full Council in February 2019, a motion was carried to declare a 'Climate Emergency' in recognition of the scale and urgency of the global challenge from Climate Change. It was also resolved to develop a Strategy to identify ways towards making the county of Somerset 'carbon neutral' by 2030.

All the 4 Somerset District Councils subsequently passed similar resolutions either recognising or declaring Climate Emergencies. Whilst the individual declarations differed in detail, all aspired to achieving carbon neutrality, to identifying adaptation and mitigation measures which could arrest the negative impacts on our climate and to reduce the carbon emissions

released into the atmosphere.

It was agreed to develop a cross-authority, county-wide strategy to achieve our aims and to find ways to work in partnership with other public sector organisations, businesses, our communities and industry experts to bring together a coherent and effective strategy and action plan.

Robust governance has been put in place to steer the development of the strategy including a cross-authority Task and Finish group of Members and a dedicated group of Cabinet Members and Portfolio Holders which reports directly to the Somerset Leaders and Chief Executives group, showing the level of importance this work has been given.

Over the last six months a great deal of work has been undertaken to baseline Somerset's carbon footprint, calculating both emissions and to take this work forward, a number of thematic workstreams have been established to look in greater depth at the implications of and for:

- Water
- Energy
- Built Environment
- Natural Environment
- Waste and Resources
- Industry, Business and Supply Chain
- Farming and Food
- Transport
- Engagement and Communication
- on our environment.

The implications on Public Health is a key cross-cutting theme which touches the work of all the workstreams. Again, the impact of Climate Change on Public Health has been recognised and the focus of the next Joint Strategic Needs Assessment will be on the public health aspects of Climate Change.

The work towards developing the strategy so far has focused on securing subject matter expertise and input into the thinking behind the strategy development. An ongoing relationship with Exeter University is being fostered as well as relationships with a number of other organisations including the Somerset Climate Action Network (SCAN).

A Framework document has been produced that sets out at a high level of detail the expected directions of travel required to identify issues and actions that might be taken towards Somerset becoming carbon neutral. It

must be stressed that this is not a strategy not even a draft strategy. The purpose of the framework is to help us begin a conversation with our local businesses, local communities, our public and health partners and ultimately government on what we all need to do, if we are to achieve our ambitious goals. Inclusive and effective consultation is a key underpinning principle of our work towards developing the strategy.

The success of the Strategy will be dependent on significant policy change at national and local level but as importantly on all of us accepting that we each must adapt the way we live our lives, our lifestyle choices and by taking individual action.

We need everyone to be and feel involved in this important work and to ultimately own this strategy, the tough decisions and actions we need to take.

To start this conversation a series of consultation and engagement events are planned for January and February 2020. The responses and feedback from all these consultation events and methods will be analysed during March 2020 to help to inform and shape a draft Strategy document, with a final document and Action Plan ready for publication during the summer of 2020. The events include:

- **Face to Face Contact** – Within each district area, day long Drop in “Have your say” sessions are arranged for members of the public and local communities
- **Online Consultation** – Running over the Consultation period there will also be online consultation to enable those people and businesses that are unable to attend the events on-line access to give their views, ideas and feedback.
- **District Supplemental Events** – To help flesh out plans in each district, it is envisaged that a number of smaller events will also be arranged to engage the community in local activities, sign-post people to the online consultation and promote the work the Councils are doing.
- **Business and Industry Events** – A tailored business and industry focused Consultation event, supported by the Federation of Small Business and the Chamber of Commerce will also take place in early December.

Young People - There is a recognition also that many young people have strong views on climate change and the impact on the planet. Actions coming from the strategy will impact their future and so it seems appropriate to engage with them separately.

It is proposed that this work makes use of the enthusiasm of the members of the Youth Parliament and that they are asked to support the formation of the online consultation as well as promoting the programme amongst young people.

Multi-Denominational Faith Group Events – It is planned that a number of events with faith groups will also take place to gain the views of the religious communities.

Brexit

SCC's Brexit planning during 2019 was informed by a workshop organised by the Avon and Somerset Local Resilience Forum in early January. At that time, the Government's position was that it was working towards the UK leaving the EU with a deal at the end of March but that organisations should plan and prepare in case of no deal. Senior Leadership Team agreed a planning approach based around business continuity preparations and the SCC Corporate Business Continuity plan was activated in January 2019. From January until the end of March, the Civil Contingencies Unit coordinated preparations. Every SCC service was asked to carry out risk assessments against key Brexit risks and these were combined to inform a corporate level risk assessment. Every service was requested to update its business continuity plan and a weekly impact monitoring process was put in place. Information was shared with the District Councils and links were developed with the Heart of the South West Brexit Resilience and Opportunities Group.

After the change of Prime Minister in July, there was an alteration in tone and direction to local authorities regarding Brexit planning. MHCLG directed local authorities to appoint a senior officer as Brexit Lead to ensure the council has taken all reasonable steps, in line with relevant guidance and messaging coming from Government and its agencies, to prepare for the UK's exit from the EU on 31st October.

SCC set up a dedicated Brexit Team and since mid-August it has worked closely with the Districts to produce a combined risk register, run an impacts and mitigations workshop, develop a communications and engagement strategy, monitor and share Government guidance and work closely with SCC services on their preparations in the run up to 31st October. In addition to regular contacts with the District Councils' Brexit Leads, the Team continues to share information with South West Councils, the LEP Brexit Resilience and Opportunities Group, Avon and Somerset Local Resilience Forum, neighbouring local authorities, business associations and key contacts in the local voluntary and community

sectors.

No background papers.

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