

West Somerset Opportunity Area

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Cabinet Member: Frances Nicholson; Children's and Families

Division and Local Members: Cllr Mandy Chilcott – Minehead; Cllr Hugh Davies – Watchet and Stogursey; Cllr Frances Nicholson - Dulverton and Exmoor and Cllr Christine Lawrence - Dunster

1. Summary

- 1.1.** The Opportunity Area Programme is a key part of the Education Secretary's priority of tackling social mobility, and improving opportunities for young people across the country. Twelve areas with both poor social mobility and schools that face challenges, will receive a share of £72 million to boost opportunities for young people in these communities.
- 1.2.** The areas chosen were amongst the weakest in both the 2016 Social Mobility Commission's index, and the Department for Education's data on school standards and capacity to improve. West Somerset was 324th out of 324 Council areas in the social mobility index in both 2016 and 2017.
- 1.3.** The original plan was published in October 2017 by the DFE working across business, education and community to create and maintain more opportunity for our young people. It is important that this is a community wide initiative, supported by Early Years providers, Schools, Colleges, Businesses, The Voluntary Sector, Health, Council services, and most importantly young people and their families. The programme runs to March 2020, with a detailed delivery plan for 2018/20.

Key Challenges for West Somerset

The initial work identified the key challenges as:

- The geography – rurality and connectivity.
- Ageing population – an older demographic (av. age 54 years) and comparatively fewer opportunities for young people.
- Low aspirations among young people and disadvantaged families.
- Low wages and a high incidence of seasonal, part-time and low-skilled employment.
- The need to accelerate early years development.
- Access to Child care
- Narrowing the gap in educational attainment between FSM children and the rest of their peer group.
- Complex Accountabilities for Education provision across Trusts and Local

Authority Schools.

- Access and Transport
- Lack of access to post 16 training and apprenticeships
- Sparsity of population – unviable service provision despite the need.

1.5 This paper outlines what constitutes Social mobility and considers the lessons learnt from the first year of the opportunity area, and the legacy planning once the Opportunity area comes to an end in March 2020.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note the ranking of Somerset communities within the Social Mobility Index. West Somerset was 324th out of 324 in both 2016 and 2017. From April 2019 West Somerset and Taunton Deane formed the new Council of Somerset West and Taunton. The new ranking is expected to be between 40 and 50% of all local Authorities meaning the issues identified in West Somerset will no longer be as visible.

2.2 Members are asked to note the issues initially targeted for development across West Somerset and the performance of the West Somerset Opportunity Area so far.

2.3 Members are asked to comment on the planned development of the legacy for the West Somerset Opportunity Area.

3. Background

3.1 What is Social Mobility

Social mobility is overseen by the Social Mobility Commission. It is about ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to build a good life for themselves regardless of their family background. In a socially mobile society, every individual has a fair chance of reaching their potential. But in today's Britain, where you start from has a big influence on where you end up. Indeed, for young people it seems that the link between demography and destiny is becoming stronger rather than weaker. But Britain's social mobility problem is not just one of income or class background. It is increasingly one of geography. The Social Mobility Commission report that there is a stark social mobility postcode lottery, where the chances of someone from a disadvantaged background getting on in life is closely linked to where they grow up and choose to make a life for themselves. The Social Mobility Commission has focused on the place-based social mobility lottery ranking all 324 lower-tier local authorities according to 16 social mobility indicators.

3.2 The Social Mobility Index, which is at the heart of this report, provides a unique picture of England's social mobility problem at the local level (see Figure 1.1 and Table 1.1). It builds on the initial version of the index that we published in January 2016.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/662744/State_of_the_Nation_2017_-

3.3 [Social Mobility in Great Britain.pdf](#)

West Somerset is 324 out of 324th with Newark and Sherwood 323th and Weymouth and Portland 322th; whilst Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea and Tower Hamlets are the top three Council areas for Social mobility.

The overall picture is complex, but the broad patterns are clear. London (and the commuter belt areas around it) is advantaged compared with the rest of the country. If you live in or near London, you have a much higher chance of being a high earner than anywhere else in the country. In contrast, disadvantage has become entrenched in certain areas of the country. Isolated rural and coastal towns and former industrial areas feature heavily as social mobility coldspots. Young people growing up in these areas have less chance of achieving good educational outcomes and often end up trapped by a lack of access to further education and employment opportunities.

The table below considers the five district Councils in Somerset.

State of the Nation 2017 – Social Mobility Commission

Performance of District Council areas against social mobility indicators.

Statement	West Somerset	Taunton	Sedgemoor	Mendip	South Somerset
All Performance	10% No 1 324 th	40-50%	30-40%	30-40%	30-40%
Early Years Performance	10% No 1 324 th	20-30%	40-50%	10/20%	30-40%
Schools Performance	40-50%	40-50%	30-40%	60-70%	60-70%
Youth Performance	30-40%	60-70%	20-30%	50-60%	20-30%
Working Lives Performance	10% No 1 324 th	40-50%	10-20%	30-40%	30-40%

Under 10% of Authorities'	10% to 20%	20.1% to 30%	30.1% to 40%	40.1% to 50%	50.1% to 60%	60.1% to 70%	70.1% to 80%	80.1% to 90%	90.1% to 100%

It is noted that from the 1st April 2019 West Somerset and Taunton Deane Councils now form one Council. It is likely that the data for 2019 will move the whole area to the 40 to 50%, reducing the spotlight on the significant need in West Somerset.

The index paints a picture of a social mobility postcode lottery where the type of area people grow up in shapes their life chances. Remote rural and coastal areas also suffer from poor connectivity by transport, so restricting opportunities still further.

The residents of coastal areas, which make up over a fifth of England's local authority areas, experience extremely poor outcomes for social mobility. Over a quarter of these areas are social mobility coldspots and only 6 per cent are social mobility hotspots. One explanation for this is that many parts of the coast suffer from poor transport links, both in terms of public transport and roads. Young people then have limited post-16 opportunities – many of the worst-performing areas are about an hour each way from the nearest university by public transport – and often even further from a selective university. With the exception of Copeland and Suffolk Coastal, all coastal areas are in the bottom decile for working lives. This conclusion is supported by recent analysis, which found poorer outcomes in work for coastal residents including higher rates of low pay and more unemployment. Economic growth also tends to be weaker in coastal communities, compared with other parts of Great Britain.

What is the Opportunity Area Programme?

In 2016 the DfE committed £72m over three financial years as a flagship policy at the heart of the Government's ambition to drive up social mobility. Twelve Opportunity Areas, located across England, were chosen because of the challenges set out in the Social Mobility Commission's index 2016 to investigate which interventions could improve Social Mobility. The areas will benefit from local initiatives that bring together local stakeholders to deliver tailored solutions to the area's problems.

Each OA has a published plan written in collaboration with the DfE, local authorities, charities, businesses and other delivery partners setting out the key priority areas.

Why West Somerset?

Data and evidence show that there are less opportunities for children from poorer backgrounds to become more socially mobile based on measures including:

- Quality of provision and outcomes at early years;
- educational outcomes,
- university attendance and;
- adult indicators such as household earnings and home ownership.

Early years indicators

West Somerset is 324th out of 324 for the Early Years indicators.

The early years of a child's life have a lasting impact, but there are stark differences in early education opportunities across the country. In areas like West Somerset, disadvantaged five-year-olds are 14 percentage points less likely to be school-ready than in other stronger areas. In 2014 in West Somerset only 30% of disadvantaged five-year-olds reach a good level of development. Areas with the best support for disadvantaged children have high-quality preschool settings, effective promotion and use of early education, evidence-based support for parents, and integrated health and education services. Uptake of the free early education offer for disadvantaged two-year-olds ranges from 39 to 96 per cent across England.

School performance

There are 18 schools across a three-tier system and the upper school has sixth form. There are 3000 pupils and all but one school is good or outstanding. Key stage 2 results are low, particularly for disadvantaged boys.

Then West Somerset Academy Trust oversees Minehead First, St Michaels First, Old Cleeve First, St Peters First, Minehead Middle, and Danesfield Middle schools

The Moorland Federation are Local Authority Schools and include Dunster First, Timberscombe First, Cutcombe First, St Dubricious First, and Exford First schools. Other Local Authority Schools include Dulverton infant and junior schools and Knights Templar First School.

From August 2019 the Haygrove Academy Trust will oversee Stogursey, Crowcombe and Stogumber Primary Schools.

Bridgwater College Academy Trust oversees the West Somerset College.

There are no special schools, pupil referral units, Adult training Centres or FE colleges in West Somerset.

Youth Indicators

The effect of postcode on prospects is most acute in this life stage.

Disadvantaged young people in urban areas – especially those in London – tend to have above-average outcomes. In fact, disadvantaged Londoners are almost twice as likely to enter university as those in other areas. By contrast, rural isolation can have major consequences for youth social mobility, as it limits access to further education, higher education, and a range of inspiration and support activities from employers, universities and charities. In remote rural and coastal areas, disadvantaged young people are half as likely to gain two or more A-levels (or equivalent qualifications) and half as likely to enter university as those in our country's major cities. There are six local authority areas in the country where just 9 to 11 per cent of disadvantaged young people go to university – less than half the average rate. In West Somerset, the percentage of all pupils who went on to University at the end of Key Stage 5 was only 26% compared to 49% nationally.

4% of West Somerset students move on to apprenticeships, half the national average.

These areas tend to have limited access to higher education locally, which restricts choice for low-income youngsters who wish to live at home while studying.

Those students not undertaking A levels at the West Somerset College travel to Taunton, Bridgwater, Tiverton or Exeter. These journeys tend to be in excess of the suggested journey times for post 16 students. It is not uncommon for West Somerset Students not studying in Minehead to have a 12 hour day including studying and travel. The current cost of traveling to post 16 education is subsidised by the County Council but requires a parental contribution of £810 a year.

Disadvantaged young people find themselves trapped as they have limited access to education employment opportunities and lack the means to move home or travel to access them. Nationally those who face the biggest barriers to success are disadvantaged youngsters and very hard to reach the sparsely populated areas. Indeed, nine of the 10 worst performing local authority areas are poorly connected (often coastal) and sparsely populated. In such areas,

disadvantaged youngsters not only have fewer local services, but also received less support from universities and other third sector organisations. The problem is not just travel time. Remote schools often have too few low income pupils to be eligible for outreach from employers or universities – meaning that people slip through the net. Isolated rural areas also suffer from weaker partnerships between local organisations – due to the distance between them local authorities and other stakeholders in rural or isolated areas need to make more consistent action to improve access to opportunities stop this can involve better transport links, better systems to ensure rural schools receive outreach and service providers, and better connection between schools charities universities and businesses. Local enterprise partnerships, or universities are well-positioned to leave such efforts.

In West Somerset there are limited business networking opportunities as Minehead and the wider West Somerset area did not have a strong local Chamber of Commerce but as part of the OA we are developing an employer forum, led by Jim Whittaker of Channel Training.

The Education Business Partnership has to date engaged 21 businesses with a presence in West Somerset in careers inspiration activity. We have also engaged businesses from Bridgwater and Taunton with activity in West Somerset. The 21 West Somerset businesses are from the following sectors:

- community development – 2
- construction - 3
- digital & communications – 2
- education - 3
- finance and businesses services – 2
- food manufacturing – 1
- health - 1
- hospitality – 3
- IT development - 1
- local government – 1
- outdoor /cultural activity – 2

Adulthood indicators

West Somerset is 324th out of 324 local Authorities. The Home Counties in the South East and East of England perform best at this life stage. Working residents in many of these areas benefit from the clustering of high-skilled, high-paid jobs, but also have higher than average rates of home ownership than in many other parts of the country, due to greater levels of affluence. Rural and coastal areas do the worst in this life stage as many are cut off from access to top jobs, leading to low rates of pay. Average wages in the worst-performing area, West Somerset, are £312 a week, less than half of those in the best-performing areas of London. Many coastal and rural areas experience poor transport links – in the most rural areas, travel to work times are nearly four times that of urban residents. Access to good jobs is an important driver for working lives outcomes as it leads to higher wages and, often, better prospects for pay progression.

High-paying knowledge-based industries are highly spatially concentrated around London and the South East, which limits access and opportunity for people outside of these areas. But low pay is pervasive throughout the country, with 5.2 million people in England paid less than the voluntary living wage, and in 71 largely rural areas more than 30 per cent of people earn below this living wage

level. West Somerset has the highest proportion of families earning below the voluntary living wage in the Country.

High housing costs are also a major barrier to social mobility. There is a stark north/south divide for housing affordability, with urban areas in the north of England offering more affordable housing than rural areas in the south.

West Somerset has a high proportion of second homes increasing the cost of housing.

It is also noted that West Somerset has been a pilot authority for the induction of the universal credit.

Access to transport

The residents of England's coastal areas experience extremely poor outcomes for social mobility in their working lives. With the exception of Copeland and Suffolk Coastal, all coastal areas are in the bottom decile. One of the main reasons why these areas, spanning over a fifth of England's local authorities, experience worse outcomes is that they all suffer from poor transport links. The role of transport is critical in connecting people to jobs and wider services. The geographical barriers in place for people living in coastal and rural areas can be significant as a result of poor public transport links.

In the most rural and isolated areas, it can take an average of 1 hour 46 minutes to travel to work on public transport. The equivalent time for urban residents is 28 minutes, nearly four times less. This has a detrimental impact on an individual's ability to get on in life, restricting access to employment and services such as Jobcentres and adult learning services. Access to a car can have a substantial impact on the working lives of rural residents by more than halving this travel-to-work time. But car ownership can be unaffordable for people on low incomes. The road infrastructure also affects connectivity, as this determines options for local residents

Key Challenges for West Somerset

The initial work identified the key challenges as:

- The geography – rurality and connectivity.
- Ageing population – an older demographic (av. age 54 years) and comparatively fewer opportunities for young people.
- Low aspirations among young people and disadvantaged families.
- Low wages and a high incidence of seasonal, part-time and low-skilled employment.
- The need to accelerate early years development.
- Access to Child care
- Narrowing the gap in educational attainment between FSM children and the rest of their peer group.
- Complex Accountabilities for Education provision across Trusts and Local Authority Schools.
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- Lack of access to post 16 training and apprenticeships
- Sparsity of population – unviable service provision despite the need.

Partnership Board

A Partnership board of key local stakeholders was created to address the challenges and developed the Opportunity Area plan.

These included:

Alison Bell – Public Health, Fiona McMillan – Chair, Frances Nicholson – Somerset CC Councillor, Julian Wooster – Director of Childrens Services, Mandy Chilcott – West Somerset DC Councillor, Melanie Roberts – Economic Development, Naomi Griffiths – Onion Collective, Paul Rushforth – West Somerset Academies Trust, Peter Elliott – Bridgwater College Academy Trust, Sam Lusardi – Regional Schools Commissioner, Tom Thayer – EDF, Jim Whittaker – Channel Group, David Ralph – CEO Heart of SWLEP, Greg Mockeridge – West Somerset College, Naomi Philp – Head Teacher Dunster School, Brendan Cleere – Somerset West and Taunton Council, Richards Dorney-Savage – Careers and Enterprise, Andrew Hanson – Education Business Partnership, Mark Nettle – Bridgwater & Taunton College, and Jan Downie – DfE Lead for the WSOA.

The four key priorities and areas of work

Early years: Every child has a great start in life

Improving educational outcomes: Educational excellence in the classroom

Supporting teenagers as they leave school: Transition to adulthood

Supporting the local workforce: Skills for employment and business

The four additional cross cutting priorities were identified.

SEND, Mental Health, Access to services, and Extra-Curricular - Residentials

What has this opportunity area done for West Somerset?

West Somerset Opportunity area has enabled key strategic leads to considering data and needs for West Somerset as one place rather than looking at data for a wider area. It has facilitated a wide variety of organisations working together across the four themes: Early years, excellent classroom teaching, transition to adulthood, business and enterprise.

What has the opportunity area identified in West Somerset?

- The power and energy of the community with capacity to help children and young people
- Partnership working including improved joint working between agencies.
- Joint identification the issues facing community - lack of post-18 training opportunities, transport, data and services
- Significant community resources which are underused due to revenue funding challenges.
- Joint problem-solving beyond schools
- Willingness the community to offer its resources to work with young people
- National Collaboration Outreach project working with Careers and Enterprise Company to develop aspirations and help young people plan their post-16 and post-19 progression routes
- Small businesses with limited capacity to support Apprenticeships but a

keenness to help develop skills.

So, what has worked?

- Voluntary groups working with parents
- Focusing on early years development
- Locally-based training
- Training Teaching Assistants
- Review of SEND and SEND provision
- Professional training opportunities for teachers
- The national programmes supporting early years and local schools.
- Local Employment engagement
- Improved partnership working.

Areas for improvement

It is recognised that many issues are beyond West Somerset, however within West Somerset we need:

- learners experience to be consistent, transition to be effective and not the cause of delayed progress.
- Academies collaborating across their communities.
- Capacity issues in small schools and making the programme offer work for them
- Improved joint working between community services for adults and those for young people
- Access to opportunities locally, transport and data
- Support for business

What are the next steps for the Opportunity Area with 15 months left in the programme.

There are four themes for the final 15 months of the programme:

- Evaluation: What is making a difference
- Legacy Planning and looking at future partnership structures to support the ongoing work
- How can ways of working be sustained after the OA
- Sharing our learning with other small rural and coastal areas.

The key issues to be addressed in the Legacy planning are:

- How education partnerships support the wider place planning for the area both economically and socially.
- How raising the participation age can be supported through transport

policy.

- Working with social enterprise and partnership with education to broaden the adult learning offer
- Working with the third sector and the wider community to support children and young people.
- Child Care
- Engaging academy chains to work beyond Education targets with the wider community.
- Using Technology to broaden experiences for both students and the wider community.
- We recognised that the geography of West Somerset mean that it is challenged with rurality and connectivity however we need to improve access to opportunities.
- The Ageing population mean that service provision can me more focused around the elderly with comparatively fewer opportunities for young people. The sparsity of population means that services for young people are often not viable and therefore not offered.
- Access to data is expensive with very limited free options other than the libraries within the West Somerset Communities.
- Creative improvements to access and transport to facilitate Education, employment and training.
- The Low attainment among young people and disadvantaged families means we need to ensure that all young people have the reach their best level of attainment giving them the widest opportunity of what is available, narrowing the gap in educational attainment between FSM children and the rest of their peer group.

4. Consultations Undertaken

- 4.1** The DFE & Somerset County Council have worked with West Somerset District Council, early year's providers, schools, colleges, employers, the voluntary sector, and the LEP to draw together plans for the West Somerset Opportunity Area. Each priority area is led by an experienced group of local stakeholders who understand the community and can develop appropriate interventions to support the work of the opportunity area.
- 4.2** The DFE have committed to making sure that young people are at the heart of the work. The DFE will be consulting with young people building on research already commissioned from the Somerset Rural Youth Project which will examines the experiences and expectations of young people living in rural parts of West Somerset along with on line pulse surveys.
- 4.3** There are a number of surveys including one to understand the barriers facing women returning to work in West Somerset. There are also surveys for pupils and

staff to monitor the impact of the work undertaken as part of the West Somerset Opportunity Area.

- 4.4 The West Somerset Opportunity Area has a website and twitter feed.

5. Implications

- 5.1 The activities within the plan will be funded by the DFE through a grant to Somerset County Council. The grant will be held by Somerset County Council and subject to Somerset County Council procurement rules. Somerset County Council will report to the DFE.
- 5.2 Each priority has a number of targets which the opportunity area has to achieve to improve outcomes for all learners.

6. Background Papers

- 6.1 **The West Somerset Opportunity plan can be found at:**
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/650231/Social_Mobility_Delivery_Plan_West_Somerset.pdf
- 6.2 **Data References**
Here is the social mobility data for Somerset
<http://www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/social-mobility.html>
- 6.3 **Data on all areas:**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-index>
- 6.4 **Digital inclusion data for Somerset**
<http://www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/digital-inclusion/>
- 6.5 **West Somerset Opportunity Area Newsletters are available on the West Somerset opportunity Area web site.**
<https://westsomersetopportunityarea.co.uk/>

6.6 Note:

For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author

Appendix 1

Report on the performance of the West Somerset Opportunity Area

Appendix 2

Proposed DFE plan for 2018/19 delivery