

Annual Report of the Leader of the Council – 2018/19

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1. Summary

- 1.1** I would like to take this opportunity to begin by expressing my heartfelt thanks to Cabinet, Scrutiny, council members, officers and the Council's partners for the great work done over the past twelve months. I particularly want to thank the voluntary and community sector for their fantastic contribution to Somerset and of course to our residents, businesses and communities, everyone working together to improve lives for Somerset.

During my time as Leader, one thing that has become increasingly clear is the need to continue to work more closely with each other - other councils, health colleagues and with our many other partners.

We have many shared interests, complementary services and an overriding commitment to improving lives.

Improving lives is what this Council, and those we work with, is all about. Somerset is at its best when working in partnership and that is something I want to build on.

1.2 Our Vision - Improving Lives

Somerset County Council has set out a collaborative and high-level Vision providing strategic direction in order to deliver a county where the public, private and voluntary sectors all work together to raise expectations and to improve the lives of our residents; where we invest in prevention; we build resilience to improve our communities; and we raise business confidence to boost job prospects throughout our county. Officers and politicians together have worked to try to create a council that is seen as an exemplar to others both regionally and nationally with robust financial, commissioning and decision-making processes, good quality data, good governance, strong performance management, effective technology and a willingness to do things differently.

Our Vision sets ambitions for the Council and our partners. It sets priorities and principles that will underpin our own decisions and seek to influence the decisions of our partners.

This year we have introduced our new 'Improving Lives in Somerset Strategy'

that sets out how Somerset County Council and its key partners will work together to improve the lives of our residents by making a difference to individuals and communities. This strategy explains how, over the next ten years, we will work together to improve people's lives by creating a thriving and productive council that is ambitious and confident. A council that provides the people of Somerset with the right information, advice and guidance to help them help themselves and targets support to those that need it most. This strategy is about setting a common direction and galvanising local organisations, groups and individuals towards that common goal.

If we are to truly make a difference to the lives of our population, we need to move from an approach where we help people who are in crisis, towards one that prioritises prevention and early intervention, working to stop families and individuals getting into crisis in the first place.

This can only be achieved by close working with our partners, from Police, Fire and Health, through the Voluntary and Community sectors, and finally with our residents, businesses and communities. We have a clear ambition and with everyone working together we can make it happen.

1.3 Our Business Plan – Delivering Outcomes That Support Our Vision

Our Council Business Plan explains how Somerset County Council will play its part towards the Vision over the next three years by highlighting four strategic outcomes. Beneath each strategic outcome sit four key priorities and a range of service activities. By lining up these activities, priorities and strategic outcomes with the Vision we can plan ahead, monitor progress, prioritise investment and above all ensure that we are working within our financial means.

Underpinning the four strategic outcomes the plan sets out our strong ambitions for the future of the Council, alongside our new approach to financial management, that will steer our organisational reshaping to ensure that SCC remains a sustainable, confident, innovative and value for money organisation that continues to improve lives for the people of Somerset.

1.4 Our Finances - Living Within Our Means, Investing in Our Future

The Council's 2018/19 revenue budget was set in February 2018 predicting a shortfall of £15m. Within a few short weeks, a culmination of failing to deliver anticipated savings and increasing service demand and pressures meant we faced a £24m challenge, along with reserves down to less than half the level we would regard as appropriate.

In response to this was the formation of a new team – the Financial Imperative Team. They worked alongside the CEO and SLT to instil a new belief, culture and narrative for the Authority underpinned by a tighter control on finance management, putting in place spending panels to challenge and halt spend.

The results are that we are on-track to deliver an in-year underspend; deliver a high percentage of our September budget proposals; paying off some of our negative reserves and replenishing our reserves. We are putting prevention “front and centre” within our services and have robust plans in place allowing our

services to look forward with confidence and plan for a successful and innovative future. We are clearly in a more robust financial position than early projections last year forecast.

2. Key achievements in delivering our Business Plan throughout the year

2.1 Improved health and wellbeing and more people living healthy and independent lives for longer

Our award-winning customer contact centre, Somerset Direct, continues to improve and impress many including Ofsted who said the service offers a quick and efficient response to children and families when they are first in need of help or protection. The contact and referral officers are skilled and confident and record concise but appropriate details that assist in timely decision-making.

In addition, our continued focus on managing demand, improving outcomes and having positive conversations with those seeking assistance within Somerset Direct (our customer contact centre) has enabled the adult services team to routinely meet, maintain and often exceed our target of 60% resolution at first point of contact since July 2018. Training, empowerment and investment in call advisers has been crucial in achieving this and has also had the knock-on benefit of fewer repeat calls, fewer abandoned calls, and enhanced customer satisfaction levels – remarkably our customer satisfaction in this area is in the high 90% - tribute to the skills of the staff and management.

Our work in the communities is both innovative and achieving national recognition for our adult community provision. Not just enabling 250 micro-providers to start up in our localities, but most importantly the way we have produced better outcomes for our residents.

Across the country, rising demand means pressure on adult social care – but Somerset is bucking the trend and our new community-based model is gaining outside interest, including having a BBC Panorama crew shadowing us and recording a documentary on the challenges facing social care nationally, and how Somerset is rising to the challenge.

Our 'common-sense' Home First programme is achieving national recognition in working with NHS Trusts, partners and communities to get people home faster and to live more independently.

Our Delayed Transfers of Care (DTOC) figures show us on a remarkable journey. An increased understanding and scrutiny of long stay patients, coupled with a more robust oversight of data and multidisciplinary decision-making has seen the DTOC performance in Somerset significantly improve over the last year, from a poor performing authority we are now in the top half of the table and in December we were one of the best three in the country.

Our Public Health team have had great results with our infant feeding and nutrition strategy, resulting in a statistically significant increase in breastfeeding rates in our 20% most deprived communities at 6-8 weeks, from 27% in 2013/14 to 37% in 2017/18. This was aided by the health visiting service fully adopting

and implementing digital record keeping, enabling a far greater insight into the needs of the population around child development and breastfeeding rates, as well as providing superior audit trail for performance monitoring. This work, set against a declining rate nationally, has been submitted for publication at LGA and PHE conferences.

Good progress has been made in improving Children's Social Care services across the board, and this improvement was recognised when Ofsted undertook a Focused Inspection in Somerset in January 2019. This visit looked at the Front Door and Early Help services and found that we were making good progress. The inspectors reported a highly motivated and professional workforce focused on the needs of the children, with evidence of continuous improvement since the 2017 Inspection. Managers know their service well in terms of both areas of strengths and areas for further improvement.

Children's Social Worker caseloads (statutory interventions) have reduced consistently over the last year with increasing amounts of work undertaken in Early Help services. This, alongside our drive to increase the number of permanent social workers and reduced numbers of locums, is seeing a rise in our capacity to deliver improved outcomes for children in Somerset.

We are also looking to the future and we have realised that in key towns, in particular Yeovil, we have had a particular problem in recruiting social care workers. We found that young people who had low paid jobs or family caring responsibilities couldn't afford either the time or the money to travel significant distances to take up graduate social care courses. So, a deal was struck with the local Yeovil College University Centre and the University of Gloucestershire to run them and the first freshers have now started their course in their home town, so they can continue to care for family members where appropriate. Alongside this we have been successful in applying to lead the third regional consortium of Step up to Social work increasing our student numbers from 8 to 12 for the 19/20 cohort and also successfully joined Frontline (an additional graduate based social work degree programme) and will take 4 students for the first south west cohort in 2020.

Our new Local Offer website (Somerset Choices for ages 0 to 25) has launched and is showing good levels of weekly site users. With 359 SEND providers, 81 support groups and 582 childcare providers the site provides information for children, young people and families including our Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Local Offer.

A SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy Action Plan has been developed that includes plans to develop a shared understanding and pathway for children with additional needs (Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) presentations) by bringing together existing workstreams and ensuring a graduated response for those with SEMH needs at risk of exclusion.

In Business Intelligence we have worked with the Behavioural Insights Team (formerly part of the Cabinet Office) who have developed data algorithms that may help children's social workers identify potential recurring cases at the point of assessment. Initial work indicates the algorithm to have a success rate of 95% and we are now looking at how this learning can be deployed in a tool to help

social workers get it right and help children and young people with their lives.

The Somerset Children and Young People Survey took place for the third time in the Spring and Summer terms of 2018 and saw almost 9,000 children and young people across Somerset participating in a Health and Wellbeing survey. Containing age-appropriate questions, the survey was designed to gather information about children and young people's health-related behaviours, perceptions and understanding. Allowing our Public Health service to use the results to influence commissioning decisions targeting support particularly for our most vulnerable children and families. The experience of schools and colleges participating in the health and wellbeing survey confirms that the data generated proves highly useful to school/college development and planning.

2.2 A County Infrastructure that drives productivity, supports economic prosperity and sustainable public services

A multi-million pound scheme to upgrade the busy M5 Junction 25 roundabout at Taunton was formally approved 19 December 2018. Junction 25 currently experiences congestion in peak hours, with queues frequently extending along the A358 in both directions and occasionally backed up onto the M5. Somerset County Council has developed a scheme to increase the capacity of this vital link to improve traffic flow, ease peak hour congestion and unlock land for employment.

Businesses in Somerset now have even more help to grow with the help of the County Council's network of Enterprise Centres. The Highbridge Enterprise Centre, which is already home to 15 businesses and 35 jobs, has had a £470,000 expansion. Three more light industrial units have been opened, providing an extra 234 square metres of space aimed at making life easier for three new and growing businesses and creating more valuable jobs.

The £18.4m Colley Lane Southern Access Road scheme will help ease congestion along Taunton Road and Broadway by connecting Parrett Way to Marsh Lane and providing access to the Colley Lane Industrial Estate from the south. The project will use innovative engineering solutions to overcome some of the challenges on site, such as poor ground conditions between the canal and river. The Somerset Bridge will carry the new Colley Lane Southern Access Road over the River Parrett and will be the longest single-span bridge in Somerset – and one of the longest in the south west. As part of its tender bid the principal contractor made a commitment to improving the community, including participating in various fundraising events and taking the 'Big Build Scheme' into local schools which gives children insight into the construction industry and encourage them to think about the structures around them. This partnership is indicative of the Council's ongoing commitment to seek out not just financial value but also social value in our contracts for our communities.

2.3 Safe, vibrant and well-balanced communities able to enjoy and benefit from the natural environment

The quality of local regulated care provision in Somerset has seen steady and

continuous improvement over recent years, evidenced by the growing proportion of providers judged by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding'. We work closely with the CQC and our health commissioning partners to monitor struggling providers and take robust action to support their improvement. In November 2016, 83% of providers were 'Good' or better. This figure rose to 87% in November 2017, and latest statistics for February 2019 reveal that Somerset had over 92.9% of providers achieving a 'Good' or better rating, with no inadequate provision. Somerset's performance in this area exceeds regional and national averages and is testament to hard work and a rigorous focus on ensuring quality across our system.

Substantial progress is being made to boost Somerset waste services by 2020 to help us all waste less, recycle more and save money. Residents have already more than tripled recycling rates in a decade to recycle over half their waste, with over 90% recycled in the UK. This has put Somerset in the top 20% of English councils, hit national targets years early, cut carbon emissions by tens of thousands of tonnes, and saved millions for vital local services. Recycle More will see weekly kerbside collections from 2020 expanded to include taking much more (plastic pots, tubs and trays, cartons, small electrical items, batteries) on top of the many things you can already recycle at the kerbside and the cessation of landfilling most household rubbish in Somerset. Instead, it will be used to generate electricity from 2020 at a new Resource Recovery Centre being built in Avonmouth.

The Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) continues to fund an extensive programme of works across the County to deliver an extra level of flood protection. This year, projects across Somerset will reduce the severity and impact of all types of flooding. Prioritising extra maintenance to rivers, roads and structures, such as culverts, giving Somerset the extra flood protection and resilience that long experience shows it needs. There are approximately 80 schemes in progress and at the March SRA Board meeting 28 further schemes were approved for 2019-20.

In declaring a climate emergency, the Council has recognised the scale and urgency of the global challenge posed by climate change as defined by the latest Special Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Understanding the strength of feeling in the county, and the fact that all governments have a duty to limit the negative impacts of climate change, the Council has resolved to act now as local government cannot wait for national government to act. Councillors agreed carbon emissions must be cut in Somerset and the Council has resolved to work with District Councils, business partners, communities and individuals towards carbon neutrality by 2030.

Nationally and globally there is a need to take action on single-use plastics as it is a growing concern due to the negative impacts on our environment. The Council's new strategy sets out how the Council will continue to work with partners, suppliers and customers to move Somerset County Council towards becoming a 'single-use-plastic-free' authority. We will achieve this alongside lobbying Somerset MPs for national legislation, actively encouraging institutions, businesses and residents of Somerset to adopt similar measures to reduce/cut out their use of single use plastics including actively encouraging additional plastics recycling through the Somerset Waste Partnership.

Our work with contractor Skanska has won a prestigious gold environment award for the innovative and sustainable approach taken on a scheme to build a new 1.2km cycleway alongside the A39 between Cannington and Sandford Hill providing a safer route for pedestrians and cyclists and connecting to other off-road facilities between Cannington and Comwich and in Wembdon. During construction, alternative surfacing products were used to reduce the amount of material required and halve the time on site. Materials were also recycled to further speed up the process and radically improve the carbon footprint by reducing the number of lorry movements.

2.4 Fairer life chances and opportunity for all

The Council has had to modernise and redesign our Library Service so that we can strike the right balance between delivering a thriving, dynamic and comprehensive library service, which meets our statutory obligations, while living within our financial means. We are pleased to say that in the majority of cases communities have come forward and expressed an interest in running their local library building in partnership with the Council. The community partners have positive ambitions for their libraries, with many seeking to make improvements to the current offer – whether by increasing opening hours, seeking improved premises, or developing the range of events and activities

We remain committed to improving and enhancing the lives of all children in Somerset, whatever their abilities and challenges. Our ongoing school building and improvement programme is about ensuring our children have new or expanded school buildings that meet their needs and the needs of our communities for generations to come. Thirteen projects were completed in 2018 and a further twelve projects were commissioned or commenced, at a total estimated cost of £64.738m. The programme currently has an additional thirteen projects in progress for delivery and ten projects that will be delivered for occupation September 2019 and September 2020.

2.5 Our Council - Rising to the Challenges

A team of senior staff from other local authorities visited in March 2018 as part of a 'Peer Challenge' which is designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus and sees the peers use their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they meet, things they observe and material that they read. The team provide feedback as critical friends, not as assessors, consultants or inspectors and the feedback report previously published identifies 'many good and some outstanding elements to what SCC does and the role and influence it has'. It highlights 'impressive' developments in approaches to Adult Social Care and the 'turnaround' in Children's Social Care which 'should not be under estimated' and, the report says, is 'reflective of a revitalised and ambitious council'. There was a strong emphasis on the council's financial sustainability and the group called for a tight financial grip to be put in place. The political and managerial leadership is described as being instrumental in creating a culture for more effective partnership working and a resolute attention on leading for, within and across Somerset. We have really moved the Council forward in the last four

years and now have a strong vision for the future that we will continue to work with our partners to take forward.

In April we welcomed back the peers, as part of a follow-up, to speak to people including a range of council staff and councillors, gather information and views across nineteen different meetings and collate additional research. The initial feedback has been positive, with peers commenting that ‘SCC has purposefully faced its immediate challenging financial issues’ and ‘politicians have taken some very difficult decisions with a more open and transparent approach to generating savings and good communications with workforce.’ It commends us on ‘understanding the financial position’ and that ‘SCC is clearly starting to put in place a longer-term vision of how the council will operate - focus on ‘Improving Lives’.’

Our new workforce strategy has been written to support staff at Somerset County Council in achieving their own ambitions and those of the authority. It follows a series of workshops in 2017 with over 700 employees, that looked at what it's like to work here and our Culture as an organisation. Our People Strategy sets out how we will work with one another, how we will work collaboratively with our partners and how we will ensure that we have the right skills, tools, values and behaviours to improve lives across our County. Linked to the overarching County Vision, three themes are at the heart of our People Strategy. We want our organisation to be Ambitious, Confident and Improving. These three themes are supported by six programmes, covering Leadership, Communities & Partnerships, Innovation, Talent, Health & Happiness and Culture. A healthy organisational culture is critical to the success of an organisation. The culture and sub-cultures at Somerset County Council have a direct impact on the services that we both deliver and commission and therefore on outcomes for our residents. Alongside this strategy we have brought a new approach to establishment control, validating data, budgets and vacancies to gain a better understanding of the real position of the organisation. We have changed our recruitment competencies and now routinely interview potential recruits based on their leadership potential. This is an in-house approach that has seen us turn away “technically” qualified recruits and take on those we believe are the leaders of the future. This was a big call but one that all of the senior leadership team and Cabinet wanted to take – we were not interested in the short-term fix but focussed at all times on the long-term sustainability of the council.

3. Background Papers

- 3.1** Background papers are available upon request from the Corporate Planning and Performance Team via 01823359895 or Performance@somerset.gov.uk