

**County Council (virtual meetings  
from July 2020 due to  
Coronavirus)  
Wednesday 18 November 2020  
10.00 am Virtual Meeting**



**SUPPLEMENT TO THE AGENDA**

To: The Members of the County Council (virtual meetings from July 2020 due to Coronavirus)

We are now able to enclose the following information which was unavailable when the agenda was published:

Item 16	Cabinet Member for Education and Transformation (Pages 3 - 16)
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Published on 12 November 2020

Democratic Services, B3, County Hall, Taunton, TA1 4DY

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Somerset County Council

County Council  
18 November 2020



## **Annual Report to Council of the Cabinet Member for Education & Transformation**

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Faye Purbrick, Cabinet Member for Education & Transformation

Local Member(s) and Division: All

Lead Officers: Julian Wooster, Director of Children's Services, and Simon Clifford, Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Corporate Affairs Pat Flaherty, Chief Executive

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### **1. Summary/link to the County Plan**

- 1.1.** 2020 has been an extraordinary year with unprecedented challenges for our schools, staff, residents and communities as they have worked together to

tackle a global pandemic. Despite these challenges and staff being widely redeployed to support the emergency response there is much to be proud of and celebrate across Education and Transformation.

- 1.2.** In education services, new working relationships forged through Covid-19 response activity are being capitalised on to drive innovative reform of the Schools Forum, forming the foundation for us to demonstrate a new vision for our role as place shapers in the education system. A new model for family safeguarding in children social care, award finalist AV1 robots in classrooms and remote learning opportunities in West Somerset contribute to a creative year. Support services for Education [SSE] were awarded 'Service Provider of the Year 2019' and we have also notched up achievements with the opening of Nerrols Primary School in Taunton, a new wing to Willowdown Primary in Bridgwater and two significant secondary expansions to Bridgwater College and Bishop Fox's Academies.
- 1.3.** Adults has also seen investment and transformation successes, working alongside communities to find imaginative solutions to delivery and enabling people to help themselves to live independently. Innovative examples include Community Connect, remote monitoring and artificial intelligence in Health and Care, Steps to Independence in the Learning Disability Service, and a new in-house Discharge to Assess Application (D2A) which has transformed the discharge process from hospital for those patients requiring ongoing reablement support.
- 1.4.** Empowering our customers to self-serve and self-help has taken great strides this year with the purchase of a new Digital Customer Experience Platform providing customers with the ability to 'report it, pay for it, track it, request it, book it, and the introduction of an electronic payment system for SCC which has revolutionised financial interactions with our customers. An exciting new SEND portal has also enabled the online processing of a child's assessment and the ability for parents and carers to track progress in real time.

This year has also seen a transformation in the way our members and staff work. Our investment, deployment and training in information and communication technology has allowed home working on a scale never imaginable before, with over 3500 users and 5000 virtual meetings a week. Change on this scale has supported our staff to work virtually, remotely and differently as well as promote resilience and wellbeing. The authority has also developed a vision for our workforce including a People attributes/ competency framework identifying the behaviours and culture demanded by our organisation to ensure the workforce is equipped with the right skills for the future.

- 1.5.** And finally, the last and ambitious piece of transformation being pursued this year was a proposal for Local Government reorganisation in Somerset. The authority has engaged with communities and partners and developed a business case for a single unitary council to be submitted to Government by December 2020. Our proposal, endorsed by Full Council, sets out innovative plans for local government reform to further improve lives across our County.

## 2. Key achievement and activities

### 2.1. Transformation

#### **Introduction**

During the past 12 months planned transformation activity has been impacted by the pandemic with resources widely redeployed to focus on the Council's emergency response. Despite this, significant progress has been made and new ways of working have generated vast amounts of learning and improvement opportunities. Business Change have led planning for how we will effectively recover from the pandemic whilst ensuring that our transformation priorities remain viable, in line with strategic objectives, with the impacts and learning from Covid-19 on their delivery understood.

#### **Recovery and Renewal**

To ensure Council transformation, improvement and Covid-19 recovery activity remains fit for purpose to "Improve Lives" a Recovery and Renewal Board has been created. It will ensure that the council's work and key programmes reflect and respond to impacts of Covid-19. The "4 R's" of recovery – return, retain, resist and radical ideas - are being used to assess and reprioritise activity. Existing transformation programmes and projects have also been reviewed against our Improving Lives principles and a revised portfolio of transformation projects and programmes has been agreed.

#### **Key transformation activity**

A **Prevention** learning programme, designed to embed a prevention ethos, has been delivered. This included Prevention Masterclasses, webinars and eLearning modules designed to develop staff understanding of what we mean by thinking and working differently. A number of test and learn projects funded through a dedicated Prevention Fund are underway, including Safe Families, where 80 families with 132 children have so far received community-based support to build family resilience and reduce demand on statutory family services. During the pandemic the numbers of families supported was increased by providing help online, often recruiting 'shielded' volunteers who were keen to connect with families by phone or video-call. The creation of the Exmoor Training & Education Hub will enable the delivery of remote educational opportunities in West Somerset to help improve the sustainability of this rural community and reduce barriers to training, education and employment.

We have focused on transforming the **behaviour and culture** of our organisation, ensuring the workforce is equipped with the right skills and demonstrates the behaviours needed to bring the Improve Lives vision to life. Following engagement with over 1000 members of staff a vision for our future workforce has been set. Twelve feelings have been agreed that embody how our workforce want and need to feel in order that we perform at our best.

People Attributes and a competency framework have been embedded in recruitment and staff development. More recently activity has focused on how we work well and stay well whilst working more virtually and remotely. Learning has been captured and is being applied to develop new ways of working so we can continue to promote workforce wellbeing, capacity and capability.

**Children's transformation** activity has focused on priority areas of high opportunity to transform commissioning and practice and ensure future sustainability of services in light of known service funding and future demand pressures. In response to escalating complexity of need and the anticipated rise in demand, the planned phased area role out of **Family Safeguarding** has been consolidated and accelerated into a single county wide implementation. Despite the challenges of virtual engagement and recruitment, close liaison with provider organisations has enabled the recruitment of adult workers who began being integrated into teams with children's workers in October. This approach will strengthen the whole family in order that children can remain with birth families and reduce the need for care.

**SEND Improvement Programme** – Further to the Somerset local area SEND inspection by Ofsted/CQC in March 2020, HM Inspectors identified nine areas for all agencies to jointly focus on in order to strengthen our support for children and young people with SEND and their families and improve their lived experience and outcomes. The report from inspectors was published in May. It concluded with a request for a joint Written Statement of Action from Somerset County Council and Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group (the 'action plan') as to how we would approach improvement in these nine areas. The joint Written Statement of Action is a two-year plan and lays the foundation for further improvement beyond 2022. An Improvement Framework has been put in place and we are awaiting approval from inspectors before beginning delivery.

**Adults transformation activity** has continued to focus on how we promote people's independence to enable us to manage demand effectively whilst improving outcomes. This has been underpinned by strengths-based practice and supported by investment in community solutions and partnerships with care providers and health. Through **Community Connect** we have linked all levels of the community together, from neighbours helping neighbours to community agents and micro providers. This is creating strong, resilient and sustainable community partnerships that reach more people. These have supported many different aspects of Somerset's Covid response, with approaches adapted to enable remote working. We have implemented the **'Steps to Independence' model in Learning Disability Services**, commissioning services with flexibility to step up and down, or to step away support completely as and when people need it.

## **2.2. Driving improvement and providing assurance**

We have developed a **Learning Portal**, capturing over 230 learning

experiences from individuals, teams and partners covering experiences of new or different ways of working and service delivery during the emergency response. The portal is accessible to all employees and will be developed in the coming months as a platform to analyse, share and apply learning across the Somerset system.

Our in-house built **Benefits Management System** is now ready for use and will enable the improved tracking and monitoring of all benefits of transformation and improvement activity. Not only will we be able to understand the benefits realised throughout projects and programmes we'll also be able to analyse overall progress against the Improving Lives themes, principles of recovery and renewal, and understand the cumulative impacts of organisational change.

**Commissioning for the future** activity has progressed well. A new integrated commissioning system "Integr8" has been designed that will provide an automated commissioning and procurement system and will be fully in place by the end of the financial year. This will streamline processes and governance and deliver improved commissioning, resulting in more effective and efficient delivery of change to improve lives.

### **2.3. Local Government Reorganisation**

In February, Cabinet approved development and delivery of the business case, and associated work, for a single unitary council for Somerset.

The initial phase of this work took place between March and October this year and has delivered the final business case approved by Council in July (submitted to the Secretary of State). This included all public engagement and communications activity as well as supporting development of the County Council Network (CCN) national policy paper on the disaggregation of county councils into two or more unitary councils plus a children's trust and the likely impact on services and budgets.

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) wrote to the Leaders of all the Somerset councils on October 8 formally inviting their proposals for LGR by November 9 (interim) and December 9 (final). Our business case will be updated with minor amendments and the outcomes of the consultation in line with the council decision taken in July and reported to members after submission.

The work underway now includes the formal consultation with residents, business and public sector partners such as the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), health, police and fire & rescue. It also includes the definition, design and planning for the implementation phase due to start in early 2021, including

working with MHCLG to define and draw up the parliamentary orders to create the new unitary council.



## **2.4. Information & Communications Technology**

During the past 12 months we have seen significant developments across our ICT and digital services that have delivered both great innovation and efficiencies for our frontline services as well as robust resilience of our workforce throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Working effectively with our partners and suppliers we have attracted supplier funding to accelerate some of our key priorities.

### **Workforce**

For our workforce we have provided an increase in the capacity and configuration of the network connection to County Hall which has enabled secure working from home at a scale never achieved before. Microsoft Teams has been adopted by over 3500 users providing virtual team meetings, virtual committee meetings and multi-agency partnership collaboration, averaging over 5000 virtual meetings every week. Extended use of technology has also delivered new ways of providing data intelligence reporting, presentations to care providers, training for schools & automation of processes such as library bookings, right across the council.

### **Integrated Health & Care**

A key focus of the last period has been closer integrated working with health partners. A joint digital delivery board has been established and data sharing agreements and systems continue to be jointly developed working toward a shared, single view of a patient's health and care record and interactions.

Working closely with colleagues across the NHS with a focus on the opportunities around technology enabled care. We are jointly applying for NHSX funding to drive forward pilots and initiatives to explore technologies such as remote monitoring and artificial intelligence (AI) in a health & care environment.

### **Customers**

For our customers we have been investing in digital solutions that empower customer self-service and self-help. A new electronic payment system has been implemented which achieves both compliance for the council and new and improved electronic payment functionality for the customer. Our new online portal for SEND has processed more than 2000 SEND assessments and reviews electronically, now also providing the ability for parents and carers to track the progress of their child's assessment online. Our latest investment has been on a digital experience platform (DXP) to provide online services for customers to "Report, Request & Pay" for services. This will provide improved customer experience and self-service for customers.

## **Innovation**

And a spotlight on a couple of the innovation highlights...

- Our award nominated and highly commended AV1 robots have been out in schools helping more than 65 children who have been unable to attend a school setting because of physical or mental health conditions to stay connected with lessons, teachers and friends.
- The in-house developed Discharge to Assess App (D2A) has transformed the discharge process from hospital for those patients requiring some ongoing reablement support. The App collects daily data from adult social care providers on their available capacity and provides the virtual discharge team with a dashboard view of capacity by area and capability to find spaces as quickly as possible freeing up hospital beds for those most in need.

It has been a year that we're immensely proud of.

## **2.5. Education – Including Future Vision & Careers & Post 16 Work**

The County of Somerset holds huge potential but capitalising on that depends on schools providing a world-class education for the next generation. The focus for the past twelve months has been on putting the building blocks in place to tackle some longstanding issues in order to move forward confidently to deliver improvement and innovation where it is needed.

While Covid-19 has presented an unprecedented challenge for schools, it has also signalled a period of revitalised relationships between the County Council's education function and local schools. As a result of new working relationships, we are now embarking on reform of Schools Forum. The coming year will see proposals put forward to put the Schools Forum on a more democratic and transparent footing. This represents a considerable innovation in the sector and an opportunity to demonstrate a new vision for our role as place-shapers in the education system.

We have been working for some years to take forward proposals to address the problems arising from reducing pupil numbers in the Ilminster and Crewkerne area. We successfully challenged a decision by the Regional Schools Commissioner that would have impeded our ability to move forward. A consultation on a single model has now been agreed by Cabinet. Whatever the outcome, we are on the way to providing much needed stability and certainty in this area.

Going forward there will be an ongoing focus on our role in creating an environment where great education can flourish. We have fantastic data capabilities within the Council, but these have been underutilised in support of better educational outcomes. We are devising a long-term plan to update our management information systems to maximise the value from newer tools such as PowerBI. Building on our data capabilities is one of the ways that we will be contributing to the multi-agency plan in response to the recent SEND inspection.

We continue to support the work of the West Somerset Opportunity Area. This project has made huge inroads, particularly in early years outcomes. In the coming year we have a short window of opportunity to use this valuable external investment in the county to drive innovation and build the foundation for future success. In particular, this will focus on:

- A workforce development programme called the Meta-Curriculum Project, in partnership with The Kemnal Academies Trust (TKAT), a national trust based in the South East.
- A project to re-envision flexible working in small rural schools.
- Improving the ability of schools to gather views of staff, pupils and parents in order to make education more responsive.

All these projects are being designed for sustainability, so that they continue to add value after the end of the Opportunity Area, and so that the resources and

learning creates capacity for the benefit of the whole area.

Careers education continues to be a real strength. We have adapted to the restrictions of Covid-19 to move much provision into a virtual offer. Last October and November we delivered physical Careers Fairs in Taunton and RNAS Yeovilton to over 6,500 young people. On November 10 this year we will be delivering our first Virtual Careers Fair and are confident that this format will reach even greater numbers of young people and parents across the whole of Somerset. This will be followed by a virtual apprenticeship & jobs fair on 10 December.

In July 2020 we delivered a Year 8 My Future virtual careers event to schools across Somerset, working closely with our Somerset Education & Business Partnership (EBP) and we are now developing a series of 14 Virtual Talent Academy Insight Briefings that will include content and live question and answer sessions with local Somerset employers representing key industry sectors.

This year we have developed Year 10 Summer Transition Panels to ensure that we can support young people who are at high risk of not being in education, employment or training (NEET) earlier and have extended the reach of our panels to include all young people with a SEND support or education, health and care plan (EHCP) notification. Over 2,100 Year 11 young people are currently being supported in their transition to post-16 through transition panels that have also moved into the virtual arena, working with every mainstream school and Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in Somerset. In addition, we have also held our first Special School Career Plan meetings on 8 October 2020 that intend to offer greater support for young SEND people who aspire to achieve a Supported Employment outcome. Our 3 regional Supported Employment Forums will concentrate on realising the actions agreed from these panels.

On September 1st 2020 we finally launched our 'SomersetWorks' European Social Fund (ESF) NEETs Prevention and Re-engagement 3-year project. SomersetWorks will be able to provide bespoke solutions to help support young people age 15-18 who are struggling to engage with education, employment or training outcomes. In the first month we have already taken over 60 referrals and achieved positive outcomes for many participants, as well as beginning to uncover underlying trends for NEET, especially mental health and anxiety.

Post 16 Education work continues to link very closely with the Economic Team on a wide range of initiatives to make sure that Education is represented on a wide range of forums including the Somerset Employment & Skills Strategic Group, The Hinkley Point C Workforce Development group, the Careers & Enterprise Company Careers Hub Strategic Group, amongst others.

## **2.6. School Build Programme – Including Place Planning**

The last 12 months have seen a number of successful projects delivered for mainstream schools.

A new 420 place primary school in Taunton (Nerrols Primary) opened September 2019, and a new wing was recently added to Willowdown Primary in Bridgwater, increasing their capacity from 210 to 420 pupils. These primary school projects have also increased much needed nursery capacity in both areas. In addition to these County Council managed projects, a new 420 place primary school in Wellington (Isambard Kingdom Brunel Primary) was funded and delivered by the Department for Education. This was made possible through a successful “Free Schools” bid in 2017. The school was completed as planned and occupied by the school following the October half term.

Two significant secondary projects were also progressed. The expansion of Bridgwater College Academy was handed over the school in February 2020, this project increased their capacity by 285 pupils and provides children in that area with a fantastic new facility. October saw the completion of the expansion of Bishop Fox’s Academy in Taunton. This project delivered an expansion of 300 pupils, through the build of a new teaching block and drama studio. It also saw the refurbishment of both the kitchen and dining area, and the existing science block.

Projects completed between September 2019 and September 2020 were delivered under budget.

Place planning continues and new commissions include a 225-place expansion at Holyrood school in Chard which will see a new dining and teaching block erected on the site of the former swimming pool.

## **2.7. Support Services for Education (SSE)**

SSE outturn position for 19/20 was affected by the emergence of Covid-19 with a reduced surplus of £78,000. This year uncommitted reserves of £107,000 resulting from SSE surpluses were reinvested back into education to specifically support vulnerable learners, following discussions with the Somerset Schools Forum.

The Support Services for Education website continues to provide a one-stop shop approach for schools, offering a wide variety of services supporting schools and other education providers. We have over 18,000 users and an average of 8,800 of them accessing regularly, creating approximately 30,000 page views per month.

SSE services continued to support schools through the Covid-19 lockdown and beyond, optimising technology and different ways of working where possible. Whilst a number of training courses and events were cancelled many training

sessions continued to be delivered online with strong attendance in areas such as Governor training. Somerset Centre for Integrated Learning (SCIL) managed to continue to deliver their programmes online with 50 students graduating in a virtual awards ceremony, with a special appearance from celebrity John Barrowman.

Other services continued to balance the day job with providing additional support for schools in response to Government Covid-19 guidance and requirements. This included:

- Advice and support around online teaching and learning.
- Coordination and communication with catering companies to arrange food parcels to support schools with their free school meal obligations.
- HR advice/support on staffing issues resulting from Covid-19 restrictions.
- Establishing a Covid-19 area on the SSE website, consolidating useful information and resources for schools.
- Coordination and publication of daily updates from Government and the County Council.

Our outdoor centres were most affected by Covid-19 restrictions and unable to provide residential activities. However, the centres and staff remained busy redirecting their focus and working closely with Children's Social Care and partners to provide a range of support to vulnerable learners and families. At the time of writing they had delivered 6,400 activity sessions to 139 young people, throughout this challenging period.

Other highlights and achievements include:

- SSE Governance were awarded 'Service Provider of the Year 2019' at the Chartered Institute of Governance Awards (ICSA Awards).
- AV Robots were made available to support schools - with 78% of them on loan (39 of the 50). At the 2020 Municipal Journal awards the initiative was a finalist in the ICT Transformation and Commended in the Transforming Live category.
- Successful provision of 'DofE with a Difference', enabling students to continue their award.
- SCIL successfully moved to Dillington and had 120% increase in numbers on their 1st year Foundation Degree from September 2019 (55 from 25).
- The Arts Council confirmed £80m for Music Education 2020/21 and Somerset Music used the Christmas concerts and the Wells Cathedral Concert on 9th December to showcase 13 schools talented young people alongside our County Youth Choir, Show and County Youth Concert Band.
- Introduction of a new SSE Refuse Collection Service from April 2020, working with SWP and the new contractor to bring a programme of change that will improve recycling performance and deliver

associated cost savings.

- The National Centre for Computing Education (NCCE) appointed eLIM's Education Technology team as Subject Matter Expert Consultants for Primary schools in the south west. This built on the excellent feedback received as Regional Delivery Partners for NCCE face-to-face CPD in 2019.
- The SSE Property team worked with schools to support SALIX sponsored improvement projects to reduce energy consumption and deliver substantial and sustainable savings over future years.
- Several schools have benefitted this year from a new finance bursar package that provides comprehensive cover for when school-employed staff are unavailable for extended periods.
- Bundled health and safety packages under a compliance theme offered schools significant savings opportunities over longer term contract periods.

## 2.8. **Dillington House**

Substantial work has taken place over the last year to improve Dillington's services and processes. We have continued to open Dillington House up to the public in order to widen its customer base and improve its financial position. As a result, we have experienced the following benefits:

- Increased income from the meeting/conference facilities.
- Increase in bookings for our revised wedding packages and success at promotional events such as wedding fairs/events.
- A reviewed and refreshed adult education programme
- Increased bed and breakfast bookings to increase occupancy of the 43 rooms available across the house.
- Improved performance and financial management information.
- New and improved website with increased functionality to book online.
- Dillington as the training centre for SSE SCIL and its range of courses including the 'outstanding' Ofsted rated Initial Teacher Training.

The business plan was updated and a revised three-year financial plan produced and independently reviewed which showed an improved financial position in future years. External grant funding was secured through the Local Government Association for a consultant to support a review of the strategic options for the future.

The emergence of Covid-19 in March 2020 unfortunately resulted in Dillington's closure to the public and the furloughing of most of its staff. The service did however use this time as an opportunity to carry out essential repairs and maintenance as well as redecorate and refurbish several of its rooms including the dining rooms and main reception/lounge.

As well as acting as a Covid-19 testing site through July, outdoor cinema events were arranged, and risk assessments were prepared to enable some services to start up as soon as Government guidance and restrictions would allow.

Residential and day courses are now running again, along with bed and breakfast, meeting rooms and small weddings.

### **3. Background papers**

**3.1.** [[Click here](#) and list background papers used when preparing the report]

**3.2.**

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