

## **Annual Report of the Cabinet Member for Customers & Communities**

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Division and Local Member(s): All

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### **1. Summary**

- 1.1** Customers & Communities [C&C] have much to be proud of despite the challenges brought on by a global pandemic. The various teams' contributions to the Somerset response and support for COVID has been impressive. The Coronavirus [CV] Helpline established during the crisis has taken over 13,600 calls for support, undertaken 7,783 welfare checks and made 50,000 calls to book vaccination slots. By the end of May 2021, the plan is to complete a further 25,000 bookings. The service has made a significant contribution to CV Communications, Contact Tracing; Triage Team to place re-deployed staff to the CV effort; a new CV website providing information and advice; as well as playing a key role in supporting the establishment and operation of the local Lateral Flow Testing Sites in Somerset.
- 1.2** The Contact Centre continues its award-winning streak securing SW Contact Centre of the Year 2020 and Contact Centre CV Response of the Year. These are notable achievements for this service this year, alongside the implementation of an innovative new telephony system. The Business Intelligence Team's performance is also to be celebrated with their continued work supporting 503 Troubled Families (now renamed as the Supporting Troubled Families Programme) and securing £1.1m payment-by-results funding from Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government ahead of schedule.

### **2. Key achievements and more detail**

#### **2.1 Contact Centre**

For the third year in a row the Customer Contact Centre [CC] scooped the SW Medium Sized Contact Centre of the year award in 2020. An impressive achievement winning this accolade for two years but to retain it for a third is outstanding especially since the service was up against tough

competition including many other Local Authorities, Public Sector and Private Companies. We were also winners in the Contact Centre CV Response category and Sharon Passmore and Keith Owen were finalists in the CC Manager of the Year and Hero of the Year categories respectively.

Over the last twelve months the CC has played an integral and important part in the authority's response to CV. The CV Helpline has remained open during 2020/21 operating from 8am to 6pm seven days a week including bank holidays. To date the CV helpline, established to support Somerset residents and businesses with all things CV, has taken over 13,600 calls. The Advisors have also undertaken 7,783 welfare calls to check our most vulnerable individuals were ok as well as working in partnership with all the District Councils to complete 50,000 calls to book Somerset residents in for their vaccination. By the end of May 2021, the plan is to complete a further 25,000 bookings. The CC also booked in over 2,000 staff and front-line workers in for vaccinations at the Hospital Hubs.

Using CC Advisors for the council's support for Contact Tracing has been very successful, so much so Public Health has recently commissioned the CC to provide a key part of the service going forward. A recruitment and selection exercise is underway to build a more resilience and sustainable model.

We would like to take this opportunity in the annual report to thank all our partners who have contributed, from health to our magnificent volunteers - but notably our district council colleagues who have supported our efforts admirably and worked hard to ensure our response to CV has been joined up and supportive to Somerset's residents.

Alongside the CV response the CC has impressively continued to maintain business as usual, manning the SCC phone lines and first points of contact for the authority which totals over 300,000 contacts a year. The service has also implemented a new telephony system which offers staff and more importantly customers a better experience, more choice in the way they interact, for example through webchat, chatbots, Facebook messenger as well as offering different ways to feedback across all channels. It is also worth noting that during this time the performance of the CC has improved with 92% of customers rating the overall service as good or very good. The average wait times for safeguarding calls (our most vulnerable customers) impressively has remained under 20 seconds but our Adults Social Care (ASC) successful signposting to community options (avoiding cost to ASC) has seen a dip from 67% to 63% this year due to community offers not being available in the same way as previous years due to the pandemic.

The CC over the last year has offered an increased breadth of support, with death registrations, the recruitment for fostering, and Adult Social Care Mental Health referrals, all of which improves the first point of contact for the authority and ultimately a better service for Somerset customers. It is also worth noting that this year the queries coming through the Adults and Children lines have been more complex and emotional which has been more difficult for staff working from home.

We would put on record our thanks to these key staff who have worked tirelessly and offered enormous support to those vulnerable families when it was most needed.

## **2.2 Business Intelligence**

Significant work has been undertaken by Business Intelligence [BI] to support the CV pandemic response. This included, leading a multi-agency countywide BI Team supporting the Community Resilience Cell with its data needs. As part of this activity a brand-new database was created at speed to identify and track the 27,000 health-shielded people in Somerset as well as the 80,000+ people identified locally as being 'at risk' because of CV. This work was the foundation of the Somerset Contact Strategy and was used to write letters, make phone calls, or arrange visits as appropriate for those who may have been in need. New reports were created to monitor the school attendance of the 6,000 most vulnerable children during lockdown and a new virtual school 'app' was created to track attendance of our Children in Care in real time. Additionally, the team worked with NHS colleagues modelling the rollout of the vaccination programme ensuring the most vulnerable groups could be vaccinated as effectively as possible.

The team's success in supporting the Council's Troubled Families Programme continued over the last year enabling Somerset to achieve its target of supporting an additional 503 families, the maximum possible [on top of the 3000 already supported in 2019/20] ahead of the deadline set by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government. This generated payment-by-results funding of £1.1m [on top of the £2.4m already secured in 2019/20]. During this year 5,500 families have been checked. The team's performance is the best in the South West and in the top 10 performers nationally. Apart from financial benefits, families have been supported to make changes that will impact positively on both their own and their children's lives. The team is also leading a joint bid with Bristol City Council for the Data Accelerator Fund, to work with multiple councils across the Avon and Somerset Constabulary area, aiming to

improve data-sharing and analysis to better support and work with families.

The team continues with its exemplary record of completing all statutory returns and mandatory user surveys accurately and within timescales set by Government, in addition to a plethora of new reports required by Government to understand the impact of CV. BI has also continued to support Adult Social Care in the implementation of the new Adults case management system, Eclipse, which has involved the creation of a full range of new reports for the service.

### **2.3 Customer Experience & Information Governance**

2020/21 for the Customer Experience and Information Governance Team has been both rewarding and challenging. Members of the team were redeployed to support the CV effort taking on roles in Contact Tracing, Vaccination Bookings, operations in the Lateral Flow Sites as well as delivery of food to many of the VCSE organisations for distribution to the most vulnerable. Whilst these team members were redeployed, remaining staff managed existing tasks and risks to ensure that key compliance activities with regards Information Governance/Data Protection, Subject Access Requests, Complaints and Freedom of Information Requests were maintained and, where needed, developed for example with a number of new CV data-sharing requirements.

During 2019/20 SCC received 1676 pieces of formal customer feedback. Most customer complaints continued to be resolved by the Council at stage 1 of the local process (94%). As a result of changes to the Education, Health and Care Plan process, the authority did see an increase in complaints regarding SEND services. The Customer Experience Team is working with the current SEND review team to ensure that the learning is captured and shared. During the year, nearly 400 compliments were also received from customers, praising a wide range of SCC services. As ever, a number of the compliments highlighted the huge difference staff have made to the lives of our customers at often challenging times. SCCs annual complaints report can be found here - [Complaints, comments, compliments somerset.gov.uk](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/complaints-comments-compliments)

The Records Management service has also contributed to the CV cause with staff on redeployment. However, the service has continued to support the authority with archiving, storage and retrieval services and has just completed a major refit of the underground space in A Block at County Hall to be able to move current records out of costly storage.

## 2.4 Communications

### Communications

The team continued to play a vital role in 2020/21, issuing 419 press releases and managing hundreds of media enquiries, including 180 between January-March 2021. Some standout achievements for 2020/21 include:

**Covid-19 response:** The Communications Team has supported all areas of SCC's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and has led the multi-agency communications response in Somerset, working closely with district councils, NHS and partners in Somerset.

**Public health:** The team stepped up to provide round the clock support to our public health team, managing hundreds of media enquiries and interview requests. Wrote and actioned Somerset's Local Outbreak Management Plan Communication Strategy priorities, which focused targeted messaging on 'engage and inform' (encouraging responsible behaviour and promoting national guidance), promoted Coronavirus symptoms and the need to self-isolate, test and trace benefits, infection control (how to prevent further spread), webinars, stakeholder briefings, supporting businesses, schools and partners with outbreaks (drafting statements, letters, responding to social media etc) and setting up webpages. The team also ran associated campaigns on mental health support (ie Mindline and weekly mental health slots on BBC Somerset), flu vaccinations, childhood accident prevention, giving up smoking (to help reduce serious illness from CV), alcohol awareness, maternity toolkit support and domestic abuse.

**Vaccination programme:** Ongoing work with the NHS to encourage take up, particularly targeting specific hard-to-reach groups. The team has supported the NHS with local Q&As, produced a 'Somerset Support' leaflet distributed to residents receiving their vaccination, encouraged Somerset Carers and health and care workers to step forward to receive their vaccination.

**Vulnerable people and community resilience cell:** Percussive promotion of CV Helpline across all channels resulting in 13,600+ calls for help, campaigns to encourage volunteers, repeated signposting to available support such as foodbanks, free school meals, activities to promote and thank community support groups/partners, including the Food Resilience Taskforce and Holiday Activities and Food Programme.

**Schools:** Supporting headteachers with media statements, parent letters, social media and creating a dedicated schools toolkit when positive cases were confirmed. Promoting national messages around wearing face masks, school testing (including creating graphics), 'back to school safety messages, food parcels for children and families and home learning support (ie laptop provision). Also designed and promoted the school symptom checker, which was promoted via schools and social media and worked with SSE to create a weekly school's newsletter.

**Businesses and recovery:** Targeted information for businesses, including tourism and hospitality sectors, directly through webinars, flyers and newsletters, also indirectly using PR and social media.

**Launch of Coronavirus e-Newsletter:** We've now issued 120 editions and have more than 2,400 subscribers.

**Social media and digital:** Our digital presence continues to grow and improve, with 3,553 new followers on Facebook (13,366 total), 681 on Twitter (13,305 total) and 429 on Instagram (2,644 total) in past six months. Increase in impressions and engagements across all platforms. Started using Next Door with considerable success (281,982 impressions to date). Somerset Shout Outs launched to celebrate community achievements: 120+ shout outs and 11,944 engagements to date. CV Catch-up films viewed more than 148,000 times.

**Internal comms:** Rose to challenge of staying connected to a newly remote workforce with a key focus on wellbeing. Issued 30 twice-weekly manager briefings and 26 CV related all-staff emails to keep staff informed during first lockdown. Launched hugely successful staff Q&A sessions using Teams Live, which regularly have 1,000+ staff attending and generating 100+ questions and answers. We have also seen an increase in the readership of Our Somerset – with 60-80 articles a month. The team devised a number of healthy lifestyle challenges (walking, cycling, running) and initiatives to encourage staff to take breaks and check on colleagues as well as updating the Working Well SharePoint site weekly which has seen an average of 16,265 visits per month. The team continued to use Yammer to connect staff with monthly Cheers sessions to thank staff and 290 members enrolled in the Working Well group. Our newly formed in-house design team have created 10 videos, more than 40 infographics, 20 leaflets, 30 posters and 10 trifolds for services across the council, and branding guidelines for One Somerset saving the Council thousands of pounds if the work had been outsourced.

**Supporting other services:** The Communications team over the last year has continued to support the organisation, including:

Adult social care - staff webinars, promotion of pop-up care homes, webinars for care providers, Proud to Care recruitment campaign, promotion of reablement to free up hospital beds

Children's services - including SEND improvement programme, Crewkerne and Ilminster schools' reorganisation, Step Up to Social Work, young people's mental health

Economy & Community Infrastructure - major highways improvement schemes (M5 Junction 25, Rowbarton traffic signals, Trenchard Way, Western Relief Road and Toneyway), launch of innovation centres, including international media coverage for the completion of the iAero aerospace innovation centre in Yeovil, launch of the Community Renewal Fund, Kickstart, Multi-agency Recovery plan, business surveys and visitor economy support plan, and the One Somerset programme.

**Partnership working** with the NHS on the Integrated Care System and joint health and care campaigns including Fit For My Future, winter planning, Think 111.

**Campaigns:** Key highlights include:

- **Fostering:** Despite the pandemic, fostering enquiries were up 48% year on year, with fostering approvals up 30% in the same period. Website traffic increased by 64%. The emergency foster care appeal, launched during the first lockdown, led to over 150 enquiries. Widespread media coverage of a 21-year-old emergency carer to promote the campaign. Our flagship campaign, Theo's Story, has been viewed more than 20,000 times across YouTube, Sky and Facebook.
- **Domestic Abuse:** #NoClosedDoors2020 led to increase in website hits to 30k (10K the year before)
- **County Lines:** 34 County Lines based releases appeared during the pandemic. Communications work is ongoing to help communities and targeted groups, for example transport providers spot the signs and know how to report it.
- **Proud to Care** Recruitment Campaign to fill care provider vacancies, including a successful paid social media campaign, creation of recruitment videos and regular events, working closely with partners like Visit Somerset and CCS. As a result, the vacancy rate has dropped during year to 6% which is lower than national (7.3%) and

regional (6.7%) rates.

- **Transformation of Intermediate Care:** Working with NHS partners, we developed a comprehensive communications strategy to support this programme, developing new leaflets, webpages, videos and presentations in plain English to emphasise benefits. Despite demand for intermediate care in Somerset increasing by 20% during the pandemic, Somerset remains one of the best performers nationally with a 42% increase in numbers supported to go home each month compared to the same time last year.
- **Healthy Teen relationships:** Campaign video has received more than 100K views on YouTube, reached more than 45K people through Facebook and via TikTok (13-17-year olds) and within a few days 90K young people had viewed.
- **Climate emergency:** Ongoing support to programme including promotion of Somerset Climate Emergency Community Fund.

Engaging and listening to our residents and communities has also been high on our agenda having completed 42 consultations in 2020/21, which received close to 5,500 responses. The key consultations carried out include:

- School admissions 2022/23, 2023/24
- One Somerset proposals – Prior to Business Case development/submission (separate from the national government consultation)
- Crewkerne and Ilminster Schools Transformation proposals
- Consultation on new primary school in Comeytrowe Taunton
- CV 19 testing and vaccination engagement

## 2.5 Digital & Digital Customer

The start of the year saw the release of a new CV website providing Somerset residents with the rapidly changing information, advice and guidance they needed during the pandemic. This site became the key publishing channel for the NHS CCG in Somerset and has seen pages viewed more than 460,000 times. The site was highly praised by the LGA who described it as one of the best examples in the country. Digital CV interactions were developed and launched by the Team including the Social Care Micro Provider Vaccination booking.

This year also saw the launch of the new One Somerset website providing residents, businesses, and key stakeholders with the latest on the authority's' approach and work with regards to Local Government



reorganisation in Somerset. The Digital Team has also spent the last twelve months working through an ongoing programme to improve our online services and decommission out-dated legacy systems. Despite the reduction in service take-up due to CV the website still served nearly 1M visitors who viewed more than 3.5M pages of information.

The Digital Team has spent 2020/21 when not in redeployed roles to support CV, driving forward the delivery of the Digital Customer Programme which was launched to offer our customers excellent online advice, guidance, and fully digital interactions as well as drive efficiency in the organisation. This ambition saw investment and technical implementation of a new digital platform for customers to interact with us 24/7 at the time and place of their choosing. Functionality enables customers to create personalised accounts, request and pay for services, report issues, track progress of requests and much more. The first two digital services using the new platform currently being launched include Report a Fault on the Highway and Financial eligibility calculator for adult social care costs. These new digital interactions have been designed, developed, and tested with our newly recruited Digital Volunteers and with customers to ensure they address their needs.

Through the year the team continued to work on and support a diverse range of Websites: building and launching a new site for SSE Outdoors, a redesign of the SCC recruitment website; and the Somerset Youth Parliament site. The team was particularly proud of the work to redesign the Somerset Survivors domestic violence website, a key service during lockdown periods that saw a 150% increase in use after redevelopment. Through the development of automation and a design pattern library the team has continued to reduce the overhead of delivering new websites and services. The service has established a user research function that is already ensuring that the digital services we are building consistently work well for customers.

### **3. Background Papers**

- 3.1**
- [www.somersetintelligence.org.uk](http://www.somersetintelligence.org.uk)
  - [www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/sinepost.html](http://www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/sinepost.html)
  - Customer Experience: <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/have-your-say/complaints-comments-and-compliments/complaints-comments-compliments/>

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