Annual Report of Cabinet Member for Transformation & Local Government Reorganisation

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1. Summary/link to the County Plan

1.1.   The progress made on transformation across the major county council services and LGR since my last report to Council has been phenomenal. Staff and elected members have collaborated closely to deliver improved performance for many services and a once in a generation new approach to local government in the county for residents and businesses alike. Staff and members should be congratulated and thanked for these achievements, whilst also dealing expertly with the second year of a global pandemic.

The debate between the different options for local government re-organisation (LGR) in Somerset was robust with different options proposed by District and County Councils. The progress made since the Secretary of State's decision to adopt the One Somerset proposal is therefore all the more remarkable.

Members and officers from across the five Somerset Councils now work closely day-to-day to design and develop the new Somerset Council. The LGR programme is complex and the biggest programme of change ever undertaken in Somerset. A programme governance model was approved by all five councils before Christmas, and committees of elected members have already met. The development programme for the new Somerset Council is now led by a Joint Committee with members from all five Councils. Its work is reviewed by Joint Scrutiny arrangements and each week's work is led by a Programme Board comprising each council's Chief Executive and supported by a Programme Management Office.

Officers from the five councils are working together on six programme workstreams developing over 1,000 identified 'products' to be delivered for the new Somerset Council, many for Vesting Day in April 2023. Each of these workstreams is led by an officer from the county council and a district council, and each has multiple sub-workstreams also led by officers from both district

and county councils.

All of this has happened during a remarkably challenging time for local government. The pandemic continues to place stress on both council services and staff and many officers have worked remotely during this time in line with government direction. However, the excellent working relations between officers of the five councils, further developed to support our county response to the pandemic, have made this five-council partnership working much smoother than it might otherwise have been.

Somerset County Council has, of course, continued to develop and transform many of our services for the day-to-day benefit of Somerset residents. Residents can now digitally report a pothole and follow the progress of its repair, while anyone in the county applying for help towards the cost of adult social care can use our newly developed web-based 'Financial Assessment and Benefit (FAB) calculator.' These are two examples of new digital services that have made life simpler and easier for our customers whilst delivering efficiencies in our back-office teams. As such they set a model for the new Somerset Council

2. Key achievement and Activities

2.1. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Somerset

On 21st July 2021 the future of local government in Somerset shifted radically, when the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government approved the county council's proposal to create a single unitary authority for Somerset. This decision set us on the path to improved local government in Somerset that will free-up £18.5 million per year to be invested in frontline services and transformation.

In the lead-up to the Secretary of State's decision, the team delivered a wide programme of engagement with partners across Somerset and nationally, to highlight our proposal, collect feedback and win support for it. During the Winter and Spring of 2020-2021 the team delivered:

- Business briefings during March to outline the benefits of a single unitary authority to business and the economy and collect ideas and feedback regarding a future unitary structure and approach.
- Social media content and press releases to outline the single unitary proposal to Somerset's residents, including radio and television interviews.
- Direct engagement with Somerset's MPs on the purpose and benefits of a single unitary Council.
- Engagement with the Town and Parish Councils, including attending events arranged by Somerset Association of Local Councils and a variety of briefings and Question and Answer sessions.
- Identification and direct engagement with stakeholders across the public

sector and voluntary, community & social enterprise sector.

- Regular Member Briefings including Question and Answer sessions and information sheets.

- Regular staff briefings led by the Chief Executive to discuss our unitary proposals, explain the benefits of a single unitary council, and bust myths.

- Detailed information provided to MHCLG to support their formal consultation on the future of local government in Somerset, including each Director writing to their key civil servant contacts.

- We worked closely with nationally recognised experts on local government reorganisation, adults social care, children's services and place-based services, to ensure our proposals were robust and deliverable.

Since the Secretary of State made his decision, the County Council and District Councils have come together to work as partners to deliver the new authority, which will come into existence on Vesting Day on 1st April 2023.

Through the incredible efforts of the teams involved across the County and District Councils, building on the strong relationships developed tackling Covid, remarkable progress has been made since the summer and we are on track to deliver by Vesting Day despite the ever-present need to tackle Covid and its impacts, whilst continuing to deliver services and support vulnerable residents.

Since July, the County Council and four District Council partnership has:
- Created strong governance and leadership for the programme with representatives from all five Councils, including a Joint Committee, Joint Scrutiny arrangements, a Programme Board comprising each council's Chief Executive, an officer Steering Group and a Programme Management Office.
- Set up a Local Government Reorganisation Advisory Board to give the public and partners a strong voice in development and delivery of the new council. These meetings take place in public and are currently focussing on Local Community Networks (LCNs). LCNs will enable priorities to be set and decisions to be taken in the communities that will be affected, right across Somerset, not in remote district or county council offices, and are critical to success of the new council.
- Set up 3 LCN pilots to test a range of ideas and approaches to learn lessons to apply on the final design of LCNs.
- Regular engagement with our towns, parishes and city council on a range of issues including LCNs, asset devolution and supporting communications on LGR to their communities. This has included the first of several planned Town and Parish Council Conferences to promote LGR and discuss opportunities and ideas.
  - Begun work, led by Somerset West and Taunton Council, to create a Town Council for Taunton.

- Started work on an asset devolution pilot with Bridgwater Town Council.
- Agreed to share the £16.5m implementation budget between the five councils: 80% from the County Council, 20% shared between the four Districts.
- Provided information, evidence and advice to the government on their Structural Changes Order which is the legislation that will enable the new council to be delivered.
- Appointed a quality assurance and delivery partner – PwC – to provide independent, "critical friend" advice and support throughout the programme. This is best practice for a programme of this size.
- Appointed an independent communications lead to provide strong internal and external communications and engagement, including common programme branding.

To design and deliver the new Somerset Council we have created six workstreams, jointly led by County and District senior managers, to identify, develop and deliver over 1000 "products" (specific changes that need to be delivered by Vesting Day). These workstreams cover:
- Governance
- People (Human resources, organisational development, culture and ways of working)
- Assets Optimisation (property, information technology)
- Service Alignment and Improvement
- Finance
- Customers, Communities and Partnerships

The work streams are now moving into formal delivery phase which includes an increase in the number of staff working on the programme. The workstreams are also identifying that benefits each product will deliver, dependencies with other LGR work and other programmes, and ensuring that reporting is accurate and timely so the overall programme can be efficiently monitored

Because this is such a complex programme, we have set up a Programme Management Office (PMO) to provide assurance, support and additional leadership for the entire programme.
- This includes holding a detailed implementation plan, coordinating performance reporting, and supporting work streams to manage risk, deliver agreed benefits and manage the resources committed to the programme.
- Progress and performance information is captured on a brand-new system developed by the programme team to automatically populate reporting and scorecards from information used by each work stream, on the basis of "tell us once". The system also connects products, work plans, risk, benefits and dependencies using automation to allow any part of programme to be viewed and analysed without the need for additional work by the team. This is an exceptionally useful tool for reporting seamlessly to Members, officers and partners without unnecessary administration, and is an example of the talent working behind the scenes to deliver the new Somerset Council.

- The PMO and work streams carried out a checkpoint review in December and January to test the health of the programme and make improvements where necessary. 3 more reviews are scheduled between now and Vesting Day.

Over the last year the team have developed relationships with other unitary county councils including Buckinghamshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and Cornwall to learn from their practical experience of delivering a new unitary council. Within work stream there has also been a strong focus on learning from peers. Valuable advice has been gained across a wide range of topics, including the critical importance of LCN design.

As the programme now presses forward, we can do so having received positive feedback from others: the Local Government Association, Department for Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities, and councils who have been through LGR recently. As well as our rate of progress they have been impressed at how all 5 councils have come together in a spirit of partnership.

2.2 <u>Transformation – Commissioning</u>

The biggest achievement this year for the Commissioning Development team has been the successful delivery of the Co-Labs learning and development programme. We have delivered three cohorts to commissioners and business partners. The participants take part in a series of webinars and coaching sessions which gives them the tools and support for tackling complex priority commissioning challenges. The teams tackle a commissioning challenge together over a 100-day period, so the aim is to make progress by bringing additional capacity and an alternative perspective to an existing challenge. So far, the programme has supported projects from across the organisation contributing to our work on:
- climate change,
- supporting young people into employment, education and training,
- looking at the market for supporting families with care,
- reducing the risk of falls in the older population,
- embedding the priorities of the National Autism Strategy
- developing an approach to ensuring there are enough registered managers to work with children in care.

The ripple effect of the programme is far reaching and influences activity well beyond that which has been directly part of the programme.

The team supported the corporate effort to support the people of Somerset through redeployment to project manage a vaccination centre and is now supporting the development of the new authority for Somerset in a similar way. This flexible use of the workforce has reduced the capacity to develop the corporate commissioning function in the ways planned however this will now be refreshed and rolled into the unitary development work.

Work has commenced on the upgrading of the existing range of internal on-demand learning and development opportunities and the associated tools / guidance - this will be a key area of activity that will run in parallel to the work on Somerset Council.

The Commissioning Development team has worked closely with all commissioning teams and business partners throughout the year. The team has successfully worked in partnership with colleagues from the NHS to support commissioning activity in the Integrated Care System, particularly getting involved with developing tools for and supporting joint commissioning.

2.3.   **Transformation - Information & Communications Technology**

During the past year we have continued to invest in and successfully deliver significant improvements and transformation for ICT and Digital services across the organisation. Emphasis on Resilience, Efficiency, Customer Experience and Innovation driving our activity.

Online customer services
Focus on improving online services for our customers has been at the heart of our work this year. We have launched new online services for 'Reporting a Fault on the Highway' and 'FAB calculator' for applying for help towards the cost of adult social care. These two examples of new digital services have made life simpler and easier for our customers, accessible online, 24/7 from any device whilst delivering efficiencies within our back-office teams. Using the latest technology to enable self-serve, quickly route and process work, we are transforming the way our customers interact with the council.
Link to press releases on 'ReportIt and 'FAB' ?
[Reporting a problem on the road is now a 'hole' lot easier | Somerset County Council Newsroom (somersetnewsroom.com)](#)
[| NEW! Financial Assessment and Benefits (FAB) checkerOur Somerset (wordpress.com)](#)

Cyber security
Another priority this year has been cyber security. Operating in a world with ever increasing levels of cyber-attack, it's critical that we continually invest in and strengthen our layers of threat defence. We have begun a project to redesign our cybersecurity function, focusing on people, processes and tools in order to evolve into a proactive threat hunting Security Operations Centre (SOC).

A new team of cross-skilled roles has been created, supported by investment in training and leading-edge cloud based cyber security tools to establish a dedicated service for cyber security detection and response.

Alongside the creation of the new SOC a programme of staff training and awareness will be delivered across the organisation during the coming year.

Our Journey to the cloud

By adopting SCC ICT's primary strategic initiative of cloud first, we have digitally transformed our service so that any renewals and selected services are now cloud hosted. This has enabled SCC to transition quickly to a remote and hybrid working which has supported our workforce and services during this pandemic. Services such as messaging in the cloud (exchange to O365) and Telephony (Openscape to MS teams, Contact Centre delivered via Genesys and Voxivo for NHS Covid Helpline and Contract Tracers), deliver improved performance and accessibility to a wider range of monitoring tools as a result of this migration. In addition, we have ambitions to conclude the migration of the majority of our server estate by May 2022, leaving the remaining systems on premise only where it is not pragmatic to migrate or where we are required to do so for legal and compliance reasons. This journey could only have been undertaken by teams who have strengthened their skills, adopted new tools, and applied new concepts while adapting to and applying the extensive range of technological changes that the move towards the cloud has brought, working alongside experts/ partners in the industry to ensure that costs are optimised, efficiencies and new capabilities are leveraged, and benefits as far as possible are sought to provide the adaptive service required to meet our needs.

The move to the cloud brings with it the ability to utilise the latest technical innovations and service delivery methods, a diverse array of tools used over unlimited server and storage capacity and allows for the automated scaling up and down of those services based upon demand, cost and performance metrics. It further makes those services much more accessible; secure, monitored and resilient to disruption. It enables immediate and automated disaster recovery and continuity of service in business continuity planning.

Digital Inclusion work within communities

During the Pandemic ICT have worked to supply and support devices for those who are unable to access technology:

The Somerset Libraries tablet loaning scheme was launched in October 2020 and since that time, the scheme has supported over 100 people looking to develop new skills for employment. Feedback from borrowers has been overwhelmingly positive, with some people stating that the scheme has directly led to them finding new employment. Others have benefitted from the health and wellbeing information and links which are highlighted on the devices, whilst some people commented that being able to become more confident in navigating the internet has been very valuable. As well as a tablet, borrowers receive a keyboard and headphones to help them with job

applications, CVs, training and even virtual interviews. The devices are data-enabled and the scheme links directly with the Positive People scheme for more intensive 1:1 support and advice. The project is currently delivered via all 19 core Somerset Libraries and regular liaison with support agencies via the Employment Support Group ensures that the scheme is promoted to potential borrowers and the information/links remain relevant and useful.

Laptops to support those Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)
As part of Somerset County Council's Covid-19 recovery plans a scheme has been set up for young people who are currently, or have been identified as having the potential, to fall into the NEETs (Not in Employment, Education or Training) category. One element of this offering is to provide young people assistance in improving digital skills and helping them to be ready for further education or the workplace.

As part of this, 300 laptops have been provided by SCC to act as loan devices during the upskilling workshops being run by the Post-16 team. These workshops are being delivered to young people across the county from a number of locations such as Libraires, pop-up sessions and community hubs.

Laptops for Children to access online education
Somerset County Council has provided refurbished laptops to assist young people who have left care, this need arose during the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic and prevented a number of young people from accessing online learning. In response to this, an offering of 70 laptops were provided to young people as well as a copy of MS Office to help support online learning for those without access to adequate technology and resources.

<u>Grow our Own Talent</u>
Within ICT we always look to grow our own talent. Developing and promoting up through the lines of service. We also look to all training Schemes the Government and Authority are supporting and have given many the opportunity to start a career in ICT with the Council. We utilised the DWP's Kick Start Scheme, 4 joined ICT last year with all finding permanent employment within the authority. 2 further Kick Starters will be joining our Service Desk as part of the ongoing Scheme.

We have also been the first authority in the Southwest to take on 2 Mencap Apprentices, and they are both doing extremely well. Other Councils are unable to support this at the present time and other areas of SCC are also looking to appoint later in January.

We also have 3 Care Leavers completing apprenticeships within ICT getting experience on the frontline backed by a Level 3 ICT Qualification. Previous

years' apprenticeships have all been a great success, with each starting on our service desk, and has yielded 6 moving into 3rd line technical support roles, roles that would otherwise have cost the council with expensive contract staff.

2.4 Somerset County Council Transformation Programme

The Council's transformation programme comprises a range of projects that are either enabling or delivering transformation and improvement. This includes Children's Transformation where an enormous amount of good work is being done and is discussed in the Children's Services Cabinet Member Annual Report which is also being brought to Full Council today.

Adults Social Care Improvement
Over the last year Adults Social Care has been under significant pressure as a result of Covid however the service has been able to continue improvement activity. This has included focussing on pilot projects aimed at managing increasing demand:

- Technology Enabled Care (TEC) – increasing technology-based options in care plans to increase independence, better support carers and improve care provider capacity. The pilot has a target of 80 nominees testing the technology on offer to meet their outcomes. Proposals are being received and TEC installations and full TEC Assessments have begun.
- New models of micro provision - exploring how we can increase the options available to people and professionals in deciding how their care and support is provided, thus reducing inequalities and promoting locally based inclusive options. The Carers Network (TCN) has been engaged and 24 micro providers have signed up and a Community Champion network mobilised. Benefits tracking and data sources have been agreed, creating an evaluation framework which allows for a mid-point review to be carried out.

The evaluation of the first phase of the Intermediate Care Model has been completed. Valuable data has been collected regarding the impact that different pathways have on maximising a person's independence when discharged from hospital, for example through providing community solutions that offer a short-term period of stabilisation, assessment, and reablement. Owing to Covid, the model has been under significant pressure to deliver their Improvement Plan. To ensure best use of resources and strongest outcomes for clients, the Intermediate Care Board agreed which essential deliverables were needed ahead of winter pressures, with the remainder of the plan to be revisited in the new year.

Inclusive Growth

During summer 2020 as part of discussions on how the County would recover from the impacts of Covid, a working group of officers came together to look at inclusive growth. This became an enabling activity in the transformation

programme and a draft prospectus was developed in autumn 2021. This innovative work has now been moved into business-as-usual within the economic development team and rescoped within the LGR programme to ensure that inclusive growth opportunities are considered in the context of the new council.

New Ways of Working

The Council's journey to new ways of working is driven by the Behaviour and Culture programme. It has established leadership and management as its priority, looking to create flexibility in the ways we work, and looking at what future working practices might be like. Work in the last year has included:
- Ebb and flow planning which will guide the flexibility of the staff when they return to offices.
- Engagement and consultation with staff, including a SharePoint knowledge centre and ongoing support and guidance to encourage adoption of hybrid working.

Recycle More

Despite significant challenge, the Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) rolled out two further phases of its Recycle More service in the course of the year. The expanded recycling collections were launched in South Somerset at the end of June and Taunton Deane at the start of November, introducing another 130,000 households to the biggest change in Somerset recycling for more than a decade.

Covid control measures (for example staggered starts, additional cleaning/sanitising) have continued throughout, keeping to a minimum its impact on staffing numbers and therefore allowing roll outs and collections to continue largely as usual.

The launch in South Somerset was affected by the national driver shortage however the Taunton Deane roll-out has been the smoothest of all so far. SWP is now gearing up to complete the service roll-out, taking the collections to more than 70,000 homes across Sedgemoor and West Somerset. The impacts of the Omicron variant on staffing are being monitored closely, risks have been mitigated (for example introducing changes to communal properties slightly later in the year) and communications and engagement are now well underway.

3. Background papers

3.1. Local Government Reorganisation in Somerset: Programme Workstreams

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