



Lead Member Education & Public Health: Education Annual Report

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Local Member(s) and Division: All

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1. EDUCATION STRATEGY

1.1 Strategy Board and Schools Forum

One of our priorities during this period has been to shift to a more strategic focus. While the pressures of the pandemic have meant that teams have at times necessarily been reactive to a rapidly changing environment, we have had some notable successes in looking at the big picture and putting in the groundwork for a more strategic approach in the coming months and years.

We commissioned of Schools Forum, a statutory decision-making body for consultation and decision-making in relation to education finance. This informed a programme of reform focused on refreshing the membership, updating the constitution with a tight focus on our statutory responsibilities, establishing a clear annual timetable for financial decision-making and introducing a regular programme of continuing professional development (CPD) to enable all Forum members to gain insight and understanding of this complex area. While reforms remain new, early signs are that these are delivering the desired effect of productive debate and informed voting.

To support Schools Forum and introduce a new focus on our long-term strategy, we have established a new Somerset Education Strategy Board. Two external advisers, Sir Michael Wilshaw, previously Chief Inspector of Schools, and Loic Menzies, author of *Young People on the Margins*, have been asked to help us shape an ambitious, wide-ranging strategy to create education in Somerset that rivals the best in the country. We aim to report at the end of 2022.

1.2 Relationships with our sectors

One of the unexpected benefits of the pandemic has been that it has prompted the creation of better lines of communication between the local authority and schools. Regular meetings that were set up in the early days of the pandemic have been evolved into essential touchpoints to share developments and shape our practice. A new weekly bulletin now reaches over 1,000 stakeholders each week, and data on readership and 'click-throughs' for articles exceeds industry standards. Our focus is on providing 'a human face' and senior leaders write personal messages and are available every week for a 'drop-in' session for school leaders which has attracted a loyal following.

While we have experienced some turbulent times as the profession has faced exceptional levels of challenges and stress, we are seeing many signs that relationships between the local authority and schools in the county are better than they have been for many years.

1.3 Somerset 'Patchwork'

In January 2020 Ofsted published a research report, "How 'stuck' schools are overcoming isolation", which identifies the risks that isolation and weak capacity can have for schools and the school system as a whole. We are making it a priority to evaluate what active steps we can take to improve capacity, particularly within local authority (LA) maintained schools. There are 144 LA maintained schools in Somerset, and over 100 of these are below the level of a single form entry (210 pupils), and more than 50 are what the government would consider 'very small schools'. We hugely value our small rural schools, but without careful consideration and support they can be vulnerable to shocks and financial and/or staffing pressures. We have seen in the pandemic how any school can become fragile if it does not have the right supportive services and networks around it.

We have discussed with LA schools whether there is potential for schools to work together with back-office functions enabling Head Teachers to focus on teaching and learning. The "Patchwork" looks at all services needed by schools and seeing if schools can share the work across a group of schools or join forces across the County to establish economies of scale. Consultation was undertaken with schools during the Autumn term with 35 schools volunteering to join a test and learn project in 2022.

2. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

2.1 School standards

Inspections started again in September 2021. To date 11 Somerset Schools have been inspected and have had the final report published. Although only one of those schools has increased its overall Ofsted grade this does not give a true representation of either success or challenge. Retaining a grade of Good or indeed Outstanding is success and illustrates a school who is meeting the needs of its community. Out of 11 inspections, all of which were inspections under a new framework with new criteria for success, 7 are now Good (5 schools having retained that grade from the previous framework inspection). The team have identified a more accurate measure for quantifying success across Somerset in inspections where a percentage can be attributed to the judgements, this enables us to make comparisons not only of overall judgement but judgement of discreet areas. A score of 75% being a grade 2 (Good) across all areas. 6 schools have achieved 75%, 2 schools over 60% (two areas 'Good', two 'Requires Improvement'), 1 is at 56% (1 area good) and 3 schools have scores at or below 50% meaning all areas Require Improvement or worse. Over the course of time, we will be able to use this conversion to identify 'real' improvement.

A priority this year has been on creating a sharper and more transparent process for challenging school performance where this is significant enough to raise concerns, maximising the impact of the statutory 'schools causing concern' regulations and guidance.

There is now a clear process to enable accurate assessment and identification of schools who may be experiencing challenge, a clearly defined support package for improvement and escalation and exit pathways for increased or stepped down support. The internal process for sharing intelligence across teams has tightened throughout the year as a key element of the Schools Causing Concern process. This tightening has enabled services to work together on emerging cross sector priorities that are more accurately identified and will lead to significant systemic change such as the allocation of capital funding for repairs and ongoing maintenance in schools.

2.2 Partnerships for improvement

A self-improving system is reliant on credible professionals with identified skills, knowledge and expertise being able work with schools who are able to not only accurately self-assess their needs but identify where that 'expertise' lies to seek and broker support, advice, and the sharing of practice. For many years the knowledge about our schools and the key relationships with them have been held by Somerset's Education Partners (SEPs). This programme has been redesigned and over the last 6 months the School Improvement Team have increased their direct engagement with schools, Multi Academy Trusts and National Leaders of Education with a focus on working with serving practitioners within the system. The range of support that can now be offered to schools is bespoke, strong and we are getting feedback that it is 'trusted' by the system. All external partners complete work that is directed by the team and a system of reporting is being embedded, enabling the team and whole sector to benefit from practice across the board, as well as enabling the team to complete sector wide needs analysis.

2.3 CPD and leadership development

The framework for newly qualified teachers has undergone significant reform nationally, and a new framework for Early Career Teachers was introduced as of September 2021. The Local Authority are one of two appropriate bodies which schools may choose for the assessment and monitoring of Early Career Teachers. The programme now lasts two years. Within Somerset there remains 24 NQTs finishing their qualification and there are currently 76 ECTs registered for which the School Improvement Team are tracking and monitoring progress and instigating support when required. There are currently 3 out of the 100 with concerns.

The success of our education system is dependent on our school leaders. Aware of the continued pressures that continue to grow on the shoulders of leaders, we have a School Leader support working group running identifying specific pieces of work that will enable us to have greater security in retaining strong leaders within Somerset's education system. The success of our work with school leaders is also reliant on Somerset being able to identify potential effective leaders early in their career. Improving our current leadership development is a key piece of work to enable us to grow and develop leaders and retain them for the children of Somerset. The school improvement team are planning a program for the future that is specifically aimed at potential leaders and equipping them for future roles within our schools.

2.4 Curriculum and assessment

A curriculum project board was set up and is now moving to a further iteration to ensure it meets the needs of a sector now highly conscious of the return of inspection. The meta-curriculum project which commenced in the 2020/21 academic year continues to grow with the support of TKAT, a national multi academy trust (MAT) known for their work on curriculum development. Alongside the meta project is the introduction of a collaborative project focused on primary science and the appointment of a serving school leader to lead on religious education (RE) within the county – both areas of work aimed at developing expertise, knowledge and confidence in these discreet areas.

Moderation of assessments is a statutory requirement at year 2 (Key Stage 1) and year 6 (Key Stage 2). It has not been undertaken since 2019 due to Covid but is fully in place for 2022. The process begins when guidance is issued in the pre-ceding July.

The school improvement team continues to hold responsibility for Key Stage 1 and 2 moderation. Although key elements of the work are outsourced under an already serving contract, the coordination and monitoring of the programme sits within the team. In the future the school improvement team will likely hold the full package for moderation without outsourcing - this can be achieved through increased knowledge of 'experts' within Somerset schools – some of whom have supported the programme as moderators for many years. There are currently 35 moderators across year 2 and year 6. The programme of training and moderation advice is open to schools beyond Somerset and to date 374 teachers have accessed this training as either being new to year 2 or 6 or requiring update.

2.5 School improvement support through the pandemic

The school improvement team has continued to play a crucial role in the support to schools throughout Covid. The team attends all the individual meetings with schools and Public Health in relation to outbreaks as well as most recently responding to the current potential challenge around staff capacity related to absence. The team are monitoring schools weekly to enable us to ascertain a county wide picture of absence in schools and whether schools are having to change provision away from expected i.e., combining classes or moving children to online learning. Through liaising with the inclusion teams and in particular the statutory SEND team we are also reviewing weekly schools' ability to continue to provide for vulnerable learners should they have to make decisions to move away from their normal structures.

3. SOMERSET'S TRADED OFFER TO SCHOOLS

Somerset County Council supports a very wide range of schools, trusts and organisations through Support Services for Education (SSE), our traded offer. SSE Services drew down £114k from its reserves for planned investments and received £1.341m of Government grant funding to compensate for 'loss of income' arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. SSE ended the 2020/21 year with a £26k surplus and contributed £793k to fund its use of SCC corporate services, as part of recovering the full cost of service delivery.

3.1 Services through the pandemic

SSE services continued to support schools through the Covid-19 pandemic, optimising technology, and different ways of working, wherever possible. Many training courses and events continued online and over 400 courses were available through SSE. 558 schools accessed services from SSE during the year, both within and outside of Somerset, with support provided to a further 713 customers – covering early years providers, colleges and parents.

The SSE website continued to provide a 'one-stop shop' of over 60 different support services and a comprehensive central resource hub of information for schools. Regular Covid-19 updates and guidance have been published on a new Covid area of the SSE website.

Our SSE Outdoor centres were significantly affected by Covid-19 restrictions and unable to provide their usual residential activities. However, the centres and staff remained open and redirected their focus on working closely with Children's Social Care and partners to provide a range of alternative provision and support to 570 vulnerable young people. The service supported over 4000 placements on the Holiday Activity and Food programme, ensuring young people had hot lunches alongside engaging activities.

3.2 Service improvements

During the course of recent months, we have had a focus on improving communications with schools, enhancing the quality of the offer available and looking for opportunities to help schools use their resources more efficiently. For example, we have seen an increase in take up of bundled business support and compliance packages over multiple delivery years - improving school planning as well as offering them better value for money.

SSE have been instrumental in introducing the new weekly bulletins to Somerset schools, with all articles published on the SSE site for further reference. The site now includes additional content to support schools in becoming more environmentally friendly, following collaboration with key partners including Eco Schools.

The Capita SIMS Support Service are now accredited and able to support schools with other proprietary management information systems such as Arbor and Bromcom. They received over 4,000 calls this year through their help line with 99% of all First line meeting target response times.

The Kilve Outdoor Centre installed a new lake and is now able to offer water sport activities to customers onsite, including paddle boarding, kayaking and raft building, which has already been used by many schools and groups. We have seen an added benefit in terms of reduced cost and environmental impact of transport to other sites.

Somerset Centre for Integrated Learning (SCIL) managed to continue to deliver their programmes to over 800 learners- moving from online delivery to a blended approach as restrictions were lifted. 47 trainee teachers were awarded PGCE qualification and Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in July 2021 and 55 newly qualified teachers (NQTs) completed their induction with SCIL.

The SSE HR team have been heavily involved in supporting the Crewkerne and Ilminster area review, alongside providing over 200 schools/academies with advice and support.

The School Library Service expanded its offer to school, which now includes technology boxes, class sets, story boxes and Early Years resources. It invested £21k in new resources and loaned over 80,000 books to schools during the year.

Successful provision of 'DofE with a Difference', which has helped to ensure over 2,000 young people are supported. Six new programmes have been established for those struggling to engage with education.

The Catering and Cleaning Advisory service helped to support the provision of over 800 food boxes to the community during the pandemic, alongside delivery of 154 audits of school catering/cleaning arrangements.

The Arts Council confirmed £80m for Music Education in 2020/21 and despite pandemic restrictions Somerset Music managed to support 4,390 students through the First Access Scheme, working with 77% of Somerset schools. 681 students accessed online lessons during the lockdown and over 11,500 people viewed the YouTube Music channel material.

Working closely with the Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP), the school refuse service, which is bought back by schools through SSE and delivered by SWP continued throughout the pandemic, despite switching to a new supplier contract and achieved a 10% saving in the process. The service rapidly instigated a specific collection service for LFT waste – at no additional

charge to schools.

The Education Technology Team continues to support primary schools in the Southwest as Subject Matter Expert Consultants for the National Centre for Computing Education (NCCE).

The SSE Property team have worked closely with corporate colleagues on school capital projects and supported the bid for decarbonisation funding. The service raised 2025 reactive orders in the year and supported 113 schools with their ground's maintenance contracts and 204 schools with play equipment safety inspection 135 schools and academies have been supported in their budgeting process and most of these were also supported with closing their accounts in 20/21. Several schools had unforeseen financial management demands in the year due to vacant posts and the team helped to cover with over 400 hours of support.

Finally, we are very proud that having been nominated by a local MAT, Ann Adams, manager of our SSE Governance service was a finalist in the 'outstanding lead governance professional' category of the National Governance Association (NGA) awards 2021.

4. CAREERS, EMPLOYABILITY AND POST 16

4.1 Reducing NEETs with Somerset Works

After securing a £1.2 million ESF bid 'SomersetWorks' was created and started in September 2020. The 3-year project now supports 15–18-year-olds who are at High Risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) in Year 11 and those that have become NEET in Year 12 and 13. To date we have received 967 referrals to the service of which:

Total with EHCP – 180

Year 12 and 13 with EHCP - 124

Year 11 with EHCP – 56

Out of Education with EHCP – 75

SomersetWorks has managed to attract further funding to expand the staff delivery team (from two to seven), which has enabled increased focus on Children Looked After, Excluded students, College early leavers, West Somerset High Risk students and those most vulnerable in Year 11. SomersetWorks was successful in securing £150K of EEF/Sunday Times funding to deliver a 2021 Summer Holiday programme for Year 11 Somerset young people. 1,730 young people signed up to our virtual platform (which had lots of supportive information and activities), and 2,443 actual activities were delivered across the summer holiday period. An additional £165K of Emergency Covid funding has now been secured to deliver a similar programme across Somerset in Summer 2022.

Through the work of SomersetWorks we have identified that many young people need a higher degree of support and an extended period of time to help them prepare for Post 16 opportunities. We have been successful in securing additional funding that will enable us to test and pilot a bespoke range of new interventions, including:

- £646K of Community Renewal Funding (CRF) to run a test & learn pilot Partnership College offer from January to June 2022
- £680K of Covid Emergency Funds to then rollout the best practice and learning from the CRF pilot over the next 2 years until the end of December 2023.

SomersetWorks focuses on a collaborative community partnership approach to delivery and services include young people support HUBS in 7 locations across Somerset, an online English & Maths tutor service, bespoke 1:1 support and brokering / commissioning of a range of activities and opportunities to help re-engage our most vulnerable Post 16 young people.

Digital upskilling and access to digital technology is key to supporting many NEETs – SomersetWorks has been successful in securing £150K to purchase and rollout 300 laptops to partner youth agencies and community libraries – so that we can extend the reach out to our target 15-18 year olds, along with another £180K to recruit a Digital tutor, train young people to become Digital Champions, develop virtual work experience opportunities and upskill cohorts with a range of Digital qualifications. We have recently appointed a NEET young person into a Kickstart Digital Content Developer role.

4.2 Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG)

CEIAG in secondary school is of key importance to help prepare young people for their post-16 journey. In response to the pandemic, we moved our annual Careers Fairs (in Taunton and Yeovil) to a virtual offer. £20K of external funding was secured to provide 4 virtual Fairs across 2020/21 –

including two Careers Fairs, an Apprenticeship & Skills Fair and the Summer Holiday Activities Fair. The October 2021 Fair attracted over 2,500 Somerset students and Teachers who accessed digital resources and content that can also be stored and used in the future.

The Somerset TalentEd Academy programme has been developed and delivered to showcase key employment sectors and employers in Somerset and beyond. 14 sectors were showcased in 2020/21 which attracted over 26,900 live views and an additional 8,500 'on demand' views to date. The 2021/22 series launched in November and will include (covid-allowing) visits to key employers in the summer term.

The Somerset EBP (Education & Business Partnership) continues to flourish and provide the essential link between employers and education. Originally funded through the HPC Community Fund and managed by SCC, long-term funding has now been secured to enable the Somerset EBP to increase the reach and scope of its work as well as lead on the production of TalentEd Academy briefings and curriculum teacher insight briefings for our schools. www.somerset-ebp.co.uk/talented

The Somerset EBP manages our Youth Employment UK website Somerset Youth Friendly places which we have funded through the Opportunity Area [Youth Friendly Places - Somerset - Youth Employment UK](#)

4.3 Preparation for employment for pupils with SEND

We have worked with SEND training provider specialists MENCAP to plan and deliver a Supported Apprenticeship programme for 15 young people, based at SCC. This is in addition to 2 cohorts of Supported Traineeship programmes being delivered at Hinkley Point C prior to lockdown. We are now working with Avon & Somerset Police Constabulary to develop and implement a Supported Traineeship programme from September 2022 for 8 young people with SEND.

To enable the development of Supported Employment opportunities we linked with Abri Housing Association, applied to the HPC Community Impact Mitigation Fund and were successful in securing £97,896 of funding to enable us to recruit 2 Supported Employment Coordinators to help drive this initiative forward. Since coming into post in September 2021 they have secured agreement with Butlins, Abri and Numatic to develop Supported Employment SEND programmes. In order to understand the scope of need and the future talent pipeline they are undertaking Career Panels with all Special Schools and College Foundation Learning departments to start tracking and supporting young people who want to have an employment destination.

'Bold & Brave' is a joint project with Young Somerset and Sen.Se (Somerset's association for special schools) which has provided young people with SEND an opportunity to manufacture and sell high quality goods in a series of pop-up shops and now in a permanent retail unit in Taunton. In addition, we have recently equipped their digital skills training room with 12 laptops.

SomersetWorks also works closely with the SEND team to track, monitor and support Post 16 young people with an education health care plan EHCP whilst they are at college, supporting those who are struggling or drop-out of their Post 16 destination.

4.4 Higher and further education

We meet half-termly with all of our Somerset FE Colleges to support their work with our most vulnerable young people. Recent work has included funding and delivering summer holiday support programmes for new Year 12 students, including an A Level induction programme at each college. We have secured funding to provide peer-to-peer mentoring for 80 young people across our Colleges with Future First. Recently we have secured access for college safeguarding staff to be able to access the SCC Transform Database which will help to improve information sharing between schools, colleges and other agencies.

We have contributed to the setting up of Skill Up – who broker apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities with employers and link them to appropriate young people. We also work closely with the Dorset & Somerset Training Provider Network (DSTPN) who have the ASK (Apprenticeship Skills & Knowledge) contract – which delivers information sessions to schools, students and parents. This helps us monitor and be assured that our young people are receiving and understanding the full range of Post 16 and Post 18 options that are available to them.

A key partner in relation to Higher Education is Next Steps South West (NSSW), who enable our colleges and neighbouring HE institutions to promote Higher Education (HE) opportunities. Our virtual Careers Fair always has good representation from our HE institutions and with NSSW we are able to organise free visits to HE campuses, access mentoring support and promotional events.

5. HIGH QUALITY SCHOOL PLACES

5.1 School Place Planning

A new £7.3 million primary free school in Taunton has been commissioned with a planning application due to be submitted in the spring of this year. The Local Authority ran a presumption competition to secure an academy

sponsor to run the school. After a six-month selection process, the Local Authority recommended a sponsor to the Department for Education and the Secretary of State confirmed just before Christmas that the Castle Partnership Trust will open the new primary school in September 2023.

The new school will serve the Orchard Grove housing development in Comeytrowe to meet the expected demand for school spaces. The 420-place primary, with early years provision, is set to become Somerset's first net zero carbon school, and only the third 'passivhaus' school in the southwest. Somerset County Council has appointed Futures for Somerset to deliver the project, which has been designed by architect firm Stride Treglown to minimise any environmental impact in line with Somerset County Council's commitment to make Somerset carbon neutral by 2030.

5.2 Crewkerne and Ilminster Reorganisation

In response to an escalating deficit and financial pressures in schools in the Crewkerne and Ilminster area, arising from a longstanding reduction in the number of pupils in the area and resultant structural pressures on finance, we initiated a consultation on changing how schools are organised in the area.

Following a previous consultation on a wide range of options for reorganisation, a revised model was consulted on in autumn 2019, followed by a statutory consultation in spring 2020. Many teams contributed to this intensive listening exercise. Regrettably forced online by Covid restrictions, the consultations nevertheless attracted hundreds of online and written responses. Somerset County Council's Cabinet took the decision to proceed with the statutory proposal in March, and teams have been working steadily, in collaboration with affected schools, to deliver a primary and secondary school structure for the area. This includes large scale investment in the school estate within the area, with £1.5m in transition works and £5.1m in condition improvement agreed as part of the Cabinet decision.

The overall cost for the project over twenty years is estimated to be at most £5.9m and is likely to be substantially lower. At the current rate of increase, the annual increase in the deficit in the upper school alone would cost £8m over twenty years. However, the proposal would negate the need for a new school building in Crewkerne which would reduce borrowing costs for the County Council in the order of £5m. So overall, the proposal would potentially release £7.1m over twenty years (unadjusted for inflation) to be re-invested in education.

5.3 School Buildings and Climate Change

Following Somerset County Council's declaration of a climate emergency we

are actively seeking to progress our future builds with future carbon neutrality in mind. Changes to our base scope include, the removal of fossil fuels, and installation of solar PV and EV charging points. We are progressing two builds to Passivhaus standard, one of which is being designed to be net zero in use, including the new free school in Comeytrowe.

The construction industry has been hugely affected by the effects of Covid and Brexit, with the cost of materials increasing dramatically, material shortages, and availability of skilled labour. Unfortunately, this led to a number of delays and increased costs during 2021. However, our project teams and contractors have worked incredibly hard to manage these issues, meaning impacts have been much reduced to that which we may have reasonably incurred.

During 2021, we successfully completed the following projects:

- Somerton Primary (relocation and expansion of a 420-place primary school) - £7.6m
- Huish Episcopi Primary (1 class expansion) - £428k
- Avalon SEN School (refurbishment and condition works) - £249k
- Fairmead SEN School (6 class expansion and 6 class replacement) - £6.8m
- Polden Bower Sen School (new 160 place school) - £22.5m
- Holway PRU (refurbishment and expansion) - £2.85m
- Polden Centre ASC Base (refurbishment and expansion) - £300k
- Fledglings Nursery (expansion) - £140k

The following projects remain active heading into 2022:

- Comeytrowe Primary (new 420 place primary school) - £7.3m
- Holyrood Academy (225 place secondary expansion) - £7.2m
- Robert Blake Secondary School (300 place expansion) - £1.4m
- Wadham Secondary (addition of years 7 and 8) - £550k
- Maiden Beech (conversion to primary) - £1.2m
- Swanmead (conversion to primary) - £500k
- Ashlands (conversion to primary) - £200k
- St Dunstons ASC – (new build) - £1.2m
- Fiveways SEN School (4 class expansion) - £5.5m

6. DILLINGTON

The Covid pandemic had a significant impact across the hospitality sector and Dillington House was no exception. Restrictions resulted in lengthy closures and significant disruption to the services Dillington would normally offer to customers. Weddings were initially prohibited and then only allowed for limited numbers of under 30. National restrictions had a significant impact on conference/meetings, adult education courses, bed and breakfast and social events. Even with restrictions lifted many customers remained anxious about Covid-19, which continues to impact on bookings.

Most staff were furloughed during the pandemic to reduce costs wherever possible, and the Governments 'loss of income' funding was accessed, enabling the outturn position to be in line with the budgeted position.

Following the success of Dillington House as a Covid Testing site in July 2020, it was used as a local vaccination centre between February and June 2021, project managed by Dillington's general manager. The site was used to provide 20,000 people with their first vaccination jab and 18,000 with their second dose.

The Dillington Operations Manager was redeployed as a manager of a vaccination centre in West Somerset and several other staff from Dillington were redeployed to various Covid related activities including Public Health teams supporting track and tracing.

As national restrictions have eased, business as usual activities have started to be on offer again, but many customers remain anxious about Covid-19, which continues to impact on future bookings.