

Somerset County Council
Joint Scrutiny Committees for Adults and
Health and Children and Families'
16 March 2021

One Somerset Programme Update including Government Consultation Process and Initial 'Stronger Somerset' Independent Report Findings

Lead Officer: Dr Carlton Brand, Programme Director One Somerset

Author: Dr Carlton Brand and Alastair Higton Contact Details:

CBrand@somerset.gov.uk 07500 808307

ARHigton@somerset.gov.uk 07977 410446

Cabinet Member: Cllr Faye Purbrick, Cabinet Member for Education & Transformation Division and Local Member: All

1. Summary

1.1. At the Policies and Place Scrutiny Committee in December 2020, members received an update on the work undertaken on the programme since the business was submitted on December 9, and also the outcomes of the consultation conducted by the programme team.

1.2. This paper sets out for members the work undertaken over the last two months and that planned through until the end of April. The same paper will go to both scrutiny committees, Policy & Place and Adults & Children. It specifically addresses:

1. General programme update
2. Government consultation on local government reform in Somerset and deferral of the county council election by one year
3. The County Council's planned response process to the 'Stronger Somerset' proposal' including commissioning four independent reports to provide an evidence based and balanced input to that response:
 - PwC report (overall Stronger Somerset proposal)
 - Prof. John Bolton report on Adult Social Care
 - Trevor Doughty report on Children's Services
 - Neil Gibson report on Economy, Planning and Transport Services

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1.** Members are asked to note the work that has been undertaken on the programme between December 2020 and March 2021.
- 2.2.** Members are invited to note the government consultation process, timing and list of named consultees and scrutinise the county council's proposed plan to respond to this including the independent reports commissioned to inform this response.

Members are asked to scrutinise the independent reports on Stronger Somerset's proposals regarding adult social care and children's services including the PwC report as it relates to social care, and ask their questions to the authors and lead Directors. It should be noted that members are not being asked to scrutinise the Stronger Somerset proposal.

3. Background

- 3.1.** Over the past three months, the programme team have been working in the following activities:
 1. Liaising with MHCLG politicians and civil servants to secure the formal start of the consultation process which commenced February 22, 2021.
 2. Procurement and award of contracts to conduct communication and engagement activity associated with the programme in the county and nationally with all stakeholders.
 3. Procurement and award of contracts to conduct communication and engagement activity associated with the programme in the county with businesses.
 4. Further analysis and evaluation of the Stronger Somerset final business case to identify the implications for service users, residents, businesses, partners and the County Council
 5. Detailed design of the County Council's consultation response to the 'Stronger Somerset' proposal including the commissioning and procurement of four independent reports, reviewing that business case in the following areas:
 - overall review and analysis
 - review and analysis of the proposals for Adult Social Services
 - review and analysis of the proposals for Children's Services

- review and analysis of the proposals for Placed based Services including Economy, Planning and Transport
6. Further virtual engagement with Town and Parish Councils.
 7. Engagement with the Voluntary and Community Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector over a number of live 'Microsoft Teams' events including detailed question and answer sessions and informal follow up sessions with those organisations requesting further information.
 8. Working with the County Council Network (CCN), Cumbria County Council and North Yorkshire County Council on all aspects of LGR, the likely consultation format and time line, early thinking on the content of the structural change orders, implementation planning, resource planning and potential organisation design.
 9. Close working, engagement and correspondence with statutory officers, public sector and business partners and other stakeholders.

4. Consultation on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

- 4.1.** Councils in Cumbria (4 proposals), North Yorkshire (2 proposals) and Somerset (2 proposals) have submitted proposals for unitary local government, eight in total.
- 4.2.** The Secretary of State has launched a consultation on all eight proposals.
- 4.3.** The consultation document is available online at <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/> and responses may be made on the department's online platform 'Citizen Space' or alternatively by email to unitaryconsultation@communities.gov.uk or in writing to Governance Reform and Democracy, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF. The consultation will run for eight weeks to Monday 19 April 2021 (23:59).
- 4.4.** The County Council is being consulted in relation to the unitary proposal from the Somerset District Councils, called 'Stronger Somerset'. The council is requested to respond to the following consultation questions, giving reasons for the answers:
 1. Is the council's proposal likely to improve local government and service delivery across each area? Specifically, is it likely to improve council services, give greater value for money, generate savings, provide stronger strategic and local leadership and create more sustainable structures?

2. Where it is proposed that services will be delivered on a different geographic footprint to currently, or through some form of joint arrangements is this likely to improve those services? Such services may for example be children's services waste collection and disposal, adult health and social care, planning and transport.
3. Is the councils' proposal also likely to impact local public services delivered by others, such as police, fire and rescue, and health services?
4. Do you support the proposal from the councils?
5. Do the unitary councils proposed by the councils represent a credible geography?
6. Do you have any other comments with regards to the proposed reorganisation of local government in each area?

4.5. Views are welcomed from any interested person, including residents and businesses, and in addition to consulting councils in the area, MHCLG are also specifically consulting neighbouring councils and certain other named consultees (see section 4.9). MHCLG stresses that any person or any organisation who is interested may respond and the County Council has been asked that we seek to bring the consultation to the attention of people and organisations across the county.

4.6. The context for this consultation is the provision in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 which requires that before a proposal for local government reorganisation can be implemented, the Secretary of State must first consult any council affected by a proposal (i.e. a council whose area in whole or in part would become part of a proposed unitary council) that has not submitted the proposal. In addition, the statute provides that the Secretary of State may consult such other persons that they consider appropriate.

4.7. Once the consultation is concluded, the Secretary of State will decide, subject to parliamentary approval, which, if any, proposals are to be implemented, with or without modification.

4.8. In taking these decisions they will have regard to all the representations received, including those from the consultation, and all other relevant information available, and reach a balanced judgement assessing the proposals against the three criteria specified in the invite received in October 2020 where:

1. they are likely to improve local government and service delivery across the area of the proposal;
2. they command a good deal of local support as assessed in the round across the whole area of the proposal; and

3. the area of any new unitary council is a credible geography with an aggregate population which is either within the range 300,000 to 600,000, or such other figure that, having regard to the circumstances of the authority, including local identity and geography.

4.9. Somerset 'Named' Consultees

The Secretary of State has named the following consultees. This means that they will be invited by him to formally respond, whereas all others can respond if they choose to.

Principal Councils in the area: Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset County Council, Somerset West & Taunton Council, South Somerset District Council.

Neighbouring Principal Councils: Bath & North East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, Devon County Council and the district councils within Devon County, Dorset, Council, North Somerset Council, Wiltshire Council and West of England Combined Authority

Other named consultees:

Public Service Bodies – Health Bodies: NHS Somerset CCG, Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust, South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust, University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust (UHBW), Yeovil District Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, The Somerset Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (ICS).

Policing, Fire and Rescue Bodies: Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner (Sue Mountstevens), Chief Constable of Avon and Somerset Police, Chief Fire Officer of Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service.

Other Public Sector Bodies: Somerset Rivers Authority, Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Cranbourne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Quantock Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Independent Chair Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board, Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership, Independent Chair of the Somerset Corporate Parenting Board, Western Gateway, Peninsula Transport.

Business Bodies: Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, Somerset Chambers of Commerce, Institute of Directors (South West), Federation of Small Businesses (South West), CBI (South West)

Voluntary Sector Bodies: Spark Somerset

Other Bodies: Lord-Lieutenant for Somerset, Visit Somerset (Somerset Tourism Association) National Bodies: Environment Agency, Highways England, Local Government Association, National Housing Federation, National Association of Local Councils, Public Health England

4.10. County Council Election Deferral

The Secretary of State also confirmed that he has decided to reschedule the ordinary elections to principal councils in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset due to be held on 6 May 2021 for one year to May 2022. PCC elections, by-elections to principal councils, and parish and town council elections in these areas will go ahead. This means that in each of the three areas the county council elections will be deferred.

In reaching his decision, he has carefully considered all representations received and reached a judgement having regard to the importance of local elections and the risk of holding elections to councils when we are also consulting on their possible abolition. As soon as practicable the Secretary of State will lay before Parliament the necessary legislation to give effect to this decision.

This approach by the Secretary of State has precedence in other local authorities going through the LGR process whilst facing a scheduled election.

5. Implications – The County Council Response to Stronger Somerset

- 5.1.** The County Council will respond to the consultation on April 18, just ahead of the submission deadline. The submission will be approved by a special Cabinet meeting to be set up, around April 14.
- 5.2.** To support the Cabinet meeting there will be two Scrutiny Committee sessions to inform the consultation response as well as the regular monthly 'all member' briefings:
 1. March 10 Policies and Place Scrutiny. To review this report and the two independent reports covering the overall proposal (the PwC report) and placed-based services (the Neil Gibson report)
 2. March 16 Joint Adults and Children Scrutiny. To review the independent reports on those specific service areas (the Prof. John Bolton report and the Trevor Doughty report).

- 5.3.** An evidence-based assessment of the proposals contained in the business case will be made from a number of perspectives, including: service users, customers, our communities, elected members, partners and partnerships as well as the underpinning statutory requirements for many of our services.
- 5.4.** The One Somerset programme has been open and transparent since its inception in January 2020. In order to continue this approach, and to develop our consultation submission in an evidence-based way, we have commissioned four independent reports by national professional leads in their respective disciplines. These are described and detailed below in section 6.
- 5.5.** This approach, we believe will give elected members, MPs, Somerset stakeholders including residents and businesses as well as the departmental ministers and civil servants the evidence, analysis, risks and issues with which to make their decisions after the consultation period closes and ahead of the final decision by the Secretary of State.

6. Stronger Somerset Independent Analysis Summary

- 6.1.** On 22 February 2021, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government launched an eight-week consultation on local government reform in Somerset.
- 6.2.** The consultation will seek views on two possible options:
- 1) The proposal from Somerset County Council (SCC), called 'One Somerset,' for a single unitary authority replacing the existing county council and four district councils.
 - 2) The proposal from the district councils, called 'Stronger Somerset,' that would replace the existing authorities and create two unitary councils in the east and west of the county, an alternative delivery model (ADM) for the delivery of children's services, a shared services company and a combined authority.
- 6.3.** To help inform views on this matter and the wider public debate during the consultation, four independent reports were commissioned by Somerset County Council into the Stronger Somerset proposal. These reports were undertaken by experts, considered as leaders in their respective fields by their peers and Government, and with many years of experience in public service delivery and reform. Further details in section 6.7. Although these reports were commissioned by Somerset County Council, the authors retained full editorial control.

- 6.4.** In undertaking their assessments of the Stronger Somerset proposals, the authors of each report had regard for the published criteria set out by the Government and issued in October 2020 to local government in Somerset, namely, that any reform proposal should improve local government in the area; command a good deal of local support overall across the area and lead to the future authorities covering a credible geography.
- 6.5.** Using the Government's criteria, the authors then analysed the Stronger Somerset proposal for any associated risks, whether any opportunities have been missed, and whether there are issues that have not been considered and addressed.
- 6.6.** Three of the reports considered specific areas: place services, adult social care and children's services with a further report that undertook an overarching review of the entirety of the Stronger Somerset proposal and its financial assumptions.
- 6.7.** The reports and brief details on the authors are as follows:
- 1) The Stronger Somerset proposal, an assessment by PwC**
PricewaterhouseCoopers is a multinational professional services network of firms, operating as partnerships under the PwC brand. PwC ranks as the second-largest professional services network in the world.
 - 2) Proposals for Adult Social Care, Professor John Bolton**
Professor John Bolton is Visiting Professor at the Institute of Public Care (Oxford Brookes University) and formerly a Director of Social Services in local government as well as Strategic Finance Director at the Department of Health and Social Care.
 - 3) Proposals for Place Services, Neil Gibson**
Neil Gibson is formerly an Executive Director for Transport, Economy & Environment in local government & former President of the Association of the Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transportation (ADEPT).
 - 4) Proposals for Children's Services, Trevor Doughty** Trevor Doughty is a former of Director of Children's Services in two authorities and a Director of Social Services. In both authorities he was part of a programme to become a unitary council and he also led Cornwall from an Inadequate Ofsted rating to Outstanding. Currently a Commissioner and Advisor for the Department of Education

The following sections provide a short summary of the findings and the conclusion from each report. The full reports are included in the appendices A-D.

The documents in full can also be found on the One Somerset website <https://onesomerset.org.uk/proposals/>

6.8. Key Findings from the reports:

- Concerns around the financial analysis and modelling used in the Stronger Somerset business case including an apparent failure to recognise additional costs of its proposed model.
- Concerns around the methodology used including lack of baseline data/facts underpinning existing service delivery and lack of tangible indications of what improvements would look like under the proposals.
- Lack of detail and evidence used to substantiate claims made in the delivery of place, adults' and children's services, including around the proposed models of service delivery. It also fails to recognise that the majority of proposed system or service improvement changes have already been implemented or are in the process of being implemented.
- Failure to understand and properly assess the impact of disaggregating existing county wide services including public health, and, then the impact to those services by creating two unitary authorities and in the case of children's services, an Alternative Delivery Model.
- Failure to understand the current operating and policy environments including Government reform such as the integration of health and care services and ongoing cost pressures within adult and children's services.
- Concerns around the future financial viability of the proposed model.
- Concerns around the effectiveness of an untried model for public service delivery including the creation of an ADM for children's services and a combined authority and its future role, without precedent and seemingly contradictory to existing Government policy.
- Concerns that certain major services are absent from the business case including highways and transportation.

6.9. PwC (Appendix A) Findings:

The authors identified seven areas of challenge with the Stronger Somerset proposal:

1. The options appraisal methodology set out in Stronger Somerset makes a direct comparison with the One Somerset proposal, which is presented in relatively negative terms. It is difficult to see how some of the assertions made about either proposal can be substantiated, given the evidence presented in the document. This calls into question the rigour and robustness of the options appraisal that has been carried out.
2. The financial analysis set out in Stronger Somerset is presented as being directly comparable with that included in One Somerset, even though the two reports are based on fundamentally different assumptions. While the Stronger Somerset financial case includes assumptions about the potential level of benefit that would be secured by using the reorganisation process as a catalyst for transformation, the One Somerset case does not (it refers to transformation opportunities but does not quantify these and has not included any assumptions in its financial case). Presenting the two financial cases as comparable in this way is misleading.
3. The way in which the geography of the county is treated within Stronger Somerset does not make a particularly compelling case for establishing two new councils. Current population levels for the two unitaries proposed are below the range indicated by the Secretary of State and local data suggests there could be an imbalance across the proposed councils for the East and the West in terms of demand for services and income. This would call into question the financial sustainability of the two councils.
4. The operating and delivery model proposed in Stronger Somerset would result in duplication of activities and functions across the county. It is not clear how some of the proposals referenced in the document would mitigate this. For example, the inclusion of an alternative delivery model for children's services within the proposal is not particularly detailed and represents an untested solution in this context (there are parallels with the children's trust model, but these are typically introduced for other reasons).
5. The proposed strategic leadership and democratic arrangements are somewhat problematic. The significance of local government in Somerset being able to speak with 'one voice' is underplayed. Furthermore, Stronger Somerset is proposing establishing two new councils which would be served by 100 members each - a relatively large number for a county the size of Somerset. There is a case for arguing that the levels of resource and effort required to support such arrangements would be better deployed in supporting engagement, service delivery and decision-making that is closer to local communities.

6. The way in which Stronger Somerset describes ambitions to use unitarisation as a stepping stone to establishing a combined authority and securing devolution arrangements represents a further area of challenge. It is possible to interpret them as suggesting there is an intention to establish a combined authority that would bring together the proposed new unitaries following their implementation. There appears to be no precedent for this type of model (combined authorities are typically established to cover larger geographies and a greater number of constituent councils).
7. Stronger Somerset makes relatively little reference to the complications that would be associated with disaggregating the services currently provided by the County Council. This calls into question whether the risks associated with this process have been properly considered and has implications for the deliverability and sustainability of the Stronger Somerset proposals. This issue is also relevant to 'place services' delivered by all the impacted councils, and public health (disaggregating public health provision in the current climate has the potential to destabilise the response to the pandemic - Stronger Somerset is not clear on what is intended in this regard). Furthermore, it is not clear what responsibilities in these areas are envisaged as having the potential to be transferred to a combined authority at a future date.

6.9.1.

PwC Conclusion

However, on the basis of this review of the Stronger Somerset proposal, and considering the relative merits of the One Somerset case, the authors of this report are also of the view that establishing a single unitary council in Somerset would be more likely to improve local government in the area and would serve a more credible geography - a single unitary would have the advantages of scale, deliver a greater level of financial saving, would cover a recognised geography and serve a population within the range specified by the Secretary of State.

6.10.

Adult Social Care, Professor John Bolton (Appendix B) Key

Findings:

The "Stronger Somerset" report is very misleading about the finances of social care and shows a lack of understanding of the way in which social care has had to operate in recent years. Every council in the UK has had to find savings in adult social care because of the reduction in Government Grants to councils. Somerset would rightly argue they have achieved this in recent years without making large "cuts" in their budget but by delivering a more cost-effective model of service

delivery. This will need to be sustained and developed over the future years. It will require leadership who understand how to achieve this.

- 6.10.1. The report refers to the measures that have been developed to assess social care called "the Adults Social Care Outcomes Framework" (ASCOF). These measures have been widely discredited by many in the sector as not being true measures of the outcomes that adult social care can achieve. In fact, the Department of Health and Social Care is currently in the process of undertaking a major review of these measures. It is important to note that some of the measures in which the report suggests that Somerset's performance is low are those that are most contentious in the survey – partly because of the way in which they are open to interpretation, partly because they result from a survey which has traditionally had a low response and partly because only a very limited number of people are asked for their views (as a percentage of those who approach social care for help). It is interesting that the analysis by those writing the Stronger Somerset bid only selected these measures. If they had considered the "Use of Resources measures" developed by the Local Government Association, they would have found a much more positive picture of Somerset Council's Adult Care.
- 6.10.2. The proposal from Stronger Somerset for Adult Social Care is that it can offer: "Interventions that give people greater control over the care they receive, with more care and support being offered in or close to people's homes, rather than in hospital or care home settings." This is the very programme on which Somerset County Council has been embarked in recent years. The data (shown above) clearly demonstrates that Somerset is making good strides into this agenda. It would seem a high- risk strategy to break up the teams that have created this progress and to bring in new managers who may have limited understanding of what and how things have been achieved. Evidence from elsewhere suggests that it will take at least three years for a new team and a new structure to bed in and for any new reforms to start to kick in – in the meantime there is a risk that much that has been gained could be lost and the new councils could find themselves back in the position that Somerset was in in 2015/16.
- 6.10.3. The proposed move to an Integrated Care System (ICS) that is likely to become statutory for the NHS and Social Care this year has been well considered and planned for by partners in Somerset. The partners welcome the fact that their single boundary continues to give them the best opportunity for collaboration and development of the right services. They both understand the respective roles of the partners and

the importance of the joint working to get the best outcomes for the population. It is therefore a big risk if one of the parties breaks these boundaries and creates a new structure to interface with the ICS. I support any proposal that ensures that commissioning of joint services between the NHS and Social Care such as the recent Intermediate Care Service is undertaken through a single joint arrangement.

- 6.10.4. The proposals for social care suggest that in Stronger Somerset there is *"Potential but less incentive to redesign services, including high-cost areas such as social care services, with focus limited to 'back office. Integration savings provide initial financial breathing space, but reinvestment opportunity issued to address existing services not their reform. Invest to save not expected to be undertaken, based on previous track record."* These statements bare no relation to the Somerset Adult Social Care known to me. There has been a full redesign of services over the last three years. There has been no suggestion that there are savings from integration with anyone else including the NHS – there is no evidence that this does deliver savings and there has been a reinvestment in the way in which adult social care is run even during a time when Government has expected significant savings. Therefore, the critique of Somerset offered by the proposal seems off the mark and shows a distinct lack of understanding of what is happening and what is required. It was these types of statement that worried me more than anything else about the proposal.
- 6.10.5. One of the features of the proposals for adult social care is a view that through digital technology big savings can be made. This is of course correct. However, the evidence suggests that this is only true if the technology is used to support a programme that aims to help people regain power, control, and independence. Savings themselves are relatively small from the use of technology itself they can be much larger if they are delivered in the right context. However, there is no adult social care department in the United Kingdom that has made its savings solely using technology. In the work I undertook for the LGA in how councils had saved money from 2010-2016, I found that there were large savings made by reducing staffing; reducing costs and reducing admissions to residential care with an additional small per centage from those councils who had made good use of assistive technology (e.g., Hampshire) – Local Government Association Efficiency Programme -Report 2015.
- 6.10.6. Adult Social Care in Somerset will accept that they are still on a journey of transformation and there are aspects of the services that still require significant improvement. However, all my work experience (over 40

years) tells me that this improvement will not come about through a structural solution. It is getting the right people to work together that enables places to improve and grow. It is those teams with longevity that usually produce the best results. The savings suggested in the proposal seem unrealistic in the time scales. I also think that there is an underestimation of the potential costs of the new structure with the locality-based teams which is likely to be offset by any savings made in the early years. Overall, my concern is that a transformation programme that is now being delivered by Somerset Council will get stopped and restarted losing valuable gains and likely to lose the momentum of the reduced costs that have been achieved.

6.10.7. The fundamental case put forward by those supporting “Stronger Somerset” is that Adult Social Care in the county is a failing service, therefore there is nothing to be lost, and some opportunity to be gained by dissolving the current arrangements and starting anew with a new set of people with refreshed ambitions. In my professional view, this is an inaccurate picture of the current state of Somerset Adult Social Care. It may be a recent picture (5 years ago), but much has changed and still is improving over the last four years. The focus on the improvements that have taken place is to create a cost-effective approach to social care that offers improved outcomes for its citizens. Therefore, there are risks to the transformation that has taken place if this service is now at best split in two or at worst dissolved into a new set of services. The ambition for social care is the same for all parties. Somerset County Council currently is working hard to deliver this ambition. In my opinion there are high risks to adult social care through a restructuring in the county. Every Council is struggling with the scarce resources allocated for social care in “normal” times and most are struggling more under the pandemic.

6.10.8. **Adult Social Care, Professor John Bolton Conclusion**

My view is that there are far more risks associated with the Stronger Somerset approach for adult care and there are likely to be more costs not recognised in the proposal. I would urge people to reconsider the evidence and look to work together to consolidate the current arrangement not least because it is both financially sound and will work best with the NHS.

6.11. **Place Services, Neil Gibson (Appendix C) Key Findings:**

Overall, the proposal is heavy on ambition and method for reform, but light on service delivery detail, evidence and impact. There are no

significant references to how existing place services are currently delivered, what will change and how they will be delivered from 2023.

- 6.11.1. The proposal is critical of the current public service model in Somerset. In Section 2.3 it identifies 7 system drivers for change and concludes that currently there is a historic lack of strategic leadership and collaboration across Somerset, leading to weak financial resilience and inefficiencies, short term approaches, a lack of local responsiveness, poor service quality and limited trust.
- 6.11.2. There is very little detail or evidence with this diagnosis. The undertone is that the County Council is culpable for many of these system failures. There is passing reference to longstanding concerns about County SEND and Children's Services, unresponsive county services remote from communities, and inefficient two-tier services linked to growth and the quality of life. The assumption might be that this is referring to place based services across all the Councils, but this is unclear. There is no data or evidence substantiating these claims.
- 6.11.3. The proposal advocates a new system led approach to service delivery through the new unitaries that will deliver better outcomes. In Section 2.4 the proposal identifies 13 'reform objectives' that the new system needs to address to create better outcomes for Somerset. There is a short high-level description for each reform objective. These are then grouped under 4 'Reform Priority' areas – People, Community, Connectivity & Growth. Place services will impact to some degree on nearly all 13 reform objectives, although the key references to planning, economy, environment and infrastructure sit within Reform Priority 4: Growth.
- 6.11.4. In Section 2.5 more overall programme objectives are detailed, with 4 high level objectives and 19 programme objectives. The reform objectives are assimilated within the longer list of programme objectives.
- 6.11.5. This is an impressive list of objectives, and they are the key issues that many Councils in England are tackling. However, there is no clear evidenced rationale in the proposal for their identification, no baseline data/facts underpinning their current status, nor any tangible indications of what better might look like as a consequence of the reforms proposed.

6.11.6. There is no suggestion that the current District Councils already adopt this system led approach – individually or collectively – and have the track record of expertise, experience and benefits to prove this approach when scaled up across all Somerset’s local authority services, or that they will deliver the proposed financial and community benefits.

6.11.7. Arguably there are too many objectives, and the grouping of objectives gets confused. It is difficult to see a consistent and simple ‘golden thread’ of intent from the 4 high level vision ambitions, through the various reform objectives to the high-level proposals for change.

6.11.8. To achieve these complex ambitions the broad suite of Place Services operating across the proposed system must be clear. The impact and seamless performance of the reconfigured Place Services will be instrumental in achieving many of these ambitions. This clarity and reassurance are not provided in the proposal.

6.11.9. **Place Service, Neil Gibson Conclusion**

From a Place Service perspective, the Stronger Somerset proposal can be summarised as:

- Broad brush, with no real detail on how Place services will work across the two unitaries.
- The method for place service reform that will underpin cost reductions and service improvements is articulated but with no baseline, targets or what better looks like described.
- Being silent on how key services like highways and transport will be delivered, both integral to the place and stated growth ambitions. The working assumption has to be that these services will be split between the two unitaries, although the Waste Partnership is to be retained.
- An overly complex Place Services solution operating at three different structural levels/tiers of operation: Somerset Combined Authority and County-wide shared service level; Unitary Council level; and City/Town/Parish or Neighbourhood level. No real explanation of where the guiding mind is within this ecosystem with a danger of high governance overhead costs, a lack of transparency and accountability, and sub-optimal delivery.
- Difficult to ascertain whether the broad-brush financials cover all ongoing base costs and hence whether the ongoing revenue baseline reductions can be delivered.
- Significant dependency of growth ambitions on a new Somerset CA and devolution deal, although the proposal is speculative at best, with no detail/targets around ambition, and with no clear statement

on how the ambitions would be delivered if a CA and deal is not agreed.

- There are risks to the place operating model delivering its stated objectives, financial savings, and service outcomes that have not been recognised and mitigations proposed.
- It must question the robustness of, and confidence in the delivery of, the proposal upon which to base the future of Place Services in Somerset.

6.12. Children's Services, Trevor Doughty (Appendix D) Key Findings:

Major local government reorganisation typically sets up local democratic structure for the next 40 or 50 years. For example, the current Somerset arrangements were established in 1974. The Stronger Somerset document attempts to be both a structural proposal and a manifesto for the two new councils should they be established. It is important to distinguish between the two and this is particularly the case when considering children's services. The overall proposal identifies many of the problems faced by Somerset and from a children's perspective that includes the high numbers living in poverty and relative poverty, low social mobility, and comparatively poor local job prospects. There is an assumption in the document that a new structure will somehow address these problems when any structure is self-evidently enabling and how effectively economic, social and environmental issues are addressed depends upon the approach of whoever is elected to those structures and who is employed to work for them. A structure of a single unitary or two unitary authorities does not in itself address these problems and the claims made for the outcomes of the structure alone are unconvincing and without evidence.

- 6.12.1. In terms of children's services, the Alternative Delivery Model could be established whether Somerset has one or two unitary Councils. As with the broader proposals, there should be no assumption that an ADM would bring about the changes in leadership and culture envisaged. If new leadership and a new approach is needed, this can be achieved with or without an ADM. All the outstanding rated children's services in the country with the exception of Kingston, 14 in all, are traditional inhouse council models. ADMs have generally been imposed on Council's with inadequate ratings and under Secretary of State intervention and have had mixed success. No evidence is provided by Stronger Somerset as to why the ADM will deliver its ambitions. The existing service, like most children's services departments has a strengths-based approach to practice. Such approaches were adopted following the 2011 Munro Review of Child Protection, commissioned

and published by the DfE and should be central to practice in every authority. The Hertfordshire Family Safeguarding model which Stronger Somerset says it supports has already been adopted by the County Council having a separate children's ADM could add to the complexity of delivering this multi-agency model.

6.12.2. In 2018/19 over half of local authority children's services departments overspent. This was primarily for three reasons, increased demand, the cost of placements and the cost of agency staff. All authorities seek to control their costs by helping children and families early to prevent the more acute costs associated with child protection plans and high numbers of children in care. All authorities attempt to recruit permanent social workers and managers. This is challenging in the face of increasing demand, more expensive placements in a seller's market, and a shortage of qualified social workers and managers. Some Councils have been successful in demonstrating that their early help is preventing more acute costs and controlling expenditure accordingly and delivering better outcomes for vulnerable children and their families. An ADM in itself, does not achieve financial control but realising the conditions for a successful service listed above, does. As a model, the creation of an ADM will add to costs because of the presumed necessity to have a board with a chair, probably a separate finance director and other associated support costs. Such costs should be factored into a two unitary proposal.

6.12.3. The aspirations for children in Somerset are laudable and would undoubtedly be supported by all local people and stakeholders. The difficulty with the proposal is that it makes huge assumptions as to the outcomes the envisaged ADM will deliver without providing evidence or supporting detail. There are possible advantages in an ADM around flexibility and the possibility of delivering broader, more integrated services particularly around health and SEND though these are not set out in the proposal. However, such an ADM is equally possible with either one or two unitaries.

6.12.4. **Children's Services, Trevor Doughty Conclusion**

In conclusion, Children's services in Somerset are on an improvement journey and anticipate a good at their next Ofsted inspection. An ADM is not without merit but can be applied to either model. Setting up an ADM is complex, time consuming and resource heavy and risks detracting from the improvement journey. It should only be done if the advantages are clearer than set out in Stronger Somerset.

7. Background papers

- 7.1.** Consultation on proposals for locally-led reorganisation of Local Government in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset, February 2021.

<https://consult.communities.gov.uk/>

Evaluating the importance of scale in proposals for local government reorganisation, County Councils Network, August 2020

Evaluating the importance of scale in proposals for local government reorganisation, Somerset County Council Case Study, August 2020

Appendix A PwC Overarching report

Appendix B Prof. John Bolton Adult Social Care report

Appendix C Neil Gibson Place-based services Report

Appendix D Trevor Doughty Children's Services report

Note For sight of individual background papers please contact Carlton Brand