

Somerset County Council
Scrutiny Committee – Policies & Environment
– 28 September 2022

Somerset Economic Futures – economic scenario planning for Somerset

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Cabinet Member: Cllr Val Keitch

Division and Local Member:

1. Summary

- 1.1.** The Somerset Economic Futures work was commissioned by SCC in partnership with the District Councils.

The aim of the work is to develop a range of future economic scenarios for Somerset over 5, 10 and 25 years to support the planning of economic priorities by identifying potential future opportunities, issues and trends which in turn will improve Somerset's resilience.

This work was commissioned by the Somerset local authorities in response to local government reorganisation and to support the new Somerset Council to support development of any future economic strategy, aid planning of investment and guide policy decision-making.

- 1.2.** The Somerset Economic Futures work will contribute and support the strategic vision laid out by the County Plan, by identifying opportunities for investment, supporting recovery post-covid and post exit from the EU, building economic resilience, increasing business and individual productivity and supporting better life chances for Somerset residents.

2. Issues for consideration

- 2.1.** The Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider and comment on the Somerset Economic Futures Summary Update Report and work undertaken to date with specific reference to:

- Issues identified by the SWOT analysis
- The proposed four economic scenarios

- 2.2.** That the Scrutiny Committee notes that the Council is undertaking the Somerset Economic Futures project and its relevance to future economic policy decision-making.

3. Background

- 3.1.** Somerset County Council, working in partnership with the District local authorities

have commissioned a 'Future Scenarios' analysis to consider what the economic future of Somerset might look like over the next 5, 10 and 25 years.

- 3.2.** With the five local authorities coming together as one Somerset Council in 2023 it provides the opportunity for a joined-up approach to understanding the trends and issues that may affect all of Somerset's residents and businesses.
- 3.3.** The scenarios will be developed in the context of national priorities (e.g. post-EU exit, post Covid, Build Back Better, Levelling Up & Shared Prosperity Fund) and local priorities including ensuring that Somerset keeps to its commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030
- 3.4.** The aim is to develop a series of evidence-based scenarios taking into account current and future trends over a 5 year, 10 year and 25 year timeframe. This will help Somerset to position itself to respond to and be more resilient when issues arise whilst also being more able to respond to opportunities.
- 3.5.** The purpose of this work is to support and guide the new Somerset Council, both members and officers, to shape the future direction of Somerset for the benefit of its residents and businesses.
- 3.6.** A Somerset Futures Steering Group has been set up to oversee the development of this work. Members of the Steering Group comprise Economic Development leads from all Somerset local authorities and the LEP.
- 3.7.** ThirdLife Economics Ltd have been brought in to support this work, bringing objectivity, independence, previous experience and expertise in developing future economic scenarios in other areas. This work has been funded by jointly from the Business Rates Retention Pilot (BRR)
- 3.8.** The first phase of the analysis has now been undertaken and comprised a comprehensive evidence review, followed by an issue identification exercise to stimulate the initial scenarios propositions this will form the basis for discussion, stakeholder engagement, questionnaire and further development and refinement in early Autumn 2022. (See attached Somerset Economic Futures Summary Report)
- 3.9.** Further broad stakeholder engagement is planned for September 2022. A series of stakeholder and questionnaire 'discovery' sessions are planned for this period. The intention is to test and develop the scenarios based on the feedback in these sessions.
- 3.10.** The final report is due for completion November 2022 and is intended to be a live document to support decision-making that can be re-visited rather than narrow and prescriptive.
- 3.11.** The purpose of this Scrutiny Report is to provide the background and rationale to the Somerset Economic Futures work and to raise awareness amongst Members and ask for their consideration and comments in relation to the SWOT analysis and economic scenario development provided in the supporting Summary

Update Report.

4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1.** Consultation between all five Somerset authorities was undertaken prior to the commissioning of this piece of work. It was agreed that this was an appropriate time for Somerset to consider afresh its future, in light of global and national contexts, potential sub-national changes, new unitary Somerset Council and specific local drivers and trends.
- 4.2.** Consultations have and will be undertaken with a wide range of Somerset wide stakeholders during the development of the future scenarios. The process of scenario development is as important as the final report, the consultation, feedback and codesign will ensure that the scenario work represents the opinions, experience and knowledge of Somerset consultees.

5. Implications

- 5.1.** This Somerset Future Scenarios work will support officers and members in developing Somerset's economic priorities by providing insight into the implications of taking a particular route.
- 5.2.** The work, whilst not being able to cover every unforeseen event, will enable those working on delivering the best outcomes for Somerset to understand the implications of decision-making over both the short and longer term. This should ensure that Somerset would be more resilient and can respond effectively when required.

6. Background papers

- 6.1.** Attached 'Somerset Economic Futures Update Report – September 2022'