

**Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2021 – *Somerset, Our County:*
*COVID-19 in Somerset Communities***

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<p>Summary:</p>	<p>This JSNA report is an investigation into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Somerset, focusing on the 10% highest-scoring neighbourhoods on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, as this is where most health and wellbeing need was to be found before the pandemic.</p> <p>It finds that the patterns are far less simple than just worsening pre-existing inequalities, and on many measures the deprived parts have, initially, fared the same or even better than more prosperous areas. Community resilience and enhanced benefit support (furlough and £20 Universal Credit uplift) may well have contributed; there is a risk that some need was not identified through lack of contact with services during lockdown.</p> <p>Nevertheless, significant need, especially in relation to food, was reported, and many elements of distress, including mental ill-health (particularly anxiety), appear to have been ‘slow burn’ problems that have continued to grow even as the direct health impacts of Covid have fallen from their peak. It also suggests that there may be cohorts or communities of ‘new need’ outside the previously most deprived areas.</p>	
<p>Recommendations:</p>	<p>That the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board discuss the issues raised in this paper and suggest elements to be included in the final draft of the JSNA, with a view to approving a dedicated development session to explore the evidence in more detail.</p>	
<p>Reasons for recommendations:</p>	<p>This document has to be taken into account in the working of the Health and Wellbeing Board. This is an opportunity to discuss the findings so far and agree an opportunity to guide the finished JSNA so that it is as useful as it can be.</p>	
<p>Links to The Improving Lives Strategy</p>	<p>A County infrastructure that drives productivity, supports economic prosperity and sustainable public services</p>	<p>YES</p>
	<p>Safe, vibrant and well-balanced communities able</p>	<p>YES</p>

	to enjoy and benefit from the natural environment	
	Fairer life chances and opportunity for all	YES
	Improved health and wellbeing and more people living healthy and independent lives for longer	YES
Financial, Legal, HR, Social value and partnership Implications:	There are no direct implications from this report. Its findings include the importance of informal, family support which has greatly helped many get through the pandemic, and the multi-faceted aspect of the impact implies the need for a partnership approach to tackling the recovery.	
Equalities Implications:	The report identifies the disparities in impact between areas of Somerset and population groups.	
Risk Assessment:	Any failure by commissioners to fully take into account the results of JSNAs and related data when taking commissioning decisions across agencies is very likely to have detrimental impacts on service improvement and delivery and the reduction of inequalities.	

1. Background info

1.1. Focus on the areas of greatest pre-existing need.

This is the first annual summary of Somerset's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is an initial investigation to understand its impact on the pattern of health needs in Somerset. It would be impossible to cover every aspect at once, so this focuses on the communities with the greatest concentration of need before the pandemic, using the 10% most deprived areas in the county, according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Comparison with the rest of Somerset allows some insight as to what is happening elsewhere.

1.2. It was not a simple exacerbation of existing inequality

This focus allows us to test whether the often-stated national effect of the pandemic worsening existing inequalities, applies here; we found that the impacts were far more nuanced than that. The contrast between more and less deprived areas was less than we might have thought.

1.3. Family resilience and benefit schemes helped these communities cope at the start

Coping mechanisms with social, and especially family support is really important in enabling resilience, especially at the start of the pandemic. Furlough and the £20 Universal Credit uplift have undoubtedly played a part: these were unprecedented responses to an unprecedented event.

1.4. Services found new ways to reach their clients

We heard about digital access, with poverty and confidence as barriers. Improving it helps service users and service providers alike. We heard from Citizens' Advice Bureau and Somerset Drug and Alcohol Service how effective new ways of working can be.

1.5. The impact has been slow but is growing

The impact on families has been a 'slow burn', with lockdown pressures increasing the risks of negative and potentially damaging behaviour, and for some, as we heard, "*It is the structure of life that went, really.*" The end of furlough and the £20 Universal Credit uplift, combined with rising prices, could be expected to raise these pressures further. The reports of hunger amongst young people were perhaps the starkest statement of real need in these communities. However, it is unclear the extent to which the hunger might have existed before the pandemic or if it was caused by it, or whether it is transitory and occasional for some families, or a more long-term need.

1.6. Previously less-deprived communities may now have new needs.

Finally, the evidence of increasing need in previously less-deprived communities should be examined further. It may be that without established coping mechanisms, and exacerbated by access issues, there are cohorts who are newly in need whose concerns need addressing.

2. Improving Lives Priorities and Outcomes

2.1. A County infrastructure that drives productivity, supports economic prosperity and sustainable public services

YES - the report looks at the patterns of unemployment in the dramatic, COVID-led economic downturn, and the importance of digital access.

Safe, vibrant and well-balanced communities able to enjoy and benefit from the natural environment

YES – the report looks at formal volunteering and includes qualitative findings on informal and family community support.

Fairer life chances and opportunity for all

YES – the report considers digital access and contrasts between impact in previously deprived communities and the county as a whole.

Improved health and wellbeing and more people living healthy and independent lives for longer

YES – the report includes detailed information on health conditions and treatment during the pandemic.

3. Consultations undertaken

3.1. This report has been prepared by the JSNA Technical Working Group (TWG) made up of representatives of all the organizations on the Health and Wellbeing Board, as well as Citizens' Advice Bureau, Spark Somerset, Community Council for Somerset, One Teams and Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership. Focus group work was conducted in the identified communities in Bridgwater by the community organisation, 'Hidden Voices' and the JSNA topic was discussed and contributed to in a 'JSNA Special' - Sedgemoor Conversation.

4. Request of the Board and Board members

4.1. That the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board recognise the issues raised in this paper and agree to a development session, which will allow greater discussion, thereby finalising information for the final draft of the JSNA.

5. Background papers

5.1. Somerset Intelligence website
www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/jsna

6. Report Sign-Off

	Seen by:	Name	Date
Report Sign off	Relevant Senior Manager / Lead Officer (Director Level)	Professor Trudi Grant	Click or tap to enter a date.
	Cabinet Member / Portfolio	Cllr Clare Paul	Click or tap to enter a date.

	Holder (if applicable)		
	Monitoring Officer (Somerset County Council)	Scott Wooldridge	Click or tap to enter a date.