

SWT Special Full Council

Tuesday, 13th April, 2021,
6.15 pm



Somerset West
and Taunton

[SWT VIRTUAL MEETING WEBCAST LINK](#)

Members: Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair), Simon Coles (Vice-Chair), Ian Aldridge, Benet Allen, Lee Baker, Marcus Barr, Mark Blaker, Chris Booth, Paul Bolton, Sue Buller, Norman Cavill, Dixie Darch, Hugh Davies, Dave Durdan, Kelly Durdan, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Andrew Govier, Roger Habgood, Andrew Hadley, John Hassall, Ross Henley, Marcia Hill, John Hunt, Marcus Kravis, Richard Lees, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Dave Mansell, Andy Milne, Chris Morgan, Simon Nicholls, Craig Palmer, Derek Perry, Martin Peters, Peter Pilkington, Andy Pritchard, Steven Pugsley, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Phil Stone, Andrew Sully, Nick Thwaites, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Ray Tully, Terry Venner, Sarah Wakefield, Alan Wedderkopp, Danny Wedderkopp, Brenda Weston, Keith Wheatley, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Agenda

1. Apologies

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest

To receive and note any declarations of disclosable pecuniary or prejudicial or personal interests in respect of any matters included on the agenda for consideration at this meeting.

(The personal interests of Councillors and Clerks of Somerset County Council, Town or Parish Councils and other Local Authorities will automatically be recorded in the minutes.)

3. Public Participation - To receive only in relation to the business for which the Extraordinary Meeting has been called any questions, statements or petitions from the public in accordance with Council Procedure Rules 14,15 and 16

The Chair to advise the Committee of any items on which members of the public have requested to speak and advise those members of the public present of the details of the Council's public participation scheme.

For those members of the public who have submitted any questions or statements, please note, a three minute time limit applies to each speaker and you will be asked to speak before Councillors debate the issue.

Temporary measures during the Coronavirus Pandemic

Due to the Government guidance on measures to reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19), we will holding meetings in a virtual manner which will be live webcast on our website. Members of the public will still be able to register to speak and ask questions, which will then be read out by the Governance and Democracy Case Manager during Public Question Time and will either be answered by the Chair of the Committee, or the relevant Portfolio Holder, or be followed up with a written response.

4. To receive any communications or announcements from the Chair of the Council

5. To receive any communications or announcements from the Leader of the Council

6. To receive only in relation to the business for which the Extraordinary Meeting has been called any questions from Councillors in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13

7. Consultation on Local Government Reform - Response to One Somerset Proposal

This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts.

The purpose of this report is to detail the planned response on behalf of Somerset West and Taunton (SWT) Council. Whilst legally this is an Executive decision, it is important that this is presented to Full Council to ensure transparency and an open debate relating to the important topic of Local Government Reform in Somerset.

(Pages 5 - 74)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Hasset". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "H".

**JAMES HASSETT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Please note that this meeting will be recorded. You should be aware that the Council is a Data Controller under the Data Protection Act 2018. Data collected during the recording will be retained in accordance with the Council's policy. Therefore unless you are advised otherwise, by taking part in the Council Meeting during Public Participation you are consenting to being recorded and to the possible use of the sound recording for access via the website or for training purposes. If you have any queries regarding this please contact the officer as detailed above.

Following Government guidance on measures to reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19), we will be live webcasting our committee meetings and you are welcome to view and listen to the discussion. The link to each webcast will be available on the meeting webpage, but you can also access them on the [Somerset West and Taunton webcasting](#) website.

If you would like to ask a question or speak at a meeting, you will need to submit your request to a member of the Governance Team in advance of the meeting. You can request to speak at a Council meeting by emailing your full name, the agenda item and your question to the Governance Team using governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

Any requests need to be received by 4pm on the day that provides 2 clear working days before the meeting (excluding the day of the meeting itself). For example, if the meeting is due to take place on a Tuesday, requests need to be received by 4pm on the Thursday prior to the meeting.

The Governance and Democracy Case Manager will take the details of your question or speech and will distribute them to the Committee prior to the meeting. The Chair will then invite you to speak at the beginning of the meeting under the agenda item Public Question Time, but speaking is limited to three minutes per person in an overall period of 15 minutes and you can only speak to the Committee once. If there are a group of people attending to speak about a particular item then a representative should be chosen to speak on behalf of the group.

Please see below for Temporary Measures during Coronavirus Pandemic and the changes we are making to public participation:-

Due to the Government guidance on measures to reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19), we will holding meetings in a virtual manner which will be live webcast on our website. Members of the public will still be able to register to speak and ask questions, which will then be read out by the Governance and Democracy Case Manager during Public Question Time and will be answered by the Portfolio Holder or followed up with a written response.

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Report Number: SWT 33/21

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Special Full Council – 13 April 2021

Consultation on Local Government Reform – Response to One Somerset Proposal

This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council, Cllr Smith-Roberts

Report Author: James Hassett, Chief Executive

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 On 9 October 2020, Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, invited local authorities in Somerset to submit a proposal for a single tier of local government by 9 December 2020. The four district authorities had already submitted an outline business case, in September 2020, with support from Full Council.
- 1.2 The final version of the Stronger Somerset Business Case was signed off by Council on the 3 December 2020, before being submitted to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on the 9 December 2020.
- 1.3 On 22 February 2021, the Government commenced consultation on Local Government Reorganisation for Somerset inviting feedback on both the Stronger Somerset and the One Somerset Proposals. The Secretary of State has invited Stronger Somerset to critique the One Somerset proposal and vice versa. One Somerset is the alternative to the districts' Stronger Somerset proposal and recommends the creation of a new, single unitary to cover the administrative district of Somerset.
- 1.4 Stronger Somerset asked PA Consultancy as professional experts to complete a review of the One Somerset Business Case and their report is attached as Appendix A to this report.
- 1.5 The purpose of this report is to detail the planned response on behalf of Somerset West and Taunton (SWT) Council. Whilst legally this is an Executive decision, it is important that this is presented to Full Council to ensure transparency and an open debate relating to the important topic of Local Government Reform in Somerset. At all times SWT has been balanced in its debate on Local Government Reorganisation for Somerset. Links to both Business Cases can be found at the end of this report.

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that Full Council:-

1. Endorses the submission of the response to the consultation, including the PA Consultancy professional experts critique attached as Appendix A and the Ipsos Mori Poll at Appendix B, on proposals for reform of local government in Somerset, specifically in respect of the One Somerset proposal.
2. Note that the decision to submit the consultation response requires an Executive decision to be made before final submission. Whilst this is legally an Executive decision, it is felt important that this is debated by Full Council to ensure transparency and openness. It is proposed that following Full Council's decision on whether or not to endorse the consultation response, the Leader of the Council will make the Executive decision to submit the consultation response to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government by the deadline of 19 April 2021.

3. Risk Assessment

- 3.1 As the Secretary of State has asked both One Somerset and Stronger Somerset to provide a critique of the other's proposal, it would potentially leave Stronger Somerset at a disadvantage if it failed to submit a consultation response

4. Background and Full details of the Report

- 4.1 In accordance with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, the Secretary of State must consult with any local authority that is affected by a proposal (but which has not submitted it) and any other persons as he considers appropriate. On 22 February 2021, the Government opened a consultation on all proposals submitted. **The consultation ends on 19 April 2021.**
- 4.2 Responses to the consultation will be considered by the Secretary of State against the following criteria before reaching a judgement on each of the proposals:
 - Is it likely to improve local government and service delivery across the area of the proposal, giving greater value for money, generating savings, providing stronger strategic and local leadership and more sustainable structures?
 - Does it command a good deal of local support as assessed in the round overall across the whole area of the proposal? and
 - Is it a credible geography consisting of one or more local government areas with an aggregate population which is either within the range of 300,000 to 600,000 or such other figures that, having regard to the

circumstances of the authority, including local identity and geography, could be considered substantial?

4.3 The Secretary of State, subject to Parliamentary approval, may implement a proposal with or without changes or may not implement any. If a proposal is to be implemented, the timeline set out in the consultation document suggests new Unitary Council(s) will come into existence from April 2023 (with transitional arrangements in place in 2022/23). As a consequence of this, the County Council elections planned for May 2021 are not taking place and have been deferred to May 2022.

4.4 The specific consultation questions are:

1) Is the Councils' 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 Council's proposal also likely to impact local public services delivered by others such as the Police, Fire and Rescue and Health Services?

4) Do you support the proposal from the Councils?

5) Do the Unitary Council(s) 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?

5. Somerset West and Taunton Council Response

Our response is structured to answer the specific questions which are posed by the Secretary of State in his invitation.

Q1. Is the proposal likely to improve council services, will it give greater value for money, generate saving, provide strong strategic and local leadership and create more sustainable structures?

A1a. There is no evidence that the One Somerset proposal will lead to improved services, give greater value for money or provide strong strategic leadership and the proposal contains no plans to achieve this.

- 5.1 The One Somerset proposal provides neither a compelling nor ambitious vision for Somerset's future, but appears to focus on reorganisation as an end in itself, rather than a stepping-stone to achieving the deeper change needed to really improve services and the quality of life for people in Somerset.
- 5.2 Whilst the One Somerset proposal shares some of the key challenges (identified in work conducted jointly between the districts and county in October 2019), the proposal does not go on to articulate in any way, how these challenges will be addressed by the changes proposed by One Somerset. As a result, there is a lack of evidence that these have been placed at the centre of a reform agenda. In fact, there is little detail to suggest from the proposals that consideration has been given on how to deliver better services and improved outcomes for the people of Somerset. If it had, this would have led them to the need for reform to be the central pillar, from which the proposed structure would have flowed. The district authorities in Somerset believe that significant reform is required to deliver better, more sustainable adults', children's and public health services. The One Somerset proposal is silent on this, despite evidence of consistent performance issues in relation to children's and adults' services, as evidenced by recent Ofsted and CQC inspections for Children's Services and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and the most recent Adults Social Care Outcomes Framework data, where more than half of indicators are in the bottom 50% of England rankings.
- 5.3 There is a broader question of why some of the changes sought in the One Somerset case are not already planned or delivered, as many are not dependent on a structural change for the county. The lack of a rigorous reform narrative combined with current service performance means that we cannot be confident that the One Somerset case provides a path to outstanding services.
- 5.4 In addition to concerns around its key services, the One Somerset proposal does little to address how it plans to reduce inequality, level up and meet other national policy drivers.

A1b We do not believe that the One Somerset proposal addresses the significant challenges created by increasing demand for key services or delivers service reform. As a result, the proposal cannot offer sustainability of service delivery into the future which presents a risk to residents, particularly the most vulnerable.

- 5.5 The One Somerset proposal focuses on a one-off programme of transition and change, attributable in large part to restructuring. It does not set the

foundations for dealing with the known financial shortfalls let alone the likely future local government budget reductions which will fall on Somerset, or how services will deal with unprecedented increases in demand, particularly across social care and public health, and made more urgent due to Covid-19. The proposal is disappointing in its limited field of vision and is a missed opportunity.

- 5.6 When we consider the County Council's wider record on managing demand-led service costs, it has struggled in this area to date. County Council budget outturns show, for example, that children's services have consistently overspent each year between 2016/17 to 2019/20, with money being taken from other services (notably economic and community infrastructure) to meet this overspend.
- 5.7 Given the challenging combination of poor performance in some service areas (as evidenced by the inspections referred to previously), together with the failure to demonstrate how demand will be tackled, it is disappointing that there is no evidence in the proposal to suggest that any changes to existing ways of working are proposed, and that the trajectory would therefore change. The proposal misses the opportunity for reorganisation to look to improve services and outcomes for residents so that real progress can be made in improving quality of life and services can be provided on a financially sustainable footing. As a result, the proposal represents a serious risk of deteriorating services that fail Somerset's residents and communities.

A1c. We do not believe that strong local leadership will result from the One Somerset proposal, as the structure proposed is imposed top down and will inhibit a truly localist approach. There is a risk of disconnect between the council and the communities it serves.

- 5.8 Local Community Networks is a potentially promising reform with the potential to drive more localism but the design outlined is top down and is undermined by a significant reduction in democratic representation. The approach is modelled on that taken forward in other large unitary councils where it is known that communities have disengaged as their voice and needs are not heard and they have little influence over decisions of the councils designed to service them. The proposals represent a step backwards from the Area Panels model employed in Somerset West and Taunton rather than reorganisation being utilised as an opportunity to go further in engaging and empowering communities and being able to tailor delivery to different local community needs.
- 5.9 The One Somerset proposal does not acknowledge the differing challenges and different local economies that exist in what is a large county. The reality

of the Eastern side of Somerset is that it is formed of attractive market towns and surrounding villages, that need a tailored approach and one that is very different to the Taunton and Bridgwater dominance that our local councils fear. Whilst a monolithic council, centred in Taunton, would be close, accessible and accountable to the people it serves, this would obviously not be the case for many parts of the potential One Somerset area. Our Ipsos MORI poll showed clearly the higher level of trust which residents place in their district council compared to the county council. The poll also demonstrated residents' views that Eastern and Western Somerset are different in character and needs and that communities are demanding a more localist approach. The One Somerset proposal neither acknowledges this nor will it deliver what residents want.

Q2. *Where it is proposed that services will be delivered on a different geographic footprint than currently, 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*

A2. The One Somerset proposal overlooks the opportunity for more local delivery of services, to better meet the needs of the community. It is also silent on those services currently delivered by the district councils, such as housing and homelessness (and the role of these as wider determinants of health), environmental health or planning. It is therefore difficult to gauge how it is envisaged these will operate within a single unitary and the implication is that these have not been adequately thought through.

5.10 Under the One Somerset proposal, children's services continue to be both commissioned and delivered centrally, but it has been shown through independent assessment that this is not working optimally for recipients of these services. In this case, the lack of change to geographic footprint and absence of fresh thinking is detrimental to service users. The Stronger Somerset solution centres delivery with an Alternative Delivery Model but, crucially, recognises that commissioning needs to flex to meet the very different needs of Western and Eastern Somerset. The One Somerset proposal is essentially more of the same and does not address current concerns set out in inspection reports around quality of services.

5.11 One Somerset does not acknowledge that whilst some services are more efficient delivered at scale, others are more efficient delivered on a more local footprint with tailored services leading to better outcomes and lower cost. Instead, One Somerset appears to adopt a centralising approach of services all being delivered in the same manner countywide. This will lead to the deterioration of many services in the eyes of residents as they become less tailored to local needs.

- 5.12 One Somerset points to the emerging Integrated Care System (ICS) as the future delivery model for adult health and social care. However, it neglects the importance of creating a strengths-based, neighbourhood model to work with the Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and emerging ICS to ensure that solutions are place-led and locally delivered.
- 5.13 Waste services in Somerset are already delivered via a shared partnership, the Somerset Waste Partnership. Neither proposal impacts upon this.

Q3. *Is the proposal also likely to impact local public services delivered by others, such as police, fire and rescue, and health services?*

- 5.14 The administrative boundary of Somerset sits within the wider force boundary for Avon and Somerset Police and Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service. However, it is important to note that both services operate within two divisions – one covering Eastern Somerset and one covering Western Somerset. A single county unitary would straddle two divisions for both the police and fire services. In fact, the service delivery boundaries for the Police and Fire and Rescue are closely co-terminous with those of the two unitaries proposed by Stronger Somerset.

Q4. *Do you support the proposal from this council?*

A4. Somerset West and Taunton Council does not support the proposal for One Somerset. The proposal has no ambition for improving services or plan to improve outcomes for communities and level up. It does not address: the current known financial shortfalls; the issues underpinning growing demand; or future likely reductions of funding. As a result, the proposal presents a serious risk of poorer outcomes for residents and communities, in particular the most vulnerable and service deterioration or even failure. We make additional observations here:

- 5.15 In our view, the One Somerset model will not deliver the economic growth necessary to level up. The One Somerset case does not mention economic growth, and yet it is fundamental to the prosperity of our area, improving quality of life and for the funding of local government and other public services. Post-Covid recovery plans are being developed across England, emphasising the need for inclusive growth. The government's devolution agenda will seek to accelerate the recovery, yet the One Somerset case is silent on the issue of devolution to generate the investment needed to transform the County.

- 5.16 The proposal does not sufficiently address concerns in relation to the current reserves of the County Council. The levels of the County Councils reserves, the ability to survive further unforeseen financial risks and the standards of financial management within the County have been a critical concern for the External Auditor in recent years. In 2019/20 the External Auditor continued to raise concerns about financial management and controls. Despite the significant attention and effort to replenish levels of reserves, the County's current levels of reserves are not high relative to comparator councils and many of the efficiency measures taken and savings achieved have largely been short term and/or opportunistic v transformational (a view supported by its external auditors).
- 5.17 The delivery of corporate transformation is a key and ongoing challenge for the County Council and delivering budgets in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) will require further savings to be delivered. Whilst financial management practices have improved, there is evidence that the County Council has not yet fundamentally tackled its strategic cost base. We would therefore characterise the improvement in the County Council's financial position as better cost management and cost control rather than delivering transformation of the County Council's cost base.
- 5.18 Within this context, One Somerset does not address how services as a whole will be reformed or even transformed to ensure they operate on a financially sustainable footing. Indeed, the financial savings proposed by One Somerset are less than the cumulative savings already identified as needed by the existing five councils of Somerset. This being the case, One Somerset presents a risk of financial failure and with it, a deterioration in services, rather than improvement, and possibly failure of key services.

Q5. Does the unitary council proposed represent a credible geography?

A5. No. The area proposed to be covered by one council is too large and its needs are too diverse. We do not believe it is possible for a single unitary to do justice to the unique characteristics across our people, place and economy.

- 5.19 Given the diversity and characteristics of Somerset, as well as the economic geography, a single unitary structure covering all of Somerset risks Local Government becoming disconnected from the people and places it serves.
- 5.20 Our county is geographically large – 1,331 sq. miles – with a very dispersed population. 48% of people living in Somerset live in a rural area, in sharp contrast to 18% for England. It takes people in Somerset 50% longer than

average to access services. Travel times within the county are significant and this is not overcome by digital connectivity which is poor. The business case does not acknowledge these differences or set out how it would maintain a place-led focus to mitigate this risk and recognise the community geography.

- 5.21 The One Somerset proposal does not reflect the natural economic geography of Somerset. There is no description of how it intends to take account of its scale to provide services that are genuinely responsive to the different businesses in the county. There is also no mention of the different functional economic areas which are characterised by very different economic make-up, and how this will be addressed by a council of this scale.
- 5.22 Within the next ten years, the population of Somerset will be more than 600,000 people (Office of National Statistics (ONS) 2019 mid-year estimates), which exceeds the highest stated desirable size for a unitary authority. The size of the population added to the size of the county means that it is impossible to see how one council for Somerset could fit the definition of being truly local government.

Q6. Do you have any other comments with regards to the proposed reorganisation?

A6a. The District Councils have commissioned a report from PA Consulting which objectively analyses the One Somerset Proposal. A copy of the report is attached at Appendix A and the Secretary of State is invited to take this analysis into consideration.

A6b The District Council commissioned IPSOS MORI to undertake a poll of a representative sample of residents. A copy of the report is attached at Appendix B. The poll shows that the One Somerset proposal does not have the support of the majority of residents. Indeed, of the four options residents were asked their preference on, One Somerset was the least popular with only 15% support, with more residents even preferring no change. The option most supported was that for two new councils proposed by the district councils in Stronger Somerset.

7. In Summary

- 7.1 The Secretary of State issued the following guidance to those authorities wishing to submit a proposal. A proposal should seek to achieve for the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government, that is the establishment of one or more unitary authorities:

- a. which are likely to improve local government and service delivery across the area of the proposal, giving greater value for money, generating savings, providing stronger strategic and local leadership, and which are more sustainable structures;
 - b. which command a good deal of local support as assessed in the round overall across the whole area of the proposal; and
 - c. where the area of each unitary authority is a credible geography consisting of one or more existing local government areas 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, could be considered substantial.
- 7.2 In respect of sustainable structures, improving value for money and delivering savings the One Somerset business case takes only a short to medium-term view on financial sustainability, with little comment on the actions required to manage long-term future demand and cost. The value for money analysis is necessarily focused on restructuring and, whilst there is a description of a new operating model in the business case, the costs and benefits of this are not quantified. In general terms, we consider that the financial analysis is a little over-simplified for a proposal of such significance.
- 7.3 One Somerset's vision for creating better services in Somerset is not supported by sufficient detail as to how it plans to achieve that ambition. In respect of both children's and adults' services this is concerning, given recent under performance and increasing demand. We also note very limited development of a firm ambition for devolution or a wider economic strategy for the region, which is disappointing given the acknowledged underperformance on a wide range of economic indicators when compared to the national average. The lack of plans calls into question the deliverability of the business case and the likelihood of it improving local service delivery and achieving better outcomes.
- 7.4 The One Somerset business case gives an account of how it plans to develop Local Community Networks (LCNs) as a way of "giving people real power and real influence over the decisions that affect them most." However, there are inconsistencies in the aims and ethos described compared with the planned approach, which casts doubt on its potential effectiveness at fostering local engagement in the scheme. The business case describes that the geography of LCN's will be based on PCNs. This 'top down' approach to boundaries appears at odds with genuine localism which is unlikely to always align with PCN boundaries. The business case also suggests that LCNs will operate as 'committees of the council cabinet.' Evidence from other places such as Wiltshire, where this structure is in place, suggest that these mechanisms are poorly attended and also perceived as top down structures. There is no

reference to any new team to deliver this work and no costs, which makes the subsequent content an aspiration at this point, rather than something that has been planned and costed into a new model

In addition, a single council may struggle to reflect the diverse economic geography of Somerset, creating an effective barrier to providing tailored services that are responsive to the different businesses in the four functional economic market areas that exist.

7.5 We did not find evidence to substantiate One Somerset's multiple claims of "significant and growing" support from different stakeholder groups. There are insufficient references, quotes, or names to corroborate support from the groups claimed including business (the example quoted is from a charitable organisation), MPs, public sector partners, and town and parish councils. By contrast, we would draw your attention to the strong evidence of support from both councillors and the public for Stronger Somerset. The majority of District Councillors do not support One Somerset, with 85% of them, drawn from across the political spectrum, including Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Labour, Green and Independent, voting to support Stronger Somerset.

7.6 In evidencing public support, One Somerset does not publish the detail of the residents' survey (for example the methodology, the questions posed or full results), making it impossible to assess the validity of the figures quoted. The results are reported variously from self-selecting public surveys and Blue marble research, but the method, questionnaire and full results are not shared, which undermines the claims made.

8. Links to Corporate Aims / Priorities

8.1 There are no linkages to the Council's current Corporate Aims / Priorities

9. Finance / Resource Implications

9.1 None arising from this report

10. Legal Implications

10.1 The legal issues are set out in the body of this report

11. Environmental Impact Implications

11.1 None arising from this report

12. Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications

12.1 None arising from this report

13. Equality and Diversity Implications

13.1 None arising from this report

14. Social Value Implications

14.1 None arising from this report

15. Partnership Implications

15.1 None arising from this report

16. Health and Wellbeing Implications

16.1 None arising from this report

17. Asset Management Implications

17.1 None arising from this report

18. Data Protection Implications

18.1 None arising from this report

19. Consultation Implications

19.1 The consultation implications are set out in the body of this report

Democratic Path:

- **Audit, Governance and Standards Committee** – No
- **Cabinet/Executive** – As legally this is an Executive decision, the Leader will complete a delegated decision once the Council has endorsed the consultation response
- **Full Council** – Yes

Reporting Frequency: Ad-hoc

List of Appendices

Appendix A	Analysis of the One Somerset proposal by PA Consulting
Appendix B	Ipsos Mori Poll full report

Links:

One Somerset full proposal can be accessed [here](#)

Stronger Somerset full proposal can be accessed [here](#)

Contact Officers

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ANALYSIS OF THE ONE SOMERSET PROPOSAL

A REPORT FOR SOMERSET'S DISTRICT COUNCILS

21 March 2021

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Version: 1.0

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Introduction

Introduction and purpose of this document

This document provides PA Consulting's analysis of the One Somerset Business case for a new single unitary council for Somerset. It has been commissioned by the Somerset District Councils to inform the government's consultation on the reorganisation of Local Government in Somerset, currently being conducted by Paul Rowsell, Senior Civil Servant in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), and his team on behalf of the Secretary of State, Robert Jenrick.

PA Consulting has been working with the District Councils to prepare the Stronger Somerset Business Case currently being considered by the Secretary of State.

Our methodology in putting this document together

Our review has primarily focused on a desktop review of the One Somerset business case (onesomerset.org.uk/proposals). Where instructive, we have also referred back to the Stronger Somerset proposal (strongersomerset.co.uk/SiteAssets/Files/Plans), submitted by the District Councils.

In addition, and where useful, we have also referred to further public documents and data sources. These are:

- Somerset County Council Medium Term Financial Plans, Annual Reports and Accounts
- County Council Network: Local Government Funding Forecast Update 2020-25
- National and regional data sets relating to Somerset and Council services – for example, Indices of Multiple Deprivation, Joint Strategic Needs Analysis, Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework Data, Educational Attainment Data, CIPFA Benchmarking Data
- The Letter of Invitation from The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

We have also had conversations with the following:

- Annie Hudson, Children's Services Advisor
- Kim Curry, Adults' Services Advisor
- Max Wide, Transformation Advisor
- Alex Parmley, CEO, South Somerset District Council
- James Hassett, CEO, Somerset West and Taunton District Council
- Stuart Brown, CEO, Mendip District Council
- Bob Brown, CEO, Sedgemoor District Council

MHCLG's three tests for local government reorganisation

In his letter of 9th October 2020, Paul Rowsell, on behalf of the Secretary of State, invited Councils from Somerset to submit proposals for a single tier of local government. In this invitation, he set out guidance for proposals as outlined below:

1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the area concerned, the establishment of a single tier of local government, that is the establishment of one or more unitary authorities:
 - a. which are likely to improve local government and service delivery across the area of the proposal, giving greater value for money, generating savings, providing stronger strategic and local leadership, and which are more sustainable structures;
 - b. which command a good deal of local support as assessed in the round overall across the whole area of the proposal; and,
 - c. where the area of each unitary authority is a credible geography consisting of one or more existing local government areas 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, could be considered substantial.

As part of further advice, the letter also advised on considering the following in formulating proposals:

- a. Describing the single tier local government structures being putting forward
- b. Explaining how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described above.
- c. The need for evidence and analysis to support a proposal
- d. Explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve
- e. Evidence of a good deal of local support
- f. Any wider context for any proposed unitary authorities around promoting economic recovery and growth, including possible future devolution deals and Mayoral Combined Authorities.

We have taken this guidance into account in putting together this document.

The structure of this document

We have structured this document around the MHCLG's core tests and guidance, providing the following sections:

1. An executive summary
2. A review of evidence and analysis included the business case
3. Analysis of the business case in terms of the degree to which it meets the three MHCLG tests:
 - a. Improving the area's local government
 - b. Commanding a good deal of local support
 - c. Covering an area that provides a credible geography
4. Conclusion

Use of this document

This paper has been commissioned by the District Councils of Somerset to inform part of their wider response to the current consultation process, due on 19th April. It is solely for use by the District Councils in relation to the consultation process currently underway. We request that it is not distributed outside of that process, without prior permission.

In preparing this paper, this review has taken into consideration documents listed in the introduction and as a result does not purport to be fully comprehensive. This paper does not seek to provide a formal opinion on the question of local government restructure in Somerset.

For questions on any of the content below, please contact Georgina.Cox@paconsulting.com (07891 417639), PA's Local Government Lead and Member of PA's Management Group.

Executive Summary

Here we summarise the findings from our review of the One Somerset Business Case.

1. The proposal does not present a comprehensive business case to ‘improve the local area’ and reform local government for the longer term in Somerset. Rather, the case is focussed on the immediate reorganisation of structures.

- In the analysis set out, the One Somerset case focuses primarily on rationalising local government structures.
- The financial analysis only covers the immediate restructure and is silent on the investment and benefits expected from a new operating model and reformed services. These elements are likely to represent a far larger opportunity to reduce inequalities, level up and meet other wider national policy drivers.
- The starting point for determining the best long-term structure for local government would be more appropriately based on the strategy and plans to deliver the best outcomes possible for the people of Somerset. A structure is then determined by what is needed to enable that, following a logic where form follows function.
- By focusing the majority of analysis on the immediate scope of organisational restructure, the One Somerset case does not follow this logic – missing the opportunity to set out a compelling and detailed plan to reform how local government will operate differently. As a result, the proposal as set out does not chart a course to address the substantial challenges Somerset faces, improving outcomes for its people and communities.

2. As a result of this, the One Somerset case describes a set of one-off financial benefits but does not make the case for long-term sustainable change in Somerset.

- The financial analysis only goes up to 2025/26 and continues to project a deficit at that stage of approximately £3.7m. Without further action to address the trajectory of spending on services, this deficit is likely to continue to rise from that point onwards, becoming unsustainable.
- This is prior to considering the growing pressures on demand-led services, all of which face current performance issues as well as significant future demand challenges. Somerset faces a number of issues: acute demographic challenges, the impact of Covid-19 and the financial risks posed by children’s services which have consistently exceeded budget between 2015 – 2019 and are still responding to poor Ofsted inspection results.
- Despite these facts, the case focusses almost entirely on ‘transition benefits’ with little analysis of the key reforms required to deliver more sustainable adults’, children’s and public health services. Without action, future pressure in these areas will mean local government in Somerset continues to be unsustainable.

3. The case lacks the evidence and level of analysis commensurate to a decision of such local significance.

- The broad ambition and vision articulated in the One Somerset business case is not backed up by detailed delivery models, costs and benefits, and delivery plans are not evidenced as to how the new Council will work in practice.
- This creates a disconnect where the detail of the case is not aligned to the overall scope it sets out. An important part of HM Treasury guidance for public sector business cases, stipulated in the Five Case Model, is where the Strategic Case sets out the desired objectives, and options are evaluated against a strategic set of ‘critical successful factors’ in the Economic Case. The One Somerset case does set out a vision and ambition, but the subsequent evaluation of options does not correlate to them.
- The modelling is overly simplistic for a business case of this significance and assumptions are not stated in full. Assumptions behind benefit profiling for each option are not stated, rather a generic modelling approach is discussed across all options, by opportunity area. This results in an overall ~50% reduction in presumed benefits between Option 3 and 4, which appears simplistically driven by scale. The lack of detailed analysis or assumptions by option makes it difficult to evaluate the reliability of the analysis and undermines the robustness of the recommendations made.
- The qualitative analysis of options is not performed against a clear, well-defined framework and does not always provide an impartial view of the options being evaluated. In some areas it is difficult to agree with some of the rationale provided for the judgements made.
- The business case frequently conflates an argument for unitary government (i.e. the advantages of combining the functions of County and District Councils), which Stronger Somerset also argues for, with an argument for a *single* unitary government covering the whole geography, without providing rationale for why one is more effective than two in relation to the specific points being made.

4. The case does not seek to respond to the significant challenges that Somerset faces.

- There is a lack of detail and analysis of the current challenges Somerset faces or the key reforms required to deliver better, more sustainable adults’, children’s and public health services. There is also then no subsequent case made for why a single unitary is the best model to enable these reforms.

- This is despite evidence of performance issues in children’s and adults’ services, as evidenced by recent Ofsted and CQC inspections for Children’s Services and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and the most recent Adults Social Care Outcomes Framework data for which more than half of indicators are in the bottom 50% of England rankings.
 - There is little discussion of how children’s services plans to complete the long-running improvement journey it is currently on, or detail for how adult’s services will deal with the substantial demographic challenges it faces.
 - This makes it difficult to be confident about either the trajectory of key services in a One Somerset model or how these services will effectively contribute to meeting Somerset’s current challenges.
- 5. Given the diversity and characteristics of Somerset, including the economic geography, a single unitary structure covering the whole county risks local government becoming disconnected from the people and places it serves. The business case does not effectively set out how it would maintain a place-led focus to mitigate this risk.**
- Creating one council in a place as large as Somerset runs the risk of contradicting the stated ambition set out, to *“give local residents more say over decisions that impact them and their communities”* (page 8). One Somerset proposes reducing the number of councillors from 269 to 100, leaving average representation of 5,630 per councillor compared with ~ 3,150 in the rest of England on average. This aggregates representative boundaries into bigger areas and risks losing the capacity and ability to “hear” local voice, creating a more transactional relationship, ill-suited to improving outcomes for the region.
 - The development of Local Community Networks is included with the intention of driving more localism. However the design outlined here, where networks will be based on Primary Care Trust boundaries, suggests an approach that pre-determines the geography of local initiatives, which is too top down to foster a genuinely localist approach which would be based on how communities want to work together. Additionally, making these networks committees of the new council would seem to reinforce the idea of a centralised, council-led approach. A localist ethos is also undermined by such a significant reduction in democratic representation.
- 6. Regarding local support, we did not find sufficient evidence to substantiate One Somerset’s claims of support.**
- Statements outlining the support of, for example, towns and parishes, other major public sector partners, MPs or local businesses are not supported with evidence, leaving them as assertions.
 - The business case does not publish the detail behind its survey establishing public support. It is not possible to ascertain the robustness of the evidence or validity of the conclusions as a result.

The sections below set out our analysis of the evidence in the business case and the evidence to support MHCLG’s tests of improving local government, commanding local support and creating a credible geography.

Evidence and analysis to support the business case

Guidance from the Secretary of State sets out that proposals 'need evidence and analysis to support a proposal and any explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve'.

This section describes our analysis of the scope and supporting evidence within the One Somerset business case. The case does not present an adequate or compelling evidence base to describe how it attends to achieve its overall objectives. The options analysis set out is not sufficiently rigorous and is at times, subjective.

Scope and focus

The primary focus and scope of the One Somerset business case is limited to an organisational re-structure, outlining the projected costs and benefits that this entails. The business case does not look to analyse or evidence how the new Council intends to reform services over the longer term in any level of detail. As a result, it does not seek to explain how better outcomes are expected to be achieved to overcome the long-term challenges that Somerset faces.

- The main focus of analysis for the One Somerset case is on the immediate restructure of Local Government - rationalising the number of local government organisations and the financial opportunity that presents to drive down operational costs. This approach is summarised in the first sentence: *"Let's start with the obvious question – why have Five when you could have One? It's a pretty simple message that sums up the duplication and waste that exists in Somerset's local councils at this time."* The business case sets out this focus and approach for the reader a number of times, for example on page 51, it states that, *"moving to a unitary structure can also be a platform for further transformation ... dependent on the ambition of the authority and appetite for investment."*
- This approach is consistent with the fact that only the costs of re-organisation are included in the financial analysis of options and the broader reform opportunities discussed in later sections are not costed and/or quantified (see Value for Money section below on page 11). The case also only analyses the financial impacts across a five-year period, by which time the re-organisation will be bedded in – rather than a longer time period which would allow for reform of the operating model, culture and services.
- This logic appears to give the resulting business case an overly short-term scope for something that will provide the platform for local government for generations to come.
- Rather, the starting point for considering the best configuration of any future unitary government might more effectively be 'what structure will best support local government to perform and deliver better outcomes to the people of Somerset', thereby following a logic where form follows function. By focusing the majority of analysis on the immediate scope of organisational restructure, the One Somerset case underplays the critical question of which structure will best support local government over the long-term.

Use of evidence

Beyond structure, there is not enough evidence shared to support One Somerset's ambition and plans. This makes it extremely challenging to assess the likelihood of the business case achieving the ambition it sets out - of improving the lives of residents, business and communities - or to have confidence that it will.

- Best practice guidance for developing public sector business cases is set out in the HM Treasury Five Case Model. In this framework, shortlisted options are evaluated against a set of strategic 'critical successful factors' which makes it easy to evaluate each option in a structured and objective way. The One Somerset business case does not follow this logic.
- Section 2.2 sets out a stated vision for the future in Somerset, however the following sections do not describe the degree to which each option will or won't meet that overall ambition. As a result, there is no clear evidence set out to evaluate the different options against their ability to meet One Somerset's overall goal. This raises serious questions as to how the public can find the confidence to support the outcomes sought.
- The design principles for the operating model described in Table 16 which supports the statement that *"the design of the new authority will be critical to its success"* is not quantified in the financial analysis.
- Cost and benefit categories are attributed to 'removal of duplication', 'numbers of senior managers' and 'costs of disaggregation' rather than the kind of broader reforms and transformation and investment that would be needed to achieve success in the operating model described.
- Furthermore, the delivery programme to implement the longer-term changes described in the document is not shown in any level of detail (Appendix F). The plan is focussed on the restructuring workstreams with very little detail as to how services will be transformed.
- The same is true in terms of reforming and improving core services, where there is limited evidence or description of plans to change and improve services (we explore this for Children's and Adults services on pages 13 and 14).
- There are also a number of occasions where evidence is not provided to support statements made, making it difficult for the reader to judge the robustness of all the claims made. For example:

- On page 5, the business case describes a groundswell of approval seen among town and parish councils without providing data or references for that.
- Case studies and examples of good practice are also presented in such a way as to make it difficult to understand the relevance for the business case. For example, when discussing adults' care, the business case outlines a case study of developing Extra Housing in Wiltshire from 2010 (page 85). However, there is no description of the significance of this case study for plans in Somerset.
- Similarly, in children's services, Case Study 11 (Page 88) describes the Hertfordshire Family Safeguarding Model but does not go on to describe or analyse how One Somerset intends to deploy this model. This tendency is repeated throughout.
- This lack of description and evidence presents a significant challenge for assessing the effectiveness or otherwise of the One Somerset business case in being able to meet the challenges that Somerset has, or answer the three government tests.

The business case makes a strong case for unitary government. However, there are frequent instances where the business case conflates the arguments for unitary government in Somerset with an argument for a single unitary structure in Somerset. In these instances, the business case lacks analysis on the benefits that other unitary configurations would bring.

- The One Somerset business case is persuasive about the benefits that unitary government can bring (for example, replacing the duplication and overlap of a two-tier system), and notes that this viewpoint is shared by all councils.
- However, arguments for unitary government are often deployed to support the recommended option of a single unitary government. For example, when discussing children's services in page 83, it states "*This outcome focus could be further developed by having fewer tiers of local government structure in the way of the resident and communities.*"
- On page 86, it states, "*The opportunity centres on influencing more of the levers that support children and young people.*"
- And on page 89, "*A unitary structure offers a number of ways to co-ordinate more factors that influence overall health and wellbeing.*"
- Similar statements are made on pages 82, 84, 85.
- These statements are all supportive of the concept of unitary government but do not distinguish between different potential configurations of unitary government.

Options analysis

The options analysis lacks detail and at times, does not fairly reflect the merits of a two unitary model. This undermines confidence in the resulting recommendation.

- The options analysis set out in the document is lacking in detail, which would have provided additional rigour. For example, the description of each option is limited to a short paragraph on page 43, omitting important detail such as how many councillors are assumed to be part of Option 3.
- In any options analysis process, each option should be described neutrally and factually before being evaluated. One Somerset's preferred option is the only one described in positive terms before evaluation. On page 43, the description of this option states: "*This maintains the sense of place and ensures co-terminosity with the health system that is critical to support the ageing population.*" Other options are described neutrally.
- One Somerset aligns its qualitative evaluation framework to MHCLG's three tests – breaking out Improving Local Government into four categories – resilience, service improvements, strong leadership and community engagement. These categories are not further defined or given any further detail as to the specific aims in each. This creates an imprecise framework of assessment.
- There are then examples where the qualitative and quantitative analysis is not a fair reflection of the different merits (strengths and weaknesses) of each of the options under consideration.
 - For example, in the qualitative evaluation section when discussing 'community engagement' (page 57): One Somerset scores Option 3 (a single unitary) as 5 out of 5, with Option 4 (two unitaries) scoring 4 out of 5. The bulleted explanations for Option 3's score of 5/5 appear thin – for example it says, "*A simpler local government structural landscape will create the space for capacity building with communities, building on existing strengths.*" This statement would logically be true of Option 4 also, which would remove the current two-tier system – but it is not commented on there. It is also not clear that capacity building is currently stymied by a current "*lack of space*" as stated. The clear role of councillors in community engagement is also not considered for any of the options here – and is a factor where a single unitary model, with the lowest number of councillors is at a disadvantage i.e. more councillors would be an asset in terms of fostering community engagement. However, this is not noted. As a result, the analysis does not consider comprehensively the potential strengths of Option 4 or some of the disbenefits of Option 3, with the scores questionable as a result.
 - Similarly, when discussing resilience on page 55, Option 3 (a single unitary) is awarded 4 points in comparison to 2 points for Option 4 (Two unitaries) – lower than the 3 points given to option 2 (increasing collaboration in the current five council set up). In terms of explanation, Option 3 is noted to provide "*much*

improved long-run resilience and stability through whole-system planning and management.” For Option 4 it notes: “*potentially some long-term improvements but that small scale underlines long-term resilience.*” Small scale is not an accurate reflection of two new unitaries that would be close to 300,000 people for each council (larger than many current unitaries). Small scale isn’t noted for Option 2 (Closer Collaboration) which scores 3 points, even though five organisations remain in this option.

- Similarly, the qualitative analysis and scores on page 54 and 58 do not consider all of the potential benefits of Option 4 or disbenefits of Option 3.

The degree to which the business case meets the three MHCLG tests

MHCLG Test: Improving local government: sustainability and value for money

This section addresses strategic analysis of the One Somerset business case against MHCLG's test to 'improve local government and service delivery across the area of the business case, giving greater value for money, generating savings, providing stronger strategic and local leadership, and which are more sustainable structures'.

The One Somerset case does not articulate costs and benefits for the operating model and service improvements described, and the analysis appears to be based on overly simplistic benefit modelling and profiling assumptions.

More sustainable local structures

The One Somerset business case only takes a short to medium-term view on financial sustainability, with the overarching narrative failing to set out the actions required to manage long-term future demand and cost. As a result, it is not possible from the current business case to assess if local structures are sustainable as data on medium to long-term plans are absent.

- The case sets out a one-off programme of transition and change attributable to restructuring, outlining the impact on budgets to 2025/26. The case does not attempt to describe how the preferred option will support service reform to deliver a more sustainable long-term future for local government. It does not set the foundations for the likely future budget reductions which will fall on local government in Somerset or how services will deal with unprecedented increases in demand, particularly across social care and public health, and made more urgent due to Covid-19. These challenges are likely to be substantial and require a longer-term plan aligned to the proposed reform of local government structures; there is the potential for One Somerset's shorter-term approach to create challenges for any new authority almost immediately, leading to service cuts for residents.
- Also significant here is the County Council's wider record on managing demand-led service costs, which suggests it has struggled in this area to date. County Council budget outturns show, for example, that children's services has consistently overspent each year between 2015/16 to 2019/20.
- From CIPFA nearest neighbours benchmarking analysis we know that expenditure on children's services is particularly high in Somerset and represents 28% of the total outturn expenditure in 2019/20. This service alone remains an area of financial risk given the its continued need for improvement. The omission of any mitigations for this significant financial risk undermines the case's analysis on sustainability in Section 8.
- One Somerset sets out a reduced deficit to 2025/26. Our analysis shows that based on expected spending increases of ~4% per annum and funding gap increases of ~20% per annum for county councils from 2022 onwards, there is likely to be a residual deficit for One Somerset post 2025. This is based on analysis completed using the County Council Network's Local Government Funding Forecast Update 2020-25 (supported by Pixel Financial Management) showing county council average funding gaps increasing by ~20% annually from 2022-2025. This does not consider the impact of Covid-19 and if this trajectory continues beyond 2025/26, the One Somerset case as presented has not evidenced how it will be sustainable beyond that point.
- Given challenging performance across demand-led services (see later section on both adults' and children's services), and failure to demonstrate in the case how demand will be tackled over the medium to long-term, there is no evidence to suggest that any changes to existing ways of working are proposed, and that the trajectory would therefore change. We would expect to see more root cause analysis and innovative community-based solutions to provide confidence and evidence of sustainable local government in the medium to longer-term.

Improving value for money and delivering savings

Value for money analysis is incomplete as it focusses on the act of restructuring and fails to quantify the costs and benefits of the ambition or new operating model described in the business case

- The cost analysis in the One Somerset business case does not mirror the operating model described qualitatively. Costs and benefits are also limited to the one-off act of restructuring and are over simplistic. All quantified benefits are 'transition savings' – the efficiency savings that are closely attributable to the act of restructuring. No service transformation benefits are assumed for Adults, Children's, Housing, Planning and Public Health Services. It is unclear therefore how costs and benefits align to the design principles and operating model described in Table 16. Changes described to the customer contact model, Local Community Network model and enabling towns and parishes to take on a new role are not costed.
- This means that the full impact of the model evaluated cannot be accurately understood and undermines the qualitative evaluation completed and the subsequent recommendation made.

The rationale for assumptions and the logic behind benefit assumptions by option is not articulated. Some of the financial analysis is unsophisticated for a case of such complexity and importance.

- The rationale for benefit assumptions for each option is not fully explained or justified. The approach to benefit modelling across all options is described as uniform, with varying levels of benefit and timing profiling, however none of this is articulated in detail, leaving an incomplete evidence base for readers to analyse.
- The rationale for the large differential between benefit assumptions is therefore unclear, in particular the rationale for a ~50% reduction in benefit between Option 3 and 4 (£18.5m in Option 3 versus £9.2m in Option 4 per annum once full potential achieved), whilst the investment costs associated with the changes are similar (£16.5m in Option 3 versus £18.5m in Option 4). This approach implies that benefits are driven by scale/volume and therefore staffing reductions, rather than genuine service transformation, as it is unlikely that organisational size would correlate precisely to level of benefit achieved. Indeed, this is supported by the value of implementation costs attributed to redundancies, which is significant (£8.4m).
- This approach also fails to recognise the shared service arrangements that exist across the county already and how those arrangements would evolve in Option 4 to develop economies of scale across two east and west unitaries. It does not recognise the potential for shared services, partnership or economies of scale in Option 4.
- Benefit analysis for 'service consolidation' elements of the model are very high level for a business case of such local significance. The business case takes a best-in-class peer council comparator approach, at overall council level (it assumes that moving to a unitary model would allow Somerset to operate at the same cost per head of population as comparator unitary councils, excluding people-based services), without discussion as to how this would be delivered and the implications for quality of services. It is unclear as to the rationale for the difference between Option 3 and 4 on this benefit area.
- Based on the 'transition savings' rationale throughout the document, moving to a smaller number of organisations across Somerset brings benefits. It is unclear therefore how moving from 5 organisations to 2 in Option 4 will create a 'dis-economy' of scale. In line with the wider logic, it would be expected that Option 4 would bring lower benefits than Option 3 versus the status quo rather than additional costs (see Table 4).

Some costs are low and profiling of benefits is ambitious.

- Some costs are low e.g. *Consolidation of existing systems and transfer to single enterprise resource planning (ERP) system* (this covers the cost of migration to legacy systems, and the procurement of new ones where legacy systems are insufficient and also includes consolidation to one ERP system and data migration) is £2.3m for Option 3 and Implementation Programme Team is £1.7m for Option 3. The Stronger Somerset case includes ~£20m of investment over several years across both the single and two unitary options, recognising the potential magnitude and complexity of an ERP programme.
- Working back through the savings (as these are not shown in a clear year by year table), we understand that savings start in the second year of the programme at 75% of total benefit (due to a part year), and continue thereafter for 3 years i.e. a total savings profile of 3.75 years for both options 2 and 3. The timing of benefit realisation (with 75% of benefits achieved within 1 year of Vesting Day) is very ambitious given programme timelines set out and the complexity of some of the programme initiatives discussed. Savings start in the year that vesting takes place, even though only design work takes place that year in the implementation plan, with any detailed implementation taking place afterwards. Given the process involved, it is unlikely that savings will materialise in the same year as vesting as implied by the financial model. The experience of other authorities, such as Dorset, who have recently been through a local government re-organisation, is that benefits are seen more gradually over several years.

MHCLG Test: Improving local government: service delivery and achieving successful outcomes

One Somerset provides a limited description of its plans to improve major service areas to produce better outcomes for Somerset residents. The narrative is somewhat generic and does not set out or engage with the specific challenges that Somerset is facing in significant detail. Performance issues are left unacknowledged in adults' services and given minor analysis in children's services. There is a broader question of why some of the changes sought in the One Somerset case are not already planned or delivered as many are not dependent on a structural change for the county. The lack of a rigorous reform narrative combined with a lack of commentary on current service performance makes it difficult to be confident that the One Somerset case provides a path to outstanding services.

One Somerset's vision for creating better services in Somerset is not supported by sufficient detail as to how it plans to achieve that ambition. This is a significant omission and these services cannot reasonably be treated as out of scope for a business case on Local Government Reorganisation – the plans and progress of these services are intrinsically linked to the future structure they operate from. The lack of plans calls into question the deliverability of the business case and the likelihood of it improving local service delivery and achieving better outcomes.

- The overall goal of any reorganisation of local government should be to improve the lives and outcomes of citizens. One Somerset captures this idea on page 8, *"The ambition is very clear – to improve the lives of*

residents, businesses and communities. Everyone wants better outcomes for the people and businesses of Somerset and local government that is fit to support them and drive that improvement.”

- However, the business case doesn't do the necessary work to describe the current starting position (the challenges Somerset faces or where services are now) or how One Somerset intends to practically achieve that vision.
- We analyse the narrative for children's and adults' services, and economic development below, which shows this challenge is multi-layered:
 - The description of Somerset's challenges is incomplete in important areas, and in parts lacks analysis.
 - There is limited acknowledgement of the fact that important services currently under-perform, discussion of the issues and challenges involved, and how new structures would contribute to improvement.
 - Beyond organisational restructure, and with the exception of developing Local Community Networks (which we analyse below), the description of the reforms required in critical areas is limited.
 - Finally, given that the County Council currently delivers many of the key services, there is a question as to why the county hasn't done some of this work already. Most of it does not rely on control of District services.

Children's services

An incomplete picture of the challenges faced

- One Somerset references some of the challenges facing children and young people but the description and analysis is relatively brief. Educational outcomes and low university admissions both get one short bullet point each on page 125 for example, despite being areas of concern.
- There is a range of important omissions, particularly a lack of analysis regarding schools and education where local authorities have critical functions. Evidence suggest performance is mixed here – in terms of educational attainment, performance is below the national average (with an average attainment 8 KS4 score of 44.9 compared with 46.8 on average for England), rates of exclusion are significantly higher than the national average (fixed term exclusions in 2018/19 were 9.71% compared with national average of 5.71%), and rates of self-harm are also significantly higher (with 40% higher rates of hospital admissions).
- While Somerset now has more than 120 academies, the local authority retains a critical role as a champion of educational needs and quality provision, with a role to work with all school leaders to ensure excellent services and outcomes for children and young people, including their pivotal role in enabling effective prevention and early intervention. There is no discussion of these functions despite being a critical role for Local Authorities.
- Similarly, there is limited description of inequality and poverty as it relates to children and young people, despite the huge impact this has on Somerset's economy, individual life chances and demand for services.
- Without a more detailed understanding of the current challenges and service issues (the as-is picture), it is difficult to assess the merits of any business case for change.

Limited analysis of current performance of services or strategy to reform

- The business case notes that services were rated as inadequate by Ofsted in 2015 and, in 2017 were judged to be 'requiring improvement to be good' as well as the improvement journey the county is currently on (page 34). There is no further discussion of the issues or approach that will be taken on the next stages of this journey, despite a significant dependency on the structure and operating model chosen. A visit by Ofsted in 2019 recognised improvements (for example in leadership) but noted there is still too much variation in the quality of services that children receive).
- Similarly, the case notes performance 'weaknesses' relating to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) (page 34) but again, contains no in-depth discussion of issues, including details about how the Written Statement of Action to address significant areas of weakness will deliver on required improvements. In fact, the case implies the problem is related to Somerset being a two-tier area, saying, "*This is seen in other two-tier areas in part due to the need to work across partners.*" This fails to reflect the critique of Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission report, which noted a lack of focus on the experiences of SEND children and families, a lack of leadership capacity across area services, weak partnership working, and poor assessment and meeting of need caused by inconsistent practice (among other findings). The ability of any new local government configuration to help address these failings is an important consideration, yet the case is silent on this interaction. As a result, it is not possible to confirm or not whether a single unitary will be able to deliver improved outcomes in this area.

Lack of detail on how services will improve

- The business case makes valuable points – for example about the voice of children in services and outlines the importance of care leavers but does not go any further to detail the proposed approach to these issues, particularly regarding care leavers.
- The business case references the Hertfordshire Model and Somerset's commitment to it but says nothing more on this and how this will be tailored to Somerset's context and implemented. Hertfordshire's model is well known in the sector and is being implemented by a range of other councils, so we expected to see more explicit and detailed plans learning from these experiences or reporting from current implementation.

- There is no discussion or analysis on the work needed to gain more control over the demand for and cost drivers for children's services, which the County Council has struggled with, and no plan for catering more effectively to special needs. There is also no financial analysis on the investment needed to fund improvement, what the financial benefits might be over time, and how different Local Government options might impact that.
- There is also minimal consideration about how education related responsibilities will be approached, which is a gap given the importance of these services.
- Again, the lack of detail makes it impossible to assess how effectively the One Somerset business case will be in improving Local Government Services and outcomes – the ultimate aim set in the business case.

Adults' services

An incomplete picture of the challenges faced

- One Somerset contains a partial description of the current challenges. The business case notes, for example, Somerset's demographic challenges (page 30) but underplays the current and future impact of these: *"The rise in older population could lead to a population in poorer health and create an unsustainable demand on services."* We would expect to see further detail on this theme – for example, quantification of the current or future pressure on services and current efforts to deal with that.
- The business case is silent on the issue of working age people with mental health problems and learning disabilities, despite the importance of this cohort of people who achieve poor outcomes.

Little acknowledgement of the current underperformance of services

- Performance in adults' services is average in Somerset. For example, of Somerset's performance against the 27 ASCOF indicators, in 2018/19 15 were ranked in the bottom half of all councils and 12 in the top half. For people using services, Somerset ranks 115th of 151 for overall satisfaction and services for carers are poor (the county is 133rd of 151 in terms of ease of carers finding service information and 122nd for consultation of carers in service design).
- Spend on adults' services, compared with other councils in CIPFA's nearest neighbours' group is low, and spend on prevention is very low. Preventative spending was cut in 2018 by £4.5m – including £1.75m of cuts in services for disabled people and £2.75m in services for adults in receipt of adult social care. These cuts are aimed at precisely those services that are needed to engender long-term sustainability, suggesting a service where the short-term need to balance the books is overriding arguably more important considerations of long-term sustainability.
- Available evidence suggest that the service is still overspending, despite recent cuts (£1.338m for the FY 2019/20) which suggests that significant, current demand pressures cannot be contained.

Lack of vision or detail on how services will improve

- Somerset County Council is pursuing a 'Promoting Independence' model of support introduced in 2017/18, but there is a lack of discussion of the how this is being implemented and indications of success.
- Given current financial challenges with the service, future demand pressures are likely to be increasingly unsustainable. In the next 10 years the projected growth amongst 65+ age group is around 35%, and the number of people 75+ will almost double, to close to 117,500. By 2033 the population in their 80s will be equivalent to those in their 20s.
- Given this backdrop and in order to provide confidence that the One Somerset business case can meet its aim of better services, we would expect to see more detail on a proposed set of reforms, encompassing areas such as disability and LD services, early intervention, setting up locality working and how plans play into better integration with health services as part of the emerging ICS.

Growth and Devolution

- The business case suggests limited development of a firm ambition for devolution or a wider economic strategy for the region.
- Our review found a lack of detail on the current economic make-up of Somerset, its established or growth sectors, or discussion of plans to stimulate the levers of economic growth and prosperity for the region. As with Children's and Adults' services, this lack of detail and plans is an important omission given the acknowledged underperformance on a wide range of economic indicators when compared to the national average (for example productivity, wages, qualifications, average new business establishment rates). It is also well understood that these factors flow on to affect local and national tax take and demand for the largest areas of national and local government services.
- In other areas, devolution has provided a pathway to secure greater funding for development, a platform to attract greater investment in high-potential sectors, as well as a basis to develop regionally specific approaches to skills development, housing and transport (among other areas).
- The One Somerset case states that *"Devolution and Mayoral Combined Authorities are viewed as part of this business case and overall process"* but then limits any discussion of plans to two short paragraphs on page 18

and one on page 91. We found no discussion of more concrete devolution objectives or plans for developing these with partners in Somerset. As a result, it is not possible to properly assess the merits of any plans for levelling up or devolution given the absence of content, raising questions about how well connected One Somerset's business case is to a longer-term regional strategy.

Deliverability on stated outcomes

Overall timelines are ambitious, and the benefit profile does not align to the timing of tasks. How the culture change and transformation will take place to deliver a new operating model is not described.

- The business case's timelines are ambitious and do not align with benefits realisation timeframes (we understand that 75% of the total annual benefit is realised in the year of vesting or year 2 of the model). Based on review of other authorities' recent similar implementation programmes, we believe that assuming Jan 21-May 22 for delivery is unrealistic for a major programme of this kind.
- Also, the programme workstreams described do not cover all the transformation of services described in Chapter 7, especially adults' and children's social care and economic growth.
- This calls into question the validity of the modelling assumptions used and reflects a very high-level approach to implementation planning.
- Compounding this problem is a lack of any detail or costs as to how One Somerset intends to transform structures and culture to a new operating model that would be capable of delivering change to services. In regard to much of the proposed new operating model (such as robust data analytics for example), it raises a question of why the county hasn't implemented this change already – it does not rely on creating a new unitary.

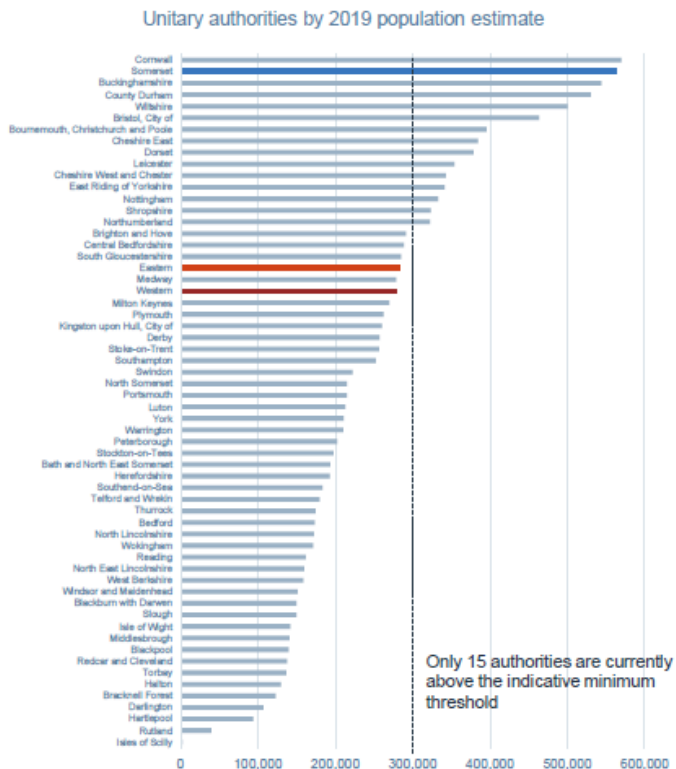
These factors undermine confidence that One Somerset will deliver the change set out rather than default to current service patterns.

MHCLG Test: Credible geography

This section analyses the One Somerset business case against MHCLG's test to ascertain that 'the area of each unitary authority is a credible geography'.

The size and diversity of Somerset means that there is a significant risk that Local Government will become disconnected from the people and places it serves under any new unitary model. The scale of a large single unitary as described in One Somerset is in tension with the ambition to deliver place-led services and while the development of Local Community Networks is potentially part of a solution, the design outlined here is likely to be too top down to foster a genuinely localist approach. In addition, a single council may struggle to reflect the diverse economic geography of Somerset, creating an effective barrier to providing tailored services that are responsive to the different businesses in the four functional economic market areas that exist.

Somerset's characteristics mean that a single unitary is likely to struggle to account for the diversity of Somerset's communities and risks becoming disconnected from the people and places it serves, stymying attempts to deliver responsive, place-led services.



- Somerset’s population will be more than 600,000 people within ten years, creating the second largest non-metropolitan unitary government in the country and higher than MHCLG’s indicative maximum guideline.
- Additionally, Somerset is physically a sizeable county – 1,331 square miles – with a dispersed population. 48% of residents live in a rural area (compared to 18% for England at the last census).
- Given these characteristics, a 63% reduction in councillors (100 down from 269), will leave average representation of 5,630 per councillor compared with ~ 3,150 in the rest of England on average. This creates a scenario where councillors will have significantly larger footprints compared with now, both geographically and in terms of population, creating higher workloads. This is likely to result in the nuance and detail of local issues being aggregated upwards and lost (especially where rural areas are included with a market town in a Councillor’s remit, for instance).
- This risk is highlighted in a recent report, *Bigger is not better: the evidenced case for keeping ‘local’ government*, by Professor Colin Copus, Professor Steve Leach, and Associate Professor Alistair Jones of De Monfort University. The report summarises analysis of 300 independent academic reports which look at the

effect of increases in council size. They state that the evidence shows that reducing councillor numbers in reorganisations, “greatly increases the difficulties and complexities of the work of councillors, while distancing them from their communities.”¹ Given that One Somerset advocates an increase in the number of people represented by each councillor of 79%, this risk seems particularly significant for the One Somerset proposal.

- As well as risking a reduction in local government’s responsiveness to place, Copus, Leach and Jones also note that the published evidence highlights a further risk of reducing the vibrancy of local democracy across a range of further measures (including electoral turnout, public trust in councillors and officers and levels of engagement – among others). Again, this risk seems particularly acute in One Somerset’s proposal to create a single unitary covering as large and diverse a place as Somerset, without effective measures to mitigate this impact.

The One Somerset business case gives a more thorough account of how it plans to develop Local Community Networks (LCNs) as a way of “giving people real power and real influence over the decisions that affect them most.” However, there are inconsistencies in the aims and ethos described compared with the planned approach, which casts doubt on its potential effectiveness at fostering local engagement in the scheme.

- Developing community networks, with potential devolution of assets and funding to community is a potentially powerful reform that can vest power with and tap into community potential. We note that the Stronger Somerset business case also includes a similar type of reform.
- The business case describes that the geography of LCN’s will be based on PCNs. This ‘top down’ approach to boundaries appears at odds with genuine localism which is unlikely to always align with PCN boundaries.
- The business case also suggests that LCNs which will operate as ‘committees of the council cabinet.’ Evidence from other places such as Wiltshire, where this structure is in place, suggest that these mechanisms are poorly attended and also perceived as top down structures.
- There is no reference to any new team to deliver this work and no costs, which makes the subsequent content an aspiration at this point, rather than something that has been planned and costed into a new model
- These points appear problematic, when also considered alongside the significant reduction in councillors proposed in One Somerset; in a model that allowed for a greater number of councillors, there would be a greater capacity for representatives to support this approach.

One Somerset does not reflect the natural economic geography of Somerset. There is no description of how it intends to take account of its scale to provide services that are genuinely responsive to the different businesses in the county.

¹ Copus, Leach, Jones. *Bigger is not better: the evidenced case for keeping ‘local’ government*. De Monfort University.

- As the One Somerset business case explains, Somerset's economy is not a homogenous whole but comprises distinct functional economic areas, travel to work areas and housing markets. This is noted on page 129: *"Somerset's economic geography is pulled in at least two and possibly up to four directions,"* and *"the administrative county straddles five travel to work areas (TTWAs) and approximations of four functional economic market areas (FEMAs)."*
- One Somerset makes the argument that, *"even though it would straddle multiple FEMAs and labour markets, this scale [i.e. provided by a single unitary] is a strength for an area that does not have an anchor city or polycentric city region to drive growth and development."* and that, *"a unitary structure would create a focussed economic development service that can work more closely with business."*
- While there may be an economy of scale for a single team over two teams, it is difficult to see how having one economic service covering these differing areas is an advantage in providing tailored growth and development services. There are undoubtedly issues that will cut across the county and will be best addressed collaboratively or as part of a future Combined Authority. However, distinctive economies are more likely to be better served by Local Authorities that can recognise and respond to distinct characteristics in a tailored way.

In terms of working within and complimenting current public sector boundaries, business cases for both a single unitary and two unitaries align well to current public sector boundaries.

- None of the business cases under consideration plan to change the geographic footprint of local government in Somerset, meaning that either a single unitary or two unitaries will fit with the current boundaries of health, police, and fire (while noting that police, and fire and rescue boundaries are not coterminous with Somerset as they cover larger Geographic areas).
- We note that the East / West split ensures good alignment with PCC and Fire and Rescue operational structures, which also have an East / West split.

MHCLG Test: A good deal of local support

This section addresses strategic analysis of the One Somerset business case against MHCLG's test to ensure that the business case 'commands a good deal of local support'.

We did not find evidence that could substantiate One Somerset's multiple claims of "significant and growing" support from different stakeholder groups. There are insufficient references, quotes, or names to corroborate support from the groups claimed including business, MPs, public sector partners, and town and parish councils. In evidencing public support, One Somerset does not publish the detail of the residents' survey (for example the methodology, the questions posed or full results), making it impossible to assess the validity of the figures quoted.

One Somerset's statements of partner support lack evidence in places

- **Business:** The One Somerset proposal states it is backed by key business leaders. We found no supporting evidence for this claim. The business case includes a quote by Rupert Fox, Chief Executive of the Royal Bath and West of England Society, which is a charitable organisation. We also note that the quote appears to be in support of unitary government rather than a single unitary government.
- **MPs:** Similar to above, the business case states that it has the support of the majority of MPs in Somerset but does not name who this does and doesn't include.
- **Town and Parish Councils:** The case notes a *"groundswell of approval amongst town and parish councils"* on page 14 and on page 38 similarly states that a majority of towns parishes and the voluntary sector are in favour of a single unitary, but again provides no evidence for this.
- **Public sector partners:** One Somerset states that *"among local government's closest partners in the provision of local public services, there is a substantial consensus in favour of the single county unitary option."* (page 38). In substantiating this, we found a quote from the outgoing chair of the PCC but no further evidence is given. The fact that all four District Councils have prepared an alternative bid underlines the lack of consensus on the best route forward among councils.
- **Public support:** The One Somerset case uses figures from a residents' survey gathered *"online and through a freepost printed survey return"* (page 37) citing that, *"out of 2644 responses, 52% were in favour [of a single unitary]."* Residents are cited as saying that *"a single authority would be more efficient and simpler for the public to understand."* One Somerset does not publish this survey, full questions, methodology or full results – but rather limits inclusion to these selective figures and quotes. It is impossible to establish the validity of these results without the information to do so. This undermines the credibility of these results as being representative of Somerset public opinion.
- We note that the business case does publish detail of further stakeholder consultation undertaken by the research agency Blue Marble in Appendix H. However, this is a separate piece of research to the public survey quoted. We found results from this published exercise are considerably more nuanced, as we would reasonably expect from broad stakeholder engagement on this topic. Results from the public survey are also discussed interchangeably with research undertaken by Blue Marble, making it difficult to understand where results are from.
- There are also inferences drawn from some results which are not supportable. For example, in discussing the support of businesses and residents, the case states, on page 37 that, *"prior knowledge of the business case*

(One Somerset) was highest for those who supported a single unitary option, compared with the no change, or greater collaboration options. This was true both for residents and businesses and suggests there is a correlation between support and knowledge of the business case.” This is vague and any correlation is of questionable value as there is no basis for cause or effect (for example, people who are already sympathetic to the concept of one unitary may decide to seek out the business case for it).

Conclusion

All councils in Somerset agree that the current arrangements for local government are not working sufficiently well. Somerset faces significant challenges economically and socially, and trails behind other areas of the country across a range of important indicators.

Local government is currently not meeting these challenges – key services are underperforming, and Somerset residents are experiencing poorer outcomes than they should as a result. Financially, when viewed in the context of the increasing pressure posed by shifting demographics and people’s changing needs, it is clear that neither the current local government structure nor the current service delivery models are sustainable in the medium or long-term.

Both the One Somerset and Stronger Somerset proposals agree on the desirability of establishing unitary government as part of the solution to this challenge. The One Somerset business case proposes establishing a single unitary council on the current footprint of Somerset County Council, where Stronger Somerset proposes two unitary councils – East and West Somerset, which are collectively coterminous with the current county.

This is a critical opportunity for Somerset. The option chosen will provide the platform for local government in Somerset as well as an important partner in a potential Combined Authority for decades to come. As we have outlined here, our review has surfaced a number of significant concerns with the One Somerset business case. Taken collectively, these concerns mean that, in our view, the single unitary authority described does not effectively meet the government’s three tests or provide a reliable and evidenced route to achieving its own overall objective of better services and outcomes for the people of Somerset.

Ultimately, a proposal that seeks to establish successful local government in Somerset should be about more than the re-organisation of structures – it must provide a route to deeper reform of public services as part of the wider system and a vision for how that reform can be continued as part of a devolution deal for the region. To make the most of this opportunity, it must be treated as a starting point on a longer journey of reform, enabling local government to play its full role in levelling up Somerset’s economy, fostering growth and prosperity and improving quality of life for Somerset residents.



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January 2021

Survey of Somerset residents on local government reorganisation

Matt Bristow, Glenn Gottfried, Holly Day

Ipsos MORI



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01

Summary

1 Summary

- When presented with four options to replace the current structure of local government in Somerset, the Stronger Somerset proposal to create two new unitary councils of Eastern and Western Somerset was the most preferred. Three in ten (29%) preferred the Stronger Somerset proposal compared with 27% who preferred more collaboration between councils within the current structure, 23% wanted no change at all, while just 15% said they preferred the creation of a new single unitary council for all of Somerset.
- Somerset residents recognised that there is a difference between Eastern and Western Somerset when it comes to landscape, infrastructure and people. A majority (54%) agreed there is a difference while only 18% disagreed. A majority in both the areas of what would become Eastern and Western Somerset agreed to this (51% in Eastern Somerset and 56% in West Somerset).
- Most Somerset residents found each of the challenges set out within the Stronger Somerset Outline Business Case to be a concern.¹ The most pressing issues residents recognised are the challenges facing young people (72%), challenges facing the economy (71%) and disadvantages of older people (70%).
- Overall, residents were more likely to think that the ability to address these challenges will stay the same if the proposal to create two new single unitary councils goes ahead. However, few thought that it would make things worse. For example, when it comes to the challenges facing young people, 50% said things would stay the same if the proposal went ahead, 23% said it would make it better while 16% say it would make things worse.
- Sentiment was more divided when it came to the Stronger Somerset proposal improving local democracy. For example, when it comes to the ability of local government to make decisions for the local area 36% said having two councils would make things better, 24% said worse and 33% said it would stay the same.
- Amongst those who preferred the Stronger Somerset proposal, these residents were much more likely to think that the proposal will improve both the ability to address the challenges facing Somerset and strengthen local democracy.
- When it comes to support for the principles of devolution and localism, residents were very much in favour of these principles. Two-thirds (66%) said they support devolution (in line with both national and local polling) while 71% support said they support localism.
- Somerset residents showed higher levels of satisfaction with their district council than they did with Somerset County Council. Two-thirds (67%) said that they were satisfied with their district council (15% dissatisfied) compared with 45% who were satisfied with the county council (31% dissatisfied).
- The services people were most satisfied with are waste and recycling collection (79%), parks and green spaces (71%) and street cleaning (64%) while they're mostly dissatisfied with road maintenance (52% say dissatisfied). The district councils were also more trusted than the County Council to deliver all services asked about in the survey, including services and support for young

¹ The Stronger Somerset Outline Business Case is available at <https://www.strongersomerset.co.uk/case-for-change>

people. The only exceptions where the County Council was more trusted was the delivery of road maintenance and environmental provisions.

02

Methodology

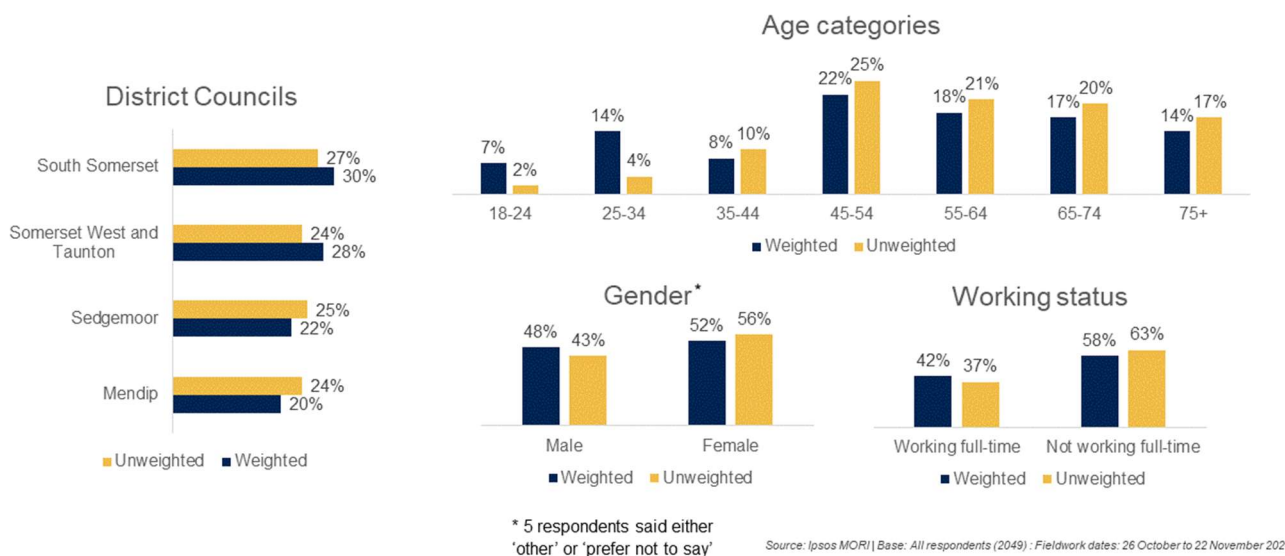
2 Methodology

Ipsos MORI carried out 2,049 telephone interviews conducted across the County of Somerset with adults aged 18+ between 26 October and 22 November 2020. Fieldwork was completed via CATI (computer assisted telephone interview) using Random Digit Dialling (RDD) to ensure random probability when contacting participants.

Quotas were used for gender, age, and work status so that the data represents the population profile of Somerset County. Ipsos MORI also ensured that a minimum of 500 interviews were completed in each of the four Somerset district councils of Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset, and Somerset West & Taunton. This is to enable comparisons between the district councils to be made.

Overall data has been weighted by gender, age, work status and district council to match the population profile of Somerset County. Figure 2.1 demonstrates the weighted and unweighted proportions of the variables used for quotas during fieldwork.

Figure 2.1: Quota demographics used during fieldwork



Where percentages in this report do not add up to exactly 100% this is due to computer rounding.

Please also note that the 'margin of error' on these figures is c. +/-2.2% at the '95% confidence interval'. This means, for example, that a figure of 50% could actually fall anywhere between 47.8% and 52.2%, though it is far more likely to fall at 50% than at the extreme ends of this range.

All comparisons between sub-groups in this report are statistically significant. If a comparison was not made it is likely that there was no statistically significance between these groups however in some instances it is mentioned where there are no differences between groups if it is important to the context or narrative of the overall findings.

03

Support for the reorganisation of local government

3 Support for the reorganisation of local government

3.1 Introduction

Residents were presented with two local government reorganisation options, along with alternative options including ‘no change’ and the option for more collaboration between existing local authorities. They were then asked which option they preferred. The option not to select any of the options was also available, as was a don’t know response.

3.2 Overall support levels for local government reorganisation options

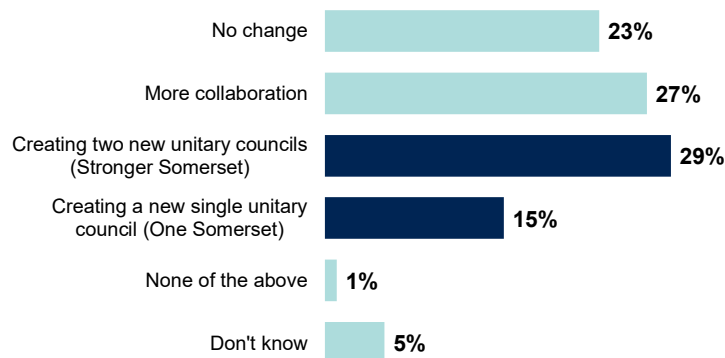
Key insight

Twice as many preferred the Stronger Somerset proposal than the One Somerset proposal of creating a new single unitary council

When Somerset residents were presented with four different options for reorganisation of local government in Somerset County, the creation of two new unitary Councils of Eastern and Western Somerset (the Stronger Somerset proposal) was the most preferred option with nearly three in ten (29%) selecting this option. This was closely followed by having more collaboration between the district councils without changing the district and county council arrangement (27%) while 23% wanted no change at all. Fifteen percent preferred the option of creating a new single unitary council (the One Somerset proposal) to replace the current local government setup.

Figure 3.1: Overall support for local government reorganisation options

Q6A. When considering how the Councils of Somerset might be restructured, which of the following four options, if any, would you most prefer?



Source: Ipsos MORI | Base: All respondents (2049) : Fieldwork dates: 26 October to 22 November 2020

There were several notable differences amongst various demographic groups when it came to reorganisation preferences. While there was no statistical significance between men and women

supporting the Stronger Somerset proposal (30% of men vs. 28% of women), women were more likely than men to prefer the option of more collaboration (30% vs. 25% respectively) while men were more likely to prefer the One Somerset proposal than women (19% vs. 11% respectively). Those aged 75+ were the age group most in favour of the status quo (no change) with three in ten (31%) opting for this option compared to 23% overall while those aged 55-64 were the most likely age group to support the One Somerset proposal (19% vs. 15% overall). Despite being the age group that most likely supported the One Somerset proposal, their preferred option was the Stronger Somerset proposal, and they, along with those aged 35-54, were the most likely age groups to support the Stronger Somerset plan (with 31% of both age groups preferring Stronger Somerset compared to 29% overall).

There were also notable differences between social grade groups.² Those with an occupation classified within the AB social grade were the most enthusiastic about the Stronger Somerset proposal with 36% choosing this as their preference compared with 30% of those in the C1 category, 27% of those within the C2 category and 24% of those within the DE category. Those within the DE category were more likely than the other groups to prefer no change with 29% opting for the status quo compared with 19% of those in the AB category, 20% in the C1 category and 22% in the C2 category.

Those who preferred no change were also presented with a scenario in which some local government reorganisation would be taking place (the Stronger Somerset proposal vs the One Somerset proposal) and asked to make a binary choice as to which they preferred. Nearly three in five (58%) of these individuals selected the creation of two new unitary councils (Stronger Somerset) while 20% selected the creation of a new single council (One Somerset).

3.3 Overall support levels for local government reorganisation options by district council

Key insight

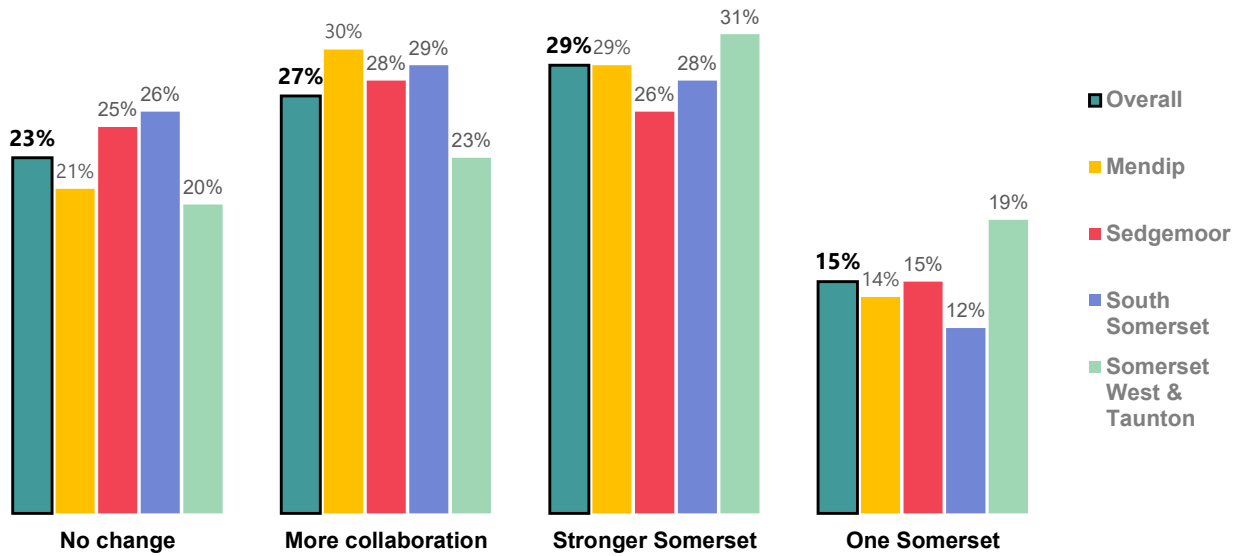
Support for the Stronger Somerset proposal was broadly consistent across all four districts, although the two reorganisation options polarised opinion in Somerset West & Taunton

Preference for creating two new unitary councils (the Stronger Somerset proposal) over creating one new single council (the One Somerset proposal) was evident in each of the four district councils. Somerset West & Taunton (the largest populated district council) was the only council where the Stronger Somerset proposal was the highest by a statistically significant margin when compared to all four options – the option of more collaboration shared similar levels of preference with Stronger Somerset in Mendip, Sedgemoor and South Somerset

² NRS social grade classification definitions are available at <http://www.nrs.co.uk/nrs-print/lifestyle-and-classification-data/social-grade/>

Figure 3.2: Support for local governance reorganisation by district council

Q6A. When considering how the Councils of Somerset might be restructured, which of the following four options, if any, would you most prefer?



Source: Ipsos MORI | Base: All respondents (2049); Mendip (501); Sedgemoor (504); Somerset West & Taunton (500); South Somerset (544) ; Fieldwork dates: 26 October to 22 November 2020

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While support for the Stronger Somerset proposal was highest in Somerset West & Taunton (standing at 31%) support for the One Somerset proposal was also highest in this district council (at 19%) showing that residents within Somerset West & Taunton are most likely to desire significant change to the current local governance structure.

04

The challenges facing Somerset

4 The challenges facing Somerset

4.1 Introduction

Respondents were asked whether they agreed that the East and West of Somerset are different to each other in terms of landscape, infrastructure and people – a principle underpinning the thinking behind the Stronger Somerset proposal for two new unitary councils.

Respondents were also asked to what extent they were concerned about each of the challenges facing Somerset listed in the Stronger Somerset business case. They were asked whether, if the proposal to create two new single unitary councils went ahead, if it would make things better or worse when addressing these challenges.

4.2 The East and West of Somerset

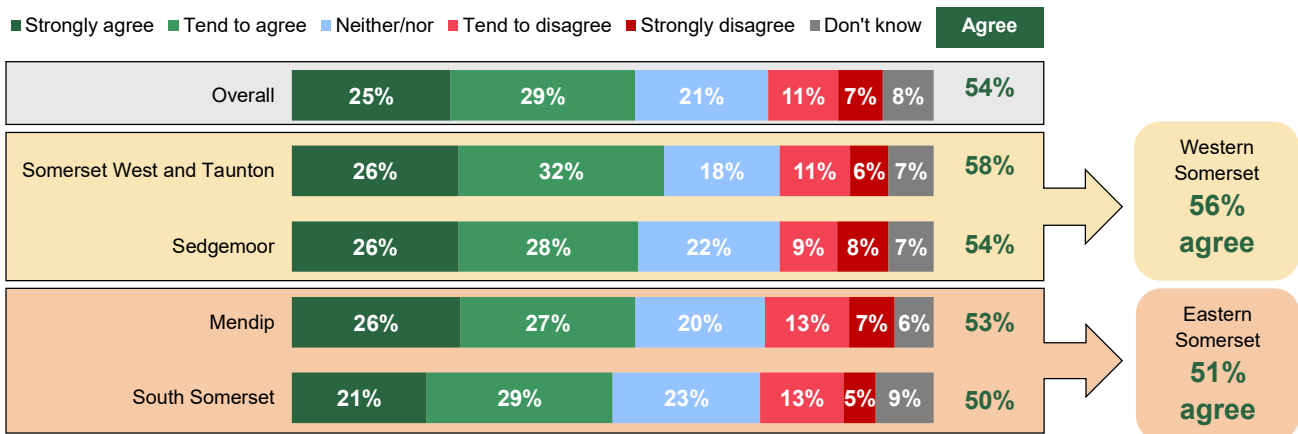
Key Insight

A majority (54%) agreed that the East and West of Somerset are different to each other. Those in the districts which would make up West Somerset were more likely to agree.

Over half (54%) agreed that there is a difference in terms of landscape, infrastructure and even people between Eastern and Western Somerset with one in five (18%) of respondents having disagreed. A further three in ten (29%) either did not know or had no strong opinion either way.

Figure 4.1: Difference between Eastern and Western Somerset

Q7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the east and west sides of Somerset are different to each other?



Source: Ipsos MORI | Base: All respondents (2049); Mendip (501); Sedgemoor (504); Somerset West & Taunton (500); South Somerset (544) : Fieldwork dates: 26 October to 22 November 2020

Those living in Somerset West & Taunton and Sedgemoor, the district councils which make up the west of the County, were more likely to agree that there are differences (56%) compared to 51% of those living in the east (Mendip and South Somerset) – a statistically significant difference between the two

areas. Fewer than one in five people disagreed with this notion (18%) but there were also many who did not know or didn't express a strong opinion either way (29%).

Aside from geographical differences, there were also a number of differences amongst demographic groups. Almost a quarter of men (23%) disagreed that these differences exist compared with 14% of women. Twice as many women than men answered that they did not know (10% vs. 5%). However, a majority of both men and women were in agreement with the statement (52% and 55% respectively).

Those aged 35-44 were most likely to disagree with this statement (21% vs. 18% overall), however across all age groups, a majority agreed that differences between the east and west are apparent. A high proportion of younger people were more likely to answer that they had no opinion either way (27%). Also, twice as many 75+ were likely to answer that they didn't know whether these differences exist (16% vs. 8% overall).

When it comes to social grade, one in ten of those with an occupation classified as AB strongly disagreed that the East and West of Somerset are different. However, those within the C2 category showed strongest levels of agreement (61% vs. 54% overall).

Those in support of the Stronger Somerset proposal were most likely to agree with the business case findings outlining the differences between the East and West of Somerset (68% vs. 54% overall). A majority of proponents of no change or greater collaboration as their preferred reorganisation option were in agreement with this principle (53% and 51% respectively), whereas 35% of those preferring the One Somerset proposal disagreed. Despite this, there was net agreement of 5% amongst those who preferred the One Somerset option.

4.3 The challenges facing Somerset and the potential to address them

Key Insight

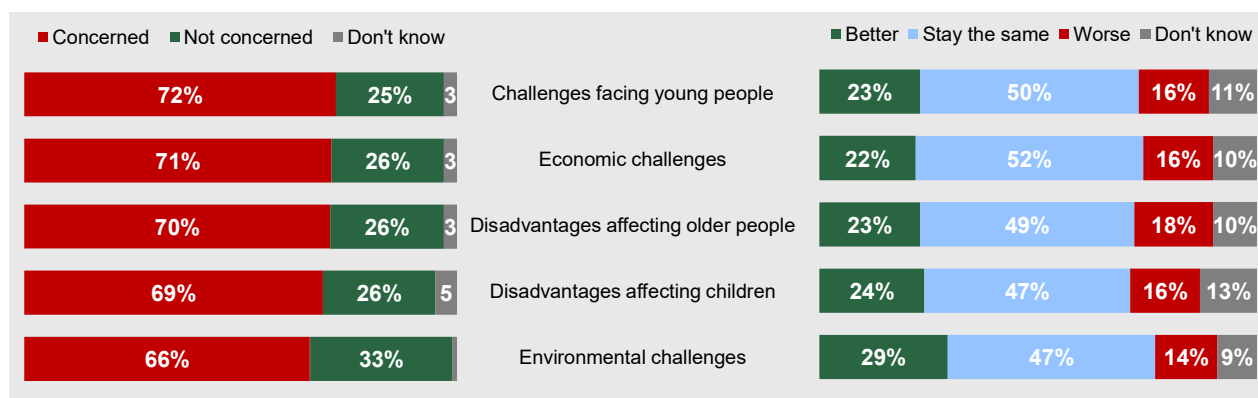
The challenges identified were all of significant concern, most notably those facing young people (72%). While more believed that the Stronger Somerset proposal would change the way these challenges would be addressed, few believed that it would make it worse.

A majority of residents agreed that all five challenges mentioned by the Stronger Somerset business case were of concern to them - the greatest of these being the challenges facing young people (72%). Most people thought that these challenges would likely remain if the Stronger Somerset proposal went ahead but, in every case, more thought that the issue would get better rather than worse as a result of creating two new single unitary authorities.

Figure 4.2: The five challenges facing Somerset

Q8. To what extent, if at all, are you concerned about each of the following issues in your local area?

Q9. Do you think the following issues would get better, get worse or stay the same as they are now?



Source: Ipsos MORI | Base: All respondents (2049). Fieldwork dates: 26 October to 22 November 2020



The challenges facing young people were identified as most concerning across the county. Overall, three-quarters (76%) of those in both Mendip and Somerset West & Taunton were very or somewhat concerned about this issue, with 50% of people in Mendip expressing they were very concerned. Comparatively, although a majority in Sedgemoor agreed, three in ten (29%) expressed little or no concern, a similar level to those in South Somerset (28%).

- When it came to age groups, those aged between 55-74 were most likely to express concern about the challenges facing young people in their local area (77%) whereas younger people themselves were most likely to be a little concerned (24% vs. 16% overall). There were few differences between social grade groups although those classified as AB were most likely to be very or somewhat concerned compared to others (77% vs 72% overall). Supporters of all available reorganisation options besides that of no change were more likely to show concern for younger people in the area (74%-77% vs. 63%), although a majority of those opting for no change were still not concerned overall.
- Half of those who responded thought that the Stronger Somerset proposal wouldn't cause this issue to get any better or worse. This was consistent across most demographic variables including age, geography and social grade. Almost a quarter (23%) thought that it would improve the issue whilst 16% thought it would worsen.

More than three quarters (76%) of those in Somerset West & Taunton said that they were very or somewhat concerned about the local economy - significantly higher than levels of concern in Mendip (69%) and Sedgemoor (66%). Women were significantly more likely to express greater concern than men about economic challenges (41% vs. 33%).

Concern was shared across the county for the challenges facing older people, but most notably of concern in Somerset West & Taunton (74%). This concern was also shared by seven in ten (70%) across all age groups, besides those who themselves were over the age of 75, over a third (35%) said they showed little or no concern about this issue.

- Those with occupations classified as C2DE were also most likely to be very concerned about the disadvantages facing older people across Somerset (39% vs. 33% ABC1).
- Again, around half (49%) stated that the proposal at hand wouldn't have a significant difference either way on the issue at hand. A majority of those who preferred an option other than the Stronger Somerset proposal were in agreement that the situation would remain the same, however, those with an opinion either way were more likely to expect the disadvantages facing older people to get worse as a result of the proposal.

Women were more likely to express concern about the disadvantages affecting children across Somerset compared with men (41% vs. 36%). Concern was greatest in Somerset West & Taunton (73%) - 10 percentage points higher than that in South Somerset (63%).

- A quarter (24%) thought that the Stronger Somerset proposal would likely improve the issues facing children across Somerset but most still thought that it would remain the same (47% overall). Among those opting for the One Somerset option, more thought it could make things better than worse (22% better vs. 16% worse).

The challenges facing the environment in Somerset were of least concern of the five issues, yet still concerning to a majority (66%) of people. Those aged 55-74 were most likely to show greatest concern, particularly compared to younger people (73% very or somewhat concerned vs. 55% of those aged 18-34). Those who were dissatisfied with the district councils and Somerset County Council were more likely to be concerned about the environmental challenges faced in Somerset.

- Of the five issues in question, more people were inclined to say that the Stronger Somerset proposal would improve environmental issues (29%) - twice as many than thought it would make things worse (14%). However, most thought that despite the proposal, environmental challenges facing the county would remain the same. Those most optimistic of improvement were from Mendip (34% better) and those preferring either the Stronger Somerset or One Somerset proposals were also more likely to think that the proposal would make things better than worse.

05

Support for the principles of devolution and localism

5 Support for the principles of devolution and localism

5.1 Introduction

Devolution and localism are principles that underpin many proposals for the restructuring of local governance structures and practices. Respondents were asked to what extent if at all they support or oppose both principles in turn following brief explanatory statements. In the questionnaire the definitions for devolution and localism were as follows:

- **Devolution** is when certain decision-making powers, as well as funding, are transferred down from Central Government to a local area. It means that decisions are taken close to where they have an effect.
- **Localism** is when certain decision-making powers or the delivery of certain services is transferred down from the Local Authority to a more localised area, such as a parish council or neighbourhood forum. It means that decisions are taken closer to where they will have an effect rather than by the Local Authority as a whole.

The impact of any local government reorganisation on issues regarding local democracy are also of importance. Respondents were asked to comment on the likelihood of the proposal to make on several issues relating to local democracy better, worse or stay the same.

5.2 Support for the principles of devolution and localism

Key Insight

Support for the principles of devolution and localism is high. Two-thirds support devolution while 71% support localism

In line with national polling data, a majority of people **support the principle of devolution** (66%) with fewer than one in ten in opposition while there was also significant **support for the principle of localism** (71%). Support for the principle of devolution is high as we have seen in other local surveys Ipsos MORI has conducted around Britain. For example, in a 2016, we found 53% of residents in 14 Local Authorities in East Anglia also supported the principle of devolution, while 16% opposed it.³

Support for the principle of devolution was shared across the county to a similar extent. Seven in ten of those aged 55-74 supported the principle - the highest across all age groups. However, of those in the younger age bracket (18-34), although six in ten expressed support for devolution, one third said that they neither supported nor opposed the principle or did not know. Those categorised within the AB or C1 social grade also support devolution in principle more explicitly than those of lower social grades.

Just over seven in ten (72%) of those who support the principle of localism were also supportive of the principle of devolution. Although a majority of those preferring no change when it came to preference for local government reorganisation expressed support for the principle of localism, a quarter (25%) said

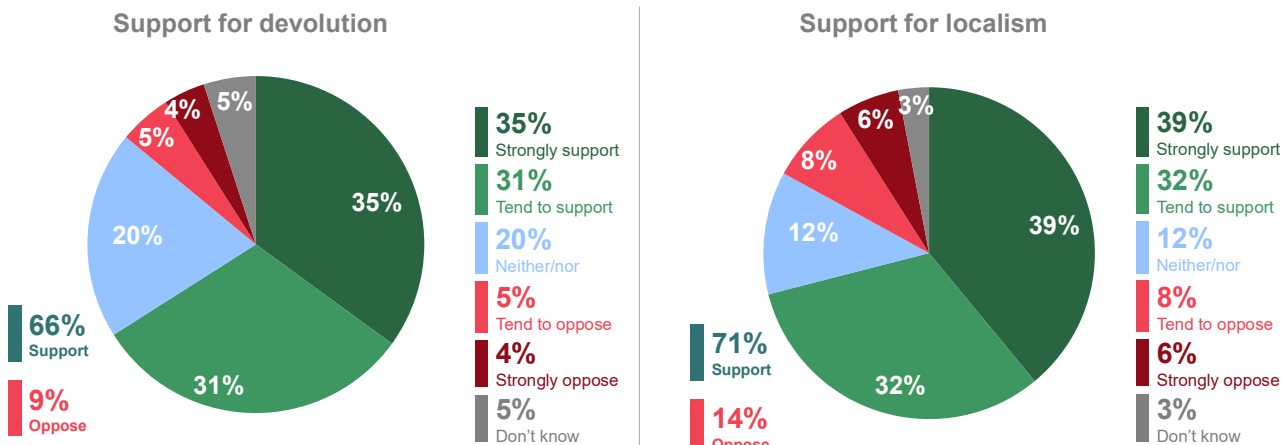
³ More information can be found at <https://www.eastangliadevo.co.uk/>

that they neither supported nor opposed the principle, a similar to those who preferred One Somerset (24%).

Figure 5.1: Support for devolution and localism

Q5A. To what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose the principle of devolution?

Q5B. To what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose the principle of localism?



Source: Ipsos MORI | Base: All respondents (2049). Fieldwork dates: 26 October to 22 November 2020



Support for the principle of localism was at similar levels to that of devolution with seven in ten (71%) expressing support compared with 14% in opposition. Women were more likely than men to be in support of the principle of localism (74% vs. 68%), although both were significantly in favour. This principle also appealed to younger people (aged 18-34), with almost eight in ten (79%) registering their support and receiving less opposition than across other age groups (7% vs. 16% of 35-54s, 17% of 55-74s and 14% of 75+). Those expressing satisfaction with local government currently across all levels were significantly more likely to be supportive of the principle.

A quarter of those who preferred the One Somerset option of reorganisation opposed the principle of localism compared to 16% of those in support of the Stronger Somerset proposal. Those opting for greater collaboration were most likely to support the principle of localism - even more so than those whose preferred option was the Stronger Somerset proposal (78% vs. 73%).

5.3 Stronger Somerset’s potential for improvement of local democracy

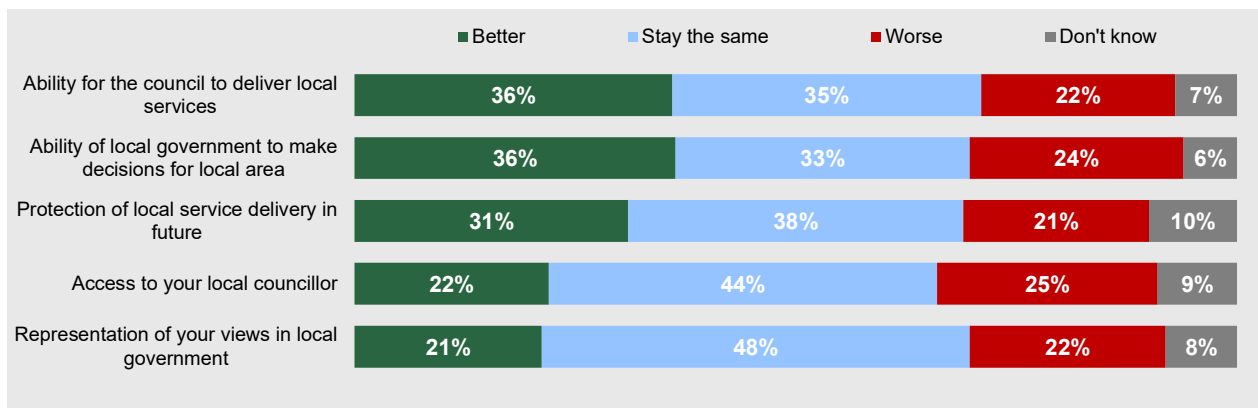
Key Insight

Views were more mixed on democratic issues. Over a third thought the proposal would improve the ability to deliver local services and make local decisions (both 36%) but there was concern that representation and access could get worse

There were mixed views on **democratic issues and the impact of the Stronger Somerset** proposal upon things such as local representation, access to local councillors, protection of service delivery and the ability to deliver local services. Although many residents thought that these things may likely stay the same, there was concern specifically that access to local councillors may get worse (25% vs. 22% better).

Figure 5.2: Stronger Somerset’s potential for improvement of local democracy

Q10. And if a proposal to create two new single (unitary) councils for East Somerset and West Somerset went forward, do you think each of the following would get better, get worse, or stay the same as they are now?



Source: Ipsos MORI | Base: All respondents (2049). Fieldwork dates: 26 October to 22 November 2020



On local services, more thought that the Stronger Somerset proposal would improve the ability for the council to deliver services (36% better. vs 22% worse). This was a view held by more people across all district councils except for Sedgemoor, where more felt that no change either way was more likely (39% stay the same vs. 35% better). Two thirds of those in support of the proposal thought that it would improve this aspect of local democracy, more than double those who preferred other options. However, of those in support of the One Somerset proposal, more thought the Stronger Somerset proposal would make this better than worse (30% vs. 24%). More also thought that the Stronger Somerset proposal would improve the ability of local government to make decisions for the local area.

Slightly more residents believed that the Stronger Somerset proposal would make access to their local councillor worse than better (25% worse vs. 22% better), while they were more split when it came to representing their views in local government (22% worse vs. 21% better). Those categorised as social grade ABC1 were more likely to expect local councillor access to worsen (28% vs. 23% of those categorised as C2DEs) and older age groups were also more likely to be pessimistic on this front although most did expect it to stay the same. Those preferring no change or greater collaboration when it came to local government reorganisation were also more likely to anticipate access to their local

councillor to worsen as opposed to be improved although, more of them did think this would remain the same.

When it came to representing their views in local government one in five (21%) expected that the Stronger Somerset proposal would improve this. Almost half of those who expressed an opinion expected this to remain the same (48%). A quarter of those aged 55-74 anticipate the representation of their views to worsen under a Stronger Somerset proposal, a similar figure to those categorised as ABC1 social grade (24%). Of those whose preferred option was the One Somerset proposal an equal proportion would expect representation to get better or worse (both 19%) with a majority anticipating no change (59%). Overall, across this range of democratic issues, most people do not anticipate significant change if the Stronger Somerset proposal were to go ahead, but in general fewer would expect things such as access, representation and service delivery to worsen.

06

Services and satisfaction

6 Services and satisfaction

6.1 Introduction

The survey gave residents the opportunity to give their opinion about a range of services delivered by either the district council(s), county council or by a combination/hybrid of both. The purpose of this part of the questionnaire was to understand resident perceptions towards the various services, how satisfied they are with them and which tier of local government they would trust to deliver different services.

6.2 Satisfaction with the district and county councils

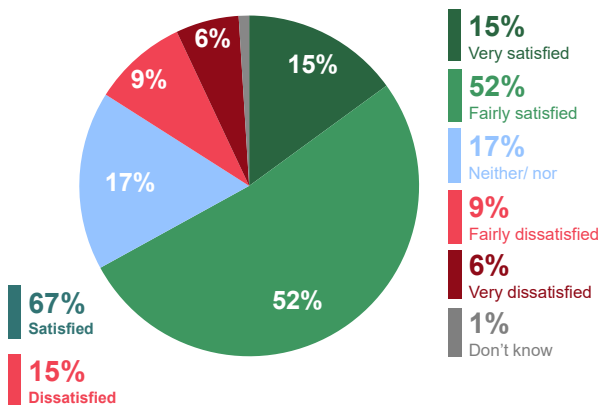
Key Insight

There is greater overall satisfaction towards the way District councils run things across Somerset than the County Council.

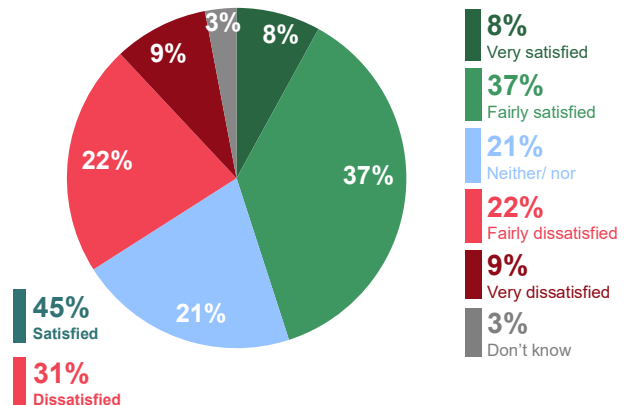
Overall there was a greater level of satisfaction with how the relevant district councils run things (67%) than the county council (45%). Just under a third (31%) of residents also said they were dissatisfied with the way the county council runs things, compared to only 15% who said the same about their relevant district council.

Figure 6.1: Satisfaction with district councils and county council

Q1. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the district council runs things?



Q2. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the Somerset County Council runs things?



Source: Ipsos MORI | Base: All respondents (2049). Fieldwork dates: 26 October to 20 November 2020



When it comes to **satisfaction with the district councils**, those living in South Somerset were significantly more likely to be satisfied overall with the way their district council ran things (72% compared to 67% overall). Otherwise there was little variance in the levels of satisfaction across the district areas.

There was a polarisation in the older age range when it came to satisfaction with the district councils. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of those aged 75 and over were significantly more satisfied with their district

council compared to the county average. Conversely, one in five of those aged between 70 and 79 were dissatisfied, which was significantly greater than the average (15%).

District council satisfaction levels also differed by social grade, with those in the upper middle class and middle class (AB) significantly more satisfied (72% compared to 67% overall), whilst those who are generally unemployed (prior to the pandemic lockdown) are also significantly more satisfied with the way the district councils run things (70%).

Those who support the principle of devolution were also significantly more likely to be satisfied with the way their district council runs things (70% compared to 67% overall).

In terms of **satisfaction levels with the way the county council runs things**, there were no notable differences between residents living in the four districts of Somerset. The main difference aligned to age, with those aged over 75 years old significantly more likely to be satisfied as to the way the council runs things (56% compared to 45% overall).

As with satisfaction towards district councils, those who are opposed to the devolution of powers from Westminster to local authorities were significantly more likely to also be dissatisfied with the way which the county council runs things.

6.3 Satisfaction with services and trust in delivering them

Key Insight

Satisfaction varies depending on service, with district councils more trusted for most services and the county more trusted to deliver those which span district boundaries, such as flood provision (environmental) and maintenance of roads.

Residents were given a number of local services and asked about levels of satisfaction and at which tier of local government (i.e. district or county level) they would trust each service to be delivered at.

In terms of service delivery there was a wide range of satisfaction levels, with a majority of residents satisfied with waste and recycling collection (79%), parks, green spaces and play areas (71%), street cleaning (64%) and environmental provision such as flood defences (53%).

When it comes to which tier of local government is trusted to deliver such services, it is generally cross-county services, such as environmental provisions, which residents trust the county council to deliver, with district councils more trusted to deliver more localised services such as parks and green spaces and street cleaning.

Figure 6.2: Satisfaction with local services and trust to deliver these services (1)

Q3. Thinking about the last 12 months, I'd like you to tell me how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the quality of each service.

Q4. For each of the following services, state whether you would have greater trust if they were delivered by xxx Council at a district level or by Somerset County Council at a county-wide level?



Source: Ipsos MORI | Base: All respondents (2049). Fieldwork dates: 26 October to 20 November 2020

Ipsos MORI

- Around four in five residents (79%) expressed satisfaction with **waste and recycling collection services**. There is a clear age difference in perception of the quality of service, with significantly more people aged between 18 and 54 likely to be dissatisfied with the quality of service (25% of 18-24 and 19% of 35-54 year olds). Conversely, those in socio-economic grade AB were more likely to be satisfied with this service (83% compared to 79% overall). When it came to the choice of delivering the service at a district or county-wide level, most residents would prefer it being delivered at a district level, although this view is not universally shared by all age groups with young people (18-34) more likely to prefer delivery at a county level (47% compared to 34% overall). Significantly more people aged between 55 and 74 (55%) and 75+ (59%) trusted the district council to deliver at a district-based level.
- Seven in ten residents (71%) were satisfied with **parks, green spaces and play areas**, which was broadly consistent across all areas and demographics.
- More residents were satisfied with **street cleaning** services than dissatisfied (+45 percentage points). Those aged between 35 and 54 were significantly more likely to be satisfied with the level of service (67% compared to 64% overall), whereas those aged over 55 were significantly more likely to be dissatisfied towards it (22% of 55-74 and 24% of 75+ year olds). As for trust in delivering the service, young people (18-24) were more likely to prefer it being delivered at a county than district level (30% compared to only 20% overall).
- Over half of residents (53%) were satisfied with **environmental provisions (such as flooding)**. Satisfaction was significantly greater amongst those residents living in Sedgemoor District (64% compared to 53% overall), whilst those living in the county aged between 55-74 were more likely to be dissatisfied with the same service (18% compared to 15% overall). In terms of trust to deliver such services, those in the socio-economic grades ABC1 were more likely to trust such services

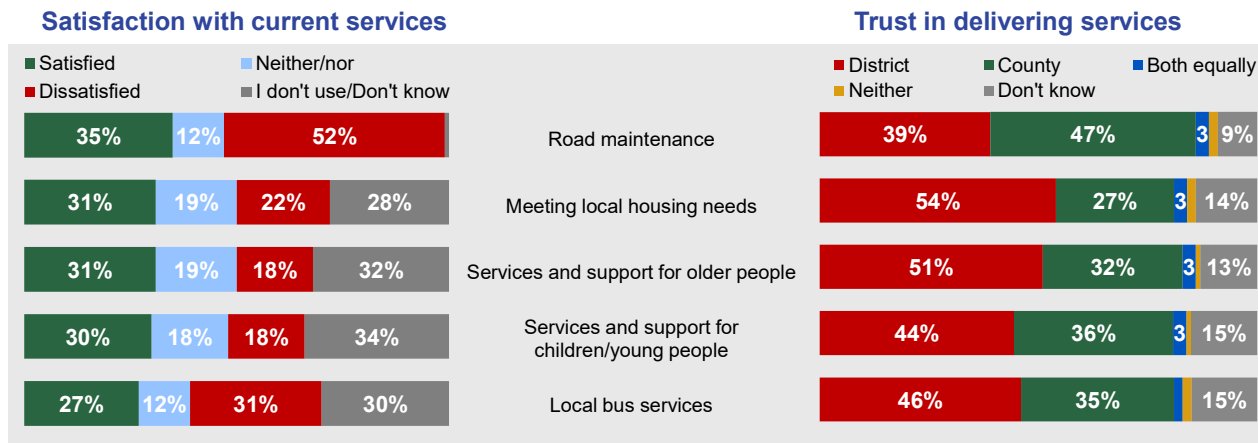
being planned for and delivered at a county level (55% compared to 51% overall), whilst those in C2DE were more likely to trust the district councils to deliver (36% compared to 33% overall).

- Satisfaction levels for **health and social care** services were consistent across all districts of Somerset, which suggests there is no significant variance in service from one to another. Significantly more older people were satisfied with the service, with just over half (52%) of 75+ year olds saying this, whilst significantly more people aged between 35 and 54 were likely to be dissatisfied with it (22% compared to 18% overall). When it comes to delivering this service at a district or county level, women were more likely to prefer it to be delivered locally at a district level (49% compared to 43% overall), whilst men were more likely to prefer to see it delivered by the county council at a county-wide level (46% compared to 40% overall). Those aged over 75 years old were least likely to have an opinion on delivery of such services (14% did not know at what level should provide this service). Older people (75+) also preferred this service to be delivered at a district level (52% compared to 43% overall), which perhaps reflects the apparent ease of accessing a more localised service for this demographic.
- When it comes to **road maintenance**, which is a service currently delivered by Somerset County Council, there was no difference in satisfaction levels between the four districts. Those aged 75 years old and over were significantly more satisfied with road maintenance (45% compared to 35% overall) whilst those slightly younger, aged between 55 and 74, were significantly more likely to be dissatisfied (55% compared to 52% overall). When it comes to who should run the service, a greater number of residents thought road maintenance should be delivered at a county rather than district level, although significantly more people who said this were also more likely to be satisfied with the way the county council runs things as well.
- **Local housing provision** is a contentious issue across the country, and fewer than a third of residents were satisfied with the service (31%). There were no significant differences between districts, and it was the young people living in the county (aged between 18 and 34) who were significantly more satisfied – over two in five (42%) said they were satisfied at what was provided (compared to 31% overall). It was older ages, specifically those between 55 and 74, who were significantly more likely to be dissatisfied with local provision (27% compared to 22% overall). When it comes to who should run the service, significantly more young people (18-34) felt that housing provision should be delivered at a county rather than district level (39% compared to 27% overall), whilst those aged between 55 and 74 were more likely to hold an opposing view and thought it should be a district level service (58% compared to 54% overall).
- When it comes to **services and support for old people**, there were higher levels of satisfaction from residents of Sedgemoor (36% were satisfied compared to 31% overall). Two in five (42%) of those aged 75+ years old were satisfied, which was significantly greater than the average (31%). Conversely, significantly more people aged between 55 and 74 were dissatisfied as to the service (21% compared to 18% overall). When it comes to who should run the service, those aged over 55 years old were significantly more likely to want the service to be delivered at a district level – 55% of 55 to 74 year olds said this (compared to 51% overall) whilst 59% of 75+ year olds said the same. Conversely, over two in five young people (43%) felt that such service should be delivered at a county level by a county council (compared to 32% overall).

Figure 6.3: Satisfaction with local services and trust to deliver these services (2)

Q3. Thinking about the last 12 months, I'd like you to tell me how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the quality of each service.

Q4. For each of the following services, state whether you would have greater trust if they were delivered by xxx Council at a district level or by Somerset County Council at a county-wide level?



Source: Ipsos MORI | Base: All respondents (2049). Fieldwork dates: 26 October to 20 November 2020



- As for **services and support for young people**, there were no significant differences between districts, with more residents being satisfied than dissatisfied at the level of service (+12 percentage points). Interestingly, significantly more 18-34 year olds were satisfied with the service (41% compared to 30% overall), whilst there was a more polarised view amongst the slightly older age group (35 to 54), with a third of this age group (34% compared to 30% overall) expressing satisfaction with the services and a quarter expressing dissatisfaction (24% compared to 18% overall). When it comes to who should run the service, more residents felt it should be run at a district level than county level (44% compared to 36% who thought county), which was consistent across all areas and demographics.
- There was net dissatisfaction towards **bus services** (-4 percentage points). There was some variance to this in Mendip District, where residents were significantly more satisfied with the bus services in their area (33% were satisfied compared to 27% overall). There was also significantly greater satisfaction amongst the older age group, with 36% of over 75s being satisfied with the service (compared to 27% overall). However, those aged between 55 and 74 were significantly more dissatisfied with the service (34% compared to 31% overall). When it comes to who should run the service, residents living in Mendip were more likely to prefer bus services to be run at a county level (40% compared to 35% overall). Young people aged between 18 and 34 were also more likely to agree with this (46%).

07

Appendix

7 Appendix

7.1 The Questionnaire

INTRODUCTORY TEXT:

Good afternoon/good evening my name is and I'm calling from Ipsos MORI an independent research agency. We're carrying out this survey on behalf of the district councils in Somerset. The councils would like to find out more about what local residents think about some of the challenges in their local area and possible ways of dealing with them in the future. This survey is being carried out in accordance with the MRS Code of Conduct, and the GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018. Your responses to the survey will be kept completely confidential and no personal information will be shared with any third parties, the postcode data will be used for analysis by local area. All data will be securely stored and deleted at the end of the research in line with GDPR.

You can access the privacy notice online at [\[LINK TO BE PROVIDED\]](#)

This explains the purposes for processing your personal data as well as your rights under data protection regulations to access your personal data, withdraw consent, object to processing of your personal data and other required information.

ROUTING/SCRIPTING INSTRUCTIONS IN BLUE

Before we start, I just want to clarify that participation in the survey is voluntary and you can stop the survey or change your mind at any time. You also have the option to answer "prefer not to say" on any question

SCREENER QUESTIONS

ASK ALL

S1. Are you happy to proceed with the interview?

1. Yes
2. No – **THANK AND CLOSE**

Firstly, we'd like to ask a few questions to ensure we are talking to a wide range of people.

ASK ALL

S2. What is your postcode please?

IF ASKED WHY: This is so we ensure we speak to a wide range of people spread throughout Somerset. This will not be shared with the district councils or anyone else and will not be used to identify you or your responses.

IF PREFER NOT TO SAY – **THANK AND CLOSE**

ASK ALL

S3. Can I just check if you work for either the Somerset County Council or any of the Somerset district councils including Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset and Somerset West and Taunton?

1. Yes – work for Somerset county or district councils – **THANK AND CLOSE**
2. No – Do not work for Somerset county or district councils - **CONTINUE**

ASK ALL

S4. Which of the following describes how you think of yourself?

1. Male
2. Female
3. In another way
4. Prefer not to say (DO NOT READ OUT)

ASK ALL

S5. How old are you?

TEXT BOX

CODE TO BAND. SINGLE CODE ONLY

1. 18 – 24
2. 25 – 34
3. 35 - 44
4. 45 – 54
5. 55 – 64
6. 65 – 74
7. 75 – 79
8. 80+
9. Prefer not to say (DO NOT READ OUT)

ASK ALL

S6. Which of these applies to you? Please refer to your status prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and national lockdown earlier this year.

1. Have paid job or self-employed full time (30+ hours per week)
2. Have paid job or self-employed part time (under 30 hrs per week)
3. Not in paid work – looking after home or family
4. Retired
5. Full time student
6. Unemployed and seeking work
7. Not in paid work and not seeking work because of long term illness or disability
8. Not in paid work and not seeking work for other reason
9. Other
10. Refused (DO NOT READ OUT)
11. Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

ASK ALL

S7 Social grade module [QUESTION: What is/was your (main) job?**If you are not currently working please think about this in relation to your last main job]**

CODE TO

- A
- B
- C1
- C2
- D
- E
- Prefer not to say

CURRENT ATTITUDES/EVALUATIONS

ASK ALL

Q1. Your local area receives services from [INSERT DISTRICT COUNCIL NAME] council. They are responsible for a range of services, such as housing and planning, street cleaning and maintaining parks and green space.

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the district council runs things?

REVERSE 1-5

1. Very satisfied
2. Fairly satisfied
3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4. Fairly dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied
6. Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

ASK ALL

Q2. Your local area also receives services from the Somerset County Council. They are responsible for a range of services such as road maintenance, and services and support for older and younger people.

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the Somerset County Council runs things?

REVERSE 1-5

1. Very satisfied
2. Fairly satisfied
3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4. Fairly dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied
6. Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

ASK ALL

Q3. I'm going to read out different types of services that are provided by both your district council and Somerset County Council. Thinking about the last 12 months, I'd like you to tell me how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the quality of each service.

RANDOMISE A-J

- A. Meeting local housing needs
- B. Waste and recycling collection
- C. Street cleaning
- D. Road maintenance
- E. Local bus services
- F. Services and support for older people
- G. Services and support for children and young people
- H. Parks, green spaces and play areas
- I. Environmental provisions such as flooding prevention
- J. Health and social care services

REVERSE 1-5

1. Very satisfied
2. Fairly satisfied
3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4. Fairly dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied

6. I/my household don't use this service (DO NOT READ OUT)
7. Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

TRUST IN DELIVERY OF SERVICES

ASK ALL

Q4. For each of the following services, please state whether you would have greater trust if they were delivered by [INSERT DISTRICT COUNCIL NAME] Council at a district level or by Somerset County Council at a county-wide level?

RANDOMISE A-J

- A. Meeting local housing needs
- B. Waste and recycling collection
- C. Street cleaning
- D. Road maintenance
- E. Local bus services
- F. Services and support for older people
- G. Services and support for children and young people
- H. Parks, green spaces and play areas
- I. Environmental provisions such as flooding prevention
- J. Health and social care services

ROTATE 1-2

1. District level
2. County level
3. Both equally (DO NOT READ OUT)
4. Neither of these (DO NOT READ OUT)
5. Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

PRINCIPLES OF DEVOLUTION AND LOCALISM

ASK ALL

Q5A. Devolution is when certain decision-making powers, as well as funding, are transferred down from Central Government to a local area. It means that decisions are taken close to where they have an effect.

To what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose the principle of devolution?

REVERSE 1-5

1. Strongly support
2. Tend to support
3. Neither support nor oppose
4. Tend to oppose
5. Strongly oppose
6. Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

ASK ALL

Q5B. Localism is when certain decision-making powers or the delivery of certain services is transferred down from the Local Authority to a more localised area, such as a parish council or neighbourhood forum. It means that decisions are taken closer to where they will have an effect rather than by the Local Authority as a whole.

To what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose the principle of localism?

REVERSE 1-5

1. Strongly support
2. Tend to support
3. Neither support nor oppose
4. Tend to oppose
5. Strongly oppose
6. Don't know **(DO NOT READ OUT)**

THE REORGANISATION OPTIONS

I'd now like to talk to you about local government in Somerset. There are a number of ways in which local government, including your district council and the County Council, could be reorganised. There are four options being considered which have been independently assessed against several criteria.

ASK ALL

Q6A. When considering how the Councils of Somerset might be restructured, which of the following four options, if any, would you most prefer?

REVERSE 1-4

1. No change – keep the councils structured as they currently are
2. More collaboration of delivering services between councils
3. Create two single (unitary) councils to replace the four district councils and county council, one representing the East and one the West of Somerset. This is known as the Stronger Somerset proposal and is supported by the four district councils
4. Create a new single (unitary) council representing all of Somerset. This is known as the One Somerset proposal and is supported by the County Council
5. None of the above **(DO NOT READ OUT)**
6. Don't know **(DO NOT READ OUT)**

ASK IF CODE 1 "NO CHANGE" AT Q6A

Q6.B And when it comes to restructuring local government in Somerset, which of the following two options would you most prefer?

ROTATE 1-2

1. Creating two new unitary councils, one representing the East and one the West of Somerset
2. Creating a new single unitary council representing all of Somerset
3. Neither **(DO NOT READ OUT)**
4. Both equally **(DO NOT READ OUT)**
5. Don't know **(DO NOT READ OUT)**

TESTING THE MOTIVATIONS BASIS FOR STRONGER SOMERSET

ASK ALL

Q7. Some people say that the east and west sides of the county of Somerset are different to each other in terms of landscape, infrastructure and even people. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the east and west sides of Somerset are different to each other?

REVERSE 1-5

1. Strongly agree
2. Tend to agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Tend to disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

ASK ALL

Q8. To what extent, if at all, are you concerned about each of the following issues in your local area?

RANDOMISE A-E

- A. The disadvantages affecting children in Somerset, including poverty and deprivation
 - B. The challenges facing young people in Somerset, such as access to higher education and affordable housing
 - C. The challenges facing Somerset's economy, such as low productivity and low wages and skills of workers
 - D. Challenges surrounding the environment in Somerset, such as reducing carbon emissions and flood prevention
 - E. The disadvantages of older people in Somerset, such as isolation and quality of their health
1. Very concerned
 2. Somewhat concerned
 3. A little concerned
 4. Not concerned
 5. Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

ASK ALL

Q9. And if a proposal to create two new single (unitary) councils of East Somerset and West Somerset went forward, do you think the following issues would get better, get worse or stay the same as they are now?

RANDOMISE A-E

- A. The disadvantages affecting children in Somerset, including poverty and deprivation
- B. The challenges facing young people in Somerset, such as access to higher education and affordable housing
- C. The challenges facing Somerset's economy, such as low productivity and low wages and skills of workers
- D. Challenges surrounding the environment in Somerset, such as reducing carbon emissions and flood prevention
- E. The disadvantages of older people in Somerset, such as isolation and the overall quality of their health

ROTATE 1-2

1. Better
2. Worse
3. Stay the same
4. Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

ASK ALL

Q10. And if a proposal to create two new single (unitary) councils for East Somerset and West Somerset went forward, do you think each of the following would get better, get worse, or stay the same as they are now?

RANDOMISE A-E

- A. Access to your local councillor
- B. The ability for the council to deliver local services
- C. The protection of local service delivery in the future
- D. The ability of local government to make decisions for the local area
- E. Representation of your views in local government

ROTATE 1-2

- 1. Better
- 2. Worse
- 3. Stay the same
- 4. Don't know (**DO NOT READ OUT**)

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