

## *From our County Councillor*

### Response to the Covid19 Pandemic

This has truly been an exceptional year. There are four statistics that demonstrate just how involved the Council has been in supporting residents:

- SCC's Public Health Team has managed over 1,700 COVID outbreaks and situations, saving lives across the county.
- SCC helped support those who needed it most by working with partners to provide or deliver 500,000 meals or food into our communities over the past year.
- The SCC contact centre has made an over 70,000 phone calls to check on those shielding, to arrange help and support or to make vaccination bookings for the NHS.
- SCC have supported our care providers and schools by spending millions of pounds to secure more than 11m pieces of personal protection equipment (PPE).

Throughout the pandemic Somerset's Public Health team has played a critical role in designing and delivering essential Covid-19 services to keep infection rates among the lowest in the country and keep people safe. This has been achieved through support to hundreds of workplaces, care homes, schools and households with outbreaks to minimise the spread. During the last year SCC have managed over 1,700 incidents with more than 20,000 cases being detected within our County boundaries. Somerset was an early pioneer for local contact tracing increasing the number of contacts made based on local insight and helping to reduce spread of the virus.

Adult Social Care mobilised pop-up care homes at the peaks of the pandemic, sourced and provided over 11 million pieces of PPE and supported settings with infection control measures and advice so they could continue to stay open for visitors. Technology innovations have kept them connected while a new app was developed by SCC's own team to support the NHS by revolutionising the way spare beds are tracked. Throughout the pandemic over 700 micro-providers have supported over 5000 people with care and support each week.

Children's Services have supported all schools to ensure they could stay open, coordinating transport, providing emergency PPE and distributing over 850 Dept. of Education devices and 50 SCC devices to enable young people to access virtual learning. Extra funds have been made available to provide families with free school meals and support during lockdown, multi-agency hubs have been established to support vulnerable children who have had to self-isolate and over 220 staff have been trained to support pupil health and wellbeing.

SCC provided funding to ensure all schools in Somerset were able to provide vouchers for children who are entitled to Free School Meals over Christmas, February Half-Term and Easter, as well as additional funding so that more families and children in need of support could receive help.

SCC's vital Communications role included a new Covid-19 website, social media campaign, Your Somerset Newspaper, leaflets, press, radio and TV messaging as well as a number of informative, timely and accessible news-style videos filmed by ex BBC veteran reporter Clinton Rogers.

### Other key achievements in delivering SCC Business Plan

SCC's focus on good financial management has continued during 2020/21 including the management of 15 different Covid funding streams and the various reporting and audit requirements around them. Latest budget monitoring reports shows continued tight financial control and a forecast

underspend of £6.6m for the year. This will be third year in a row that that authority has come in under-budget, demonstrating financial robustness and resilience.

Investment in infrastructure has included:

- completion of construction work on the iAero Centre in Yeovil which will support innovation and collaboration in the aerospace supply chain.
- opening of the Wiveliscombe and Wells Enterprise centres with a strong take up of space with 90% and 70% occupancy rates respectively. Construction work for Bruton Enterprise Centre commenced earlier this year, while the Digital Innovation Centre at the Firepool site has received planning approval.
- £19million upgrade of Junction 25 of the M5 won three of the five accolades at the Chartered Institute of Highways and Transport Awards including Project of the Year
- continuing crucial work of maintaining the highway network despite the impact of Covid, including repairing 17,947 carriageway potholes, only slightly fewer than in the previous year before the pandemic.

School projects completed include the new Hazlebrook Campus at Selworthy School, Nerrols Primary School; extension and IT upgrade at Milborne Port School, seven-class expansion for Willowdown Academy Primary School; the new King Ina Church of England Academy; the £8m expansion of Bridgwater College Academy and the £7m expansion of Bishop Fox's in Taunton. Finally, Polden Bower, a £23m special school in Bridgwater which will cater for 160 students with complex needs in Somerset.

The Climate Change response has seen the expansion of Recycle More, initially in the Mendip area; the decarbonising of SCC buildings, promotion and provision of public transport and the enabling of SCC staff to work from home and cut emissions and pollutants as a consequence of fewer commuter miles. A £1 million Somerset Climate Emergency Community Fund was created to encourage innovative community projects that share the Council's vision of working towards a climate resilient Somerset. More than 136 applications were submitted and 40 projects across Somerset were awarded grant funding.

Somerset County Council have invested in 153 apprenticeships and have supported 87 staff to complete apprenticeships. In addition SCC have also supported 20 small employers throughout Somerset to recruit apprentices into their workforce

Despite Covid-19, the new 'Family Solutions Somerset' approach in Children's Services is working in partnership through the Family Safeguarding Model and the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) to support parents to tackle health and wellbeing issues impacting on their ability to parent well.

The Family Intervention Service was also launched and provides a flexible, specialist county-wide service joining up established edge-of-care and complex family needs services with a Rapid Response service at weekends to ensure seamless support. Social Workers in Schools is a ground-breaking initiative to place social workers in schools to help keep children safe from exploitation.

The Government's consultation on Somerset County Councils One Somerset proposal and an alternative bid by the four District Councils has just finished and we await the Secretary of State's decision in July.

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