

# SOMERSET COUNTY PLAN 2012-2013 - Refreshed July 2012





# Welcome to the Somerset County Plan



John Osman  
Leader  
Somerset County Council



## New Leader, New Approach

As the new Leader of Somerset County Council I felt it right to set out my ambitions, my vision for the Council and for all our residents, communities, businesses and visitors.

This County Plan highlights the continuing priorities for the Council for the coming year – looking after vulnerable people, bringing more jobs to Somerset, building an economy that will help young people to thrive. As a first step towards achieving some of this ambition, I am committed to see more apprenticeships return across the County. Young people are our future and I will drive this Council to work on their – and everyone's behalf - at all times.

I want to bring a new spirit of optimism about the future and new ambitions for the Council, our staff, our residents and businesses. In particular I want your help, your involvement in the way this Council operates now and into the future. I want this Council to listen and learn from you. To engage and consult with you to make sure your voice is heard.





I want to develop my role to work across Somerset, to involve public sector organisations, charities, businesses, voluntary groups and communities to pull together and help each other. I want to raise standards, to improve prospects, and to deliver better services for everyone. Above all I want local people, local communities to be ready, willing and able to help themselves, their neighbours and their neighbourhoods.

There are big changes coming to Policing across Avon and Somerset. The creation of a new Police Commissioner for our area will help us work more closely to make Somerset a safer place for our residents.

But we have to achieve all this with ever-decreasing funding. Government cuts have had a dramatic impact on our own budgets and we continue to wrestle with the challenge of providing important local services with reduced resources.

As a new leader I will commit to working to promote all of these ambitions and this County Plan sets out in detail how we will seek to bring them into reality.

John Osman

Leader, Somerset County Council





# Investing in our Future

2011 was a year of growth in Somerset.

A year that saw us spend almost £70m on major projects from the Museum of Somerset to building new bridges and roads. We have done what we can to stimulate the jobs market and to create the right environment for businesses to flourish.

The year ahead sees our hugely important and exciting Broadband project take off – we won a £30m government grant to bring faster speeds to all businesses and households across the county by 2015 – and superfast speeds to all by 2020. We hope next year will be another year of growth.



Third Way Bridge opening

“Transport Minister Norman Baker opened the Third Way link road and bridge in Taunton in September. The new £7.5m project aims to reduce town centre congestion and help economic growth in the town.”



# Investing in our Future

## Achievements:

- 👍 Into Somerset, our inward investment team, has helped over 40 businesses to move to or set up in Somerset in the last three years, creating around 700 new jobs. For example, this year Into Somerset supported Paragon Laundry to refurbish premises in Yeovil and employ 80 new staff. The laundry business is expected to create a further 200+ jobs in the next two years.
- 👍 We have invested £592,000 into the Market Enterprise Centre, Wheddon Cross, to give existing businesses the opportunity to stay in Exmoor and also attract new businesses and jobs to the area.
- 👍 57 per cent of students in Somerset were awarded five or more GCSEs, including Maths and English, at grades A\* to C. This is three per cent higher than last year and is another record-breaking achievement in the Council's effort to improve qualifications held by children in the county.



The Ariel Atom. Photo courtesy of The Ariel Motor Company, Somerset.

“We have won a £30m government grant to bring faster broadband connection speeds across Somerset, particularly in remote locations.”

# Investing in our Future

## We will:

- ⇒ Bring high speed broadband to homes and businesses across Somerset from 2015.
- ⇒ Promote economic growth through an enterprise culture within Somerset, and support existing successful companies to stay and expand, creating more jobs for Somerset.
- ⇒ Invest in and improve our infrastructure, such as roads, and protect our unique environment to make Somerset a more attractive and competitive place to do business and create new employment opportunities.
- ⇒ Continue to support even more inward investment opportunities, attracting new businesses into the county.
- ⇒ Ensure Somerset benefits from any proposed new nuclear power station development at Hinkley Point.
- ⇒ Make it easier for people to visit and enjoy Somerset as a tourist destination.
- ⇒ Stimulate investment in new schools and improve the condition of school facilities.
- ⇒ Work in partnership with schools to actively support increased educational attainment and improved outcomes for children and young people.
- ⇒ Improve young people's prospects and skills through the promotion of a range of learning opportunities and apprenticeships and seek to reduce unemployment.



Museum of Somerset, Taunton

"The Museum of Somerset reopened in September 2011. Admission to the museum is free and 25,000 people visited during the first six weeks."





## Caring & Protecting

We are here to support and protect vulnerable people and their carers.

We provide care to a wide range of people in the county including those who are older, people with physical or learning disabilities, people with mental health problems or sensory loss and their carers. Wherever possible we aim to support people in their own communities and every year help over 15,000 adults to remain living at home.

People are living longer and surviving more health problems. Most people are independent, but some people, often with very complex care needs, will always need the Council's help. This number is growing. It's a challenge in tight financial times, but we are determined to meet it. The Council will give everyone who wants it as much choice and control as possible. We will help people to make their own decisions and fashion their own care and support in ways that suit them best.

"We launched the online AskSARA service to make it easier for people to find equipment to help them stay independent in their own homes. It helps people decide what equipment they need and shows them where they can find it locally."





# Caring & Protecting

## Achievements:

- 👍 Somerset's Children's Services have been rated as 'performing well' by Ofsted for the fifth year in a row.
- 👍 Following an inspection in October 2011, Somerset County Council's Adoption Service was judged to be 'outstanding' by Ofsted.
- 👍 Our work to help people at risk from flooding received a £160,000 boost from the European Regional Development Fund. We have used this money to fund a 'Flood Aware' project to raise awareness and help people be more prepared for a flood event by involving local communities in creating innovative and practical solutions to reduce the risk and effects of flooding.



"More than 500 children are in care in Somerset. In 2011, 37 new foster care households were successfully approved, compared to 22 in 2010. More foster carers are needed in the next year to give the rising number of children in care safe and stable homes."



# Caring & Protecting

## We will:

- ⇒ Continue to protect and care for the most vulnerable children, adults and families in the community and support their carers.
- ⇒ Support and recruit more people to adopt and foster children.
- ⇒ Help people to regain their independence after a period of illness or a stay in hospital.
- ⇒ Enable older people and those with disabilities to have choice and control over their long-term care.
- ⇒ Improve the prospects of children and young people most at risk of being disadvantaged.
- ⇒ Promote healthy lifestyles to help individuals live longer, healthier and more independent lives.
- ⇒ Reduce waste and help residents recycle.
- ⇒ Reduce the Council's own carbon footprint.
- ⇒ Promote the green agenda and green energy use, including the production of energy from waste.
- ⇒ Work with National Grid to make sure that the electricity distribution network respects the unique character of the county.
- ⇒ Put in place appropriate flood alleviation schemes and help people to be able to help themselves to protect property in at-risk areas.
- ⇒ We will work with Military and Community partners to develop and deliver the Armed Forces Community Covenant and support the Armed Forces in Somerset.





# Keeping Costs Down

We have moved from one challenging financial year – and all the signs are that we face very difficult challenges in the years ahead.

Already it is clear that we will need to look for value for money in everything that we do. We are doing what we can for our residents by freezing Council Tax for a third year in a row. We are looking to slim down our costs by reducing the number of buildings we use and we are looking to save multi-million pounds by changing the way the Council is run. And importantly, we are moving away from delivering services ourselves, instead we will use our slimmed down budgets to help communities, organisations and businesses take over and deliver quality services themselves.



"Through the Next Steps Volunteer Bureau, this year we are on target to recruit and place 1,200 volunteers to work in social care, from volunteer drivers to people providing support at day centres. We are also working with Next Steps to develop a volunteer scheme that will help vulnerable people to take part in activities in their communities."



# Keeping Cost Down

## Achievements:

- 👍 Council Tax was frozen for the second year in a row.
- 👍 Somerset County Council is progressing with its aims to reduce the number of major office buildings it operates from 33 to just five – saving £5m over the next ten years.
- 👍 We are making plans to deliver £20m in taxpayer savings through the Council's Change Programme. This will look to move some areas of work to the private, charitable and voluntary sectors. We will retain supervision but not provide the service ourselves. An example of this is the recent transfer of the catering and cleaning contract to the private sector, saving £2.3m over seven years.



"We have introduced 'Tell us once', a service that takes some of the burden away from bereaved families, by taking relevant information about someone who has died and passing it on to other public sector bodies that deal with pensions, driving licences, bus passes etc. The service is a relief to families at a difficult time and has allowed the public sector in Somerset to become more efficient and joined up."



# Keeping Cost Down

## We will:

- ⇒ Freeze Council Tax increases for a further year – that will be three in a row.
- ⇒ Make the Council far more flexible and agile in the way it manages and deploys its employees. Ensuring staff fulfil their responsibilities with a positive attitude.
- ⇒ Let others provide services where they are able to do it well and at less cost.
- ⇒ Use our property to best effect for frontline services by sharing, transferring or selling them.
- ⇒ Encourage participation, volunteering and community self-help. Help others to help themselves.
- ⇒ Help local councillors to adapt or change the Council's services to suit local needs.
- ⇒ Proactively seek the views of residents, business, staff and members to rate the quality of our services and make them more fit for purpose
- ⇒ Work with our partners to simplify access to our services.
- ⇒ Be open and transparent and go beyond statutory duties to provide information on costs and decision-making to our residents.
- ⇒ Forge ever closer links with town and parish councils, community groups and residents.





# Contacts

If you have any specific questions or comments on this publication, please contact the Planning and Performance Team on 01823 358281 or email [planningandperformance@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:planningandperformance@somerset.gov.uk).



This document is also available in Braille, large print, tape and on disc and we can translate it into different languages. We can provide a member of staff to discuss the details. Please contact 0845 345 9166.



*"I want this Council to listen and learn from you, to engage and consult with you to make sure your voice is heard."*  
*Cllr John Osman, Leader of Somerset County Council.*