

29th November 2024

Dear Colleague

I hope this letter finds you well.

In September 2023 the Council and NHS Somerset signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) committing us to working more collaboratively and equitably with the VCFSE sector.

It is now just over 12 months since the MoU was signed so I thought it worth updating you on progress and on the Council's current position and ambition. Along with the progress you'll have seen highlighted in the VCFSE Collaborative's newsletters, there has been work going on 'behind the scenes' too.

In July we appointed a jointly-funded post to support and improve partnership working with VCFSE and join up our efforts across the NHS and Council. We have helped develop and coordinate bids for external funding and enabled the Shared Prosperity Fund to bring much-needed resources to Somerset's VCFSE sector. Work is ongoing to better understand Council and NHS commissioning of the VCFSE sector, and recent agreements have been over the longest duration possible.

Spark Somerset has recently published the [2024 State of the Sector report](#), which includes key recommendations for how the Council and its public sector partners should respond.

In the year since we signed the MoU Somerset Council has faced numerous challenges, and has had to make some very difficult decisions. I am pleased however that through better partnership working with VCFSE sector organisations and other partners (including local councils), we are making progress on delivering the best possible outcomes for Somerset's communities. Thank you for your support and engagement, and please be assured that we remain committed to furthering our collaborative relationship.

We have agreed the devolution of valued assets and services to some of our local councils, and we are progressing opportunities with others. We will continue to support collaboration and devolution to appropriate local partners, both to protect the services our residents value and because we know that local leadership and oversight ensures an effective response to the needs of our communities.

We are working with Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) to develop a Charter to underpin the relationship

between Somerset Council and our city, town and parish councils. Aligning with the VCFSE MoU this will be key in cementing a broad partnership and securing long term equitable collaboration in meeting the needs our residents.

You will have seen that Somerset Council is going through a significant restructure and transformation programme to become financially sustainable. We are doing our best to carry on with business as usual, but recognise that the situation has caused frustration with some of our services.

We are working towards financial stability, which is crucial in enabling us to focus on the development and growth of our county. We are committed to making Somerset a thriving and prosperous place for all its residents.

At the time of writing, we await full details and analysis of the implications of the Autumn Statement. Whilst there was sympathy for local government's financial situation, and some specific responses, we must recognise that there is a long way to go to address social care, homelessness and SEND pressures. There are clearly more difficult and heartbreaking decisions facing local government, and effective partnership working will become increasingly important.

We will receive details of the financial settlement from Government in late December, which makes it difficult to assess the implications for us and our partners. We are assured by Government that this 'cascade of uncertainty' will end, with multi-year settlements helping us to plan better for the long term.

On the topic of working together to support our residents and communities, I would like to highlight the importance our fostering services, and seek your help in promoting them. You'll find all the information you need here www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk/.

We have seen a significant increase in the demand for foster placements, and this is a factor in our current overspend as we do not have sufficient foster carers to meet the demand. The best outcome for these children is to provide them with safe and loving homes, but we are approximately 50 foster carers short. I hope we can work together to close this gap and ensure that every Somerset child can grow up in a nurturing environment here. Please use your communication channels to share this message with our communities.

Once again, I thank you for your continuing engagement, challenge and support.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Bill Revans
Leader of Somerset Council