



# Somerset's Vital Issues

**2016**



## Contents

Foreword.....	3
Introduction to themes and priorities .....	4
Methodology.....	4
Grades: what they mean.....	5
The Vital Signs themes.....	8
1. Arts, Culture and Heritage .....	8
2. Education and Learning .....	10
3. Environment.....	13
4. Fairness .....	15
5. Housing and homelessness.....	18
6. Physical and Mental Health .....	21
7. Rural isolation .....	24
8. Stronger communities.....	26
9. Transport.....	29
10. Work and the local economy .....	31
Acknowledgements.....	33
References and Sources.....	34

## Foreword

### **Welcome to Somerset's Vital Issues, the accompaniment to Somerset's Vital Signs 2016.**

There are upwards of 2,000 charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises in Somerset providing essential services to our communities. As charities face a steep rise in demand for their services, and the extent of the Foundation's community investment exceeds £500,000 annually, this report provides our behind the scenes, in-depth analysis of social strengths and areas of need in our county. It points the way to where the voluntary sector – and philanthropy – can make the biggest difference.

Our research shines a light on Somerset, reflecting both the many strengths we can build on in this beautiful county and the complex social and structural challenges. These continue to affect the most isolated and vulnerable people in our communities. The accompanying report, Vital Signs, blends these hard statistics with the voices of community members to identify where community-led responses can make life better.

Undoubtedly, the majority of us in Somerset enjoy a good quality of life. We have high employment; thriving communities; and terrific environment. Our research demonstrates, however, that there is a significant level of need hidden beneath the surface. For example, the 34% attainment gap at GCSE level between children from poorer backgrounds and their peers; the striking fact that the number of 'fuel poor' households has increased to nearly 30,000 this year; and research showing that 1 in 6 older people in the county say they have insufficient social contact and feel socially isolated.

The good news is that many of the answers lie within our communities. In our view, strong communities are this county's greatest asset, and local philanthropy - reaching thousands of community groups supporting community action - changes outcomes for people experiencing the biggest challenges.

## Introduction to themes and priorities

Vital Signs is a community philanthropy tool bringing together existing research and local knowledge into two reports that provide a qualitative and quantitative health check, benchmark and needs analysis around ten (or more) social themes facing communities today.

The Vital Signs initiative was started by community foundations in Canada, and has been designed specifically by and for community foundations. It has been further developed for the UK by a steering group of community foundations, supported by UKCF.

## Methodology

Somerset's report covers 10 issues. Eight of these are based on nationally agreed Vital Signs themes. An additional two were selected as being of particular local interest for Somerset. The table below illustrates this relationship:

National Vital Signs theme	Somerset's Vital Signs themes
<b>Strong Communities</b>	Stronger Communities
<b>Fairness</b>	Fairness
<b>Arts, Culture and Heritage</b>	Arts, Culture and Heritage
<b>Environment</b>	Environment
<b>Safety</b>	
<b>Work</b>	Work and the local economy
<b>Local Economy</b>	
<b>Learning</b>	Education and Learning
<b>Healthy Living</b>	Healthy Living
<b>Housing and homelessness</b>	Housing and homelessness
	Rural isolation
	Transport

At a national level, a range of indicators have been agreed for each of the 10 national themes that allow for a relatively objective grade to be awarded showing how each Vital Signs area is doing relative to the rest of the UK.

## Grades: what they mean

Grades are used within this report and accompanying Vital Signs report to give an indication of how urgently we think action needs to be taken in relation to a specific aspect of community life. The grades are awarded in part on the basis of how the area is doing relative to the rest of the UK.

### A = Theme Grade

In order to calculate each grade we took into account three factors.

- How well Somerset is doing in this area compared to comparable areas;
- Our local research and knowledge into particular issues affecting Somerset;
- The views of our stakeholders, including partner organisations and grantees, and local communities.

The table below summarises what each of our grades mean:

A = Everything is great. Let's keep things that way!

B = Things are going well, but we can make them better.

C = The situation is OK, but could be improved.

D = Things aren't going well. We should take action as soon as possible.

E = Things are going very badly. We must act now!

Using this approach, we calculated grades for Somerset showing where we rank in a range from the top 20% of comparable areas (grade A) through the middle 20% grade (grade C) to the bottom 20% (grade E). The grades awarded in this way for each theme are set out below:

Theme	Grading
Arts, Culture and Heritage	D
Environment	D
Fairness	D
Healthy Living	C
Housing and homelessness	B
Learning	C
Local Economy	D
Safety	A
Strong Communities	A
Work	B

Whilst these grades provided an objective, nationally comparable measure of the situation in Somerset they were of limited use in enabling us to fully understand the local situation. In Somerset's Vital Issues the approach we have taken is to give a local perspective on the themes for Somerset. This involved:

1. Collection and evaluation of key statistical data to establish the main priorities revealed by the Place Analytics data sets. These data sets are essentially of the statistical indicators available in the UK over a variety of geographical levels from Super Output Areas to regions.
2. Supplementing this with a desktop local literary review designed to add substance, fill gaps in our knowledge, confirm or challenge statistical conclusions and generally inform appropriate modifications.
3. Engaged with key organisations and individuals, particularly in the voluntary and community sector, to review the draft priorities in order to check significance against specialist knowledge.

These stages were not as clearly separated in practice and often ran alongside each other in firming up the priorities for each theme.

We then revised our gradings so that they are something more than simply an assessment of how the area is doing relative to the rest of the UK. They now reflect the degree of urgency with which action is needed to address the issues raised.

Theme	Grading	What they mean
<b>Arts, Culture and Heritage</b>	<b>B</b>	Things are going well, but we can make them better
<b>Education and Learning</b>	<b>C</b>	The situation is OK, but could be improved
<b>Environment</b>	<b>A</b>	Everything is great. Let's keep things that way!
<b>Fairness</b>	<b>C</b>	The situation is OK, but could be improved
<b>Housing and homelessness</b>	<b>C</b>	The situation is OK, but could be improved.
<b>Physical and mental health</b>	<b>C</b>	The situation is OK, but could be improved.
<b>Rural Isolation</b>	<b>D</b>	Things aren't going well. We should take action as soon as possible.
<b>Strong Communities</b>	<b>B</b>	Things are going well, but we can make them better
<b>Transport</b>	<b>D</b>	Things aren't going well. We should take action as soon as possible.
<b>Work and the local economy</b>	<b>C</b>	The situation is OK, but could be improved.

Themes with a C or D grading stand out as areas where more urgent and concerted action is needed and local giving can play a key role in delivering this.

This report sets out the evidence behind these conclusions. On the strength of our findings, we believe that the priorities for community philanthropy in Somerset are:

- Building on the strength of local communities, particularly in order to address rural isolation and poor transport links
- Fairness of opportunity for all
- Homelessness and housing challenges
- Mental health.

## The Vital Signs themes

### 1. Arts, Culture and Heritage

#### **B Things are going well, but we can make them better**

Somerset is a county full of culture, ranging from the ancient mists of Avalon to the biggest music festival in the UK. We boast spectacular buildings, a wealth of talent in fields ranging from folk music to willow craft, and cathedrals and churches that tourists come for miles to see. But access is an issue in our rural county. Remote locations and poor transport means that the opportunities culture has to offer, with the health and wellbeing benefits that can result, are not consistent across our population.

Somerset's rich cultural assets are not known as well as they should be outside the County, and the enormous contribution made by volunteers is not yet sufficiently measured or celebrated. It is here the voluntary sector can make a huge contribution.

#### **What's going well**

Heritage sites and listed buildings	Somerset has a long history and is well endowed with heritage and listed buildings. South Somerset, particularly, has a high ratio of heritage and ancient buildings per kilometre. (ONS, 2007).
Engagement with the arts	Arts organisations reach a very large number of participants across the County. A 2009 study of the social impact of the arts in Somerset found 358 participative projects involving 25,289 participants: 5% of the population. (Jackson, 2009).  Somerset benefits from a good number of arts organisations dedicated to promoting the arts to rural areas via village halls. (Jackson, 2009).
Social impact	A study of the social impact of the arts in Somerset found that arts activities enabled people to take up opportunities that are presented to them, whether personal, social, economic or financial. (Jackson, 2009). The study demonstrated positive impact on participants' health and wellbeing.

Creative businesses	Mendip is better than 60% of comparable districts in the share of businesses in the area that are in the creative industry (ONS, 2008). There are increasing numbers employed in the sector (Somerset County Council, 2016c).
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Where action is needed

Cultural amenities	A measure of the number of cultural amenities available for residents of Somerset shows that the County scores worse than other areas for access (Local Futures, 2012). This includes access to sports grounds, theme parks, event venues, attractions, and so on. With fewer attractions in geographically dispersed areas, people have to travel far to access cultural amenities and this is a major barrier for those without access to transport.
Employment in creative industries	The proportion of people employed in creative industries such as the artistic professions, arts facility management, cultural education and architecture is particularly low in West Somerset, in the lowest 20% in England (BRES, 2014). Whilst not surprising given the scarcity of cultural facilities in the District, it provides some concern as this is an area of interest to many young people who would stay if the right opportunities are available. In contrast, it is an exciting area of growth for the voluntary sector where voluntary arts projects engaging young volunteers are flourishing.

And finally...

- Tourism is worth £1.3 billion to the county and 34,000 jobs (Visit Somerset, 2013).
- Somerset Day is on May 11 each year, and was launched in 2015.

## 2. Education and Learning

### C The situation is OK, but could be improved

School results in Somerset were well under national average in 2013-14 leading to a concerted plan for action. Since then a great deal of positive development has been achieved including improvement in results at GCSE level.

But this positive overall picture masks some area of concern particularly outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. An Ofsted report, Access and Achievement (Ofsted, 2013) revealed that disadvantaged white children in rural areas and coastal towns are the biggest underperformers in British schools and this pattern is seen here in Somerset where attainment gaps between pupils from low income families and their more affluent peers persist through all key stages of education (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).

It is here that the voluntary and community sector can provide holistic solutions which do not just have a narrow focus on exam results but provide young people with the chance to fulfil their potential.

The skills of the wider population are another issue where more action is needed. The number of adults with higher level skills and the proportion of Somerset pupils going into Higher Education are lower than the national average (Somerset Intelligence). In addressing this, local philanthropy can play a part by supporting voluntary organisations to engage local people in learning. Social action, or volunteering, projects have been shown to improve people's employability skills as well as doing good for the wider society (Sanders, 2016).

### What's going well

GCSE Results (A* - C) 2015	Provisional 2015 results at Key Stage 4 show Somerset's performance at 5 or more GCSE A*-C grades including English and Mathematics improved to 58.0%, compared to 53.9% in 2014. This is higher than the national average last year which was 56.1% (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).
School performance	91% of all schools in Somerset are judged to be good or better, higher than the South

	West (89%) and national (84%) averages. (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).
Young people not in education, employment or training	<p>The known number of young people leaving school aged 16-18 and not staying in education or training in Somerset has fallen since 2014 and is lower than the national average, at 4.1% of 16-18 year olds. (Department for Education 2016)</p> <p>But we know that only 92% of young people of this age group were recorded as going into sustained education, employment or training. (Somerset Intelligence, 2016)</p>
Behaviour of children at school	<p>The proportion of primary schools in Somerset judged as having good or better standards of behaviour has increased year by year since 2008 to 97.7% in 2011.</p> <p>This proportion continues to be higher than is the case nationally, regionally or in similar authorities. (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).</p>

#### Where action is needed

Labour market qualifications	Fewer people of working age in Sedgemoor and West Somerset held qualifications at degree level or above than other areas in Somerset. The average for the county is 25.6% and this is below the England average of 29.7% (ONS, 2011).
No qualifications	Sedgemoor is the area in Somerset with the highest proportion of adults with no formal qualifications: the national average is 15% of all people of working age. In Sedgemoor in 2011 it was 25%. (ONS, 2011)

<p>Young people's skills and employment</p>	<p>Somerset is well below the national average in terms of the proportion of 16-18 year old NEETs re-engaging in education, employment or training: 2.4% in 2014/15, compared to an England average of 7.7% (Department for Education, 2014). This is an area where the voluntary sector can contribute additional value. But this intensive work is expensive and requires broad based support within the community. (Somerset Intelligence, 2016)</p>
<p>Outcomes for vulnerable children</p>	<p>There is a gap in attainment between the outcomes of disadvantaged children and their peers in Reading Writing and Maths at Key Stage 2 (age 11) of 23.8%. This gap has widened from 2014, when it was 20.4%.(Somerset Intelligence, 2016). Although significant resources are directed at this area more needs to be done.</p> <p>The voluntary sector plays a crucial role in offering solutions to engage and support children without putting pressure on them to achieve higher exam grades.</p>

And finally..

- Boys are over-represented in figures for children who have special educational needs, are looked after, excluded from school or not in education, employment or training. (Somerset Intelligence, 2016)
- Somerset is in the top ten local authorities in England in terms of the proportion of its schools classified as rural for both primary and secondary schools. (Somerset Intelligence, 2016)

### 3. Environment

#### A Everything is great. Let's keep things that way!

Somerset is rich in environmental assets including sandy beaches, stretching fields, mysterious levels, and beautiful 'chocolate box' English villages. In fact, West Somerset is ranked in the top 10% most beautiful places in the UK (Local Futures, 2013) when consideration is given to its National Parks; AONBs; Heritage Coasts; 'Blue Flag' beaches; Ancient Woodland; Nature Reserves; and environmentally-sensitive areas.

But of course this beauty isn't the whole picture and there are some areas of the County experiencing very different circumstances. Those living in an urban environment in our towns and cities have less chance to enjoy the rural landscape and may be experiencing poor conditions in their immediate environment. In West Somerset, the quality of housing conditions presents challenges for some living in the district (DCLG, 2015)

#### What's going well

Natural Environment	<p>The natural environment score for Somerset, which takes into account the housing density; road density; air quality; tranquillity; natural beauty; green space; and water in an area reveals that Somerset is in the top 20% of areas in the UK. West Somerset with its sparse housing and plentiful countryside, is ranked 5th in the UK. (Local Futures, 2013)</p> <p>The voluntary sector plays a key role in maintaining these wonderful resources and ensuring they remain open to all.</p>
Tranquillity	Somerset, and particularly West Somerset with its scarce population, scores highly for tranquillity as measured by population density (ONS, 2011).
Air quality	Air quality is very good, and Somerset scores are some of the best in the country. In particular, air quality in West Somerset is in the top 10% of areas in England (ONS, 2010).

Where action is needed

<p>Living Environment Deprivation Index</p>	<p>Somerset scores more highly than neighbouring areas such as Wiltshire and Gloucestershire on the measure of deprivation as it relates to living environment. This measures both the outside living environment (though air pollution and traffic accidents) and inside, through the proportion of houses that fail to meet the decent homes standard, and those that do not have central heating. (Somerset Intelligence, 2015).</p> <p>West Somerset is the area in our county which has the most deprivation when measured in this way. It is in the top 10% most deprived areas in England for living environment. (DCLG, 2015), which means there are a large number of homes in poor condition.</p> <p>The voluntary sector has a key role to play supporting families who are experiencing the ‘double jeopardy’ of living in unsuitable conditions and being rurally isolated.</p>
<p>Flytipping</p>	<p>Flytipping remains an issue in Mendip. Statistics from 2014-15 show that flytipping incidents per population in Mendip are more than twice as high as in any other Somerset district (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).</p>

## 4. Fairness

### C The situation is OK, but could be improved

On the surface, Somerset is a relatively affluent county, with overall deprivation rates at around the national average. But inequality is a key issue for Somerset. Whilst the most deprived neighbourhoods are found within the county's larger urban areas, there are significant pockets of disadvantage in market towns, villages and hamlets hidden in national statistics. The number of 'highly deprived' neighbourhoods in Somerset (categorised as being within the 20% most deprived in England) increased to 25 at the time the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) was last measured in 2015, up from 14 at the time of IMD 2010, and affecting 38,000 people. (Somerset Intelligence, 2015). The most significant aspects of deprivation affecting households in Somerset are geographic barriers to housing and services, and indoors living environment.

The voluntary sector is uniquely placed to make a difference on these issues, as, by working at a very local level, communities are able to reach people that are too often overlooked.

Hidden pockets of need are the real story of inequality in Somerset today.

#### What's going well

Rural parts of West Somerset	Compared to IMD 2010, levels of deprivation in West Somerset now appear less pronounced compared to the rest of Somerset (Somerset Intelligence, 2015). However, the change seems to relate to a worsening situation in other parts of the County rather than marked improvement in West Somerset, which remains the most disadvantaged district overall.
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#### Where action is needed

Equality issues	Minority groups in Somerset experience disadvantage in different ways, often compounded by the rural nature of the county which can prevent easy access to support services. Race, religion, ethnic background, gender, disability and sexual orientation all have a part in forging someone's identity and can also contribute to their life circumstances. For example, LGB and Trans young people in Somerset were more likely than their peers to suffer from anxiety, depression, self-harm, and
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	<p>suicidal ideas as a result of stress from isolation, bullying and harassment. (Diversity Trust 2015).</p> <p>Activities that promote participation and give communities of interest a voice and influence need support and are an area where the voluntary sector is making a significant difference to the lives of vulnerable people.</p>
Neighbourhoods experiencing the most disadvantage	Nine Somerset LSOAs are now amongst the most deprived 10% nationally, up from five in IMD 2010. These are in parts of Taunton, Bridgwater, Yeovil, Highbridge and Glastonbury. The combined population of these areas is approximately 13,900 (Somerset Intelligence, 2015)
Entrenched disadvantage	Two Somerset LSOAs are amongst the most deprived 5% nationally (the same number as in IMD 2010). These are in the Taunton Halcon/Lambrook area, and have a combined population of around 3,100. (Somerset Intelligence, 2015)
Fuel poverty	Poverty is not simply about lack of income. Fuel poverty is defined in terms of the effect that excessive fuel costs, combined with poor standards of accommodation may have in taking households below the poverty line. The latest (2014) estimate is that there are 29,663 fuel poor households in Somerset (Department of Energy and Climate Change, 2016). In West Somerset, 14.5% of households were in fuel poverty in 2014. This is in the top 10% of England.
Child Poverty	<p>The child poverty measure assesses the number of households with children on incomes significantly lower than the median ie those who are relatively poor. Levels of child poverty in Somerset are consistently below South West and national averages, but mask significant variations at lower geographical levels.</p> <p>Taunton Halcon Ward had the highest proportion of children (under 16) living in poverty (30.6%). Other Somerset wards where the proportion of children living in poverty was at least one in four were in parts of Bridgwater and Highbridge &amp; Burnham (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).</p> <p>Somerset County Council's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment focusing on vulnerable children found that between 5,000 and 10,000 children are in particular need in Somerset, with the</p>

	<p>majority of those living in the most deprived wards in the county's towns. (Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board, 2016).</p> <p>Of 14,300 children in low income households in Somerset, half live in specific concentrated low income areas, meaning that another 50% are dispersed over 95% of the county. (SHWB, 2016).</p>
Inequality	<p>Equally important is the issue of inequality: the gap between rich and poor that many now argue is damaging to everyone in society. In Somerset, Taunton Deane experiences the highest level of inequality, worse than 60% of comparable areas. (DCLG 2015).</p> <p>West Somerset, in contrast, experiences a low level of inequality, better than 80% of comparable areas. (DCLG, 2015)</p> <p>It has been argued that lower levels of inequality lead to improved wellbeing, and perhaps this helps explain why West Somerset has a very high score in life satisfaction, coming 19th in England (ONS, 2014)</p>

## 5. Housing and homelessness

### C The situation is OK, but could be improved.

The availability and affordability of housing relates closely to other Vital Signs themes of fairness, health and stronger communities. It is split story as, whilst the increase in house prices along with low mortgage rates continues to benefit owner occupiers, those who have yet to access the housing ladder find themselves increasingly squeezed out. Lack of affordable housing is driving apart communities where young people find they are not able to live in the area they grew up but have to move out to our towns and villages. A recent study by the Country Land and Business Association found that rural homes cost 22% more than in urban areas and only 8% of homes are classed as affordable. This has a significant impact on the rural economy, as it forces young people to move away and stifles job creation, perpetuating low wages in rural areas.

In Somerset, the Hinkley Point nuclear power station development is likely to have a significant impact on the availability of private sector accommodation and rent levels and may well increase homelessness applications (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).

There has been a notable decline in recent years in Somerset of the quality of housing where a greater proportion of homes are in poor condition or without central heating (Somerset Intelligence, 2015). This has particularly affected the quality of housing in areas of already high deprivation in our urban centres.

#### What's going well

Homelessness	443 households were accepted by the Local Authority as homeless and in priority need in 2014/15, this is a fall from 2012/13 levels (Somerset Intelligence, 2016). As a proportion of all households, Somerset's number of acceptances has remained, at 1.89 per thousand households, below the national average rate for the second year running. It is worth mentioning, however, that homeless people do tend to gravitate towards urban centres (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).
Rates of temporary accommodation	Once accepted as homeless, householders in Somerset are far less likely than in other parts of the country to be placed in temporary accommodation; a solution that, we know, has particularly negative implications for children. In particular, the number of households in Somerset temporarily accommodated in B&Bs for at least six weeks declined to zero in 2014 (Somerset Intelligence, 2016). By comparison, numbers nationally have risen, driven by increases within some London

	boroughs. (Somerset Intelligence, 2016). Strong action by District Councils and their voluntary and community sector partners in this area has borne results.
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### Where action is needed

Affordability	Rural homes cost 22% more than in urban areas and in English rural areas only 8% of homes are classed as affordable. This has a significant impact on the rural economy, as it forces young people to move away and stifles job creation, perpetuating low wages in rural areas. (Country Land and Business Association, 2016).
Quality of housing	<p>Poor housing can have a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of young people: children living in overcrowded homes are up to 10 times more likely to contract meningitis and three times more likely to have respiratory problems (SHWB, 2016)</p> <p>In Somerset, research suggests that up to 40% of private rented homes would fail to meet a 'decent homes standard'. Poor housing is most often found in communities that are deprived in other ways, compounding the problems for people living there. (SHWB, 2016)</p>
Outcomes for care leavers	One-third of young people with care backgrounds experience homelessness at some stage between six and 24 months after leaving care (Stein, 2010). Homelessness in this context includes 'sofa surfing' (short stays with family, friends or acquaintances, usually sleeping in a room other than a bedroom), staying at homeless hostels or refuges, sleeping rough and spending short time in B&B accommodation.
Young people	<p>Whilst official numbers of homeless young people have decreased slightly in recent years (Homeless Link, 2015) this could be a result of young people 'opting out' of official systems in the face of welfare changes, and choosing to stay with friends and live in unsuitable accommodation (Homeless Link, 2015).</p> <p>Breakdown of relationships with parents and carers remains the biggest reason for youth homelessness for over 16s (Homeless Link 2015). The voluntary sector plays an essential role both in</p>

	providing information and advice about options for young people caught in this situation, and also providing emergency and move on accommodation for them.
Fuel Poverty	Fuel poverty is a measure of the impact on household income it would take to adequately heat the home. Fuel poverty is also particularly prevalent in West Somerset, where more than one in five households are considered 'fuel-poor'. This is reflection both of the poor quality of housing (insulation), low level of access to mains gas, and the low average household income in the area (Somerset Intelligence, 2016). The voluntary sector provides advice both about negotiating the best deals with energy providers, and also about how to insulate the home to make it more fuel efficient.

And finally...

- House prices vary according to area. The median house price in Wedmore is £357,000 and in North Bridgwater is £116,000 (Somerset Intelligence, 2014)
- The median house price in Somerset is 7.2 times the median earnings in the county, compared to 6.7 times for England as a whole (Somerset Intelligence, 2014).

## 6. Physical and Mental Health

### C The situation is OK but could be improved

The majority of Somerset residents enjoy good health and a reasonable life expectancy but there are areas of concern. The number of people aged 80 and over living in Somerset has increased by a quarter over the last 15 years (Somerset Intelligence, 2016) putting additional pressure on health and social care services as well as unpaid carers. Over 23,000 women and 9,500 men aged 65 or older now live alone (Somerset Intelligence, 2016) and loneliness is closely linked with poor mental and physical health.

Mental health is a growing concern in Somerset where services are stretched in responding to vulnerable people's particular needs. Loneliness and isolation can exacerbate mental health conditions and the rural nature of Somerset's society can compound the effects. As a result, Somerset's mental health services are forced to focus on the most urgent cases, leaving little capacity for work to prevent depression or anxiety from escalating or to promote general wellbeing. Here the voluntary and community sector is playing an essential role.

#### What's going well

Life satisfaction and subjective wellbeing	<p>Personal well-being in Somerset is better than the national average in respect of four important indicators of wellbeing: satisfaction with life, feeling that life is worthwhile, feeling happy and feeling anxious (Somerset Intelligence, 2016)</p> <p>In line with overall national trends, rural areas tend to have higher levels of subjective well-being than urban areas and this is the case in Somerset, where wellbeing rates are highest in West Somerset and lowest in Taunton Deane. We know that your health, your work status and your relationships have the greatest impact on wellbeing rates (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).</p>
Mortality and life expectancy	<p>In very general terms, the healthier people are, the longer they are likely to live and the lower an area's mortality rate (Somerset Intelligence, 2016). Life expectancies for both males and females in Somerset are around a year higher than national averages. However, there is wide variation at a local level: the mortality rate in the Somerset ward with the highest rate is around four times higher than in the ward with the lowest rate (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).</p>

Healthy eating	An estimated 29.7% of adults in the county eat a health and balanced diet, slightly higher than the national average of 28.7% (Public Health England, 2013).
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### Where action is needed

Mental health for vulnerable people	<p>Whilst the majority of people in Somerset report positive levels of wellbeing, there are significant and worrying trends for some groups of poor mental health. A recent study found that, on average, three children in every classroom have a clinically diagnosable mental health condition, (IPPR, May 2016)</p> <p>Hospital admissions for self-harm in children have increased in recent years; to 624.4 per 100,000 (SHWB, 2016), significantly higher than the England figure of 412.1 per 100,000. Self-harm rates are clearly linked to poor mental health and even suicide. Self-harm rates are significantly higher for young women than young men. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a survey of young people conducted by Somerset Children and Young People’s services in 2014 found that only 29% of primary aged children reported high self-esteem, compared to 38% nationally (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).</p> <p>Somerset scores significantly worse than the national average in terms of the percentage of adults with depression and the rate of emergency hospital admissions for self-harm (Public Health England, 2014). This is a particular issue for vulnerable people including those with alcohol problems and those experiencing homelessness (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).</p> <p>The voluntary sector is playing a key role both in educating the wider society about mental illness in order to change attitudes, and by providing specific services to combat problems at an early stage. For example, youth groups raise young people’s self- esteem and boost their sense of belonging. Charities working with homeless people address their wellbeing as well as providing support to their housing situation, thereby supporting them over the longer term.</p>
Substance abuse	The Somerset rate of hospital admissions for young people due to substance misuse in 2013 was 118.5 per 100,000 significantly higher than the England figure of 81.3 per 100,000 (SHWB, 2016).
Childhood obesity	23.2% of Somerset reception children are overweight or obese, compared to an England average of 21.9%. Studies show that

	children who are overweight or obese have an increased risk of becoming overweight or obese in adulthood (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).
Care leavers	The percentage of young people leaving care at age 18 experiencing significant difficulties has doubled from 2007 to 64% in 2015 (Somerset Intelligence, 2016). The fact that the greatest proportion faced emotional difficulties (23%) is a concern but the proportion is decreasing, whereas the proportion facing mental health problems (15%) has increased since 2014. (Somerset Intelligence, 2016)

And finally...

- A couple smoking 20 cigarettes a day each will spend over £5,000 a year on cigarettes (NHS Choices, 2016).
- Alcohol is more than half (54%) more affordable than it was in 1980 (HSCIC, 2015)

## 7. Rural isolation

**D Things aren't going well. We should take action as soon as possible.**

Somerset is one of the most rural counties in England. Its population density of 1.5 people per hectare is well below the England average of 4.1 per hectare. 48% of Somerset's population is classified as living in a rural area compared with 52% in urban areas. This makes it one of the 10 most rural local authorities in England (Somerset Intelligence, 2016). In particular, West Somerset's density of 0.5 per hectare is one of the five lowest of any local authority in England (SHWB, 2016). Whilst the natural beauty and rural tranquillity of rural Somerset is one of our key assets, rurality also bring its own issues for people living in these communities.

In 2015, Somerset County Council published its Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on the nature of rural life in Somerset, following extensive consultation and debate. This revealed that, whilst residents highly valued the quality and tranquillity of their environment, there was a clear impact of living rurally on the most vulnerable in our society. In particular, young people, the very old, those living with poor health and those experiencing economic disadvantage found their challenges magnified by poor access to services (SHWB, 2016).

### What's going well

Tranquillity	Somerset scores highly in terms of the tranquillity of the area (Local Futures, 2013). In particular, West Somerset is a quiet place to live.
Natural beauty	Somerset as a county is ranked better than 60% of areas in terms of its natural beauty and West Somerset is considered one of the top 5 most beautiful natural areas in England (Local Futures 2013).

### Where action is needed

Barriers to services	Some parts of Somerset have particularly poor access to important services such as health services, schools, and shops. In very rural areas such as West Somerset, it can be difficult to access sustainable employment that pays sufficiently well to cover high transport costs (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).
Isolation	In a consultation run by Somerset County Council in 2014, isolation brought about by poor transport services and poor access to amenities was given as a top issue of concern by people in rural areas (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).
Community cohesion	The rate of houses which are second homes is above the national average in all Somerset districts but West Somerset

	<p>has the 8th highest rate of second addresses used for holidays of any local authority in England (Somerset Intelligence, 2016). Second home ownership brings money to the local economy but may impact on local house prices and community cohesion.</p> <p>At a very local level, the voluntary sector plays an important role in bringing together members of small rural communities for opportunities to build community spirit.</p>
Economic wellbeing	<p>There is a stark disparity in how available and accessible jobs are in different parts of Somerset. Total employment (jobs) in Somerset increased by 1.5% between 2013 and 2014, compared to an increase of 2.7% at national level (Somerset Intelligence, 2016), but people with limited mobility or more complex circumstances find it harder to access employment and their situation is compounded by rural isolation</p> <p>Across Somerset, the voluntary sector is helping to support vulnerable people into work through job clubs, which support people's needs in a holistic way; basic skills training, and mentoring schemes.</p>
Young people	<p>Young people who live in a rural area said in a recent consultation (Somerset Rural Youth Project, 2015) that they wanted to remain in Somerset if possible, but felt they would need to move away at some point in the near future for the sake of their career or future employment.</p> <p>The biggest concern for young people in rural areas is a lack of places to spend their leisure time and no place to 'hang out' (SRYP, 2012). The voluntary sector provides crucial opportunities for personal and social development through volunteer run youth clubs in towns and villages. Many of these have achieved the Somerset County Council 'quality mark' indicating the high quality of provision.</p>

And finally...

- Crime rates in rural Somerset are notably lower than urban areas for most major crime types (Somerset Intelligence, 2016)
- People in rural areas have a longer life expectancy than those in urban areas (Somerset Intelligence, 2016)

## 8. Stronger communities

### B Things are going well, but we can make them better

People in Somerset feel rooted in the community and many have a strong sense of belonging here. Their commitment to social cohesion is shown in the fact that Somerset residents are more likely to be active members of their community, particularly in doing unpaid voluntary work, than in other parts of England (Somerset Intelligence, 2016). They are likely to be playing a part in the success of the 2,000 charities registered in Somerset and the many more voluntary and community groups operating here (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).

Whilst the majority are playing an active part in the strength of the community, there remain particular groups of people who are isolated and vulnerable. Their situation is undeniably compounded by poor transport links and rural isolation.

#### What's going well

Local good causes	£488,633 was awarded to 233 groups by Somerset Community Foundation in 2015/16. This is a mark of the thriving nature of community groups working locally to make a difference.
Volunteering by adults and young people	<p>Three in ten people in Somerset have given unpaid help to a charity or voluntary group at least once a month, and around four in ten in the past year. This places Somerset as one of the best in the country in terms of volunteering rates (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).</p> <p>When asked in 2014 what children and young people had done the day before the survey, 5% of young people said they 'helped and volunteered outside the home' (Somerset Children and Young People Survey 2014). The majority of children and young people behave positively out of school and participate in their communities and in decision making.</p>
Levels of social cohesion	Levels of social cohesion - indicated by the extent to which residents feel a sense of belonging to their area, and feel people treat each other with respect - are high in Somerset (Somerset Intelligence Network, 2008). In particular, West Somerset residents have a strong sense of belonging and satisfaction with their area. (SIN, 2008) This could be linked to the fact that the District has low levels of inequality.
Wellbeing	Measures of wellbeing last taken in 2015 indicate that West Somerset, Mendip and South Somerset residents have very high

	<p>levels of wellbeing compared to those living in other areas (residents of Taunton Deane and Sedgemoor were broadly average). (Somerset Intelligence, 2016). Again, West Somerset residents come out best and in fact are ranked in the top 10 areas of the country for wellbeing. This measures life satisfaction, feeling life is worthwhile, levels of happiness and levels of anxiety. (Somerset Intelligence, 2016)</p>
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### Where action is needed

Loneliness	<p>With rising numbers of older people in Somerset, 1 in 7 Somerset households contain someone aged 65 or older living alone. About 1 in 6 older people in Somerset said they had insufficient social contact or felt socially isolated. (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).</p> <p>Loneliness can affect both mental and physical health and wellbeing and increases the risk of disability, cognitive decline and the onset of dementia. The voluntary sector is uniquely placed to provide effective regular and sustainable support to those experiencing loneliness. Community groups work at a very local level and can support people in a way that enriches their lives and does not stigmatise.</p>
Access	<p>Poor access due to rurality and poor transport links is restricting people's opportunities to get involved in activities with others, including volunteering opportunities (SHWB, 2016). Young people are inhibited from accessing valuable volunteering and work placements due to access difficulties: travel to the volunteering placement can be costly or even impossible, and limiting to choice (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).</p> <p>The voluntary sector is making a significant difference here by bringing services to remote rural areas and ensuring vulnerable groups can access them. Grant funding is vital in allowing this to happen.</p>
Population flow	<p>Somerset experiences a net flow of migrants in from other parts of England and Wales, especially from some neighbouring districts, the South East and London. This is leading to a rising population, particularly of older residents. (Somerset intelligence, 2016).</p> <p>However, there is a consistent net flow of 16-24 year-olds out of Somerset as young people leave to go to University. This has implications for the future economic development of the</p>

	<p>county as there is a dwindling resource of young people to generate income. (Somerset Intelligence, 2016)</p> <p>Compared to this, the numbers of people arriving into Somerset from abroad is relatively small and the largest country of origin is Poland. The areas with the highest number of registrations are central Bridgwater, Yeovil and Taunton. (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).</p> <p>The voluntary sector has a key role to play in developing community relationships, supporting transitions and ensuring access to appropriate services for those new to the community.</p>
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And finally....

- 21% of Britain's population lack the basic digital skills and capabilities required to realise the benefits of the internet (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).

## 9. Transport

### D Things aren't going well. We should take action as soon as possible.

As one of the most rural parts of the country, many people in Somerset rely on their cars to get about and car ownership is high. In our most rural areas, however, one in nine households in rural areas do not have access to a car or van and will rely on other forms of transport (Somerset Intelligence, 2016). For vulnerable people and those in particularly remote areas this can present particular problems as publically provided transport is costly to provide for low numbers of people, meaning that services are under threat.

Many areas of Somerset are served by community transport organisations, offering a degree of flexibility tailored to their clients' needs, but they too are supported by subsidies. In some villages there are very local community car schemes led by volunteers using their own vehicles, but coverage is patchy.

#### What's going well

Community car schemes	There are a growing number of community car schemes across the county, supported by Somerset's County Council toolkit and through Somerset Community Foundation. At least 24 such schemes are registered in the County with more operating an at informal level. (Somerset County Council, 2016a). These schemes rely on a vital network of local drivers who volunteer their time and operate as low cost local charities or community groups.
Slinky Bus	The Slinky is an accessible bus service funded by Somerset County Council for people unable to access conventional transport. The service is stretched due to demand, particularly in rural areas.
Congestion	Somerset's roads are generally less congested in peak times than in more urban areas. Average vehicle speed in the weekday morning peak is just over 31mph, consistently above the regional and national averages in other parts of England (Somerset Intelligence, 2013). However, the volume of traffic on Somerset's roads increased for the third successive year in 2015 (Somerset Intelligence, 2013).

#### Where action is needed

Isolation	In a county so dependent on car use, older people – especially older women - are particularly affected by a lack of transport.
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	Older women are often disadvantaged if they outlive their partner, as they are less likely to drive a car. In Somerset about 75% of older people without a car are women living alone. (Somerset Intelligence, 2016)
Access to services	<p>Poor transport affects many important aspects of people's lives including access to vital services. In parts of Exmoor households can be on average around 40 minutes by public transport from their nearest food store and 50 minutes from a GP (Somerset Intelligence, 2013).</p> <p>More than half of people over 80 find it difficult to travel to a hospital. Those with the worst health and the lowest incomes struggle the most to travel to health services (Somerset Intelligence, 2016)</p>
Young people	Lack of transport and poor transport links were cited as young people's strongest dislike about living in Somerset in a 2015 consultation with young people about their area conducted by Somerset Rural Youth Project (SRYP, 2015). Lack of adequate and affordable transport affects young people's ability to attend education, job interviews and employment. (Somerset intelligence, 2016).

And finally...

- Half of households in rural Somerset have at least two vehicles (Somerset Intelligence, 2013)
- Taunton train station had 1.26 million people entering and exiting the station annually in 2013/14 (Somerset Intelligence, 2013)
- Somerset has one of the highest average road speeds in the South West (Somerset Intelligence, 2013).
- Pelican crossings assume that pedestrians walk at a pace of at least 1.2 metres per second (2.7 miles per hour) but 76 % of men and 85 % of women over 65 walk more slowly than this. (Asher, 2014).

## 10. Work and the local economy

### C The situation is OK, but could be improved.

Somerset's economy is one of small and medium sized business, and rates of self-employment are higher than in other areas (Somerset County Council, 2016c). Perhaps as a result, our economy has remained relatively strong in the face of recent economic challenges. Since 2012 it has grown at a faster rate than neighbouring areas and the UK as a whole but is widely recognised as a low wage economy.

We need the workers of the future to possess the right personal and vocational skills for sectors with the highest growth potential, such as engineering (SCC, 2016c), and the resilience to deal with future uncertainty in the local and national economy.

#### What's going well

Economic growth	In 2014, the Somerset economy was worth £9.5 billion, an increase of 3.2% since 2013. Since 2012 the Somerset economy has been growing at a faster rate than the UK. (SCC, 2016c).
Unemployment	<p>The proportion of adults who are seeking work in Somerset remains lower than the national average: 81% of Somerset's population are economically active, compared to 77.8% nationally, and 19% (60,200) are economically inactive compared to 22.2% nationally (ONS, 2016).</p> <p>Unemployment rates in Somerset are low at 3.8% (year to March 2016) compared to 5.1% nationally (ONS, 2016) and 31.4% (18,900) of economically inactive people wants a job, compared to 24.6% nationally (ONS, 2016).</p>
Children in out of work households	The reduction in numbers claiming out of work benefits has led to a decrease in the numbers of children living in households claiming benefits (a measure of the numbers living in poverty). The numbers fell by 9% in 2014 from 2013 figures, which mirrors national trends. At a local (ward) level, the largest annual falls in numbers of children in out-of-work benefit households were in Taunton Halcon and in Bridgwater Sydenham. (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).
Youth employment	4.4% of young people aged 16–18 in Somerset are not in employment, education or training, lower than the national figure of 4.7%. (Somerset Intelligence, 2016).

## Where action is needed

<p>In work poverty</p>	<p>A significant number of jobs in Somerset are in lower wage sectors and 20% of the working population of Somerset are employed in “elementary” or “operative” jobs, compared to 16% in the rest of the South West. (ONS, 2016) Partly as a result, the average wage is lower here. Gross pay is 8% lower in Somerset compared to the rest of Great Britain, equivalent to £50 a week. (ONS, 2016).</p> <p>Children living in households where there is in work poverty is an increasing issue: 14.1% of children in Somerset are defined as living in poverty (income less than 60% of national median) (Somerset Intelligence, 2016). The voluntary sector provides crucial support to families through subsidised activities and food banks.</p>
<p>Employability skills</p>	<p>In a 2014 study by the British Chamber of Commerce, 88% of businesses said that they felt school leavers are unprepared for the world of work. In a recent Somerset survey, more than four in five Somerset businesses cite attitude towards work as one of the most important considerations in recruiting young people. With huge changes in the way careers guidance has been delivered to young people over the last few years, this is an important area where the voluntary sector is making a difference. Young people can improve their employability through work experience and mentoring (EEF, 2016).</p> <p>With 3,930 16–24 yr olds still benefit and looking for work in July 2016 (ONS, 2016), there is still more that can be done to assist them into work.</p>

### And finally...

- There is a ‘poverty premium’. National research has shown that a typical low-income family could pay over £1,200 a year more than a better off family for their basic goods and services, because without a bank account or credit it is not possible to take advantage of offers. (SCC, 2014).
- A 2009 study estimated that around 20,000 people in Somerset borrowed from lenders who collect from their homes (so called ‘pay day loans’). (SCC, 2014).

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