

Ian Liddell-Grainger MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

ianlg@parliament.uk
LIDDELLI@parliament.uk

Please ask for: David Fothergill

Email: djafothergill@somerset.gov.uk

Date: 14th January 2021

Dear Ian,

I am writing to correct comments made by yourself in the House of Commons on 12th January 2021 regarding Somerset County Council.

You assert that Somerset County Council has, in your view, misused funding from the Government designed to support the county during the coronavirus pandemic. This is not correct. You have now made this assertion on repeated occasions; it is baseless and without foundation.

Somerset County Council is using all of the Covid-19 funding it has (and will) received in full compliance of the requirements of the various grants and is being used as Government intended – to help residents, communities and businesses in Somerset. The County Council has fully completed the returns and claims that have been required by Whitehall Departments and we will continue to do so. Covid-19 funding has enabled Somerset to help keep infection rates among the lowest in the country.

I also note that you have failed to attend any briefing with the County for a significant number of months where these issues have been discussed and explained at considerable length.

Let me also emphasise, that dealing with the pandemic is the SCC's chief priority. There are around 700 redeployed Somerset County Council staff supporting the enormous challenge of rolling out the county's biggest ever vaccination programme. They are working, for example, with our health partners to support the creation and logistics behind the coronavirus vaccination centres in the county. They deserve the public support of all elected members who represent our county.

On local government reform, the proposal for One Somerset would deliver a blueprint for better services, better value for money and reduced bureaucracy as we look to rebuild our communities and country following the pandemic. That's why it has significant support among public sector partners, businesses and local residents.

Indeed, current events illustrate that local government has a key role to play in supporting local communities. But they have also shown the limitations of the current system with unnecessary boundaries, duplication and inefficiencies. We also need to go further and be able to make sure that Somerset is able to emerge from the effects of the pandemic, by creating and attracting jobs and businesses with the long-term investment and infrastructure that we will be required. That is why we need to move forward and seize this opportunity for meaningful reform. We are unashamedly ambitious for Somerset, and in wanting to help our communities get back on their feet as we recover from the virus.

Given the public interest in these matters, I am placing a copy of this letter in the public domain and sending it to all MPs in Somerset, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Local Government Minister and Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Fothergill', with a long horizontal line underneath it.

Cllr David Fothergill
Leader of Somerset County Council

cc.

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Luke Hall MP, Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government

Marcus Fysh MP

James Heappey MP

Rebecca Pow MP

David Warburton MP