

## **MJ Awards**

On 17 September I attended the MJ Awards in London. Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) was shortlisted for this year's MJ Achievement Awards in recognition for its work to support neurodiversity in the workplace.

I am pleased to say that, whilst we did not win the award overall, we were highly commended, which is fantastic.

SWT's People Business Partner team and myself attended a live awards ceremony along with five other nominees for the Innovation in Building Diversity and Inclusion' category. A project to support neurodivergent needs was initiated by the council's Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources, Cllr Ross Henley, with support from Strategic HR Lead, Julie Jordan, following a rise in mental health issues experienced by staff. It was recognised that the cause of these issues had emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic and following a significant transformation programme to merge the former Taunton Deane and Somerset West councils in April 2019. Neurodiversity covers a range of conditions including attention deficit disorders, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia and Tourette's. It is estimated that more than 15 per cent of people in the UK are neurodivergent, meaning they learn and process information differently. The aim of the project was to support staff, customers, Councillors and partners with neurodivergent needs through a review of the council's recruitment processes and by raising awareness through learning and development.

A working group comprising staff with direct or indirect experience in neurodivergent issues was established to help shape policy and make recommendations for change.

## **Local Government Reorganisation**

Since my update at Full Council in September we have continued to work at Member and Officer level collaboratively setting up governance. Officers have been working hard to shape the implementing plan that will transition all authorities into the new unitary council.

As you will be aware Chief Executives were requested by the Dept for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to submit proposals for boundaries and councillor numbers. You will know from our briefings that the task was large, the timescale short and was a complex piece of work. Firstly, I would like to thank our elections team for all their hard work in completing this task.

The options have now been forwarded to the Dept for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities at the agreed timescale they set along with our District and County Colleagues. We will now await the draft Structural Change Order to understand the Secretary of States thinking on these proposals.

Thank you also Councillors for your engagement in this.