Somerset County Council has been advised of the report from the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) to the Health Select Committee, stating:

“In Somerset, local services have been cut back to the extent that many people are being forced to travel 33 miles (or 1 hour) for family planning clinics, meaning that many quite simply will not make the journey, hugely increasing the risk of unplanned pregnancy or unaddressed complications during pregnancy.”

No ‘family planning clinics’, as made reference to above, have been cut in Somerset. No one living in Somerset would be required to travel 33 miles to attend a clinic. This is despite being one of the most rural counties in England.

Somerset County Council (SCC) has redesigned their sexual health services so that the Somerset population now have access to a modern integrated sexual health service. This service was launched on 1 April 2016.

The previous Contraceptive and Sexual Health Service delivered in community-based clinics and the two Genito-Urinary Medicine services based in Somerset’s two Acute Trust hospitals are now delivered through the new community based Somerset-wide Integrated Sexual Health Service (SWISH). Somerset had tried over the last decade to re-design and integrate the local sexual health services. However, it wasn’t until enactment of the Health & Social Care Act in 2013 and the transfer of commissioning responsibilities for sexual health commissioning to Local Government, that Somerset was able to achieve this, following extensive public and professional consultation.

Through the service redesign, additional open access contraceptive and sexual health clinics are now available. Through the integration of GUM services with contraceptive services they will be able to offer comprehensive services through a one stop shop model of delivery.

Public Health at SCC have also invested additional money to expand their targeted sexual health promotion, HIV prevention and support for people living with HIV as an outreach element of the new SWISH service.

The new SWISH service has clinics operating across the 5 district council areas using a hub and spoke model, with the main hub based in Taunton, mini hubs in Bridgwater and Yeovil and further spokes in the market towns of Frome, Glastonbury/Street, Chard, Wincanton and Minehead. The new service offers extended clinic times, additional Saturday clinics and evening clinics.

We would be keen to have a dialogue with the representative of the Faculty of SRH who has shared this information with the Health Select Committee, as locally no concerns have been raised in regards to clinic locations and access to contraceptive services with SCC or the new SWISH since the service was launched.

Somerset also has good access to contraceptive services through General Practice which is essential in a large rural county. Prescribing rates for long acting reversible contraception in General Practice are significantly higher than the regional and national average. Somerset County Council remain fully committed to providing open access contraceptive and sexual health services and are dismayed to hear the inaccurate report by the Faculty of SRH to the Health Select Committee

9 June 2016