
LCNs: Update, Initial Review and Terms of Reference

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Executive Lead Member: Cllr Theo Butt Philip, Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources

Associate Lead Member: Cllr Val Keitch, Associate Lead Member for Public Health and Localities (LCNs)

Division / Local Member: N/A

1. Summary

- 1.1.** The purpose of this report is to seek support to the review of the Terms of Reference for Local Community Networks. It seeks the views from Scrutiny Committee on the recommended revised ToRs which have been drafted taking into account learnings from the first 9 months of meetings, feedback from Chairs and Vice chairs and the current financial position of Somerset Council.
- 1.2.** It also considers a brief overview of the current position of LCNs including the governance, staffing and support, geographies, participation and stakeholders and invites feedback from the Scrutiny Committee at this early stage of the review of LCNs, which will feed into the Council's Improvement and Transformation Programme. Specifically the Partnerships, Devolution and Localities element.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1.** The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note, and comment on, the contents of this report.
- 2.2.** The Scrutiny Committee is asked to indicate if there are any particular areas of consideration to be noted regarding the proposed Terms of Reference.
- 2.3.** The Scrutiny Committee is invited to inform the review of LCNs in the coming months, making recommendations for areas of further exploration with stakeholders including Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) partners and City, Town and Parish Councils.

3. Background

- 3.1.** Local Community Networks (LCNs) are a key commitment to ensure the new Somerset Council is engaged with and listening to our communities.
- 3.2.** The purpose, ways of working and initial roles of LCNs, were agreed by the Executive on 18 January 2023, with the Terms of Reference agreed by Constitution and Governance Committee in 30th January 2023, with final approval and adoption in the constitution at Full Council in 22nd February 2023.
- 3.3.** The purpose of LCNs, as agreed by the Executive on 18 January 2023, is as follows:
To be the focus for community development, engagement and partnership working at a local level; improving outcomes for residents and establishing strong connections between the Council, our communities and our partners.
- 3.4.** The 18 LCNs are now in their fifth round of meetings with AGMs planned for June and July.
- 3.5.** Each LCN is producing a yearly report to be presented at the AGM which will detail their agreed priorities and achievements in year 1.
- 3.6.** The main LCN meetings are taking place, primarily, in community venues and are running as hybrid meetings.
- 3.7. Geographies**
Following extensive consultation, it was agreed that there would be 18 LCNs, covering all of Somerset, created around communities, landscape character and the natural flow of residents between towns and parishes.
- 3.8.** Initial feedback regarding geographies was that on the whole the LCN boundaries reflect the above. However, there are a couple of parishes on the margins of the boundaries in one LCN area that are potentially interested in being grouped in a neighbouring LCN area. There is provision for boundary changes to be made in consultation with the Associate and Lead Members during the year, where there is a clear rationale for such a change.
- 3.9.** As services within Somerset Council become more familiar with the purpose of LCNs and the opportunities arising from working with communities in this way, some are starting to align their project delivery or areas of focus to the LCN boundaries
- 3.10.** A very small number of parishes have expressed an interest to move from one LCN area to another and these will be followed up ahead of AGMs due to take place in June and July. If changes are to be made these will be in consultation with the Associate and Lead members.

3.11. Governance

The Terms of Reference (ToRs) were developed to enable LCNs to be recognised as formal boards of Somerset Council, providing an established link both into and out from the Council. It was agreed, in February, that a review of the ToRs would take place within the first year of LCNs.

3.12. The four rounds of meetings have highlighted some areas for consideration in the ToRs. Initial feedback from core members for LCNs indicated a desire to consider some changes to the standard agendas for main LCN meetings. In order to better understand potential changes a workshop session was facilitated at the recent Chairs and Vice Chair Day with a focus on the ToRs.

3.13. LCN Chairs and Vice Chairs expressed a desire for greater, local, autonomy over agenda setting. They identified existing agenda items as often limiting and or often not relevant; including 'Public Questions' and 'Declarations of Interest'

3.14. When considering frequency of meetings, Chairs and Vice Chairs agreed a minimum number of four per year, with a local option to schedule additional meetings.

3.15. LCNs continue to build local partnerships and identify key local partners. We do not anticipate any changes to the core membership of each LCN approved in the Lead Member non- key decision paper, by the Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources on the 28th June 2023, ahead of AGMs in June/ July 2024.

3.16. Promotion, Participation and Attendance

Inaugural LCN meetings were promoted to City, Town and Parish Councils, Somerset Council Members and to wider VCFSE and statutory partners as outlined in the 'core membership' defined in the ToRs, through existing mechanisms, as a soft launch.

3.17. Over the course of the year LCNs continue to build participation in main LCN meetings and in the LCN Working Groups, from partners, local stakeholders and interested members of the public.

3.18. There is still work to do to continue to build attendance at LCN meetings and to ensure that the voice of residents is used to inform discussion and decision making.

3.19. Local feedback from meetings is used to help shape future LCN meetings and working groups enable focused and topic specific discussion bring in a wider range of partners.

3.20. Feedback from attendees has, on the whole, been positive. However, discussion in LCN meetings taking place over the winter centred on the

emerging financial situation of Somerset Council which impacted progress to identify and address local priorities and instead created a focus on asset and service devolution, primarily with city, town and parish councils.

3.21. LCNs have now returned to their initial priorities and the financial context has, in some ways provided perspective and clarity, regarding the local landscape within which partners seek to address local issues and priorities.

3.22. Somerset Council services including teams from Highways and Traffic teams, Active Travel, Local Nature Recovery and Civil Contingencies have actively engaged with LCNs, supported the development of relevant working groups and presented at main meetings.

3.23. ICT, Hybrid and Practical Considerations

LCN meetings are being supported by ICT colleagues to trial a technology set-up that provides adequate and appropriate sound and visual infrastructure to create inclusive online and in person participation.

3.24. LCN and ICT colleagues have worked together to overcome the challenges presented by running hybrid meetings in community venues in order to provide a good experience for both participants in the room and online. However there continue to be occasions where rural bandwidth presents some issues.

3.25. ICT colleagues will stand down their support for LCNs as LCN Link and Project Officers take over the ICT set up and management of hybrid meetings over the coming months.

3.26. Each LCN has a small number of suitable venues for main meetings, facilitating wider participation across LCN areas in main meetings. Working groups take place in local parish halls or online.

3.27. LCN team / staff capacity

The first year of LCN meetings has been supported and facilitated by an interim LCN staff team, drawn primarily from colleagues across Partnerships and Localities Service Directorate. We have learnt more about the capacity needed, and the vital role of staff in enabling new ways of working, during this first round of LCN meetings.

3.28. LCN formal meetings have been serviced by Democratic Services colleagues. From May they will step down their support and the proposed new Terms of Reference reflect this. Meeting support, notes and ICT support will be provided by Link Officers and LCN Project Officers.

3.29. As part of the restructure of Partnerships and Localities, matching and suitable alternative employment applications have now been considered for the LCN Manager and LCN Link officers. We will continue to recruit into the LCN Link

Officer roles in the coming weeks. In addition we have recruited one of two temporary LCN Project Officer roles to support LCNs over the coming months.

3.30. There continue to be some capacity challenges in this interim stage, particularly where there is a strong desire from many LCNs to meet regularly in their initial stages and to develop active working groups. We expect that the recruitment of the full LCN team will overcome these.

3.31. Emerging themes and priorities

LCNs have started to identify priorities specific to their geographic communities. They have also begun to work together, locally and with each other and other partners, to address long standing priorities often shared across all LCNs for example Highways and Traffic concerns.

3.32. They have been active in addressing Highways and Traffic issues, Flooding and Emergency planning, Active Travel, Environment and Nature, Children and Young People, Anti Social Behaviour and the Health and Wellbeing of residents.

3.33. They continue to build effective partnerships, particularly through working groups, to identify and deliver action plans to address issues and priorities.

3.34. Examples of positive action include increased youth provision, networking and linking of services, mapping and the provision of information locally to enable residents to help each other and help themselves. LCNs have enabled the facilitation of emergency planning workshops and better understood the needs of their residents across a wide range of topics and issues, through hearing from and working with a wide range of partners and stakeholders across statutory and voluntary and community organisations.

3.35. LCNs are starting to play a critical role in bringing together a range of stakeholders to develop place based services. They have enabled a, sometimes challenging, constructive and progressive dialogue between Somerset Council and its partners;

- Shaping, informing and coordinating the delivery of Early Help services; supporting the objectives of Connect Somerset by bringing together partners to identify the needs of residents, gaps in provision and building local plans to address local need.
- Building Resilient Communities, including through LCN wide emergency planning and the facilitation of locally strategic discussions regarding asset and service devolution.
- Enabling Somerset Council to start to evolve Locality Working which builds capacity and capital in communities to support the delivery of corporate objectives and service delivery. For example Highways and Traffic working groups, Active Travel plans and participation in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

- 3.36.** More detailed consideration of the role of LCNs in Locality Working will take place in the coming weeks as part of the Partnerships, Devolution and Localities work stream of the Transformation Programme.
- 3.37.** Building on our learning over the last 9 months and once the LCN team is fully recruited, our focus will extend beyond the main LCN meetings, building on the work that has started; to build strategic, asset-based community development, addressing the priorities unique to each LCN area, positively impacting outcomes for residents.
- 3.38.** LCN Link Officers will be trained as Public Health Ambassadors, to support the wider determinants of health and continue to build strong working relationships with colleagues across all areas of Somerset Council in order to support the delivery of the Council Plan.
- 3.39.** The LCN team will continue to gather feedback from this first year of LCN meetings in order to inform the development of individual LCNs and the wider programme. Honouring our ambition to evolve LCNs as a codesign between Somerset Council and other stakeholders, we welcome the opportunity to work with all partners to develop mechanisms for review and development of LCNs.
- 3.40.** We recognise that some parishes and other stakeholders have experienced some barriers to participating fully in LCNs and we continue to work with them to better understand and address these.
- 3.41.** The revised Terms of Reference (**appendix X**) take into account the staffing of LCNs, in particular the role of Democratic Services colleagues and suggested changes to meeting frequency and agenda setting as outlined above.

4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1.** Detailed feedback regarding the Terms of Reference for LCNs was established through a workshop session with Chairs and Vice Chairs of LCNs. In addition ongoing feedback from participants including City, Town and Parish representatives and the VCFSE has been taken into account when reviewing the ToRs.

5. Implications

5.1. Financial and Risk Implications

The LCN staff team is now budgeted for within the Partnerships and Localities' overall envelope. On 18 January 2023, Executive noted that indicative annual costs for running LCNs would be up to £900k. Members agreed a one-off Earmarked Reserve amount of £300k that could be used to mobilise LCNs, pending a review of existing community development spend across the

Council. As part of the Improvement and Transformation programme LCNs will be considered in the Localities work stream.

5.2. It is intended that the priorities of LCNs will, locally and strategically, influence the spend of the Council and it is hoped that over time existing funding streams aligned to particular priorities can be directed through these networks. There is also the potential for 'return on investment' with LCNs playing a role in preventing residents reaching crisis and in the support of Asset and Service Devolution.

5.3. Legal and HR implications

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. The revised Terms of Reference have been considered and proposed by governance colleagues in line with the LCN's function of Boards, rather than committees of Somerset Council.

5.4. Equalities Implications

An initial Equalities Impact Assessment accompanied the decision paper to Executive on 18 January 2023. This assessment directly influenced how LCN meetings have been designed and delivered, however equality considerations are a key part of ongoing evaluation and review.

5.5. Community Safety Implications

There are no community safety implications arising directly from this report. However, there is potential for LCNs, once established, to support community safety priorities.

5.6. Sustainability Implications

There are no sustainability implications arising directly from this report. However, there is potential for LCNs to support sustainability priorities of communities and the Council.

5.7. Health and Safety Implications

There are no health and safety implications arising directly from this report.

5.8. Health and Wellbeing Implications

There are no Health and Wellbeing implications arising directly from this report. However, there is an expectation that LCNs will have significant potential to support Health and Wellbeing priorities.

5.9. Social Value

There are no Social Value implications arising directly from this report. However, there is potential for LCNs, over time, to contribute to Social Value priorities.

6. Background papers

- 6.1.** Decision Report to Executive January 2023: Local Community Network (LCN) Development Next Steps is [here](#)
Decision Report To Governance and Constitution Committee January 2023: Governance Arrangements for Local Community Networks [here](#)

Note For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author