



## Decision Report - Executive Decision

Forward Plan Reference: FP/22/10/20

Decision Date - 18/01/23

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### Local Community Network (LCN) Development Next Steps

Executive Member(s): Cllr Val Keitch - Lead Member for Local Government

Reorganisation & Prosperity

Local Member(s) and Division: N/A

Lead Officer: Jan Stafford and Sara Skirton

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Joint Leads

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#### 1. Summary / Background

- 1.1** The Unitary business case sets out a vision for a '*new authority which will provide seamless and accessible local governance to the people of Somerset, with services redesigned to be delivered within communities at a local level*'.

Fundamental to this vision is a commitment to give local residents a voice and more influence over decisions that impact them and their communities.

The Administration's Manifesto pledge to '*Deliver Local Community Networks (LCNs) that genuinely listen to the views of local people*' consolidates this commitment.

On 16 November 2022 the Executive of Somerset County Council considered a report that reflected the work undertaken to date towards the establishment of LCNs. The report summarised the research, consultation and engagement undertaken in recent months to consider in more detail the scope of the role of LCNs, and potential geographic boundaries. It drew out a number of themes and lines for further enquiry.

The Executive considered and agreed a number of recommendations and principles to inform further work on LCN development, including how LCN areas should be drawn up. These recommendations are listed in full in section 11.1 of this paper.

This report reflects the work that has been undertaken since the November 2022 Executive meeting, shaped by these principles. It also draws on some of the findings from the recent LGR light touch Peer Review, which included a focus on LCNs.

One of the key purposes of this report is to set out what will be in place for 'Day 1' for LCNs. It asks the Executive to consider and agree to a number

of recommendations relating to function, form and financing (resourcing) to enable the implementation of arrangements for LCNs.

## **2. Recommendations**

**2.1.** The Executive is asked to agree:

1. The purpose and initial roles for LCNS, and that there are opportunities for future development, as set out in sections 13 and 14 of the report
2. The proposed eighteen LCN areas as a basis for moving forward for Vesting Day
3. That decisions on any changes to the LCN areas, resulting from discussions with stakeholders, be delegated to the Lead Member for Local Government Reorganisation & Prosperity, in consultation with the appropriate Divisional Members
4. The draft initial model Terms of Reference for LCNs
5. An earmarked reserve of £300k to establish LCNs and to support the completion of a community engagement and development spend review across the five councils, to identify existing funding to support LCNs on an ongoing basis.

## **3. Reasons for recommendations**

To support the development and establishment of LCN arrangements across Somerset for Vesting Day, that will provide a firm foundation for convening partners and engaging communities to establish priorities and goals for the local areas.

The aim is to create LCNs that will over time have the ability to join the strategic policies of the Unitary Council with local delivery, alongside community and partner priorities.

LCNs will be central to evolving how the councils currently deliver community development functions to ensure they are fit for purpose. Noting that the development and evolution of LCNs will happen in phases over a number of years.

## **4. Other options considered**

**4.1.** The decisions made by Executive at its meeting on 16 November 2022 provided confirmation of commitment to LCNs and a clear direction for the next stages of their development, therefore not proceeding is not considered to be an option.

A commitment was made to bring a proposal for LCN areas, along with further developed details on function, form and resourcing, to the meeting of

the Executive on 18 January 2023. Achieving this has been the focus of the LCN team.

## **5. Links to County Vision, Business Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy**

- 5.1.** The establishment of LCNs is a commitment in the 'One Somerset: Business case for a new single unitary council for Somerset' Version 1.3 December 2020, para 6.3 page 68.

LCNs will both influence and work within the corporate priorities and policy framework for the new Council.

- 5.2.** A request for an earmarked reserve of £300k has been submitted as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan. Alongside this a review of community development spend has commenced across the five councils to identify resources which could be reassigned in the short term and provide the basis for ongoing funding for LCNs. Opportunities will also be explored to seek alternative methods of funding, acknowledging that it is too soon to be able to depend on these for the first year at least of operation.

## **6. Consultations and co-production**

- 6.1.** An extensive engagement and consultation activity undertaken by the LGR Programme regarding LCN development has involved a wide range of internal and external stakeholders and elicited a diverse range of views and opinions, some of which potentially conflict or need detailed consideration to reconcile. The principles agreed by the Executive on 16 November and referred to in this report have helped to do this.
- 6.2.** This activity is considered as part of the ongoing dialogue and co-production of LCNs, rather than a one-off event.

## **7. Financial and Risk Implications**

- 7.1.** The establishment and ongoing development of LCNs requires a level of financial investment in their 'infrastructure', to ensure that LCNs have the best chance of success. This requirement for appropriate resourcing, particularly in terms of a suitably skilled and experienced team of LCN support officers, reflects experience from other Unitary areas, emerging feedback from the Pilot LCNs and the recent light touch LGA Peer Review.

In November Executive Members acknowledged the cost of setting up LCNs in Somerset could be up to £900k, as well as recognising that we are not starting from a zero position with there being locality and community development roles and expertise within the existing five councils which could potentially be repurposed to underpin ongoing funding for LCNS.

In liaison with the Director for Finance and Governance, and accepting this is a transition year, it is proposed to:

- set aside an earmarked reserve of £300k to enable LCNs to progress

- understand the new officer structure of Somerset Council
- explore the reassignment of existing resources and community engagement and development staff
- identify funding to LCNs on an on-going basis.

It is intended that the priorities of LCNs will, locally and strategically, influence the spend of the Council and it may be 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.

- 7.2.** The commitment to establishing LCNs has been the subject of much engagement and communication with communities, stakeholders and partners. A move to a single Unitary council introduces a risk of lack of local voice and community representation at a strategic level, resulting in a disconnect from localities. LCNs are key to mitigating this risk. Failure to define, support or adequately resource them will impact negatively on their chances of success, and potentially on the reputation of the new Council, and on trust between it and its communities. There is also an association with the LGR Programme risk:

*Loss of opportunity to align public and VCFSE services to new operating model and outcomes as defined in the business case.*

## **8. Legal and HR Implications**

- 8.1.** There are no legal implications arising directly from this report, although there are implications for Governance, in that the governance arrangements for LCNs will need to be reflected in the constitution. The LGR Customers, Communities and Partnerships (CCP) workstream is working with LGR Governance colleagues to ensure that the governance arrangements for LCNs will be appropriate and proportionate to their function. This work is reflected in the draft model Terms of Reference for LCNs at Appendix 3.
- 8.2.** As referenced above in Financial Implications, LCNs will need to be supported by a team of officers with a wide range of knowledge, skills and experience, spanning community development, stakeholder and partnership relationship building, the ability to think locally and strategically, manage projects and negotiate solutions and resources. The LGR CCP workstream recognises the need to work with the LGR People workstream, to ensure that the community development team can be drawn together and established ready to support LCNs.

## **9. Other Implications**

### **9.1. Equalities Implications**

The equalities implications relating to decisions on LCN function and form have been considered in the accompanying Equalities Impact Assessment. The creation of LCNs provides an opportunity to work with communities to

address inequalities by ensuring that data, insight and intelligence underpins decision making. At this stage in LCN development, the Equalities Impact Assessment is necessarily high level, however there is a commitment to completing further assessments as LCN arrangements are further defined.

## **9.2. 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.

## **9.3. Sustainability Implications**

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

## **9.4. Health and Safety Implications**

There are no Health and Safety implications arising directly from this report.

## **9.5. Health and Wellbeing Implications**

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

## **9.6. Social Value**

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

## **10. Scrutiny comments / recommendations:**

- 10.1.** LGR Joint Scrutiny Board has received regular updates and has provided valued input to LCN development. Following the meeting of the Executive on 16 November 2022, a report updating on next steps was due to be considered by Joint Scrutiny Board on 8 December 2022. Following the cancellation of this meeting, the same report was considered by the LGR Implementation Board on 20 December 2022. Joint Scrutiny Board Members had been invited to attend that meeting. Discussion at the meeting was broadly positive, with constructive feedback received.

Additionally, a workshop with Members of the LGR Joint Scrutiny Board is proposed for 13 January 2023. Officers will present the main developments

since the LGR Implementation Board meeting in December 2022 and open up to questions and answers from the Board.

At the end of the discussion, a note of the main feedback points will be summarised in the presentation to Executive at its meeting on 18 January 2023.

## **11. Background**

### **11.1. Executive Resolutions**

On 16 November 2022, the Executive of Somerset County Council considered a report – Local Community Network Consultation Review. The report summarised the research, consultation and engagement undertaken in recent months to consider in more detail the scope of the role of LCNs, and potential geographic boundaries. It also included learning from the three LCN Pilots in Somerset, and from experiences of locality working in other Unitary areas. The report drew out a number of themes from the consultation, and lines for further enquiry.

The Executive:

1. Noted the key findings from the recent LCN consultation and engagement activities, alongside the learning from the LCN Pilots and other Unitary areas ' locality arrangements.
2. Considered and commented on the conclusions, proposals and further lines of enquiry arising.
3. Endorsed the establishment of LCNs as a vehicle for bringing together and focussing the community development and engagement activity in the new Council.
4. Noted and supported the rationale for further work and dialogue to be undertaken before a recommendation is made on LCN geographical boundaries.
5. Agreed a specific set of principles that will inform this work:
  - a. *Respect the rurality of Somerset and find ways to work with differences between rural / urban priorities within an LCN area, and across LCN boundaries*
  - b. *Respect the diversity of Somerset's landscape character*
  - c. *Work across Somerset to better align with the Integrated Care System and other partners, recognising the benefits of partnership working*
  - d. *Observe town and parish boundaries*
  - e. *Consider unitary division boundaries*
  - f. *Consider equalities implications.*
6. Agreed to receive a further paper in January 2023 on the outcomes of the further work, including reasoned recommendations for LCN roles and geographies.

7. Note that an additional funding request of up to £900,000 has been submitted for consideration through the MTFP process, to enable the resourcing of LCN arrangements from Vesting Day.

This report details the work that has since been undertaken, shaped by the above recommendations and principles.

## **12. Current Position**

Since the meeting of the Executive on 16 November 2022, the following activity has taken place:

- Mapping exercise to overlay town, city and parish boundaries with unitary divisions, PCNs and areas where communities naturally align (according to feedback via consultation and T&PC meetings). Assess fit with the five principles set out in 11.1.
- Consideration of the outcomes of mapping exercise by Lead Members
- Discussion with colleagues in Adults' Services, Children's Services and Public Health to begin to clarify benefits of alignment with ICS and what this could mean for geographical arrangements
- Discussions with representatives from Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC), Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) and SPARK Somerset. At the time of writing, a discussion with Health colleagues is being arranged.
- Preparation of an Equalities Impact Assessment relating to the recommendations in this report
- Work to understand the scope of current community development and engagement activity across the five councils. Including areas of good practice that need to be supported through transition.
- Commence a review of existing community engagement and development staffing and spend across the five councils with potential to support LCNs, with a view to refining the budget requirements for LCNs.
- Consideration of what aspects of LCNs it is feasible to have in place by Vesting Day, given the scale of change associated with moving from five councils to one, and the timelines for creation of new management and staff structures.

There is more detail on the outcomes of this work within the following sections of this report.

## **13. Function – Purpose**

- 13.1.** A strong message from a number of stakeholders, echoed by the recent LGA light touch Peer Review of the LGR Programme, is the need to be clear from the outset about the purpose of LCNs. This is recognising that the scope will evolve, and that there are clear opportunities to look at how LCNs can support services to be delivered on a locality basis as the new Council develops and transforms.

In the context of the feedback received from communities and partners, and Executive's previous agreement to the recommendation to *'Endorse the establishment of LCNs as a vehicle for bringing together and focussing the community development and engagement activity in the new Council'* the following is proposed as an overarching purpose for LCNs from Vesting Day:

*To be the focus for the new Council for community engagement and development, within an ethos of local partnership working, looking to improve outcomes for residents through establishing strong connections between Somerset Council, our communities and our partners.*

## **14. Function – Roles**

- 14.1.** Underpinning the purpose of LCNs, it is important to be clear about their initial roles – what is and is not in scope from the outset.

### **In the first year**

Drawing from the Unitary business case, and shaped by dialogue and input from a wide range of stakeholders, the following are proposed as the initial role for LCNs:

- Be a forum for community voice, engagement and influence
- Be a means for enhancing participation in democracy and local decision making
- Enhance collaboration by bringing together at a local level, representatives from partner organisations, town, City and parish councils, community groups and residents
- Identify evidence-based community priorities; across Economic, Social and Environmental issues
- Create plans to reflect how the priorities will be addressed
- Identify and secure resource opportunities for local projects



## **Opportunities for Future LCN Development**

LCN arrangements must be flexible to respond to and accommodate changing priorities at a local and countywide level.

Other Unitary areas have, over time, aligned local service delivery to the geographies of their community networks. Early conversations indicate there are unique opportunities for the new Council and its partners to explore how this can be done in Somerset, and LCNs will be key to influencing and shaping these opportunities.

Whilst it is not possible to fully explore these opportunities ahead of Vesting Day, the intention is that it forms part of a development plan for LCNs for the new Council, aligned to its corporate priorities and transformation and change programmes.

Regulatory functions such as planning and licensing are not part of the initial LCN development. We will work towards making stronger links, particularly in relation to influencing place shaping, as we develop these services in the new Somerset Council.

### **15. Function – How LCNs will work**

- 15.1.** It is envisaged that LCNs, supported by dedicated Council Officers, will:
- Meet regularly as a whole network, with potential to set up geographic or topic based sub-groups
  - Inform and be informed by Somerset Council's strategic priorities and plans and those of our partners
  - Consider evidence and ambitions for the local area and agree priorities
  - Seek solutions and create positive change - thinking locally and strategically
  - Support parishes and communities to work together, including across LCNs and at a 'sub LCN' level
  - Create an engaging, participative and facilitated space: enabling opportunities for effective communication, collaboration and consensus building.
  - Build on the knowledge, skills and understanding of all partners
  - Research and explore new and existing opportunities
  - Facilitate networking opportunities across LCNs
  - Learn from what does and doesn't work across all LCN areas, celebrate success (plan, do, review approach)
  - Develop new priorities over time

### **16. Form – LCN Areas**

- 16.1.** At its meeting on 16 November, Executive Members considered a summary of the views and opinions received through the LCN consultation and engagement exercise. Given the wide range of perspectives, it was agreed that there was a need to undertake further analysis and evaluation work before a recommendation is made for the establishment of LCN areas.

As emphasised through the recent LGA light touch Peer Review of the LGR programme, it is essential to define the geographical areas as a starting point for LCNs. These LCN areas will need to be flexible and 'porous', recognising there will be priorities that span more than one area. Equally, the way in which LCNs operate must support priorities that relate to a 'subset' of an LCN area, for example a topic that has more relevance to a particular group of rural parishes. This was a strong view emerging from the LCN consultation.

Another key point, highlighted by the LGA light touch Peer Review Team, is that the LCN areas will not be set in stone forever; we will build in scope for review and changes in the future, for example as a result of Boundary Commission reviews.

Taking the consultation and engagement feedback as the foundation, the officer team mapped the areas where communities, town, city and parish councils have indicated they already have a relationship or see the potential for doing so in the future. This could be on the basis of existing networks and /or because of common issues such as those relating to landscape characteristics.

This visual mapping was then overlaid with town, City and parish boundaries, Unitary electoral divisions, and also Primary Care Networks.

The purpose of this exercise was to arrive at a proposal that is the 'best fit' across the agreed five principles.

The proposal that the Executive is now asked to consider is for eighteen LCN areas across Somerset. This number reflects a general preference from the consultation for more rather than fewer LCNs.

These proposed eighteen areas are illustrated in the map at Appendix 1 and accompanied by a list of the town and parish council areas and Electoral Divisions that would sit within them (Appendix 2).

It is important to reiterate that the areas presented in this paper are proposed as the starting point for LCNs. Whilst the proposal seeks to achieve the best possible fit with the feedback we received from the consultation, alongside the other principles previously agreed by Executive, we recognise that there may be views we have not captured. We are committed to dialogue with any town, parish or community that considers they are better aligned with a neighbouring LCN area.

The outputs from the mapping exercise have been discussed with Lead Members, colleagues and a number of our partners, and further dialogue is underway or planned. Such conversations are inevitably iterative and will inform the ongoing development of LCNs.

Representatives of Somerset Association of Local Councils and the Society of Local Council Clerks have confirmed that from their perspectives they are broadly comfortable with the emerging LCN areas. They recognise that no one size fits all but feel that the proposed areas create a best fit to the principles, and will not stop parishes working together across boundaries in the future.

## **17. Form – Governance**

- 17.1.** The Unitary Business Case envisaged that LCNs would be committees of the Cabinet. Feedback from the consultation raised concerns about the formality of committees limiting wider community engagement in LCNs, and that more of a partnership arrangement was preferred. However, other respondents supported LCNs being formal committees as this would give them gravitas and ability to make decisions.

Balancing the differing perspectives, it is vital, if LCNs are going to have real influence, that they are firmly embedded in the governance 'fabric' of the Council and its constitution. If it is agreed that LCNs will not, in the short to medium term, have direct responsibility for regulatory services, the need for them to be formal committees becomes less of an imperative.

Taking the above into account, along with learning from other Unitary Areas' locality arrangements, it is recommended that LCNs initially be established as boards, with scope for future review. Advice from Governance colleagues indicates there is scope within the Structural Change Order for the Council to agree this change.

A proposed initial Terms of Reference for LCNs is attached at Appendix 3.

## **18. Finance – Resourcing**

- 18.1.** On 16 November 2022, Executive Members noted that to establish LCNs in Somerset it could cost up to £900k based on modelling at that time from other Unitary authorities and learning from LCN pilots. This is comprised predominantly of community development and democratic services staffing and one-off capital costs for technology. Further work has been done to refine that figure, including evaluation of job descriptions to understand

salary impacts, allocation of the new pay award as well as recognising the part year effect of being able to recruit staff to the new LCN roles.

There was also a recognition that the new Council would not be working from a standing start with there being locality and community development roles and expertise within the current five Councils, and of the desire to build on this best practice and legacy. Whilst scope and resourcing levels are different in each council, it is expected that there will be officers in the new Somerset Council with the knowledge, skills and experience to develop and manage LCNs. However, at this point in time it is not possible to accurately quantify the capacity that will be available, as in many cases the current roles cover multiple functions, some of which are likely to sit within different directorates in the new Council. Nonetheless a review of community development spend has commenced and we are confident that existing community engagement and development staff and resources could be identified and re-assigned to support LCNs over the coming 12 months. Furthermore, there are also opportunities to explore other funding streams with partners and shared models of delivery.

In liaison with the Director for Finance and Governance, and accepting this is a transition year, it is proposed to:

- set aside an earmarked reserve of £300k to enable LCNs to progress
- understand the new officer structure of Somerset Council
- explore the reassignment of existing resources and community engagement and development staff
- identify funding to LCNs on an on-going basis.

## **19. Day One Readiness**

- 19.1.** Consideration has been given to when LCNs will actually be operational. Linked to the recruitment timetable for Executive and Service Directors in the new Council, and the transfer of staff from the district councils, there will need to be a period of planning and mobilisation, convening of partners and community groups, along with recruitment to LCN teams, that will take place after 1 April 2023. It is therefore realistic to assume that LCN meetings will begin to take place from around June / July 2023.

In the meantime, work will continue at pace within the Customers, Communities and Partnerships workstream to prepare for LCNs. Subject to Members' approval of the recommendations in this report, it is intended that the following will be in place for 1 April 2023:

- LCNs' purpose and initial roles and functions will be agreed and widely communicated
- LCN geographies will be defined

- City, Town and Parish councils and local community groups will know which LCN they are in, and the other parishes within it
- There will be a defined staffing structure with agreed job descriptions and a timetable and approach for recruitment
- Initial 'link officers' identified for each LCN, who may be drawn from existing staffing / roles
- The Pilot LCNs will have agreed infrastructure and support to enable their successful transition into the new LCN arrangements
- Headline Terms of Reference will be in place for LCNs
- Agreement with key partners on how they will engage with LCNs at a local level and strategically.

## 20. Background Papers

- 20.1.** The following appendices accompany this report:  
 Appendix 1 – Map of proposed LCN areas  
 Appendix 2 - List of Parish, Town and City Council areas and Electoral Divisions  
 Appendices 3 a and b – Draft initial Terms of Reference for LCNs – full and simplified versions  
 Appendix 4 – Equality Impact Assessment in relation to the recommendations in this report
- 20.2.** Local Community Network Consultation Review – Report to Somerset County Council' s Executive 16 November 2022
- 20.3.** Local Community Network Development Next Steps – Report to LGR Joint Scrutiny Board /Implementation Board 20 December 2022

### Report Sign-Off

		Date completed
Legal Implications	Tom Woodhams	09/01/2023
Governance	Scott Wooldridge	10/01/2023
Corporate Finance	Jason Vaughan	10/01/2023
Customers, Digital and Workforce	Chris Squire	09/01/2023
Property	Paula Hewitt / Oliver Woodhams	09/01/2023
Procurement	Claire Griffiths	09/01/2023
Senior Manager	Alyn Jones	09/01/2023
Commissioning Development	Sunita Mills / Ryszard Rusinek	09/01/2023
Executive Member	Cllr Val Keitch - Lead Member for Local Government Reorganisation & Prosperity	09/01/2023

<b><u>Sign-off Key Decision / Consulted on Non-Key Decision</u></b>		
Local Member		N/A
Opposition Spokesperson	Opposition Spokesperson for LGR – Cllr Faye Purbrick	Sent 06/01/2023
Scrutiny Chair	Scrutiny Committee – Joint Scrutiny for Local Government Reorganisation Committee- Cllr Bob Filmer	Sent 06/01/2023