

## **Local Community Networks Consultation Analysis - November 2022**

### **Introduction**

A Local Community Network [LCN] consultation and engagement exercise ran for six weeks during September and October 2022, with the aim of informing the development of LCNs for Somerset. 549 responses were received from a broad range of stakeholders and partners across Somerset. This paper provides a summary of the results of the consultation and engagement undertaken.

### **Consultation & Engagement**

The LCN consultation document was launched in September and formally closed on the 17 October 2022. During this period there was a significant communications campaign and engagement activity to promote the completion, understanding and feedback on the role, name, boundaries and challenges to participation in the emerging model of LCN's. Late responses for a few City, Town and Parish [CT&P] Councils were accepted, as a result of them not being able to meet due to the period of national mourning for Queen Elizabeth.

The range of communication undertaken include:

- Dedicated space on the New Somerset Website
- Comprehensive Frequently Asked Questions which were regularly updated with new questions as the consultation progressed
- Letter from the lead LGR member to all C&TP Councils
- Newsletter updates
- Press releases and media coverage across the county
- Information and links shared through Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise [VCFSE] networks
- Multi-channel communications; including social media across all 5 councils
- Signposting through City, Town and Parish Networks
- LGR update meetings
- Wider partner updates

Engagement activities included:

- 6 in person face-to-face sessions held across the county with 66 participants
- Online briefing sessions for C&TP Councils, VCFSE, District and SCC members (209 Participants)
- Evening meetings for groups of parishes in the Nether Stowey area, Wells area, Cheddar area, Othery/Middlezoy, West Hatch and Doultong areas (with circa 75 parishes represented and circa 150 attendees)
- Presentation and discussion sessions at each of the three LCN pilot meetings
- A dedicated LCN email box (circa 256 conversations)

- 1:1 telephone calls with Clerks and other interested parties
- Individual and group meetings with colleagues and partner organisations: Health, Infrastructure organisations, SCC Senior Leadership Team.

In order to ensure a wide reach and breadth of engagement with the VCFSE sector, the LCN Team worked in partnership with Spark Somerset to inform the consultation and promote opportunities for engagement throughout the 6-week period. Spark sent a newsletter and two personal emails to their database of 1,700, signposting people to the New Somerset webpage for further information, LCN briefings and drop ins. Spark posted on various social media platforms during the consultation, and while attending several partnership meetings shared the information on the consultation, encouraging participation.

### **Response Coverage**

A total of 549 consultation responses were received online, with participants completing the survey on behalf of the following sectors:

- 371 Individual responses
- 71 VCFSE responses
- 207 Individual City, Town and Parishes responses
- 18 Groups of city, town and parish responses
- 5 Emergency services
- 13 Education
- 22 Health
- 18 Business

Many respondents ticked more than one box, acknowledging that they completed the survey on behalf of more than one sector.

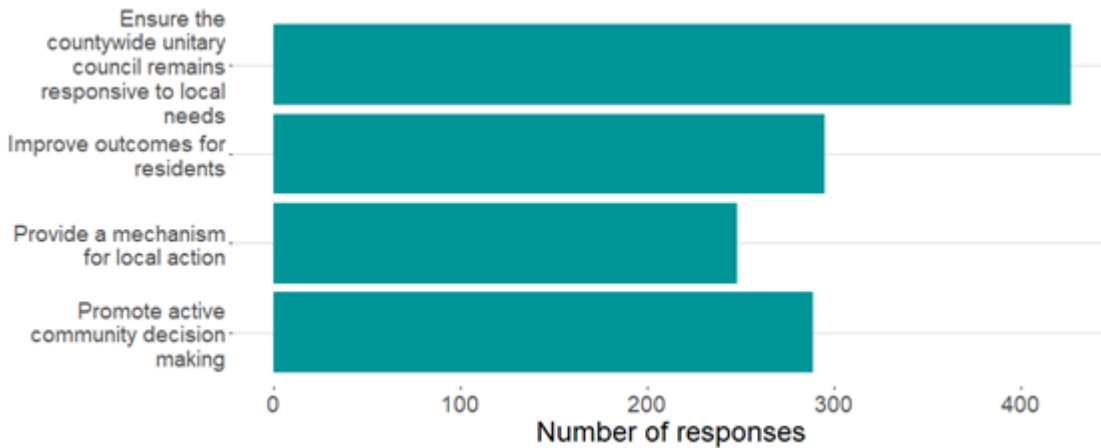
The following map shows the geographical coverage of 339 respondents who voluntarily provided their postcode.



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**Summary of Responses to the Consultation questions**

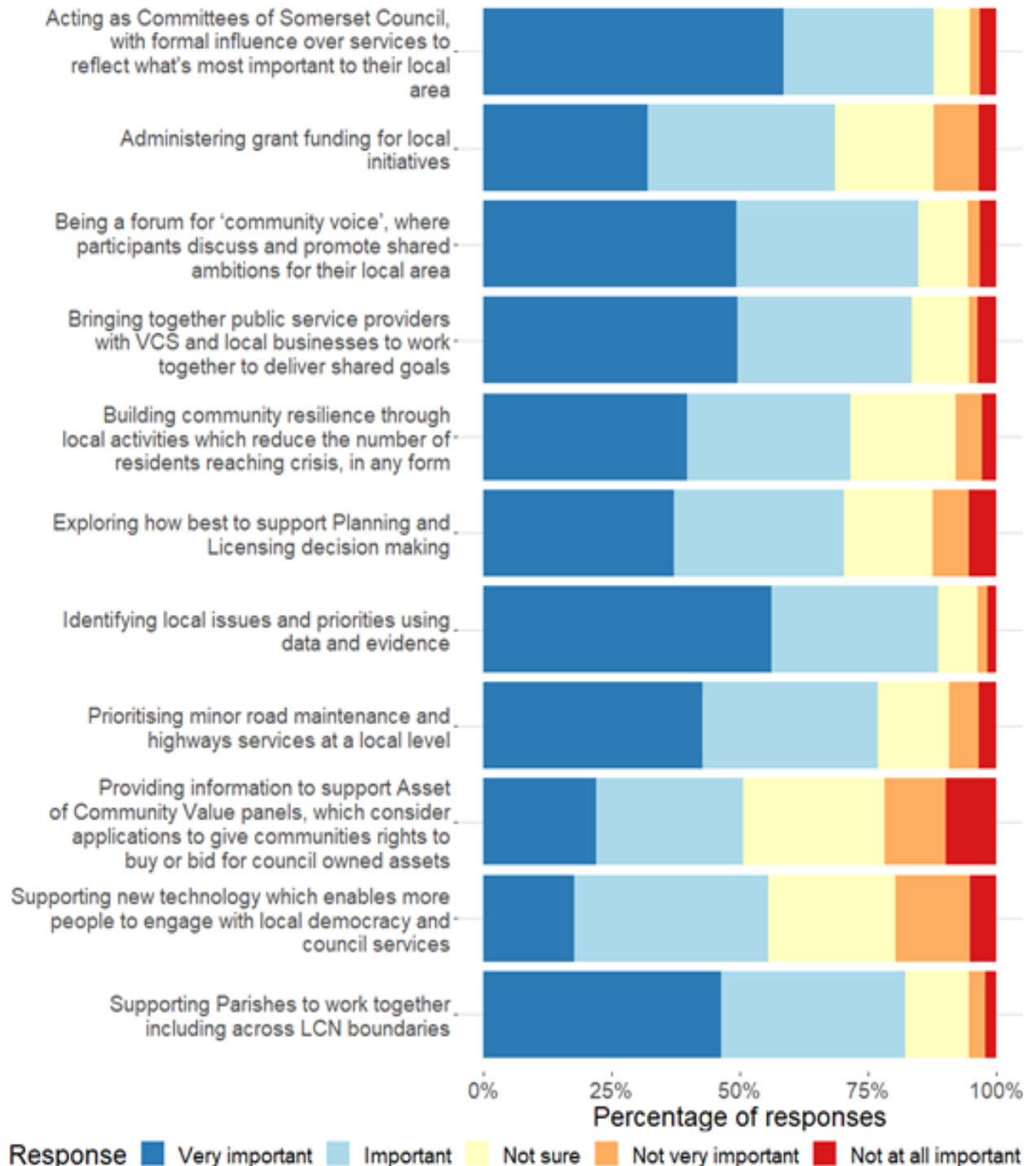
**Question 1 - Which do you think are the most important aims of LCNs?**



NB. Participants could choose any number of responses to this question.

The text box responses noted the positive opportunities that LCNs might offer for service alignment, transformational change, national and regional funding, identification of common goals and creation of collective voice, meaningful input into decision making, greater communication and resident engagement, collaboration amongst partners and support for parishes and sharing of resources and assets.

**Question 2 - How important do you consider each of the following roles for LCNs to be?**



The greatest support is for:  
 01 – Acting as committees  
 04 – Identifying local issues

Then

02 – Bringing together public services with VCFSE

03 – Being Forum for community voice

11 – Supporting parishes to work together

Participants were also asked if there were other roles and responsibilities, they considered important but not listed. Responses can be broadly grouped under the following headings:

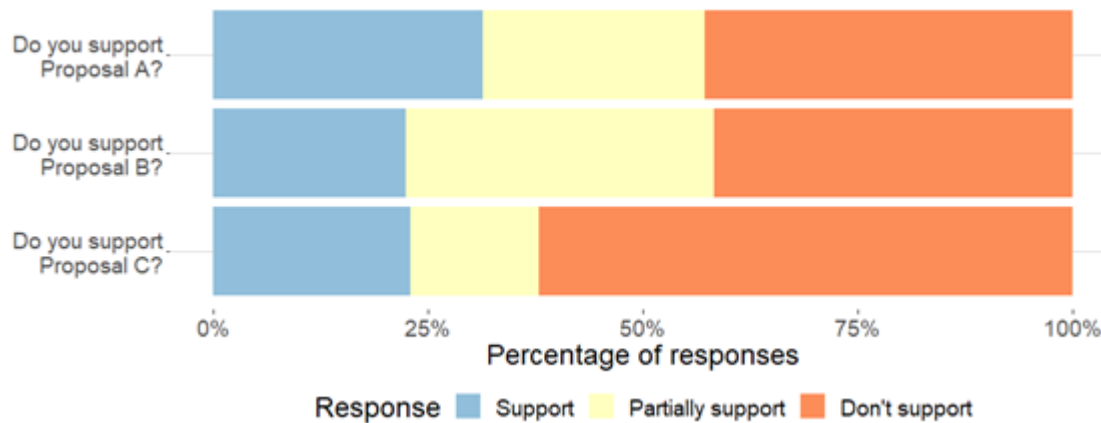
- Climate and Nature\_
- Health and Social Care
- Planning and Licensing
- Working culture of the new Somerset Council
- Highways
- Opportunities to work together to: attract funding, work across LCN areas, create collective voice around common issues
- Create greater communication with residents, gather local knowledge, enhance engagement
- Scrutiny of Somerset Council
- Support and enhance role of Parish Councils

Participants also noted concerns:

- Lack of clarity on what the roles of an LCN would or could be
- Lack of inclusivity – transport, representation, timing and scheduling of meetings
- Financial sustainability
- How the meetings will be run and who will be selected as chair
- Number of meetings in a year and the potential burden of too many
- Overall governance not being clear hence the concerns of voices being heard, and issues not being brought to light
- Reliance on volunteers who have limited computer literacy, funding, or time
- Local decisions may not be taken at local level
- Lack of responsibility and accountability
- Risk that LCN's become a talking shop
- Lack of commitment if nothing is secured/decided in first few meetings
- General disinterest in a small community which doesn't feel that it will achieve any representation

### Question 3 to 5 - Boundary Proposals A, B & C

Participants were asked to tell us about their thoughts on each of the three boundary proposals with the option to either support, partially support or don't support.



- 31.2% of respondents did not fully support any of the proposals
- 0.18% of respondents fully supported all three boundary proposals
- The majority of participants provided detailed written feedback on one or more of the proposals.

Comments pertaining to the geographic boundaries provide specific information about potential groupings of parishes, identifying those which naturally align with one LCN area rather than another. Other comments in this section can be grouped into the following themes:

- A strong desire to work together in natural communities, and at a sub unitary LCN level
- Concern smaller parishes may lose voice to town issues [rural vs Town]
  - Connection with the Cornwall model, for example Truro Style delivery method where towns and parishes are grouped together but enabled to explore rural and town themes separately.
  - Having distinct town LCNs and rural LCNs
- Some parishes would prefer to be grouped by landscape character:
  - Lowlands & high lands
  - Coastal & moorland
  - Historical connections & themes which they are already working on e.g. highway issues connecting villages
  - Blackdown hills & AONB
  - Levels
  - Polden villages
  - West Hatch grouping
  - Exmoor National Park & Panel

- Quantocks & AONB
- Some parishes specified a desire to be grouped with neighbours not currently identified in one of the three proposals.
- Losing voice in large areas and a lack of natural community identity was also raised.

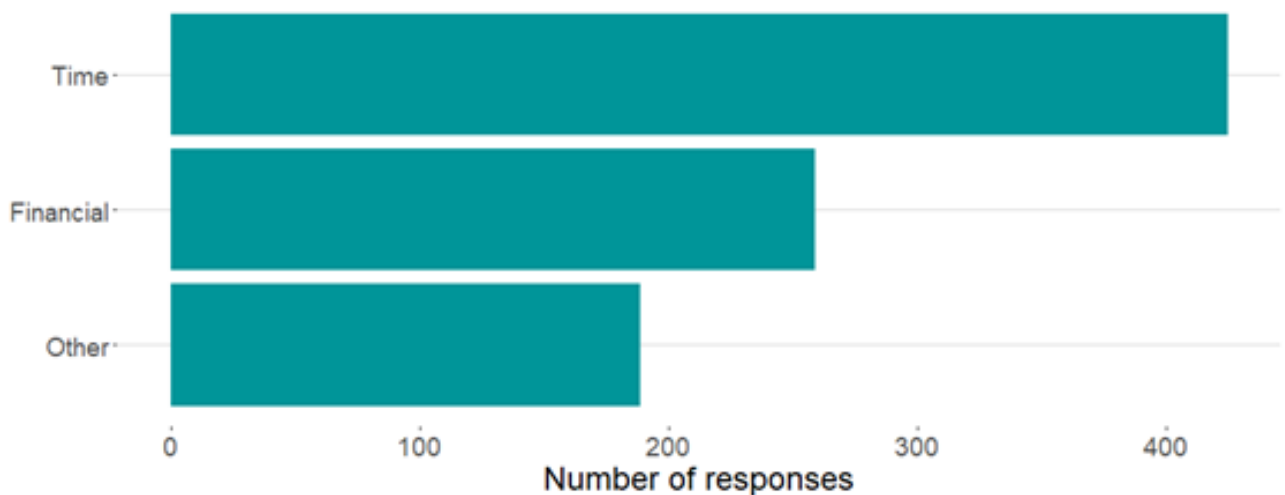
VCFSE colleagues commented that smaller LCN areas will allow more opportunity to make a meaningful difference for people and places and the engagement of smaller, locally based, organisations, who would welcome the opportunity to participate. They have also recognised the importance of ensuring residents voices are represented and heard and that smaller LCN areas would support this.

There was concern that county wide organisations would find it difficult to participate in too many LCNs and that smaller LCN areas may not reflect a broad demographic and that smaller areas of deprivation will not be recognised.

Health colleagues indicated that LCN alignment with PCN areas would be preferable in order to better understand local challenges across all services, enabling co-designing of solutions and commissioning of services.

The police expressed a preference for proposal C, recognising that smaller towns and parishes may feel under-represented in larger geographical areas.

**Question 6 - Participants identified the following barriers to participating in LCNs:**



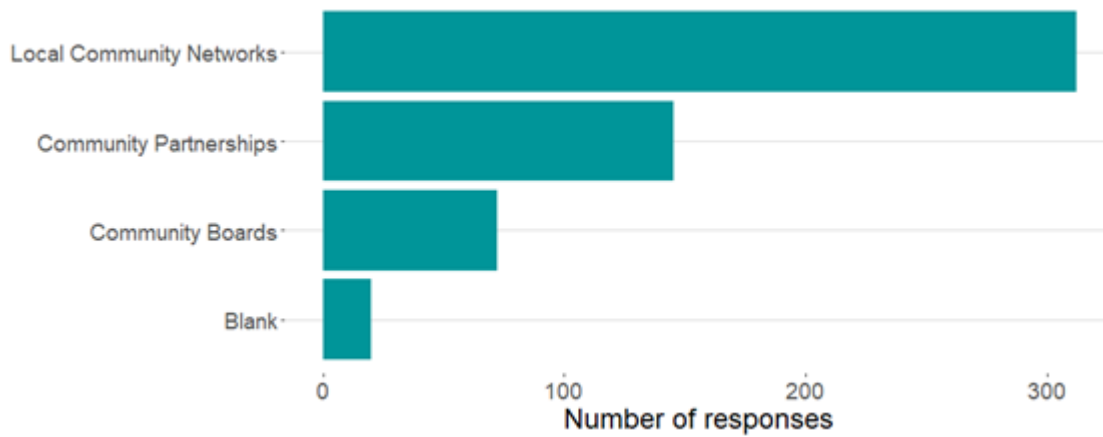
Respondents also raised the following barriers to participation under the following themes:

- **Inclusivity to participation** – issues of attending in person and ensuring hybrid/online being an option for attendance. Access to and the cost of public transport, timing of meetings being accessible to all including volunteers and residents [work/caring commitments] and scheduling of meetings to avoid conflicts, membership and the process of identifying who attends, funding of travel expenses, time to travel to meetings and creative ways to increase participation. The impact of climate change was also of concern.
- **Chairing & Voting** - Need for independent chair appointed by the LCN not the new Somerset Council which has a set term of office. All representatives to have an equal say (vote if required) to prevent largest or loudest areas dominating. Lack of voting may be a barrier to participation at LCN's. Skilled leadership to balance power dynamics.
- **Vision and Objectives** – Lack of agreed objectives/priorities and a clear strategic vision could hamper progress and value of LCN's Important to gain insight from 'lived experience' in shaping new ways of working. This takes considerable time and effort.
- **Formal 'committees'** environment /meetings can be off-putting. Mechanisms for engagement need to be ambitious if we want this to be different. Unlikely that larger organisations straddling two or more LCNs, will have the capacity to participate. Too much emphasis on elected councillors may risk bringing more politics into the LCN environment than is helpful, which could mean that other individuals/organisations feel disenfranchised. Bureaucracy being onerous and taking too much time. Locally planned calendar of meetings.
- **Financial support** - for participants who may be volunteers or from groups with limited resources. Concern regarding the potential impact for parish councils.
- **Place based impact** – local affinity will encourage engagement. Evidence of positive change. Engagement of all sectors at a local level, representing all areas within an LCN.
- **Capacity in the servicing of LCNs** – having the right roles with capacity to support and deliver action. Suitable venues.



### Question 7 – Name for LCN's

When asked what LCNs (which has been a working name) should be called participants gave the following responses:



58 respondents commented on the name options with many offering alternatives to the three above which included:

- Community Councils
- Local Parish Networks
- Community Parish Networks
- Local Residents Board
- Somerset Local Boards
- Local Community Partnerships
- Regional Community Teams
- Community Action Partnerships
- Talking Shop
- Area Partnership Boards
- Community Committees
- District Councils
- Community Steering Groups
- Community Hubs
- Community Partnership
- Cheddar Valley Cluster
- District Communities
- Community Teams
- Local Interest Communities
- Communities Connect