

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Somerset – Updated Implementation Plan

Lead Member(s): Bill Revans - Leader of the Council

Val Keitch - Lead Member for Local Government Reorganisation and Prosperity

Local Member(s) and Division: No direct impact on specific Divisions or Members

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1. Summary / Background

- 1.1.** On 17 March 2022 the Secretary of State made the Somerset (Structural Changes) Order 2022 (the SCO). The SCO sets out the mechanism for the reorganisation of local government and the establishment of a single unitary council in Somerset on 1 April 2023.

In particular, the SCO requires that during the period from 10 May 2022 until 31 March 2023 the Executive of Somerset County Council will be responsible for implementing local government reorganisation in Somerset, and in particular:

- Ensuring delivery of “effective, efficient and timely transfer of the district councils’ functions, property, rights and liabilities.” In other words, to ensure delivery of the new council.
- Holding and keep under review an Implementation Plan including plans, timetables and budgets that support delivery of the new unitary council’s functions on (or after) 1 April 2023.

- 1.2.** In line with the SCO and the Administration’s intentions for the programme, an Implementation Board has been mobilised to monitor the programme and provide advice and recommendations on its implementation to the Executive of Somerset County Council. The Board provides oversight on behalf of the County's Executive in relation to the responsibilities outlined in section 1.1 above.

- 1.3.** Therefore, the Implementation Board has a responsibility to review the LGR Implementation Plan, particularly the objectives of the programme, and recommend to the Executive how to ensure they remain appropriate. Previously the LGR Programme Team committed to reviewing and updating this plan and presenting to SCC Executive for their approval. The updated Implementation Plan can be found in Appendix A of this report.

- 1.4.** This report proposes amendments to the Implementation to ensure it

remains fit for purpose. Appendix B provides a list of changes and additions proposed. Critically, changes are proposed to be made to the programme Strategic Objectives, alongside additional context on the environment in which we are delivering the LGR Programme

The Strategic objectives are proposed to change as follows:

Current	Proposed
Create a new unitary Council for Somerset that delivers the approved business case on 1 April 2023.	Create a new unitary Council for Somerset in line with the approved programme delivery plan for 1 April 2023, and with due regard to the Business Case
Enable performance capability – to deliver business case vision on 1 April 2023	Enable performance capability – to deliver business case vision from 1 April 2023.
No changes were made to Strategic Objective 3: Develop the new council to optimise benefits and opportunities from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2025	

Additional context is proposed to ensure that the Strategic Objectives remain fit for purpose:

- The programme operates in a context of financial pressure both in-year and future years, as well as recruitment and retention challenges. Therefore financial benefits and critical activity must be maximised and unnecessary work (business-as-usual and LGR) be reconsidered where appropriate in order to release financial or staff resources. LGR has a key role of play in delivering a financially sustainable council.
- The programme should consider its activity in the context of the Somerset Climate Emergency Declaration and more recently, Ecological Emergency Declaration.
- There is a risk that if relationships with Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE), communities and other public sector partners are not strong, programme benefit (including reduced or redirected demand leading to savings) will not be fully achieved. Relationships with VCFSE and other stakeholders are critical to success of the programme and the new council
- Tranche 1 products remain the prime focus of programme delivery up to Vesting Day
- The emerging Council Plan will add additional context to the LGR programme.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** Executive are asked to approve the amended Implementation Plan as provided in appendix A, in order to discharge its responsibilities as laid out in the Somerset (Structural Changes) Order 2022.

3. Reasons for recommendations

- 3.1** The purpose of the recommendations is to ensure effective and transparent governance and delivery of the LGR Programme.

4. Other options considered

- 4.1.** No alternative options have been considered. It is good practice and a programme requirement to regularly review and update our Implementation Plan to ensure it is accurately reflecting our objectives and progress with the programme.

5. Links to Council Policy and Budgets

- 5.1.** LGR in Somerset, LGR Programme and recommendations in this report are consistent with the County Vision to improve lives. The financial benefits defined in the Business Case are £18.5m per year after the 2-year payback period.

The LGR programme delivery and MTFP under development are being delivered in parallel in order that dependencies are understood and maximum financial benefit achieved.

- 5.2.** Opportunities for significant transformation and improvement in line with Council policy as a result of unitarisation are also anticipated and will deliver additional financial and non-financial benefits

6. Consultations and co-production

- 6.1.** Consultation has been undertaken informally with the new Administration and formally through each of the 5 Councils through the Programme Board, Programme Steering Group and members of the Governance Workstream. This report and recommendations reflect those discussions, as well as feedback from those required to provide sign-off for the final report.

7. Financial and Risk Implications

- 7.1.** No specific financial or risk implications have been identified in relation to the recommendations in this report.
- 7.2.** Maintaining in up-to-date Implementation Plan helps mitigate programme risks (including financial ones) including:
- Stronger partnerships and working relationships
 - Managing change effectively
 - Ensuring stronger collaboration and coproduction for better outcomes.
 - The benefits of transparency, programme oversight and informed

decision-making

The Programme Risk Register is incorporated into the Implementation Plan.

8. Legal and HR Implications

- 8.1.** Articles 9 and 11 of the Somerset (Structural Changes) Order 2022 provides that the Executive must “prepare, keep under review, and revise as necessary, an Implementation Plan” and that for the purposes of doing so it must have regard to the Business Case submitted by Somerset County Council to the Secretary of State.

Therefore, the strategic objectives of the implementation plan must be crafted taking into account the original business case.

9. Other Implications

9.1. Equalities Implications

No specific implications have been identified in relation to the recommendations in this report.

9.2. Community Safety Implications

No specific implications have been identified in relation to the recommendations in this report.

9.3. Sustainability Implications

No specific implications have been identified in relation to the recommendations in this report.

9.4. Health and Safety Implications

No specific implications have been identified in relation to the recommendations in this report.

9.5. Health and Wellbeing Implications

No specific implications have been identified in relation to the recommendations in this report.

9.6. Social Value

No specific implications have been identified in relation to the recommendations in this report.

10. Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

- 10.1.** The maintenance of an Implementation Plan is the responsibility of the Executive, advised by the Implementation Board. On 15 June 2022 the Executive approved the creation of the Implementation Board to monitor the LGR programme and provide advice and recommendations to the Executive

in relation to it, including to "...keep under review an Implementation Plan".
The Implementation Board have reviewed the Implementation Plan and recommend its adoption.

11. Background Papers

11.1. Appendix A: Presentation showing recommended updates to LGR Implementation Plan

Appendix B: Proposed updated LGR Implementation Plan (full document)

<u>Report Sign-Off</u>		Date completed
Legal Implications	Tom Woodhams	31/10/22
Governance	Scott Wooldridge	Click or tap to enter a date.
Corporate Finance	Jason Vaughan	29/10/22
Human Resources and ICT	Chris Squire	Click or tap to enter a date.
Property	Paula Hewitt	30/10/22
Procurement	Claire Griffiths	31/10/22
Senior Manager	Alyn Jones	Click or tap to enter a date.
Commissioning Development	Sunita Mills / Ryszard Rusinek	Click or tap to enter a date.
Executive Lead Member	Val Keitch	Click or tap to enter a date.
<u>Consulted on report</u>		
Opposition Spokesperson (non-key decision: inform)	Cllr Faye Purbrick	Click or tap to enter a date.