

Local Community Network (LCN) Development Next Steps

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New Somerset Council

Executive Member(s): Cllr Val Keitch - Lead

Member for Local Government Reorganisation & Prosperity

Local Member(s) and Division: N/A

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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. These recommendations are listed in full in section 11.1 of this paper.

This report summarises the work that is being undertaken to deliver the recommendations and associated principles, to inform the paper that will be considered by Executive in January 2023.

Implementation Board members are invited to consider, comment and advise on the scope of this work in terms of its appropriateness and completeness.

Comments and recommendations from LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee and Implementation Board have been invaluable in informing the approach towards LCN development to date.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1.** LGR Implementation Board is asked to:

1. Note the recommendations agreed by Executive on 16 November 2022 in relation to the LCN Consultation Review paper, in particular the associated principles, to inform the ongoing development of LCNs
2. To consider, comment and advise on the current and proposed actions to deliver the recommendations.

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 and to give them a voice.

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.** Implementation Board has received regular reports regarding LCN development and in particular the recent consultation and engagement exercises. On 16 November 2022 the Executive agreed to receive a further paper in January 2023 on the outcomes of further work, including reasoned recommendations for LCN roles and geographies. Ideally, Scrutiny would be asked to consider a draft of the report before it is considered by Executive on 18 January 2023. However, the work to prepare this report to the Executive will not be completed by the time of the meeting of LGR Joint Scrutiny Board on 8 December 2022, which was cancelled in any case. In addition, the next LGR Joint Scrutiny Board is not scheduled until after the January Executive meeting.

It is therefore considered important that the Implementation Board is able to consider and comment on the proposed actions that will take place over the coming weeks, to inform the decisions that the Executive will be asked to make on 18 January 2023. The Chair of LGR Joint Scrutiny Board will be consulted on the January Executive paper when it is drafted.

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.
- 5.2.** It is expected that LCNs will both influence and work within the policy framework of the new Council and therefore their development over the coming months will be influenced by the emerging corporate priorities for the Council. A growth bid has been submitted to establish LCNs and work has begun 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.** The 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.
- 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', primarily in terms of staffing budgets, 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 areas with similar working arrangements, and the emerging feedback from the Pilot LCNs. An additional funding request of up to £900,000 has been submitted as part of the MTFP process based on modelling community development and democratic services officer and operational support costs. Noting that there will also be a review of existing community development spend to see where there is potential to repurpose these budgets. It should be noted that fewer LCNs does not necessarily equate to a smaller budgetary requirement. However, currently the MTFP process has revealed a potential funding gap for the new Somerset Council of £38.2m and as a result, it is unlikely that new initiatives can be funded.

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 VCSE 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.
- 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

There will be consideration of equalities implications as a significant factor in the proposed work to shape a geographical proposal, which will also act as a steer regarding equality in the future development of LCNs: form and function.

The January Executive report will include full and robust consideration of the Equalities impact of recommendations.

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. N/A

11. Background

11.1. Report to Executive on 16 November 2022 and Resulting 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. In summary:

- Feedback confirms support for LCNs as a means of ensuring that the new Unitary council is able to remain engaged with and responsive to local needs and support improved outcomes for local people.
- Recognition of the importance of LCNs having genuine voice and influence over what happens in the local area, that LCN priorities are evidence based, and that LCNs are a vehicle for convening partners and communities to work toward addressing those priorities.
- Whilst there was some support for LCNs having a relationship with planning and licensing functions, there was concern expressed that introducing regulatory roles could stifle collaboration and partnership working. Some responses do, however, recognise the place shaping potential of LCNs, which is something that could be developed over time.
- A strong argument is being put forward by partners and colleagues in the VCFSE and Health and Social Care sectors about maximising the potential of LCNs to support the bringing together and integration of multi-agency, multi-disciplinary approaches to create better community outcomes, more efficiently.
- The diverse range of views in relation to LCN geographies indicate that it would be premature to recommend a particular solution at this point.
- Barriers to participation that were identified during the consultation related to practical issues such as time, finance and access. For smaller parishes in particular, the main concern is capacity and lack of clarity about what will be expected from them.
- The consultation indicates that Local Community Network was the preferred name.

The Executive agreed the following:

1. Note 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. Consider and comment on the conclusions, proposals and further lines of enquiry arising.
3. Endorse the establishment of LCNs as a vehicle for bringing together and focussing the community development and engagement activity in the new Council.
4. Note and support the rationale for further work and dialogue to be undertaken before a recommendation is made on LCN geographical

boundaries.

5. Agree 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 (amended from Ensure alignment with the Integrated Care System and establish the benefits that this could bring*
 - d. *Observe town and parish boundaries*
 - e. *Consider unitary division boundaries*
 - f. *Consider equalities implications.*

6. Agree 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.

12. Current Position and Next Steps

The resolutions made by the Executive provide a clear direction for the ongoing development work towards establishing LCNs.

The LGR Customers, Communities and Partnerships workstream team have taken the resolutions and agreed principles to create a framework for the activity that needs to take place over the next two months. This activity is summarised in the table below. The table represents a high level summary; there is a significant amount of detailed activity sitting behind each action, and little scope for slippage.

| Executive Recommendation / Principle | Associated actions description | Complete by |
|--|--|--------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Respect the rurality of Somerset and find ways to work with differences between rural / urban priorities within an LCN area, and across LCN boundaries</i> • <i>Respect the diversity of</i> | <p>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.</p> <p>Summarise in a map and narrative format to</p> | 21/11 |

| | | |
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| <p><i>Somerset's landscape character</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Observe town and parish boundaries</i> • <i>Consider unitary division boundaries</i> | <p>inform discussions with colleagues and partners.</p> <p>Ensure governance arrangements enable rural and urban focussed sub-groups to be established within LCN areas, to support the development of specific local priorities for urban and rural areas.</p> | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Work across Somerset to better align with the Integrated Care System and other partners, recognising the benefits of partnership working</i> | <p>Discuss outcomes of mapping exercise with Lead Members for LGR and Communities</p> | 2/12 |
| | <p>Discussion with colleagues in Adults' Services, Children's Services and Public Health to clarify benefits of alignment with ICS and what this could mean for geographical arrangements</p> | 2/12 |
| | <p>Meeting with Health colleagues, informed by discussions with SLT colleagues, to further refine LCN role scope and geographical proposal</p> | 9/12 |
| | <p>Meetings with other partners to check and challenge emerging proposals</p> | Ongoing and via December LGR Advisory Forum |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Consider equalities implications.</i> | <p>Prepare full Equalities Impact Assessment for January Executive Paper</p> | 9/12 (allow for revisions as final paper develops) |
| <p>Endorse the establishment of LCNs as a vehicle for bringing together and focussing the community development and engagement activity in the new Council.</p> | <p>Fully 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.</p> | 2/12 |
| <p>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.</p> | <p>Commence a review of existing community development and engagement spend across the five councils to understand what might be repurposed to support LCNs. Provide position statement as part of January Executive paper</p> | 23/12 |
| <p>Note and support the rationale for further work and dialogue to be undertaken before a recommendation is made on LCN geographical boundaries.</p> | <p>Prepare paper that is the culmination of all of the above activities.</p> | <p>Initial working draft 16/12</p> <p>Draft to DS 4/1, final 9/1,</p> |
| <p>Agree to receive a further</p> | | |

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| <p>paper in January 2023 on the outcomes of the further work, including reasoned recommendations for LCN roles and geographies.</p> | | <p>publication 10/1</p> |
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Running alongside the actions listed above will be development of a communications strategy to ensure ongoing engagement with partners and stakeholders. This will primarily be through our established networks and communications channels, including Member and Town and Parish Council briefings and meetings, statements and website updates.

13. Background Papers

- 13.1.** Local Community Network Consultation Review – Report to Somerset County Council’s Executive 16 November 2022, with the following appendices:
- Appendix A - LCN Consultation report
 - Appendix B - ‘Companion’ copy of LCN questionnaire
 - Appendix C - Comparison table of arrangements for locality working in Cornwall, Wiltshire and Buckinghamshire