

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a Meeting of the Local Government Reorganisation Joint Scrutiny Committee held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton, on Thursday 27 October 2022 at 2.00 pm

**Present:** Cllr B Filmer (Chair) (SCC), Cllr B Hamilton (Vice-Chair) (SSDC), Cllr B Crow (SDC), Cllr P Ham (MDC), Cllr C Inchley (MDC), Cllr M Lithgow (SWT), Cllr D Mansell (SCC), Cllr P Maxwell (SSDC), Cllr H Prior-Sankey (SCC), Cllr J Roundell Greene (SCC), Cllr B Smedley (SCC), Cllr M Lovell (SCC), Cllr J Lloyd (SWT) and Cllr E Pearlstone (SCC)

**Other Members present:** Cllr A Bradford, Cllr J Hunt, Cllr V Keitch,

**Other Members present on Microsoft Teams:** Cllr N Cavill, Cllr S Coles, Cllr H Kay, Cllr C Lawrence, Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr F Purbrick, Cllr L Redman, Cllr H Shearer, Cllr S Wakefield and Cllr M Wales

**Apologies for absence:** Cllr S Buller, Cllr T Butt Philip, Cllr M Chilcott and Cllr T Deakin

### **24 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1**

Apologies were received from Councillor Mandy Chilcott, Councillor Sue Buller, who was substituted by Councillor Janet Lloyd, Councillor Theo Butt Philip, who was substituted by Councillor Emily Pearlstone and Councillor Tom Deakin, who was substituted by Councillor Martin Lovell.

### **25 Minutes of the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2**

The minutes of the LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 30 September 2022 were approved.

### **26 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3**

The Committee noted the details of the personal interests of all Councillors present already declared in relation to their membership of County, District, Town and Parish Councils.

### **27 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4**

There had been no submissions for statements/questions received by the deadline of Friday 21 October 2022.

### **28 Summary of LCN Consultation - Agenda Item 5**

The Local Community Network (LCN) Project Leads, Sara Skirton and Jan Stafford, gave a PowerPoint presentation which provided an update on the LCN consultation.

The Committee discussed the presentation, and the following was a summary of the areas raised:-

- Councillors queried how many of the responses were from non-parish council related organisations/individuals.  
*The LCN Project Lead advised that out of the 549 responses, 278 had been from Parish Councils.*
- Councillors queried whether the proposal drawn up from the responses would go back for further consultation prior to the report being taken to the Executive.  
*The LCN Project Lead advised that it probably would not go back for any further consultation.*
- Councillors queried how the reporting would work and how the Implementation Board would fit in the process.  
*The LCN Project Lead advised that they could take the report to the Implementation Board. The report would be taken to the Somerset County Council (SCC) Executive in November 2022, as they were the decision-making body, and would include feedback from the responses and where targeted discussions might be needed.*
- Councillors queried whether the report would be taken to the SCC Full Council meeting for sign off.  
*The LGR Programme Director advised that the SCC Executive were the decision-making body which had been allocated by the Structural Change Order.*
- Concern was raised that there would not be enough time or resources to set up the LCNs by vesting day.  
*The LCN Project Lead advised that was why they were keen to get the report to the November 2022 Executive meeting, to enable progress to be made. As they were aware that in other Unitary Authorities it had taken a couple of years to establish the networks and some had even carried out reviews and made changes in that time.*
- Concern was raised that LCNs were reviewed because they did not work.  
*The LCN Project Lead advised that they were a valued necessity for a sub unitary level, to bring groups together to discuss local issues.*
- Concern was raised on the delay in taking the report to Executive and that it could cause a delay in the work being carried out on the new Constitution.
- Concern was raised on the number, size and areas covered by the LCNs. Councillors believed that they should be split based on urban and rural areas, as they would have different types of issues.
- The Chair agreed that there was a lot of data to analyse, and he looked forward to future presentations with further information.

**The LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the presentation.**

## 29 LGR Programme Update - Agenda Item 6

The LGR Programme Director, Alyn Jones gave a PowerPoint presentation updating the Committee on the LGR programme covering the PwC monthly feedback report for August 2022.

The Committee discussed the presentation, and the following was a summary of the areas raised:-

- Councillors queried what effort had been put in to understand the changes that would be made and impact officers.  
*The LGR Programme Director advised that work had started on being ready for vesting day but that they needed to understand what was important for officers and that a lot of the work was theoretical. He further advised that work was being carried out on ensuring the following was ready for vesting day: payroll, lanyards, branding, 'logging on', work locations and many more.*

**The LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the presentation.**

### 30 **Devolution of Assets** - Agenda Item 7

The Head of Law and Governance Services and Monitoring Officer from Mendip District Council, David Clark gave a PowerPoint presentation updating the Committee on the project carrying out work on the devolution of assets.

The Committee discussed the presentation, and the following was a summary of areas raised:-

- Councillors highlighted that it had been a frustrating process but they thanked the officers for all their work on the trial area.
- Councillors queried why officers had changed the process to be followed.  
*The Head of Law and Governance Services advised that the change was based on the work carried out in the trial area.*
- Councillors agreed that a phased approach was the sensible way forward.
- Councillors queried how LCNs would fit in the process as they had been mentioned.  
*The Head of Law and Governance Services advised that nothing would be devolved to LCNs and that they would be used to promote the process within the local areas.*
- Concern was raised that if too many assets were devolved to the parish councils, it could lead to a council tax rise, as the parish councils could increase their precepts to cover the cost of the services.  
*The Head of Law and Governance Services acknowledged the concern, however, in other areas it had shown that when a parish council had taken on the responsibility it had improved the quality of the service for little increase in the cost of council tax.*
- Councillors queried if the devolution process was open to organisations/groups other than parish councils.  
*The Head of Law and Governance Services advised that they had not asked any other groups if they were interested in the devolution process yet.*
- Councillors queried certain services and whether the parish councils would take on the whole service or could it lead to a fragmented service with different levels of responsibility.

*The Head of Law and Governance Services advised that there were a lot of options for devolution within the business case, which were all available for the parish councils to choose from.*

- Concern was raised on the loss of cost neutrality within the council tax precepts.

*The Head of Law and Governance Services advised that they had looked into cost neutrality very closely and wanted to ensure that they had been open and transparent about the work.*

- Concern was raised on the expectation on the parish councils to take on too much responsibility.
- Concern was raised that the parish councils were setting their budgets for the 2023/34 tax year now, so they needed to know more details as soon as they were available.

*The Head of Law and Governance Services agreed that the timeline was important which was why they had suggested a phased approach for after vesting day.*

- Councillors agreed that officers needed to be careful with the language used within the process and that it was not simply a 'cost shunting' exercise.
- Councillors advised that the report was due to go to the Implementation Board.

### **The LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the presentation.**

#### **31 Risk Register - Agenda Item 8**

The Risk Manager, Angela Farmer, gave a PowerPoint presentation on the LGR Risk Register.

The Committee discussed the presentation, and the following was a summary of the areas raised:-

- Concern was raised on the risk for officers going through the recruitment process.
- Concern was raised on the financial risk.  
*The Risk Manager advised that finance officers were in constant discussions with the programme board to try and keep the score level, the Medium-Term Financial Plan was for the LGR Programme not just for SCC.*
- Councillors queried what was going to happen with the office buildings going past vesting day.  
*The Risk Manager advised that the asset management workstream group would be looking into the options available for the office buildings.*
- Concern was raised on the amount of job vacancies across the five councils.  
*The Risk Manager advised that the programme board were constantly reviewing the vacancies across the five councils and wanted to stabilise the structure going forward.*
- Concern was raised on the timing of the TUPE consultation, and they queried what would happen to those officers who were not due to be transferred across and when would they be told.

*The Risk Manager advised that the intention was to take a phased approach for majority of officers, the only officers that would not be included in the main approach would be officers within tier two and three, who were management level. Those officers would be consulted with during November 2022, the rest of officers would be consulted after vesting day.*

- Concern was raised on risk eleven and that it was marked as green, but councillors were aware of insufficient resources.
- Concern was raised that there was not an officer present at the meeting from Human Resources.
- Councillors queried whether there were any district risks that had not been included.
- Councillors highlighted that the committee were to scrutinise LGR risks only.

**The LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the presentation.**

**32 Work Programme - Agenda Item 9**

The LGR Programme Manager, Alastair Highton gave an update on the Work Programme.

The Committee discussed the presentation, and the following was a summary of the areas raised:-

- Councillors requested an update from the Human Resources department.  
*The LGR Programme Manager advised that he would request that an officer attend the next meeting to give an update.*
- Councillors suggested that the Medium-Term Financial Plan would need to be moved to another meeting.  
*The LGR Programme Manager advised that it would be moved to the January meeting.*

**The LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the Work Programme.**

**33 Any Other Urgent Items of Business - Agenda Item 10**

There were no other urgent items of business raised.

**(The meeting ended at 4.30 pm)**

**CHAIRMAN**