

Somerset County Council
Constitution and Governance Committee
30 January 2023

Governance Arrangements for Local Community Networks

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Executive Lead Member: Cllr Val Keitch - Lead Member for Local Government
Reorganisation & Prosperity

Division and Local Member: N/A

1. Summary

- 1.1.** This report asks the Committee to consider the proposed governance arrangements for Local Community Networks (LCNs) and the proposed initial Terms of Reference which form appendices 1 (full Terms of Reference – for inclusion in the Constitution) and 2 (simplified Terms of Reference – for the LCNs to use).

It asks the Committee to recommend the inclusion of the LCN governance arrangements within the Constitution of Somerset Council.

The draft Terms of Reference were presented to and supported by the Executive on 18 January 2023, recognising that they represent a starting point for LCN governance arrangements, that will be tested, reviewed and revised as appropriate over time.

- 1.2.** The establishment of Local Community Networks (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.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1.** That the Constitution and Governance Committee:

- Recommends to Full Council that the proposed LCN governance arrangements and Terms of Reference be included in the Constitution of the new Somerset Council.

And in doing so notes that:

- The terms of reference have been developed to reflect the proposed roles and responsibilities of LCNs in their initial stages, appropriate and proportionate to their function

- Each LCN will adopt the model terms of reference to enable a level of consistency, noting that there will be scope to consider local flexibility where appropriate.
- The terms of reference will be reviewed during year one of LCNs.

3. Background

3.1. The Executive Committee, on 18 January 2023, agreed the following recommendations regarding LCNs, building on an initial paper to Executive on 16 November 2022:

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 or names, 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.

3.2. Terms of Reference for LCNs

The terms of reference at Appendix 1 and 2 have been drafted to take the purpose, role, function and form of LCNs, agreed at Executive, into account. Key points are summarised in the following sections.

3.3. Governance Structure for LCNs

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 they considered this would give them gravitas and ability to make decisions. Section 12 of the Terms of Reference set out how the LCNs will feed into the Somerset Council democratic process.

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 and are able to make decisions locally. A board structure does not hinder this and does enable LCNs to be consulted on strategic matters.

The development of LCNs is an evolutionary process and there has been a focus

on equal partnership, engagement and empowerment. The proposed core membership facilitates this. If LCNs were formal committees of the Council, only the elected Somerset Councillors would have voting rights.

A board structure at this early stage in LCN development offers greater flexibility, putting all core members on an equal footing in terms of influence and decision making, and helping create an agile and participative environment from day one to meet the proposed initial roles and functions of LCNs. Over time, as functions of LCNs evolve and become clearer, the Council can review the governance and structural arrangements and terms of reference to reflect any changes, and if appropriate evolve to committees.

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.

3.4. Initial Roles for LCNs

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 roles for LCNs in year one:

- 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

3.5. Membership of LCNs and Decision Making

LCNs will be accessible and inclusive, and engagement with wider community groups and residents will be actively encouraged.

The terms of reference outline the proposed membership and representation of LCNs.

LCNs will aim to reach decisions by consensus, with the need for a formal vote being the exception rather than the norm. However, if a vote is required, it will be the core membership that is able to vote. Each Local Community Network

will comprise the following core membership:

- 1) The elected Somerset Council Councillors representing the electoral divisions covered by the Local Community Network;
- 2) An elected representative from each City, Town or Parish Council within the area covered by the Local Community Network;
- 3) Representatives from the following groups or organisations:
 - a) Local Neighbourhood policing team;
 - b) Somerset National Health Service
 - c) Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service;
 - d) Education
 - e) Representatives from Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Organisations
 - f) Representatives from Businesses or Trade Groups

It is acknowledged that the selection of representatives of the above listed organisations requires further consideration, and the make-up may vary from one LCN to another. This will be discussed with partners and stakeholders in the coming weeks and months, including via the LGR Advisory Forum.

In addition to the core membership of each LCN, it is anticipated that each LCN will invite and actively encourage the participation of a wider range of stakeholders relevant to the priorities and issues they are discussing at any one time.

With regard to the election and role of the chair; a supplementary role description for the chair will be created, accompanied by a nomination and election process.

Where there are instances where the democratic mandate needs to be used, recommendations will be made by the appropriate LCN and referred to the Executive for consideration and approval.

Minutes and Agendas of each LCN meeting will be made publicly available on the Somerset Council website.

3.6. Meeting Arrangements

The 18 LCNs will be supported to meet 6 to 8 times a year and will have the discretion to agree the setting of these and any working group meetings at a local level in consultation with the LCN Officer team. Meetings will be held in public, with public participation being a standard item on every agenda and actively encouraged.

3.7. Review

These Terms of Reference are the starting point for the LCNs, to ensure a level of consistency, with flexibility to reflect local circumstances. They will be reviewed during the first year of operation to ascertain how effectively they are working,

before the Unitary Council Annual Meeting approves them again in May 2024.

4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1.** 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.
- 4.2.** This activity is considered as part of the ongoing dialogue and co-production of LCNs, rather than a one-off event.

5. Implications

- 5.1.** The governance arrangements for LCNs will need to be reflected in the constitution of Somerset Council.
- 5.2.** 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. They will also need the support of Governance Colleagues to administer and minute meetings.
- 5.3.** 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.
- Governance support has been budgeted for within this context.

6. Background papers

- 6.1.** Appendix 1 – LCN Full Terms of Reference
Appendix 2 – LCN Simplified Terms of Reference
LCN Executive Paper November 2022
LCN Executive Paper January 2023

Note For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author