

Decision Report - Executive Decision

Forward Plan Reference: FP/22/10/13

Decision Date – 18/01/22



Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review into Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Somerset: final report and plan of action

Executive Member(s): Cllr Val Keitch - Lead Member for Local Government

Reorganisation & Prosperity

Local Member(s) and Division: All

Lead Officer: Alyn Jones – LGR Programme Director, Alastair Higton – LGR Programme Manager

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1. Summary / Background

1.1 At the LGA Conference in the summer of 2022, the Leader of the Council invited the LGA to carry out a Peer Review of the Local Government Reorganisation Programme in Somerset. Intended to provide a light-touch review of the programme, the Peer Reviewers were asked to specifically focus on the following criteria:

- Preparedness for “day 1” of the new council on 1 April 2023
- Plans for “day 2 and beyond”, meaning how the council could be prepared to transition and transform once it has come into existence
- Making the most of Local Community Networks, which are a key feature of the LGR Business case.

This review therefore largely had an internal focus, offering a view on progress, challenges and peer suggestions for improvement. It was not intended to be a Corporate Peer Challenge.

1.2 The Peer Review took place between 6 and 8 December 2022, the team having prepared by reviewing a range of information ahead of their visit to be as familiar as possible with the issues affecting the LGR programme. Altogether the team spent over 110 hours to complete the review and report.

When the Peer review took place approximately 16 weeks remained until Vesting Day of the new council. This review was therefore timely in that it supports the Executive and Programme Board in being assured that the programme is on target, and where additional focus should be given.

1.3 The purpose of this report is to present the Peer Reviewers’ final report and findings, and propose that a plan of action be prepared to address those findings, including maintaining momentum in the run-up to Vesting day, and how to adapt the programme to support transition and transformation plans during the first years of the new council.

- 1.4 Executive are requested to refer to the Peer Reviewers' final report (appendix A) for detail on their findings and recommendations, however in summary the Programme Team consider it a positive assessment of work to date, that provides valuable insight into how we can maintain or improve delivery against the criteria outlined in 1.1 of this report.
- 1.5 In summary, the Peer Reviewers key reflections and findings were:
- **Articulate your vision** – the reviewers heard that the political administration has a vision and sense of priority activity for the new council; this now needs to be made explicit and socialised.
 - **Be explicit in your commitment to engage partners from all sectors** in the co-production and co-design of policies, structures etc in the new council.
 - **Stop, think and create space as the council 'top team'** – when key senior positions have been filled ensuring we create organisational time and space to consider ways in which the new council will thrive into the future.
 - **Ensure robust finance plans are in place and widely understood** – ensuring staff are aware of the budget position and how this could impact on the functionality of the new council.
 - **Make sure you allow sufficient time for tranche 2** and ensure teams and leaders are able to deliver the new plan and culture
 - **Do not underestimate the time needed for stabilisation** - this will inevitably go beyond 6 months and may even last a full electoral cycle for ambitions to be fully realised.
 - **Keep resolutely focussed on delivering the one council ethos and culture**, throughout the new council and with partners
 - **Ensure you have the necessary capacity in the new council to ensure effective communication**, internally as well as externally
 - **Establish clear transition milestones** – ensure sufficient capacity to support transition. This will help avoid the risk that key systems and policies are not aligned as quickly as some may expect.
 - **Settle on geography, structure and initial people & budget resourcing of LCNs** before Vesting Day, so they can operate from day 1
 - Develop a **strong package of support and engagement with Members**, including an effective member development programme.

In detail, regarding transition, the Peer Reviewers said:

- They have highlighted several times in their report the time needed for **stabilisation / transition** – which based upon their experience to be 18-24 months.
- Furthermore, **transformation plans** for the longer term for the next 5 years and beyond should be being developed and rolled out whilst that strong footing is being established.
- Because of this, and what will be a pressing need to both transform services and make efficiencies, **Somerset Council will need to strike a balance between running a stable council (with capacity to deliver), and the need to improve whilst driving out savings.**

- 1.6** Work is now required to develop a response to the Peer Review, including:
- Maintaining momentum to deliver the new council on Vesting Day.
 - An approach to transition (tranche 2) and subsequent transformation phases for consideration by the Executive and leadership team of the new council
 - Ensuring engagement with Executive, SLT and Programme Board on the above

2. Recommendations

- 2.1.** That the Executive:
1. Accept and endorse the Peer Review findings
 2. Approve publication of the final Peer Review report on the SCC and LGR websites
 3. Request that the LGR Programme Management Office, with LGR Workstreams, Programme Board, SLT and Executive and stakeholders begin work to develop and deliver a plan of action to respond to the LGA Peer Review findings, and report back to February's Executive.

3. Reasons for recommendations

- 3.1** To provide Executive with the final Peer Review report and proposals on how to take its findings forward.
- 3.2** Although this is not a Corporate Peer Challenge which would expect the final report to be published alongside a plan of action, it is proposed to do so anyway in line with programme transparency and a desire to deliver the best new council possible that is ready to deliver once operational.
- 3.3** The timing of the final Peer Review report, and the Christmas period have provided little time to develop a detailed action plan addressing each of the findings

4. Other options considered

- 4.1.** The only alternative option would be to not publish the report or develop a plan of action. This would have undermined the purpose of the Peer Review and miss opportunities to improve the programme and address post-Vesting Day opportunities for transition and transformation.

5. Links to County Vision, Business Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

- 5.1.** The Peer Review final report and plan of action support delivery of the unitary Council Business case and declared aims of the Executive, including through the emerging Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan.

6. Consultations and co-production

- 6.1.** The Peer Reviewers met 75 Members of staff across all 5 councils, at all levels, as well as Members and partners, in order to inform their report. The Leader, Deputy Leader and Executive Lead for LGR and Prosperity received a

presentation on initial findings on the final day of the Peer Review, and all Executive Members and Senior Leadership Team received a copy of the draft Peer Review report when submitted by the LGA.

7. Financial and Risk Implications

- 7.1. The Peer Review report supports delivery of a financially sustainable council and supports reduction of risk both at a programme and workstream / product level. For example, ensuring that the new council has the capacity and capability it needs to deliver agreed plans.
- 7.2. Risk to the LGR Programme, business as usual of the current 5 councils, or to the new Somerset Council, is minimal. The Peer Review report and action plan will instead support identification of opportunities and the ability of services to act upon them.

Likelihood	1	Impact	1	Risk Score	1
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8. Legal and HR Implications

- 8.1. There are no implications inherent to this report or the Peer Review report. Implications arising (positive or negative) from delivering the recommendations in section 2.1.3 of this report will be addressed as those plans are developed.

8.2. Equalities Implications

There are no implications inherent to this report or the Peer Review report. Any implication arising (positive or negative) from delivering the recommendations in section 2.1.3 of this report will be addressed as those plans are developed.

9. Other Implications

9.1. Community Safety Implications

There are no implications inherent to this report or the Peer Review report. Any implication arising (positive or negative) from delivering the recommendations in section 2.1.3 of this report will be addressed as those plans are developed.

9.2. Health and Safety Implications

There are no implications inherent to this report or the Peer Review report. Any implication arising (positive or negative) from delivering the recommendations in section 2.1.3 of this report will be addressed as those plans are developed.

9.3. Health and Wellbeing Implications

There are no implications inherent to this report or the Peer Review report. Any implication arising (positive or negative) from delivering the recommendations in section 2.1.3 of this report will be addressed as those plans are developed.

9.4. Social Value

There are no implications inherent to this report or the Peer Review report. Any implication arising (positive or negative) from delivering the recommendations in section 2.1.3 of this report will be addressed as those plans are developed.

9.5. Health and Wellbeing Implications

There are no implications inherent to this report or the Peer Review report. Any implication arising (positive or negative) from delivering the recommendations in section 2.1.3 of this report will be addressed as those plans are developed.

10. Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

10.1 Owing to the timing of the Peer Review and final report, it has not been possible for the Joint Scrutiny Committee to review and comment on the Peer Review report. However, in development of the plan of action, they will be involved. The Chair of the Joint Scrutiny Committee has however had the opportunity to review the report and comment.

11. Background papers

LGA led LGR Peer-Challenge Feedback Report

Report Sign-Off		Date completed
Legal Implications	Honor Clarke	09/01/23
Governance	Scott Wooldridge	10/01/23
Corporate Finance	Jason Vaughan	09/01/23
Customers, Digital & Workforce	Chris Squire	09/01/23
Property	Paula Hewitt / Oliver Woodhams	09/01/23
Procurement	Claire Griffiths	10/01/23
Senior Manager	Alyn Jones	09/01/23
Commissioning Development	Sunita Mills / Ryszard Rusinek	09/01/23
Executive Member	Cllr Val Keitch - Lead Member for Local Government Reorganisation & Prosperity	09/01/23
Sign-off: Consulted on Non-Key Decision		
Local Member	Not applicable	-
Opposition Spokesperson	Opposition Spokesperson - LGR Cllr Faye Purbrick	09/01/23
Scrutiny Chair	Scrutiny Committee – Joint Scrutiny Committee for LGR - Cllr Bob Filmer	09/01/23