

## Decision Report - Executive Decision

Forward Plan Reference: FP/24/03/12

Decision Date – 8<sup>th</sup> May 2024

Key Decision – no

Confidential Information – no

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LCNs: Update, Initial Review and Terms of Reference

Executive Member(s): Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources

Associate Lead Member for Localities (LCNs & Public Health

Local Member(s) and Division: N/A

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### Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to seek agreement of the revised Terms of Reference for Local Community Networks. They have been drafted considering learnings from the first nine months of meetings, feedback from Chairs and Vice Chairs and the current financial position of Somerset Council
2. It also considers a brief overview of the current position of LCNs including the governance, staffing and support, geographies, participation, and stakeholders. It invites feedback from the Executive Committee at this early stage of the review of LCNs, which will feed into the Council's Improvement and Transformation Programme; specifically, the Partnerships, Devolution and Localities element.

### Recommendations

3. The Executive is asked to consider the initial review of the 18 LCNs and agree the amended Terms of Reference for LCNs.

### Reasons for recommendations

4. Local Community Networks (LCNs) are a key commitment to ensure that Somerset Council is engaged with and listening to our communities.
5. Following the first five rounds of main LCN meetings and taking into account the current financial position of Somerset Council, consideration has been

given to the operating model of LCNs, in particular the staffing and resource arrangements to reduce the costs of delivery of the main LCN meetings.

6. The Terms of Reference for LCNs (appendix A) have been amended to reflect these changes and have also considered feedback from Chairs and Vice chairs of LCNs regarding the minimum number of main meetings each year and the standard agenda items.
7. We have learnt that working groups, which take place between main LCN meetings, play a key role in defining priorities and creating, developing, and delivering action plans to meet local need. As such there will be more emphasis on building these in the coming year and a more detailed review will be incorporated in the Transformation Programme, in particular the Partnerships, Devolution and Localities aspects.

#### **Other options considered**

8. Detailed consideration has been given to continuing to deliver the main LCN meetings with existing levels of ICT and Democratic Services support, and the current Terms of Reference. Due to the current financial pressures, it was considered necessary to find ways of making efficiencies in how LCNs are supported. In light of upcoming Annual General Meetings of all 18 LCNs in June / July it was considered timely to revise the Terms of Reference, to reflect the operational and governance changes, and the experience and feedback to date regarding LCNs.

#### **Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan**

9. The LCN staff costs are being met within the Partnerships and Localities' overall salary envelope.
10. On 18 January 2023, Executive agreed a one-off Earmarked Reserve amount of £300k to be used to mobilise LCNs during 2023/24 only. This was to enable a review and repurposing of existing community development spend across the Council.
11. It is anticipated that the ongoing annual staff resources for LCNs will be circa £600k. This is being met through repurposing of existing staff budgets within the Partnerships and Localities Service Directorate as part of the agreed restructure of that area. In addition there is a small delivery budget for

operational costs such as training and venue hire, met from within Partnerships and Localities overall budget envelope.

12. Where possible, and in consultation with LCN membership, main LCN meetings will take place in central Council-owned venues, however where there is not a suitable Council base in an LCN area, community venues are used. We recognise the importance of the use of appropriate venues both in terms of being geographically and physically accessible and meeting our technical requirements for a hybrid set up. During the first year we have developed and agreed, with local LCN members, a suitable portfolio of venues across each LCN.
13. It is intended that the priorities of LCNs will, locally and strategically, influence the spend of the Council and it is hoped 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 and in the support of Asset and Service Devolution. LCNs' contribution to creating resilient communities and strong local partnerships is even more important in the context of the financial emergency.

### **Financial and Risk Implications**

14. There are no significant financial implications relating directly to this report. The proposed changes to the terms of reference help reduce the costs of the delivery of main LCN meetings.

### **Legal Implications**

15. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. The revised Terms of Reference have been considered and proposed by governance colleagues in line with the LCN's function of Boards, rather than committees of Somerset Council.

### **HR Implications**

16. There are significant HR implications arising directly from this report. The reduction in Democratic Service support is being accounted for within the service plans and operational budget for DS. ICT support has been paid for in year 1 through the LCN EMR and will cease in year 2.

## **Other Implications:**

### **Equalities Implications**

17. An initial Equalities Impact Assessment accompanied the decision paper to Executive on 18 January 2023. This assessment directly influenced how LCN meetings have been designed and delivered, however equality considerations are a key part of ongoing evaluation and review.

### **Community Safety Implications**

18. There are no community safety implications arising directly from this report. However, there is potential for LCNs, once better established, to further support community safety priorities.

We are starting to see the positive impacts of working group actions influencing:

- The ability for services to help prevent crime and disorder, particularly through the increase in targeted services and opportunities for children and young people for example in the Taunton LCN outcomes.
  - Impact upon quality of life and wellbeing of residents through better understanding local service provision for residents, consideration of gaps in provision and barriers to accessing appropriate community, place based support and signposting.
  - The perception and fear of crime within LCN areas, triangulating data, lived experience of residents and perception leading to a better understanding of issues such as anti social behaviour shared with residents and stakeholders in communities.
  - A broader understanding of the issues facing communities and their residents and the impacts of social isolation and or exclusion, leading to the development of place based services and improved active travel networks.
19. LCNs continue to work alongside One Teams and Connect Somerset to map services and provision, identify gaps and develop local solutions to local need.

### **Climate Change and Sustainability Implications**

20. LCNs have become a forum for better understanding local opportunities regarding Climate and Environmental issues. The Chard and Blackdowns LCN, for example, are contributing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Many LCNs

have formed working groups to improve and enhance Active Travel networks and Flooding and Emergency planning working groups are starting to consider mitigating actions that could be delivered at a local level, for example tree planting and land management.

### **Health and Safety Implications**

21. There are no Health and Safety implications arising directly from this report

### **Health and Wellbeing Implications**

22. There are no Health and Wellbeing implications arising directly from this report. However, we are working with colleagues in Public Health to train LCN Link officers as Public Health Ambassadors to further support community action to address health and wellbeing priorities through an asset based approach to community development. This is part of a Council wide approach to establishing Public Health Ambassadors in service areas.

### **Social Value**

23. There are no Social Value implications arising directly from this report. However, as LCNs better understand the needs of their communities and refine priorities, we are starting to see the potential for significant positive impacts of social value relating to skills, training and employment, health and wellbeing, and reducing inequalities; In particular, in building community capacity to meet local need through the development of place-based services and opportunities.

### **Scrutiny comments / recommendations:**

24. At its meeting on 25 April 2024, the Corporate and Resources Scrutiny Committee considered the proposed amendments to the Terms of Reference for Local Community Networks (LCNs). Some of the specific changes proposed included clarification on the ratio of Link Officers to LCNs and a strengthening of the route from LCNs back into the Council to ensure local priorities are properly considered. These proposed changes are included in Appendix A.

During discussion about experiences of LCNs to date, the Committee acknowledged the need for LCNs to prove their cost-effectiveness, especially in the context of the financial emergency. It was recognised that individual LCNs

are progressing at varying rates, and the potential for mutual learning across LCN areas. The Committee also noted the inconsistent representation from other agencies and the need to address this. It was noted that in some areas, parish engagement was limited and it was recommended that their perspectives were sought on how to make LCNs more inclusive and the priorities more locally relevant. It was flagged that public awareness of LCNs was low and that social media could play a role in promoting them more widely. Overall, Members recognised that there was still significant development work required to ensure that LCNs fulfil their potential. It was resolved to establish a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group to focus on this.

## **Background**

25. The purpose, ways of working and initial roles of LCNs, were agreed by the Executive

on 18th January 2023, with the Terms of Reference agreed by Constitution and Governance Committee on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023, with final approval and adoption in the Constitution at Full Council on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023.

26. The purpose of LCNs, as agreed by the Executive on 18th January 2023, is as follows:

*To be the focus for community development, engagement and partnership working at a local level; improving outcomes for residents and establishing strong connections between the Council, our communities and our partners*

27. The 18 LCNs are now in their fifth round of meetings with AGMs planned for June and July. Each LCN is producing a yearly report to be presented at the AGM which will detail their agreed priorities and achievements in year 1. A summary of the AGM reports and detailed priorities for each LCN will be presented to Executive following the AGM meetings.

28. The main LCN meetings are taking place, primarily, in community venues and are running as hybrid meetings. Working groups have been established across all LCNs to better understand priorities, create and deliver actions plans. These meet both face to face and online, hosted locally by partners and facilitated by the LCN team, taking place between main meetings.

29. **Geographies**

Following extensive consultation, it was agreed that there would be 18 LCNs, covering all of Somerset, created around communities, landscape character and the natural flow of residents between towns and parishes.

30. Initial feedback regarding geographies was that on the whole the LCN boundaries reflect the above. However, there are a couple of parishes on the margins of the boundaries in one LCN area that are potentially interested in being grouped in a neighbouring LCN area. There is provision for boundary changes to be made in consultation with the Associate and Lead Members during the year, where there is a clear rationale for such a change.
31. As services within Somerset Council become more familiar with the purpose of LCNs and the opportunities arising from working with communities in this way, some are starting to align their project delivery or areas of focus to the LCN boundaries, for example Highways.
32. A very small number of parishes have expressed an interest to move from one LCN area to another and these will be followed up ahead of AGMs due to take place in June and July. If changes are to be made these will be in consultation with the Associate and Lead members.
33. **Governance**  
The Terms of Reference (ToRs) were developed to enable LCNs to be recognised as formal boards of Somerset Council, providing an established link both into and out from the Council. It was agreed, in February, that a review of the ToRs would take place within the first year of LCNs.
34. The first four rounds of main LCN meetings have highlighted some areas for consideration in the ToRs. Initial feedback from core members for LCNs indicated a desire to consider some changes to the standard agendas for main LCN meetings. In order to better understand potential changes a workshop session was facilitated at the recent Chairs and Vice Chair day with a focus on the ToRs.
35. LCN Chairs and Vice Chairs expressed a desire for greater, local, autonomy over agenda setting. They identified existing agenda items as often limiting and or often not relevant; including 'Public Questions' and 'Declarations of Interest'
36. When considering frequency of meetings, Chairs and Vice Chairs agreed a minimum number of four per year, with a local option to schedule additional meetings.
37. LCNs continue to build local partnerships and identify key local partners. We do not anticipate any changes to the core membership of each LCN ahead of

AGMs in June/ July 2024. Membership was approved in the Lead Member non-key decision paper, by the Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 2023. Any changes would need to be approved by the same Lead Member.

**38. Promotion, Participation and Attendance**

A soft launch approach was taken to promoting inaugural LCN meetings to give them time to establish.

39. Over the course of the year LCNs continue to build participation in main LCN meetings and in the LCN Working Groups, from statutory and non-statutory partners, local stakeholders and interested members of the public.

40. There is still work to do to continue to build attendance at LCN meetings, including through local promotion and engagement with key stakeholders and to ensure widest possible local representation and that the voices of residents and businesses are used to inform discussion and decision making.

41. Local feedback from meetings is used to help shape future LCN meetings and working groups to enable focused and topic specific discussion are bringing in a wider range of partners.

42. Feedback from attendees has, on the whole, been positive. However, discussion in LCN meetings taking place over the winter centred on the emerging financial situation of Somerset Council which impacted progress to identify and address local priorities and instead created a focus on asset and service devolution, primarily with city, town and parish councils.

43. LCNs have now returned to their initial priorities and the financial context has, in some ways provided perspective and clarity, regarding the local landscape within which partners seek to address local issues and priorities.

44. Somerset Council services including teams from Highways and Traffic teams, Active Travel, Local Nature Recovery and Civil Contingencies have actively engaged with LCNs, supported the development of relevant working groups and presented at main meetings.

**45. ICT, Hybrid and Practical Considerations**

LCN meetings are being supported by ICT colleagues to trial a technology set-up that provides adequate and appropriate sound and visual infrastructure to create inclusive online and in person participation.



46. LCN and ICT colleagues have worked together to overcome the challenges presented by running hybrid meetings in community venues to provide a good experience for both participants in the room and online. However there continue to be occasions where rural bandwidth presents some issues.
47. ICT colleagues will stand down their support for LCNs as LCN Link and Project Officers take over the ICT set up and management of hybrid meetings over the coming months.
48. Each LCN has a small number of suitable venues for main meetings, facilitating wider participation across LCN areas in main meetings. Working groups take place in local parish halls or online.
49. **LCN team / staff capacity**

The first year of LCN meetings has been supported and facilitated by an interim LCN staff team, drawn primarily from colleagues across Partnerships and Localities Service Directorate. We have learnt more about the capacity needed, and the vital role of staff in enabling new ways of working, during this first round of LCN meetings.
50. LCN formal meetings have been serviced by Democratic Services colleagues. From May they will step down their support and the proposed new Terms of Reference reflect this. Meeting support, notes and ICT support will be overseen by 9 FTE Link Officers; who will have responsibility for up to 2 LCNs each, building local partnership working, supporting the development and delivery of local action plans and identifying opportunities and gaps in place based services and activity to meet priorities agreed by the LCN and the needs of local residents. Technical and administrative support will be provided by LCN Project Officers; who will enable the running of main LCN meetings and working groups, through the promotion of meetings and agendas, note taking and circulation, venue booking. At present there are two temporary project officers on 6 month fixed term contracts, to enable the ongoing support requirements to be fully assessed.
51. As part of the restructure of Partnerships and Localities, matching and suitable alternative employment applications have now been considered for the LCN Manager and LCN Link officers. We will continue to recruit into the LCN Link Officer roles in the coming weeks. In addition, we have recruited one of the two temporary LCN Project Officer roles to support LCNs over the coming months.

52. There continue to be some capacity challenges in this interim stage, particularly where there is a strong desire from many LCNs to meet regularly in their initial stages and to develop active working groups. We expect that the recruitment of the full LCN team will overcome these.
53. **Emerging themes and priorities**  
LCNs have started to identify priorities specific to their geographic communities. They have also begun to work together, locally and with each other and other partners, to address long standing priorities often shared across all LCNs, for example Highways and Traffic concerns.
54. They have been active in addressing Highways and Traffic issues, Flooding and Emergency Planning, Active Travel, Environment and Nature, Children and Young People, Anti Social Behaviour and the Health and Wellbeing of residents.
55. They continue to build effective partnerships, particularly through working groups, to identify and deliver action plans to address issues and priorities, however some LCNs are taking longer to build the foundations for effective participative practice and an asset-based community development approach, than others and the LCN team continue to monitor and support their development. It is anticipated that a permanent staff team will help stabilise all LCNs and enable additional resource where required.
56. Examples of positive action include increased youth provision, networking and linking of services, mapping and the provision of information locally to enable residents to help each other and help themselves. LCNs have enabled the facilitation of emergency planning workshops and better understood the needs of their residents across a wide range of topics and issues, through hearing from and working with a wide range of partners and stakeholders across statutory and voluntary and community organisations.
57. LCNs are starting to play a critical role in bringing together a range of stakeholders to develop place-based services. Progress across LCNs is mixed while they continue to develop however we are seeing some encouraging examples of their potential. They have enabled a, sometimes challenging, constructive and progressive dialogue between Somerset Council and its partners:
- Shaping, informing and coordinating the delivery of Early Help services; supporting the objectives of Connect Somerset by bringing together

partners to identify the needs of residents, gaps in provision and building local plans to address local need.

- Building Resilient Communities, including through LCN wide emergency planning and the facilitation of locally strategic discussions regarding asset and service devolution.
- Enabling Somerset Council to start to evolve Locality Working which builds capacity and capital in communities to support the delivery of corporate objectives and service delivery. For example, Highways and Traffic working groups, Active Travel plans and participation in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

57. More detailed consideration of the role of LCNs in Locality Working will take place in the coming weeks as part of the Partnerships, Devolution and Localities work stream of the Improvement and Transformation Programme.
58. Building on our learning over the last 9 months and once the LCN team is fully recruited, our focus will extend beyond the main LCN meetings, to build strategic, asset-based community development, addressing the priorities unique to each LCN area, positively impacting outcomes for residents.
59. LCN Link Officers will be trained as Public Health Ambassadors, to support the wider determinants of health and continue to build strong working relationships with colleagues across all areas of Somerset Council, contributing to the delivery of the Council Plan.
60. The LCN team will continue to gather feedback from this first year of LCN meetings in order to inform the development of individual LCNs and the wider programme. Honouring our ambition to evolve LCNs as a codesign between Somerset Council and other stakeholders, we welcome the opportunity to work with all partners to develop mechanisms for review and development of LCNs.
61. We recognise that some parishes and other stakeholders have experienced some barriers to participating fully in LCNs and we continue to work with them to better understand and address these.
62. The revised Terms of Reference (Appendix A) take into account the staffing of LCNs, in particular the role of Democratic Services colleagues and suggested changes to meeting frequency and agenda setting as outlined above.

## Background Papers

63. Decision Report to the Executive on 18 January 2023: Local Community Network (LCN) Development Next Steps is [here](#)

Decision Report to Governance and Constitution Committee January 2023: Governance Arrangements for Local Community Networks [here](#)

## Appendices

- Amended Terms of Reference for LCNs 2024

## Assurance checklist

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	David Clark	22/04/2024
Communications	Peter Elliott	26/04/2024
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	25/04/2024
Workforce	Dawn Bettridge	29/04/2024
Asset Management	Oliver Woodhams	25/04/2024
Executive Director / Senior Manager	Alyn Jones	19/04/2024
Strategy & Performance	Sara Cretney	26/04/2024
Executive Lead Member		29/04/2024
<b>Consulted:</b>	Councillor Name	
Local Division Members	N/A	
Opposition Spokesperson	Councillor Faye Purbrick	23/04/2024
Scrutiny Chair	Cllr Bob Filmer	26/04/2024