

**Committee: FULL COUNCIL**

**Date: 25 January 2022**

**Title: Future of Local Government in Somerset**

**Purpose of Report**

For members to receive updates and consider how they see Ilminster post Somerset unification.

**Recommendation:**

Members to note the report

**Report:**

1. It was intended that this item would be used to verbally update members on how matters are progressing with the new Unitary authority. However as a result of a recent Parish and Town Clerks Teams meeting notes have been produced and appended to the end of this report (**Appendix 16B**), that may assist members with understanding some of the progress and plans that have been made.
2. As reported at the last Full Council meeting in December. The mayors and clerks from Chard and Crewkerne held a meeting here in Ilminster on the 18 January with Cllr Burton and the town Clerk.
3. The meeting was a very positive one that should see the three towns looking to collaborate over a variety of matters. Discussions were of a relaxed nature with thoughts given to three areas that the towns could look at working together in the coming months.
4. These three possible areas were.
  - a. Joint training of both members and of staff.
  - b. Resilience preparations such as joint purchases and bulk buying leading to greater savings
  - c. Youth provisions
5. The new unitary authority was discussed and concerns were voiced over how the Local Community Networks might be rolled out. A further meeting has been scheduled for February.

## AGENDA ITEM 16

6. As can be seen from the meeting notes, there is a great deal yet to resolved with regards the LCN's. As has been communicated to members at previous meetings there are in fact three main LCN pilots operating at the moment. How the outcome from these pilots is going to be replicated in other LCN's remains to be seen.
7. What is concerning from the Exmoor Pilot is that there may be some costs having to be paid for from the members councils towards matters that would in the past have been the remit of the District or County Councils. Greater clarity of thought on these is going to be needed.
8. It is disappointing to see that the planned Conference is now not going to involve any breakout sessions. It does mean that this will be an event purely for Clerks and deputies for three hours. How much interaction will take place is still an unknown.
9. Members to note the report.

**Mark Tredwin**  
**Town clerk**  
**January 2022**

## Town and Parish Clerks meeting notes

### 1. LGR Update - Carlton Brand, Programme Director

SCO will be laid before Parliament either late this week / early next. No dates re. debates for that.

Will only get 3-4 days' notice. Expecting that to come through end of next week up to middle of March.

Amendments to SCO re. wording. New Taunton Town Council to have elections in May 23. All other councils to have theirs this year.

All members briefing next Monday.

### 2. LCN Update - Sara Skirton (MDC) & Alyn Jones (SCC)

- Frome pilot - before Christmas workshop with Frome and area identified potential priorities. Sports and recreation. Looking at making links with partners. AJ & SS having initial conversations with colleagues with health and care regards that.
- Wincanton, Bruton and Castle Cary - consulting with surrounding parishes on appropriate health & wellbeing priorities. In discussion as to how we (LGR team) provide support at right time.
- Exmoor- developed Exmoor pilot following consultation with Exmoor panel. Shared 1st draft proposal. Being reviewed. Working on enhancing and improving communications between the Council and Exmoor. Being discussed by smaller group from panel to work out how they can influence proposal for implementation end of March. March panel programming of works. Discretionary spend. Activities for year ahead on their network. Concern around highway steward scheme may undermine parish steward scheme so working group set up to work through detail to make sure they tie in together.

Wider LCNs and next steps.

- Dialogue with voluntary sector. Understand concerns and links in.
- Interest from T&PCs not part of a pilot. Message remains the same re. unable to establish further pilots. However, CCP team more than happy to come and talk to you about progressing works once new unitary is in place and prep work everyone can do in the meantime.
- Boundaries - exploring options. Likely to come forward early summer for consultation. Clear message here that we don't want to stifle existing relationships and networks.

**February Conference.** It's a virtual event 6-9pm using MSTeams. We will be circulating a registration for this in early February. The invite won't be able to be forwarded on and we're asking that only clerks and chairs sign up to the event. Unfortunately, we will not be able to host breakout sessions. We are also

hoping to circulate the agenda in early February so unlikely we'll be sharing much more before then.

- Inviting unitary clerk peer. Maybe 2. experience sharing.
- In discussion w/ David Mears and Justin SALC re. Charter for Somerset. Relationship between all councils. Being led by SALC & SLCC to shape with consultation from yourselves. Hope to bring to conference.

*Q = Question. A = Answer. W = Want.*

Q: What happens to the non-statutory requirements for council to deliver? Want a picture of Unitary structure. Where do non-stat items fit?

A: Structure wise - we're way off that. Understand the want. Raised with SLT yesterday. Resounding feedback from Julian Wooster (CSC)...need to think about everyone else out there. Not just about what local authority can deliver. From pilot and more generally need to join up various teams and services on what they're going to deliver to create individual links and then map new structure when administration and CEO are appointed. We will try and provide you with as much information and links as possible in the meantime.

W: Great to be involved in voluntary sector conversations.

A: Absolutely. Looking to do asap.

Q: integration into LCNs and into County. Parish Meetings don't have as much formalisation to them. Need to make sure PM are integrated properly alongside parish councils.

A: Heard and noted. Extend that - we are looking how LCNs represent wider communities. Doesn't need to be formally produced groups but anyone with a stake in that. Need to work through how that happens in a practical ways in terms of resourcing.

Floor: LCNs aren't the only way we interact with the Unitary. Don't just create a structure through LCNs but more width otherwise there could be obvious delays. Comes back to who is there to talk to within the Council and understand various platforms. (prev. question link)

Q: Are you looking into and management of multi-use footpaths. Multi user - national term.

A: Will be for each LCN to consider in terms of priorities and maintenance standard to adhere to. Wiltshire example you can see debate and discussion and priorities. We're going with grain of Exmoor area priorities.

Exmoor want more discretion over works. Bespoke standards for highway maintenance. Cost implication they may have to bare. Their focus. Wider issue - nothing stopping LCNs having those conversations.

W: Policy to make it uniformed.

A: Can't comment on new policies. New members to focus that. Good point unified policy approach but LCNs to drive in early days.

Q: Mendip DC leads multi-user path initiative. Will go across boundaries. Should be integrated into new authority and led down. LCNs being helped by DC now. Supportive with guidance and funding. Delivered by District. Should continue into Unitary authority.

A: no barrier for it continuing it through. Active travel clear policy initiative. Ref. to LCNs ability for comms to influence and control interventions for their locality.

Q: Hope for LCNS to be more flexible in relation to unitary. Chippenham clerk example. Talk from Wiltshire is that the area boards being static and inflexible become a thing you do. Not so focused. Dream from pilots will learn best way to make comms work is to be focused on a problem / issue. Bring localities together. Rather than defining obligations to work together. Don't want to stifle LCNs but promote dynamcy (*new word!*) of LCNs.

A: Frome pilot great example of this.