

Committee: FULL COUNCIL

Date: 27 September 2022

Title: Future of Local Government in Somerset

Purpose of Report

For members to receive updates and consider how they see Ilminster post the unification of the District Councils and Somerset County Council

Recommendation:

Members to note the report.

Report:

1. Since September 2021 members have been receiving regular updates from the District and County Councillors alongside information provided by officers on the progress of the new unitary authority that will come into being on 1 April 2023.
2. The most recent information that has been provided relates primarily to both the establishment of the Local Community Networks (LCN) as well as the forthcoming LGR conference on the 4 October.
3. The consultation that is currently underway allows not just members of the Town Council to voice their opinions about the proposed LCN creations, but also every group and organisation in the county as well. It is important that each member voices their thoughts. To assist with this there is a “Frequently Asked Questions” page that has been created and this can be accessed by clicking on the visiting this link
<https://newsomersetcouncil.org.uk/consultation-faqs/>
4. The purpose of the LCNs is outlined to be;
 - A Local forum which provides a time for discussion, listening and a mechanism for action, consultation and oversight. A community voice.
 - Bring together Somerset Council, partners including Health, Police, Parish/Town and City Councils, voluntary organisations and communities to work together to achieve local ambitions and improve outcomes for residents.
 - Identify local issues and priorities through the use of data and evidence.
 - Act as committees of Somerset Council, providing a local contact point for areas.

- Promote active community decision making, provide a focus for local engagement and a way to engage all people.
 - A forum for engaging with council processes through new digital means.
 - Explore how best to support Planning and Licensing decision-making.
 - Provide information to support Asset of Community Value panels, which consider applications to give communities rights to buy or bid for council-owned assets, such as buildings or land, should they be offered for sale.
 - Access to and administration of local grants.
 - Enabling local activities which reduce the number of residents reaching crisis, in any form.
 - Promote and prioritise minor highways road maintenance and services at a local level.
 - Supporting Parishes to work together including across LCN boundaries
5. One of the first things to note is that there are three proposals for the areas to be created. These range in number from 18 down to 10. It can be seen that all of these see Ilminster being linked in a network area with Crewkerne.
6. Whilst Chard would be in a different LCN in all three proposals there should still be mechanisms in place that will allow for cross boundary LCN co-operation.
7. The main focus of the Conference for Town and Parish councils on the 4 October will be to look at the LCN make up and how they can be implemented successfully. Members have been emailed information on this and should you be attending please let officers know that you are doing so.
8. The clerk has been attending regular briefing sessions along with other town and parish clerks and as a result has been voicing questions raised by members and officers of Ilminster Town Council.
9. Some these questions include;
- Understanding how planning will take place
 - What is the distribution of S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funds likely to be as a result of different District Council consulting Town and Parishes in different ways?

- What will be the rules for Street trading and Markets post vesting day as once again these currently vary?
 - What funding will be available to help councils with changes to provision of services?
 - How will the ability for Town and Parishes to take over assets be managed and funded
10. Unfortunately the answer to these and other similar questions remain unanswered yet.
11. Information has been provided on the various localised pilot projects that have been instigated and these can be seen here at <https://newsomersetcouncil.org.uk/lcn-pilot-projects/> . As has been mentioned at previous meetings the project relating to local Highways Stewards is something that this council may wish to explore further.
12. Members to note the report.

Mark Tredwin

**Town Clerk
September 2022**