

## Decision Report - Executive Decision

Forward Plan Reference: N/A

Decision Date - 16/11/22

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### Local Community Network (LCN) Consultation Review

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

Local Member(s) and Division: N/A

Lead Officer: Jan Stafford and Sara Skirton

Author: Jan Stafford and Sara Skirton, LGR Customers, Communities and Partnerships Joint Leads

Contact Details: [Jan.Stafford@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:Jan.Stafford@somerset.gov.uk) / [Sara.Skirton@mendip.gov.uk](mailto:Sara.Skirton@mendip.gov.uk)

#### 1. Summary / Background

- 1.1** The Unitary business case sets out a vision for a '*new authority which will provide seamless and accessible local governance to the people of Somerset, with services redesigned to be delivered within communities at a local level*'.

Fundamental to this vision is a commitment to give local residents a voice and more influence over decisions that impact them and their communities.

The Administration's Manifesto pledge to '*Deliver Local Community Networks (LCNs) that genuinely listen to the views of local people*' consolidates this commitment.

This report reflects the work undertaken towards the establishment of LCNs by 1 April 2023. In particular it reflects the research, consultation and engagement undertaken in recent months to consider in more detail the scope of the role of LCNs, and potential geographic boundaries.

The report includes:

- Consultation feedback from public and stakeholder engagement about potential roles, responsibilities and boundaries for LCNs (considering the interrelated aspects of Function, Form and Name). It also reflects feedback from online briefings, pop up events and the City, Town and Parish conference on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 2022.
- Comparison with other unitary councils who have been operating locality arrangements.
- Reflection on learning to date from the three LCN pilot areas in Somerset which have been carrying out work over the past year.

The report draws this information together into themes, draws out conclusions and identifies areas for further enquiry.

In brief, the paper concludes that the feedback does not demonstrate a clear case for recommending any particular one of the three geographical proposals presented in the consultation. However, the many and often detailed narrative responses provide further valuable information to be used to inform a recommended geographical solution.

A set of principles, derived from the feedback, are proposed, in order to inform next steps.

Alongside the engagement activities, officers have considered the resourcing requirements to implement LCN arrangements. This report includes a request for the Executive to support a financial envelope to enable this.

## **2. Recommendations**

### **2.1.** The Executive is asked to:

1. Note the key findings from the recent LCN consultation and engagement activities, alongside the learning from the LCN Pilots and other Unitary areas' locality arrangements.
2. Consider and comment on the conclusions, proposals and further lines of enquiry arising.
3. Endorse the establishment of LCNs as a vehicle for bringing together and focussing the community development and engagement activity in the new Council.
4. Note and support the rationale for further work and dialogue to be undertaken before a recommendation is made on LCN geographical boundaries.
5. Agree a specific set of principles that will inform this work:
  - a. *Respect the rurality of Somerset and find ways to work with differences between rural / urban priorities within an LCN area, and across LCN boundaries*
  - b. *Respect the diversity of Somerset's landscape character*
  - c. *Ensure alignment with the Integrated Care System and establish the benefits that this could bring*
  - d. *Observe town and parish boundaries*
  - e. *Consider unitary division boundaries*
  - f. *Consider equalities implications.*
6. Agree to receive a further paper in January 2023 on the outcomes of the further work, including reasoned recommendations for LCN roles and geographies.
7. Note that an additional funding request of up to £900,000 has been submitted for consideration through the MTFP process, to enable the resourcing of LCN arrangements from Vesting Day.

### **3. Reasons for recommendations**

To progress the development and establishment of LCN arrangements across Somerset for Vesting Day, that will provide a firm foundation for convening partners and engaging communities to establish priorities and goals for the local areas.

The aim is to create LCNs that will over time have the ability to join the strategic policies of the Unitary Council with local delivery, alongside community and partner priorities.

LCNs will be central to evolving how the councils currently deliver community development functions to ensure they are fit for purpose. Noting that the development and evolution of LCNs will happen in phases over a number of years.

### **4. Other options considered**

- 4.1.** The Council has confirmed its commitment to creating LCNs in Somerset. However, the external landscape and drivers have changed significantly since the business case was developed, and there is a range of options for how LCNs might be configured. Hence the decision to consult with residents, communities and stakeholders, to inform decisions on LCN role, function and form.

With regard to LCN geographies, three proposals were presented for consideration in the consultation period, based on a range of criteria including:

- Population – relative balance of population numbers across LCNs
- Geographies – how similar in size might LCNs be and are they distributed
- Electoral Divisions – how these align with potential LCN boundaries, how many divisions would there be within LCNs
- Local Plan Areas – alignment to LCN areas
- Deprivation – using indices of multiple deprivation, how are the most and least deprived areas distributed
- Libraries – how are these situated in relation to LCNs
- Primary Care Networks – fit of PCN boundaries to potential LCN boundaries
- Secondary School Catchment Areas – how these are split in relation to LCNs
- Travel to Work Area – alignment to LCN areas

One option would be to make a recommendation at this point to agree one of these proposals, potentially with some modifications. However, the recent consultation confirms a diverse range of stakeholder views on how the

geographies could be configured, that should be explored further before recommendations are made.

There is also ongoing dialogue with colleagues about how LCNs can support the delivery of the Council's emerging priorities and those of its partners, in particular Health. It is important that these discussions are taken into consideration before conclusions are reached, and therefore this report does not ask Executive to endorse a particular proposal at this point, but rather to consider the emerging themes and lines of enquiry, and agree to receive a further paper 22 which will include reasoned recommendations for LCN roles and geographies.

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

- 5.1.** The establishment of 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.
- 5.2.** It is expected that LCNs will both influence and work within the policy framework of the new Council and therefore their development over the coming months will be influenced by the emerging corporate priorities for the Council. A growth bid has been submitted to establish LCNs and work has begun to seek alternative methods of funding, acknowledging that it is too soon to be able to depend on these for the first year at least of operation.

## **6. Consultations and co-production**

- 6.1.** The report focusses on consultation and engagement activity to inform the development of LCNs. This 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.
- 6.2.** This activity is considered as part of the ongoing dialogue and co-production of LCNs, rather than a one-off event.

## **7. Financial and Risk Implications**

- 7.1.** The establishment and ongoing development of LCNs requires a level of financial investment in their 'infrastructure', primarily in terms of staffing budgets, to ensure that LCNs have the best chance of success. This requirement for appropriate resourcing, particularly in terms of a suitably skilled and experienced team of LCN support officers, reflects experience from other areas with similar working arrangements, and the emerging feedback from the Pilot LCNs. An additional funding request of up to £900,000 has been submitted as part of the MTFP process based on modelling community development and democratic services officer and

operational support costs. Noting that there will also be a review of existing community development spend to see where there is potential to repurpose these budgets. It should be noted that fewer LCNs does not necessarily equate to a smaller budgetary requirement. However, currently the MTFP process has revealed a potential funding gap for the new Somerset Council of £38.2m and as a result, it is unlikely that new initiatives can be funded.

It is intended that the priorities of LCNs will, locally and strategically, influence the spend of the Council and it may be 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.

- 7.2.** The commitment to establishing LCNs has been the subject of much engagement and communication with communities, stakeholders and partners. A move to a single Unitary council introduces a risk of lack of local voice and community representation at a strategic level, resulting in a disconnect from localities. LCNs are key to mitigating this risk. Failure to define, support or adequately resource them will impact negatively on their chances of success, and potentially on the reputation of the new Council, and on trust between it and its communities. There is also an association with the LGR Programme risk:

*Loss of opportunity to align public and VCSE services to new operating model and outcomes as defined in the business case.*

## **8. Legal and HR Implications**

- 8.1.** There are no legal implications arising directly from this report, although there are implications for Governance, in that the governance arrangements for LCNs will need to be reflected in the constitution. The LGR Customers, Communities and Partnerships (CCP) workstream is working with LGR Governance colleagues to ensure that the governance arrangements for LCNs will be appropriate and proportionate to their function.
- 8.2.** As referenced above in Financial Implications, 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. The LGR CCP workstream recognises the need to work with the LGR People workstream, to ensure that the community development team can be drawn together and established ready to support LCNs.

## **9. Other Implications**

### **9.1. Equalities Implications**

There will be consideration of equalities implications as a significant factor in the proposed work to shape a geographical proposal, which will also act as a steer regarding equality in the future development of LCNs: form and function.

Key themes that have come out of the consultation relating to equality particularly with reference to participation, include transport, travel, distance, voice, lack of understanding, councillor availability, finance (travel and other expenses), ensuring hybrid/online being an option for attendance, timing of meetings being accessible to all including volunteers and residents [work/caring commitments] and scheduling of meetings to avoid conflicts, membership and the process of identifying who attends.

The January report will include full and robust consideration of the Equalities impact of recommendations.

### **9.2. Community Safety Implications**

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

### **9.3. Sustainability Implications**

There are no sustainability implications arising directly from this report. However, there is potential for LCNs, once established, to support sustainability priorities of communities and the Council.

### **9.4. Health and Safety Implications**

There are no health and safety implications arising directly from this report.

### **9.5. Health and Wellbeing Implications**

There are no Health and Wellbeing implications arising directly from this report. However, there is potential for LCNs, once established, to support Health and Wellbeing priorities.

## 9.6. Social Value

There are no Social Value implications arising directly from this report. However, there is potential for LCNs, once established and over time, to contribute to Social Value priorities.

## 10. Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

- 10.1.** Whilst time constraints between the closing of the consultation and the publication of the Executive report have meant that LGR Joint Scrutiny Board has not considered this report, the latter has received regular reports in relation to the development of LCNs and in particular the recent consultation exercise.

Comments and recommendations from LGR Joint Scrutiny Board have been very constructive in informing the approach, including range of stakeholders to engage with and introducing flexibility around the closing date to take account of the national mourning period.

## 11. Background

### 11.1. Vision and Commitment to LCNs

The Unitary business case sets out a vision for a:

*'new authority which will provide seamless and accessible local governance to the people of Somerset, with services redesigned to be delivered within communities at a local level'.*

The establishment of Local Community Networks is a key commitment for the Council. Their creation presents an opportunity to put community influence and more local decision making at the heart of the new Council's operating model.

The business case states that:

- Every part of the new authority, whether urban or rural, would be in an LCN area.
- Every part of the new authority would have a strong local voice that can stand up for local people.
- Every part of the new authority will help to tackle the inequality that can remain hidden from those not "on the ground".
- Every part of the new authority will have a real say in how to tackle climate change and improve their own environment.

LCNs will bring together local voluntary and community organisations, City, Parish and Town Councils, partners including police, health and education, with the new Somerset Council, to agree local, evidence-based priorities and encourage a more participative democracy.

The design principles for development of LCNs have been informed by the above.

However, it is recognised that since the business case was prepared, there has been significant flux in the external environment that is impacting as we move to the new Unitary council. This includes sharply increased budgetary pressures, policy changes and pressures within service areas. There is also a unique opportunity for aligning how we development mechanisms to work with our communities with other strategic approaches, including the Integrated Care System. This context needs to be taken into account in how LCNs are shaped.

In terms of the LGR Programme, the primary requirement, or minimum viable product, is to have agreed geographies in place for LCNs by vesting day. It is recognised that the full potential of LCNs, in particular how they can support priorities and service delivery in the new Council, will develop and evolve over a number of years, alongside and aligned to the Council's own transformation programme and other internal and external drivers.

## **11.2. Current Position**

At the time of writing, a period of consultation and engagement about the role, function and form of LCNs has just concluded. This report reflects the emerging findings, themes and perspectives of a range of stakeholders.

The LCN Consultation report is included as an appendix to this report.

This report also reflects what has been learnt to date from the three LCN Pilots, which have brought together Town and Parish Councils, partners, community groups and service providers:

- Frome Area Pilot – with a focus on Children, Young People and Families
- South East Somerset Area Pilot – exploring the themes of Rural Isolation and Wellbeing
- Exmoor Area Pilot – trialling a new approach to delivering local street scene and highways services.

This learning includes some of the successes and also the challenges that have been experienced, which can help inform future development of LCNs.



It also reflects the experiences from other Unitary areas with similar locality working arrangements.

## **12. Consultation and Engagement**

The LGR programme has engaged with stakeholders both pre and post business case approval. During September and October 2022, public and stakeholder engagement in the development of LCNs was intensified with an online questionnaire and supporting communications, briefing and events. The accompanying consultation report provides more detail.

The questions posed in the questionnaire sought views on:

- Aims for LCNs
- Potential roles for LCNs
- Three geographical proposals for LCN boundaries
- Potential barriers to participation in LCNs
- Whether LCNs is the best name or is there a better alternative.

A copy of the questionnaire is appended to this report

549 questionnaire responses were received, and many more views elicited via briefings, meetings and the Town and Parish Conference held on 4 October. The feedback included a wealth of detailed narrative views and perspectives, and we very are grateful to those who took the time to provide such comprehensive and reasoned responses to inform how LCNs will develop.

The following sections of this report set out a high-level summary of the responses by theme, i.e. function - roles and responsibilities, and form – geographies and governance.

### **12.1. Stakeholder support for and commitment to LCNs**

One of the benefits of the consultation and engagement exercise has been the ability to test the assumption that the concept of LCNs is generally supported and indeed needed. The feedback received, particularly the narrative responses, has confirmed this.

VCFSE partners' responses emphasise that they recognise and support the need for *'a model for communities where local voices are heard, partners are brought together, and decisions are taken with the benefit of local knowledge and experience'* and that LCNs have the potential effect positive change in Somerset, if we get it right. Furthermore they are keen to be involved in the co-production of this model, both strategically and at a place level.

Partners see LCNs as a great opportunity for local people to consider and understand system wide challenges. One example being given is a local understanding of the climate and ecological emergency.

Health sector colleagues' response recognises that LCNs provide *'an exciting opportunity to transform the way in which the NHS and new Somerset Council jointly engage, empower and work alongside local communities to improve services and outcomes for the people of Somerset'*.

Avon and Somerset Police have indicated that they would look to focus their engagement at the LCN level.

## **12.2. Function – Roles and Responsibilities**

As evidenced through the consultation and engagement activity, there are many views on the potential roles and responsibilities of LCNs, and these inevitably vary across different stakeholder groups.

Respondents to the online questionnaire were asked to indicate which of four stated aims for LCNs they considered most important. They were asked to select at least one option. Perhaps unsurprisingly, all scored highly. They are listed below in order of numbers of respondents selecting each one:

- Ensuring that the countywide unitary council remains responsive to local needs
- Improving outcomes for residents
- Promoting active community decision making
- Providing a mechanism for local action.

In terms of the most important roles for LCNs now and in the future as they evolve, the top five themes emerging were that they should:

- Have formal influence over what is most important to the local area
- Identify evidence based local issues and priorities
- Bring together service providers, VCFSE and local businesses to work towards shared goals
- Be a forum for community voice, to discuss and promote shared ambitions for the local area
- Support parishes to work together, including across LCN boundaries.

Ranking in the middle were roles including:

- Supporting community resilience to prevent people reaching crisis, in any form
- Exploring supporting Planning and Licensing
- Administering local grants

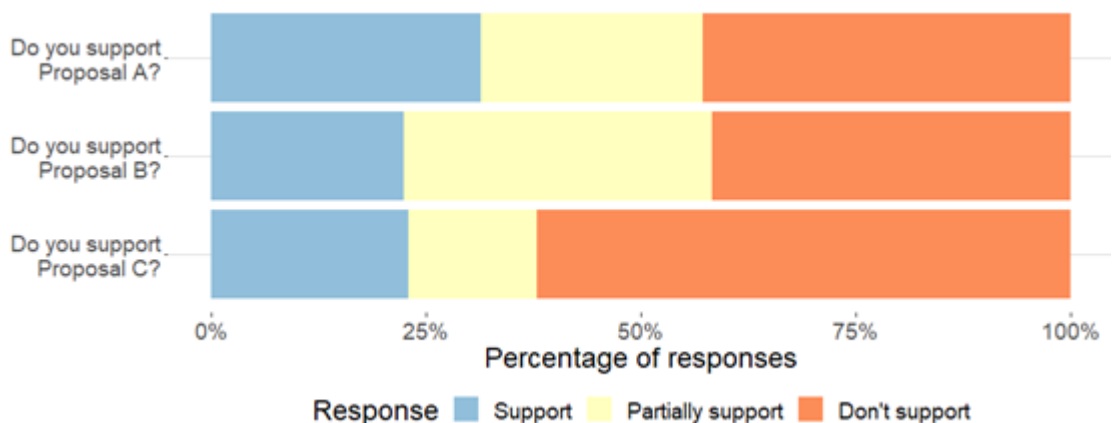
Roles that were less frequently selected as being important or very important for LCNs included:

- Information to support Assets of Community Value Panels
- Supporting new technology to enable more people to engage with local democracy and council services

There was a fairly diverse range of additional or alternative suggestions for LCN roles, with environmental topics appearing frequently.

### 12.3. Form – Geographies

The table below shows the level of support indicated by respondents for each of the three geographic proposals. It is of note that none of the proposals had more than 32% respondents indicating full support.



Proposals A and B received more indications of support or partial support than proposal C. In general, parishes and local community groups tended to prefer more rather than fewer LCNs.

Proposal C had some level of support from Council and partner colleagues, mainly due to potential to align with other geographical arrangements, such as Primary Care Networks, and facilitate integrated approaches. Other respondents considered proposal C would create LCNs that were too large, where local voices would not be heard.

A significant theme, particularly amongst some parish councils, was a concern about being in the same LCN as a town, on the basis that town issues might dominate the agenda, and / or that rural areas have particular issues and priorities that are different to those of the towns. There was some concern that local identity would be lost if there were fewer, larger LCNs.

Some respondents would prefer to have LCN areas defined by theme, such as landscape character (e.g. coastal, levels and moors, AONB), and local issues such as quarrying.

A number of respondents have suggested alternative geographical proposals, which mostly reflect their local circumstances and existing networks and relationships.

VCFSE colleagues' response supports more rather than fewer LCN areas, in terms of community engagement, on the basis that it would facilitate more local engagement and tailored approaches. There was a preference for Proposal B over Proposal A, (people over geography) in terms of offering the best outcome for a focus on 'improving lives and livelihoods' and they make the point that it offers the most likely alignment to the Integrated Care System, as funding tends to be 'per head' not per acre. The response did however highlight a risk of missed synergies by not aligning geographically with Primary Care Networks.

There was a concern that Proposal C would result in LCN areas that are too big to make a meaningful difference in achieving better outcomes for people and places and that they wouldn't have a truly local focus.

Health colleagues are keen for LCNs to work closely with Primary Care Networks (PCNs) to understand local challenges, co-design solutions and commission services which better meet the needs of local people.

The response from the Police indicates a preference for proposal C, although it acknowledges that smaller towns and parishes might consider that their areas won't be so well represented in larger LCN areas.

#### **12.4. Form – Governance and Terms of Reference**

Whilst respondents weren't specifically asked to comment on governance arrangements for LCNs at this stage, views and concerns were expressed in some of the narrative comments, and through feedback from various engagement events.

Comments, particularly from Town and Parish Councils, related to need for clarity on the practical aspects of LCN meetings, for example how will the chair be selected, how many meetings will there be per annum, where will responsibility and accountability and risk of lack of commitment if nothing tangible is secured or agreed in the first few meetings.

VCFSE partners flagged the risk of LCNs as committees being off-putting and the need to develop ambitious mechanisms for engagement to make LCNs different from traditional models. They also raised the need to consider

balance of power within LCNs and ensure that they do not become overly political. Linked to role and remit, there was a view that a focus on regulatory services would introduce bureaucracy and risk detracting from collaborative and learning-centric partnership focused on the needs of communities. There was a strong request to ensure that *'space for the VCFSE to participate as an equal voice in strategic decision making is also 'designed in' to new governance and leadership arrangements in the new Council and its partnerships'*.

Health partners also raised concerns about LCNs being seen as formal committees of Somerset Council, in that they could be considered remote structures that risk duplication with Parish and Town Councils and consequently restrict ability to drive local collaboration and integration.

### **12.5. Participation in LCNs**

Respondents were asked to consider if they could foresee any barriers to participation in LCNs. Options given were time, financial or 'other'.

Time was most frequently selected as a potential barrier, with financial barriers also being selected by a significant number of respondents. Other potential barriers related to transport, travel, distance, voice, lack of understanding, councillor availability, alignment, engagement and participation.

For Town and Parish Councils, the main issues expressed related to capacity of clerks and councillors and current uncertainty about the time and resource commitment expected from local councils. Other potential barriers to engaging mentioned were if geographies do not reflect nature communities or if the topics of discussion are not considered to be of relevance.

Responses from VCFSE colleagues echoed other concerns around capacity, particularly if organisations are expected to cover more than one LCN, accessibility (time, travel) and finance. There was concern that a 'post-code lottery' could occur if larger organisations were forced by capacity constraints or location to choose which LCNs to engage with.

## **13. Learning from LCN Pilots**

In December 2021 at the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Advisory Board endorsed the piloting of three LCNs. The geographic areas were chosen in part for the topic discovery that they indicated a desire to explore and in part due to the willingness of the towns and parishes in the three areas to engage. In the Exmoor area the Exmoor Panel was an established mechanism for addressing community issues across the group of parishes.

All three pilots have a focus on a different topic: Children and Young People, Wellbeing and Rural Isolation, and Highways, offering the opportunity to evaluate how LCNs can influence county wide service delivery, develop place-based solutions and best meet the needs of residents in their areas through working together.

The interim evaluation, collated in October 2022, used feedback from SCC and District officers acting as pilots leads, local Councillor leads and LCN Development Leads observations. It highlights the following learning with regard to Function; Roles and Responsibilities, Form; Governance, and Geographies and Resource; Staffing and Finance.

### **13.1. Function – Roles and Responsibilities:**

Clarity of Role: The pilots would benefit from having a clearly defined remit, an understanding of the structure and more comprehensive strategic oversight from SCC. This would enable them to move passed regular conversations about which parishes are in / out, what the form will look like in the future and when decisions will be made, in order to focus on addressing local issues.

Identifying priorities; The pilots were given agreed areas of focus, within these headlines they have worked together to identify priorities using data, perception, and live experience to inform the development of local actions. In two of the three pilot areas there is ongoing conversation about other areas of need from a parish perspective, often giving rise to the discussion about rural vs town priorities.

All three pilots are ready to move into a more permanent arrangement in their areas allowing them to give wider consideration to the priorities that are important to them outside of the initial themes.

### **13.2. Governance**

Terms of Reference (ToR): All three models are different and are currently working well. They have not been tested in a potentially contentious context, i.e. decision making on a tricky subject area. No one of the three governance models stands out as an exemplar. Headline ToR for all LCNs across Somerset could provide a consistent approach, reflecting the need to have clarity regarding roles and responsibilities with local flexibility.

Chairing: all of the pilots have a locally elected, interim, chair. They are all facilitating conversation, discussion and consensus and are working with local and LCN officers with regard to agenda setting, managing working groups and delivery of actions.

Voting: In all three pilots decisions are made by discussion and consensus. The South East stipulates one parish one vote. ToR could reflect an ambition to reach consensus, whilst also recognising the potential requirement for Unitary Members to retain voting powers for specific unitary actions or financial decision making.

Representation: In all three of the pilot areas participants have been invited to attend to discuss a particular topic and or represent an individual or group of organisations, are self selecting representatives of parish councils, are the local unitary or district member. No individual members of the public have yet attended the pilot LCN meetings, however the voice of residents has been represented in a number of ways.

### **13.3. Geographic Boundaries**

The pilots have built on pre-existing relationships, in their local areas, enabling them to come together around common issues, however they have been hampered by looking at a single topic. The groupings of the pilot areas have largely worked but clarity on who is in and out would enable them to fully cement relationships and the work of the pilot LCNs.

### **13.4. Resource – Staffing and Finance**

All of the pilots have identified capacity issues with regard to servicing the pilots with venue booking, meeting notes and general organisation, communication of the meetings and sharing of successes and actions of the pilots to a wider local and Somerset wide audience.

They particularly note the importance of having a central, locally based, community development lead, type role, with local knowledge to engage parishes not participating, make local and Somerset wide strategic connections and bring together the appropriate VCFSE organisations, businesses and services depending on the topic or priority issues.

All of the pilots have benefited from central support from SCC to inform data

Funding: The pilots have demonstrated actions can be delivered through a range of funding routes:

- Central LGR funding – equivalent to devolved SCC funding
- Grant funding – devolved to the pilots to through SCC from LGA
- Partnership working with Voluntary organisations who are able to draw on national and or local grant funding sources
- Influence over Somerset Council budgets
- Devolved funding from SCC (Children's, Public Health, Highways)
- Local funding through parish precepts

### **13.5. Progress**

Good progress is being made across all three pilots in terms of delivering actions which have a positive impact for local communities and their residents. On Exmoor the pilot has demonstrated a positive impact on the dissatisfaction rates of the county highways department, the role of local decision making in the delivery of local services with minor highways improvements ongoing.

In the South East Area Pilot work to better understand the needs of young people is influencing the commissioning of local youth services and discussions regarding adult isolation and social care needs and the impact of the cost of living are leading to increased locally coordinated actions.

In the Frome Area the pilot LCN has worked with Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership (SASP) to recruit a local development worker to increase sporting opportunities for young people. SCC Early Help and Children's Services Leads are working to further develop a local early help offer building on the existing activity delivered by the VCFSE sector to best meet the needs of local families. A local mapping exercises has been undertaken to better understand the issues in parishes, triangulating this information with data provided by SCC, the police and other VCFSE partners and the perception of the parish representatives.

## **14. Learning from other Unitary Areas with Locality Arrangements**

- 14.1.** The LGR team has engaged with other Unitary areas to understand and learn from their experiences of locality working and some of this experience has been shared with partners including Town and Parish Councils through



conference workshops. A table summarising the different arrangements across a number of Councils accompanies this report.

## **14.2. Cornwall**

Particularly timely for Somerset is the review currently being undertaken by Cornwall Council of their Community Network Panels, which have been in existence for a number of years. The review proposals include changing the name to Community Area Partnerships, reducing the number of partnerships to ensure they are affordable and sustainable, and sharpening the definition of their role and functions.

This review is a key element of a wider programme to transform how the Council works in place. The stated drivers for the review include the Council's ambitious business plan to drive forward the key priorities for Cornwall and its communities. It recognises the need to work more effectively with partners and communities and the role of the partnerships in achieving this.

In governance terms the proposal is for a partnership meeting comprising Cornwall Councillors and Town & Parish Councils, together with other nominated public and VCFSE sector partner groups and organisations, with a view to strengthening partnership working and facilitating how to share expertise and resources in addressing issues together in place. Linked to this, the proposal includes an open public forum.

## **14.3. Wiltshire**

Wiltshire's 18 Area Boards have devolved power to make decisions on a wide range of local issues, where it is within budget, adheres to Wiltshire Council policy and does not affect other community areas. The Area Boards have a strong focus towards delivery in line with the 2022 – 2032 Wiltshire Council business plan

Wiltshire aims to take a long term strategic view through its Boards, investing in prevention and early intervention.

The focus of the Area Board model includes:

- Develop a strong, well established and highly functioning network of local partners, organisations and residents
- Generate an in-depth understanding of local communities, including the demographics and the issues faced by the residents
- Empower and facilitate community led action
- Ensure decisions are taken in consultation with and close to the residents that they affect
- Effectively share data and intelligence at a local level

- Provide a local platform for local engagement and conversation
- Deliver an opportunity for residents to gain an understanding of the way the council works
- Help deliver the Wiltshire Council business plan at a local level with the involvement of communities

Each Area Board comprises the elected unitary councillor representing the electoral divisions within that respective area and is supported by a Community Engagement Manager and a Democratic Services Officer.

The Area Boards provide over £1m of grants each year to non-profit organisations including community groups, charities and Community Interest Companies (CICs).

## **14.4. Buckinghamshire**

Buckinghamshire's 16 Community Boards aim to:

- Represent the voice of local people
- Capture thoughts, ideas and suggestions to address council and local priorities.
- Bring together key community partners and residents
- Identify local needs and work to produce creative solutions.

There is a focus on how the Community Boards can help achieve and support the Council's corporate priorities at a local level.

Determining the number of Community Boards and their boundaries was an extensive piece of work during preparation for the new unitary council. Having initially proposed 14 areas, this was increased as a result of consultation with members of the five former Buckinghamshire councils, town and parish councils, and conversations with key partners such as our local police and primary care networks. The board areas were developed informed by feedback from Town and Parish Councils and local members on the natural geographies and relationships and -where possible -electoral divisions. Much consideration was given to limit boundary conflicts with the three local police areas and the Primary Care Networks

The Chairman and Vice Chairman of each Community Board are appointed by the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Portfolio holder for Communities. The Chairman and Vice Chairman must be a member of Buckinghamshire Council and a local councillor in the respective community board area.

Each Board is allocated funding, based on the needs of the population.

## **15. Report Conclusions, Proposals and Further Lines of Enquiry**

### **15.1. Function: Role and Responsibilities**

The potential scope of roles and responsibilities for LCNs is broad, with the expectation that each LCN will identify its own priorities which could span any number or combination of economic, social and environmental topics.

Whilst this presents opportunities and flexibility, the consultation findings and experience of the Pilots reflected the challenges of an absence of definition of on what the roles of an LCN would or could be.

The feedback confirms support for LCNs as a means of ensuring that the new Unitary council is able to remain engaged with and responsive to local needs and support improved outcomes for local people.

The feedback also endorses the importance of LCNs having genuine voice and influence over what happens in the local area, that LCN priorities are evidence based, and that LCNs are a vehicle for convening partners and communities to work toward addressing those priorities. It is also considered important that LCNs support parishes working together and that this can be across LCN boundaries.

Whilst there was some support for LCNs having a relationship with planning and licensing functions, there was concern expressed that introducing regulatory roles could stifle collaboration and partnership working. Some responses do, however, recognise the place shaping potential of LCNs, which is something that could be developed over time.

*It is proposed that regulatory functions such as planning and licensing are not part of the scope of the initial LCN development, however the potential for making links is kept under review as these services transition and transform in the new Council.*

There is a strong argument being put forward by partners and colleagues in the VCFSE and Health and Social Care sectors about maximising the potential of LCNs to support the bringing together and integration of multi-agency, multi-disciplinary approaches to create better community outcomes, more efficiently. LGR represents a unique opportunity to look at how this can work, aligned to development of the Target Operating Model and Council Plan. In essence, the LCN model could help draw together all community development activity into 'whole system' locality working, to support the delivery of the Council's strategic aims.

*It is proposed that this is a key area for further discussion and exploration, potentially working through with a particular service area. This will also help inform decisions around LCN geographies.*

## **15.2. Form – Geographies**

The consultation and engagement have demonstrated that geographical boundaries are of fundamental importance to some stakeholders, and less so for others. It is clear that decisions around geographies and the functions of LCNS are inextricably linked.

In agreeing LCN geographies, the narrative feedback provides a compelling need to consider how they can take account of the differences between the priorities and aspirations of rural and urban areas. Whilst there will be a defined number of LCNs, we will create mechanisms to ensure very local characteristics are recognised, supported and prioritised. An LCN can have a

number of priorities, some of which will be of more relevance to some of its members than others, and we are committed to accommodating this, regardless of the geographical boundaries, and indeed across boundaries. The officers who work with and support LCNs will be key to supporting this flexibility. *It is proposed that the experience of how this is managed in Truro, as referenced by some respondents, is explored in more detail.*

A number of respondents have suggested alternative geographical proposals, which mostly reflect their local circumstances and relationships. Work is underway to understand and map these.

The diverse range of views in relation to LCN geographies indicate that it would be premature to recommend a particular solution at this point. Given the range of feedback received on the geographical proposals, and no compelling single solution, the next step is to look at how to best reconcile the different perspectives to create a geographical framework to enable us to convene communities and partners to start the conversation. Recognising that this framework has to be flexible; 'lines not walls'. *It is proposed that a set of principles inform further work to arrive at a recommended geographical solution, that:*

- *Respect the rurality of Somerset and find ways to work with differences between rural / urban priorities within an LCN area, and across LCN boundaries*
- *Respect the diversity of Somerset's landscape character*
- *Look for best fit in aligning with Health and Social Care services*
- *Observe town and parish boundaries*
- *Consider unitary division boundaries*

### **15.3. Form - Governance**

LCNs will need to recognise the 'sovereignty' of each organisation that sits on them. A number of respondents, particularly from town and parish councils, raised concerns about democratic mandates and voting rights. This needs to be balanced with ensuring that communities have a voice and influence and that LCNs are part of the fabric of the governance of the Council.

A number of stakeholders have indicated concerns about LCNs being committees of Council, in as much as the formality may be a barrier to wider community participation and may restrict developmental approaches and solutions. Conversely, other respondents consider that the fact that they are to be committees helps mitigate them being seen as 'talking shops'.

The formality or otherwise of LCNs is an area for further consideration, and the experience in Cornwall, Wiltshire and Buckinghamshire will help with this.

Whilst initial work has been undertaken to develop Terms of Reference for LCNs, there is a direct relationship between function and form. As the former becomes more defined, further work will take place, with Governance colleagues, on the associated governance and constitutional arrangements.

In terms of how LCNs will operate, it is a working assumption that most decision making will be made through seeking consensus. Whilst one organisation cannot commit another organisation or its resources to a particular action, a collective 'opinion' vote on occasion may be required and its outcome something the Council and its partners can take into account. A robust evidence base will help mitigate any risk of priorities being dominated by 'those who shout loudest'.

To help give an LCN credibility, it will need to develop a plan that sets out priorities and how it intends to work towards them over the short, medium and longer term. These plans could be considered individually and collectively by the new Council and its partners, with a view to securing their endorsement and support for their delivery. This type of approach is being mooted in Cornwall. *It is proposed that a similar approach is considered and developed for Somerset's LCNs.*

#### **15.4. Barriers to participation**

Barriers to participation that were identified during the consultation related to practical issues such as time, finance and access. For smaller parishes in particular, the main concern is capacity and lack of clarity about what will be expected from them. This is a recurring theme in many discussions with the sector. Further dialogue with the section, including with Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) may assist in identifying ways to ensure that all parishes can engage in a way that works best for them.

There is a relationship between the decision on numbers of LCNs and barriers in terms of travel time. This could be mitigated through hybrid LCN meetings.

#### **15.5. Name**

The consultation indicates that Local Community Network is the preferred name of the three options given (noting that respondents had to choose one). *It is therefore proposed that the name Local Community Network is retained.*

## **15.6. Finance and Resourcing**

Experience from the pilots shows the ability to harness resources from within the community and the existing local authorities. However the experience does demonstrate that limited capacity, in particular around community development skills, is the main barrier to progress.

*This needs to be considered, in consultation with the LGR People workstream, in agreeing the staff resourcing of LCNs, including the role descriptions and skills sets required.*

## **16. Background Papers**

**16.1.** Appendix A - LCN Consultation report

Appendix B - 'Companion' copy of LCN questionnaire

Appendix C - Comparison table of arrangements for locality arrangements in Cornwall, Wiltshire and Buckinghamshire

## **Report Sign-Off**

		Date completed
Legal Implications	Honor Clarke	08/11/22
Governance	Scott Wooldridge	07/11/22
Corporate Finance	Jason Vaughan	08/11/22
Customers, Digital and Workforce	Chris Squire	07/11/22
Property	Paula Hewitt / Oliver Woodhams	07/11/22
Procurement	Claire Griffiths	07/11/22
Senior Manager	Alyn Jones	07/11/22
Commissioning Development	Sunita Mills / Ryszard Rusinek	04/11/22
Executive Member	Cllr Val Keitch - Lead Member for Local Government Reorganisation & Prosperity	07/11/22
<b><u>Sign-off Key Decision / Consulted on Non-Key Decision</u></b>		
Local Member		N/A
Opposition Spokesperson	Opposition Spokesperson for LGR – Cllr Faye Purbrick	Sent 07/11/22
Scrutiny Chair	Scrutiny Committee – Joint Scrutiny for Local Government Reorganisation Committee- Cllr Bob Filmer	Sent 07/11/22