

Together we are delivering your
New Somerset Council

Local Community Networks (LCNs)

Public Consultation

City, Town and Parish Councils Briefing Pack



Together we are delivering your

New Somerset Council

6th September 2022

Dear friends,

A public consultation on the development of Local Community Networks (LCNs) has been launched. It will run for six weeks until **Monday 17th October 2022**.

Help us shape LCNs by completing the survey, please share the links, and encourage conversations locally about this important evolution in our local democracy.

The views of our City, Town and Parish Councils are critical in this process, and we anticipate constructive and valuable insights from you.

Throughout the summer my councillor colleagues and I have been working on the LCN model and we are seeking your involvement in guiding decisions on the following key areas:

- The **roles and responsibilities** of LCNs in the first and subsequent years of Somerset Council.
- The development of **boundary options** using existing democratic geographies, Local Plans and community infrastructure.
- **The name.** Is 'Local Community Networks' the right title?

The new unitary authority will cover a large geographic area. It will be a big Council. LCNs will ensure local voices remain heard, partners are brought together, and decisions are taken with the benefit of local knowledge and experience. That's why we support them.

However, in this challenging economic environment, you will appreciate that as well as being effective and sustainable, LCNs must also be affordable.

You'll find more details on our [website](#) including background information, extensive FAQs, and listings of LCN engagement sessions. (See also: Engagement Dates below).

The consultation link is [HERE](#).

Check out our interactive map, to see where your parish fits in relation to the three boundary proposals [HERE](#).

And we've a dedicated email for any LCN enquiries LCN@somerset.gov.uk
Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions.

Best wishes,

Cllr Val Keitch

**Somerset County Council Lead Member for Local Government
Reorganisation**

LCN Consultation - Engagement Dates

Important: with regards to the virtual briefings please email the LCN inbox LCN@somerset.gov.uk to let us know which ones you would like to attend so we can send you a Teams invitation.

	DATE	Pop-Ups Face to face	C,T&P Virtual Briefings online Teams
Week 1	From 5th Sept		
	7 th September: 10-4pm	SW&T Taunton Council Offices	
Week 2	12 th September: 12-1pm		confirmed
	13 th September: 2-3pm		confirmed
Week 3	20 th September: 8-9am		confirmed
	22 nd September: 10-4pm	Mendip Council Offices Shepton Mallet	
	28 th September: 9-10am		confirmed
	29 th September: 10-4pm	SSDC Offices Brympton	
Week 5	SAVE THE DATE City, Town and Parish CONFERENCE	OCTOBER 4th 9.30-4pm	Westlands. Yeovil
	7 th October: 10-4pm	Sedgemoor Council Offices, Bridgwater	
Week 6	10 th October: 10-4pm	West Somerset House, Williton	
	11 th October: 1-2pm		confirmed
	13 th October: 7-8pm		Confirmed

Local Community Networks (LCNs)

Public Consultation

Background

On 1st April 2023 a new unitary Somerset Council will replace Somerset County Council and the four district councils (Mendip, Sedgemoor, Somerset West and Taunton, and South Somerset).

Somerset Council will cover a large geographical area. Council Leaders are mindful that we need 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. That is why all the Somerset Councils support the development of Local Community Networks (LCNs).

LCNs will be established in every part of Somerset. They will be Committees of the unitary Council, supported by dedicated officers and managers, with formal decision-making powers and influence. They will enable the Council, partners and communities to work together to address local issues and priorities, support health and wellbeing activities, and improve outcomes for residents. LCNs must be affordable and have the potential to develop their role alongside the new Somerset Council in the years to come.

Throughout the summer we have been working on developing the LCN model. This consultation asks for your involvement in guiding the decisions on the following key aspects; what roles and responsibilities the LCNs can have in the first and subsequent years of Somerset Council. options for the LCN boundaries, and whether 'Local Community Network' is the right name.

Have your say

We recommend you [read more about LCNs](#) before sharing your views about the Proposals.

You'll find the consultation [HERE](#).

If you want to request a paper copy of the survey, or would like the information in an easy-read or alternative format, please contact us by email at

LCN@somerset.gov.uk

Or call Somerset County Council direct on **0300 123 2224**.

What happens next?

Timeline

The LCN consultation opens until 17th October 2022.

Following the consultation, a formal decision paper, including a resourcing plan, will be submitted to Somerset County Council's Executive, scheduled for 16th November 2022.

In-person engagement sessions

We are holding in-person engagement events where you can join us to discuss the proposals in more detail with a member of our team.

Please visit our website for full listings [HERE](#).

There will be sessions for Members, our City, Town and Parish Councils, stakeholders and staff, throughout the process.

Feedback

We will publish the feedback we receive on these proposals, online, once the consultation ends.

Press Release

Together we are delivering your
New Somerset Council

Release: Immediate

Public invited to help shape local democracy in Somerset, as consultation launched

A public consultation on the development of Local Community Networks (LCNs) has been launched.

People are encouraged to have their say on plans to develop LCNs across the county, to support decision-making at its most local level.

You'll find the link to the consultation [HERE](#).

Opinions are being sought on a range of aspects, from LCN roles and responsibilities, boundary options, to choosing a suitable name.

The consultation is supported by the County Council and four district councils (Mendip, Sedgemoor, Somerset West and Taunton, and South Somerset) who will be replaced by a single Somerset Council on 1st April 2023.

Councillor Val Keitch, Somerset County Council Lead Member for Local Government Reorganisation, said: "The new unitary Council will cover a large geographic area, so we are mindful we need 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."

“LCNs will be Committees of the unitary Council, supported by dedicated officers and managers, with formal decision-making powers and influence. They will address local issues and priorities, support health and wellbeing activities, and improve outcomes for our residents.

“We want the public to help us shape them. That’s why we are encouraging people to take part in the consultation and have their say on how LCNs will operate, and where they think they should be located.”

Cllr Keitch added: “LCNs must have the potential to develop their role alongside the new Somerset Council in the years to come. And it’s important to stress, in this challenging economic environment, that they must be effective, sustainable and also affordable.”

Have your say! The public consultation is open now, and runs for six weeks until 17th October 2022.

Please visit our website for further details, including information about our in-person engagement sessions which take place across the county in the coming weeks.

You’ll find the consultation [HERE](#).

Check out our interactive map, to see where your parish fits in relation to the three boundary proposals [HERE](#).

There’s a dedicated inbox for all LCN enquires. Email us at LCN@somerset.gov.uk

Media contact:

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Local Community Networks (LCNs)

FAQs

LCNs : general information

What are Local Community Networks (LCNs)?

Local Community Networks (LCNs) will be part of the new Somerset Unitary Council, with formal power as 'Committees of the council', that listen to and are influenced by local communities.

LCNs bring Somerset Unitary Councillors and Officers together with key partners such as Town, City and Parish Councils, Health, Police, the Voluntary Sector and local groups,

The elected leaders of the new Somerset Council have confirmed their commitment to LCNs, which emerged from the One Somerset Business Case, along with their intention to develop the model further to support their vision for a fairer, greener, flourishing Somerset.

See business case [HERE](#).

What is this LCN consultation about?

The public consultation is about gathering views from the public and key stakeholders about how LCNs should develop and work in practice. It will explore how many LCNs the new Somerset Council will have, the role they will undertake and their name; exploring whether Local Community Networks is the right title for this Committee.

The new Somerset Council is committed to working with communities and partners and is keen to hear your views from across Somerset on emerging LCNs. Please see the consultation [HERE](#).

What are the three proposals in the consultation based on?

Based on analysis of a range of data and intelligence, three potential boundary proposals were identified – and we would welcome your comments on each of them.

Proposal A would have 18 LCNs

Proposal B would have 17 LCNs

Proposal C would have 10 LCNs

To help assess the proposals, we looked at a range of factors, to enable comparisons to be drawn. We tried to think about where people live, work, go to school and access services including health. In all cases we kept to parish outlines as close as possible. The things we considered:

- **Population** – we looked at how balanced the population numbers were in each LCN, how important or not is it that they have similar numbers of residents in each area
- **Geographies** – how similar in size of area they were, and their distribution/spread across Somerset
- **Electoral Divisions** – the number of Unitary Electoral divisions, and how they split within, and across, LCN boundaries
- **Deprivation** – using indices of multiple deprivation, we looked at how the most and least deprived areas were distributed
- **Community Facilities, e.g. Libraries** – we looked at where these were situated
- **Health** – fit of Primary Care Network (PCN) boundaries to LCN boundaries (PCNs are explained further down in the FAQs)
- **Secondary School Catchment Areas** – we checked how these were split in relation to LCNs, recognising schools are often at the heart of communities
- **Travel to Work Area** – we looked at their alignment to LCN areas
- **Current Local Plan Geographies** – we looked at their alignment to LCN areas

Who will be part of LCNs?

The 110 newly elected Somerset Councillors will sit on the LCN in their area, alongside partners. These will include city, town and parish councils, voluntary, community and social enterprise groups, the NHS, schools, the police, local businesses and other interested parties and residents. They will meet in local areas, in every part of the county. They will discuss what is most important for their area and work together to agree how best to achieve it.

Why do we need LCNs?

A large Somerset Unitary authority needs to ensure that it is connected and invested in the people of Somerset and will need a cast-iron way for local communities to work together to identify what's important to residents, stakeholders and different towns and villages, based on local needs.

LCNs are about recognising the many different communities in Somerset– and enabling them to set their own priorities for council service and develop solutions to address themes, to have a mechanism to have their voice heard.

What will the role of LCNs be?

LCNs will have a critical role in influencing council services and enabling the development of opportunities for residents in their area. They will bring together Somerset Council with local city, town and parish councils, other statutory services such as the police and Health providers and local voluntary and community organisations, to agree local priorities and consider how best to support needs locally.

Some of the potential roles are outlined here:

- 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. Further information can be viewed [HERE](#). [link to be added]
- 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

If you believe that LCNs should have another role please let us know and contribute to the consultation which can be found [HERE](#).

How many LCNs are you planning to have and what areas will they cover?

Currently we are consulting on three LCN models for Somerset, with a view to making a recommendation to the Executive (the principle decision making body for the Council) in November 2022. The three boundary proposals are covered in the consultation, and we would be keen to hear your views on each. Follow the link to see the three options, which are linked to an interactive map, to see where your own locality may fit [HERE](#).

Every part of the county will be part of an LCN. The forthcoming consultation exercise will inform decisions on the number of LCNs and the areas they will cover. It is important that LCNs are large enough to have real power and influence, whilst keeping a focus on local priorities.

Somerset Council is committed to consulting on how we deliver the LCNs in a way which best fits local areas and is sustainable in the future. We have undertaken an extensive modelling exercise which considers population sizes, parish boundaries, Unitary electoral divisions, and the way in which public services are organised and delivered in Somerset.

Why do the boundary proposals for LCNs have villages grouped with Towns?

We recognise that residents in our areas flow between the city, towns and parishes to access the services and shops of larger towns and villages and to enjoy everything that our villages and countryside have to offer. LCNs are a way of bringing everyone together to look at how to support the needs of all of our residents.

How often will LCNs meet?

It has been proposed that LCNs will meet six to eight times a year, with locally led groups pursuing their goals between meetings.

Will LCNs have money to invest in local projects?

Giving people at a local level the ability to influence the decision-making of the new Somerset Council has always been central to the LCN model. By identifying and agreeing local priorities, LCNs will influence the budgets and policies of the Council. The new administration will continue to review budget options to strengthen the ability of LCNs to support fairer, greener and flourishing communities in Somerset.

When will LCNs begin?

LCNs will begin when the new council is formed on 1 April 2023. There will be a period of development through the first years of operation as communities work together to develop their own approaches and priorities, supported by dedicated officers.

Will LCNs have Planning or Licensing functions?

The new Council Executive believes in enabling local decision-making and is prepared to put planning and licensing back on the table for discussion as our Local Community Networks develop after vesting day.

That will not happen overnight – current Local Plans each have their own lifespan and planning and licensing will continue to operate on the existing district model from vesting day and into the first years of the new Somerset Council.

Will LCNs have assets or services devolved to them?

No. Assets and services **cannot** be devolved to LCNs as LCNs are Committees and are part of the Somerset Council. Where Town, City and Parish Councils and local communities wish to take on council assets or services, because it makes good sense to do so, this can be considered, and LCNs could be a forum for facilitating this discussion. When the new council has its policies in place, meaningful conversations will be able to take place with partners, with regard to assets.

LCNs : Governance

Who will have the voting rights (the decision-making powers) on the LCNs?

We anticipate that LCNs use a range of evidence, views and information to identify and agree local priorities, seeking to reach consensus where possible. There could be occasions when decisions relating to Somerset Council business necessitate a formal vote for Somerset Councillors.

Feedback from the pilots will inform the standard terms of reference for LCNs, with an expectation that each area will have responsibility for the development of its ways of working.

Will Unitary Councillors be expected to attend more than one LCN if they cross electoral boundaries?

Each Somerset Councillor will have a seat on the LCN or LCNs that their division covers. The number of Somerset Councillors on each LCN will be determined once the LCN geographies are agreed, later this year.

Will there be officer support available for LCNs?

Yes. Each LCN will have council officer support and a senior level sponsor. This will be necessary as LCNs will be a formal part of the new Council's decision-making structure and provide an enabling role to support LCNs achieve their objectives.

Are you engaging with voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) groups?

Yes. There are numerous networks for the VCSE, and the Somerset Group of Charities have been working on a new engagement model for the Somerset VCSE and we hope to use this to inform the further development of LCNs, through our work with Spark Somerset.

Can any VCSE group be part of an LCN?

Yes. Local groups working in a particular area may want to find ways to participate effectively in LCNs.

Will LCNs work with businesses?

Yes. Businesses will be supported and encouraged to be active partners in LCNs alongside all other partners.

Will LCNs work with other Statutory partners?

Yes. We are already talking to the Police and key Health and Wellbeing partners about their involvement in and with LCNs. LCNs will also engage the Fire Service, schools, social care settings and other statutory service providers alongside Somerset Council services to discuss priority areas and agree local actions.

How will LCNs include Individuals and community members?

LCNs will be public meetings and members of the public will be encouraged to attend and be actively included in the discussion of topics, enhancing the breadth of understanding about local issues, priority areas and potential actions.

LCNs : working with city, town and parish councils

Are you engaging with our city, town and parish councils about LCNs?

Yes. There is an online forum for Somerset Town, City and Parish Clerks which meets each fortnight to discuss Local Government Reorganisation in Somerset. If you'd like to join this please register your interest by emailing:

LCN@somerset.gov.uk

We also hold City, Town and Parish Council Conferences. Keep your eye on our website for details for times and dates.

We are in regular discussion with key representatives, including the Society of Local Clerks (SLCC) and Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC).

We welcome invitations to meet with groups of City, Town and Parish Councils.

Will every City, Town and Parish council (and parish meeting) be part of an LCN?

Yes. There are more than 300 parishes and parish meetings in Somerset. Through the LCN pilots we are looking at ways to ensure that our city, towns, parishes and communities are represented, recognising that some parishes may have limited resources.

Can our City, Town or Parish only work with the others formally identified in our LCN?

No. There are many examples across Somerset of the City, Towns and Parishes coming together with each other, the voluntary and community sector and council services to consider issues that are important to them. We expect these working relationships to continue, and to be improved and enhanced through the LCN network across Somerset.

Will LCNs place an extra burden on parish councils?

LCNs are intended to support people to come together around topics that are important to them to best meet the needs of residents in their area. We hope that all city, towns and parishes councils will actively engage, and we expect each LCN to agree its own meetings dates and times.

We do recognise that parish councillors are unpaid office holders and that there may be other capacity constraints for parishes. We will continue to work closely with SALC and SLCC to further consider the barriers to participation in LCNs and how we can work together to address them.

In some places, City, Town and Parish councils are forming networks and looking at ways to share experiences and support each other.

What are Primary Care Networks and what is their relationship with LCNs?

Primary Care Networks (PCNs) are groups of GP surgeries working together in partnership with community, mental health, social care, pharmacy, hospital and voluntary services in their local area. They serve communities of between 30,000 and 80,000 patients in a defined local area. The average individual GP surgery serves 9,000 patients.

PCNs receive funding directly to employ additional primary care staff including pharmacists, health coaches and physiotherapists.

PCNs build on existing primary care services and allow greater provision of proactive, personalised, co-ordinated and better integrated health and social care for people, close to home. include providing medical care to people in care homes and arranging social prescribing services. Social prescribing includes activities such as health walks and finding new friendships.

Clinicians describe this as a change from reactively providing appointments to proactively caring for people and communities.

These wider set of activities are referred to as Neighbourhoods. The NHS and County Council established 12 Neighbourhoods to help local services and communities to come together and develop Neighbourhood Care Teams to work in a more joined up way.

Neighbourhoods work with many of the same partners who may be engaged in LCNs, so shared priorities, objectives and engagement must be explored to ensure we all work together in an integrated way.

How will LCNs ensure equality of opportunity?

LCNs are intended to address the needs of all residents in our communities. They will be paying particular attention to the needs of under-represented groups and those with protected characteristics. Local voluntary and community organisations could provide valuable help to LCNs.

Somerset is both a rural and urban county and we believe it is important that LCNs have representation that reflects its community.

The LCN officer team, working with our partners, will be key to facilitating engagement and representation from of our communities.

We hope that this will ensure that the voice of all residents are heard.

LCNs : Pilots

Where are the LCN Pilots?

Three Pilot LCNs are exploring ways of working with City, Town and Parish Councils, Highways, Children's Services, Public Health, the Police, Voluntary Sector Organisations and other local groups.

- The Frome Area pilot LCN is exploring the theme of Children, Young People and Families.
- The South East Somerset pilot (in the Wincanton, Bruton and Castle Cary area) is considering Rural isolation and Wellbeing.
- In the Exmoor area Somerset County Council is piloting a new approach to delivering local street scene and highways services, with Town and Parish councils.

What is the purpose of the Pilots?

The LCN Pilots test new ways of working without dictating the terms to communities. They provide useful insight to the LCN model to be determined for Somerset. As part of the evaluation framework we shall consider good practice and learn from things that did not work quite so well. As well as continue to look towards other Unitary authorities for ideas and best practice.

Are you planning to run any more pilots?

No. We need to learn from these and apply that to the formation of all LCNs from 1st April 2023.

What lessons have you learnt so far from the pilots?

- ✓ That many City, Town and Parish want to grasp the opportunity to do more locally – but not all.
- ✓ The NHS, and the police (as well as the new Council) see LCNs becoming a central vehicle for engaging with the public.
- ✓ Voluntary and community sectors see the opportunity of being engaged with LCNs that have formal power as ‘committees’ of the council.
- ✓ LCNs must remain flexible over time.
- ✓ It is important that LCNs are given time and support to develop and agree priorities and associated actions.
- ✓ LCNs can positively influence and support the delivery of the councils’ strategic ambitions.
- ✓ LCNs have a role in bringing a range of interested parties and organisations together to affect positive change in local communities.

LCNs : best practice

Are you exploring best practice with other councils who have gone through this unitary process (the creation of the new Somerset Council)? How do LCN equivalents work there?

Yes, definitely. As well as learning from the pilots, we have been conducting background research throughout the programme, looking at some of the good examples of how community panels work in other locations. We are keen to develop peer-to-peer support too, so there are direct connections forged with councils who have already experienced this.

These opportunities are being taken. We are talking to Wiltshire, Cornwall, Buckinghamshire and other unitary areas and we are also linking in with town and parishes in those areas to help our own towns and parishes learn from their experience.

We are learning from what works well and not so well in other areas where community networks or area panels have been established. This will help ensure LCNs work across Somerset from vesting day.

LCNs : what next?

A timetable for LCN development is in place, and is as follows:

- Consideration of role, geographies, governance and funding of LCN – September to October 2022
- Refine governance and financial modelling, linked to the Council's budget setting timetable - October to November 2022
- Formal Decision Paper including resourcing plan - November 2022

I'd like to know more about LCNs. Can you come and talk to us?

If you have questions not covered by these FAQs, please let us know. Whilst we can't promise to attend every individual town or parish meeting, we'd be delighted to have conversations with groups or networks of town and parish councils or organisations.

Please get in touch by emailing: LCN@somerset.gov.uk

In-person engagement sessions

We are holding in-person engagement events where you can join us to discuss the proposals in more detail with a member of our team. Do come along!

7 th	September	10-4pm	Somerset West and Taunton Offices, Taunton
22 nd	September	10-4pm	Mendip Council Offices, Shepton Mallet
29 th	September	10-4pm	South Somerset District Council Offices, Brympton
7 th	October	10-4pm	Sedgemoor Council Offices, Bridgwater
10 th	October	10-4pm	West Somerset House, Williton

We'll be consulting our City, Town and Parishes, our key stakeholders and our staff at all five councils, throughout the six-week period too.

ENDS