

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING	Cabinet	
MEETING	6th December 2014	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 2719
TITLE:	Connecting Communities: Update	
WARD:	All- but with recommendation 2.4 particular relating to Bathavon North, Bathavon South and Bathavon West wards	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: None		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 This report sets out progress so far on the Connecting Communities programme (including establishing Connecting Communities Forums), provides an update on Bath City governance, and recommends next steps.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Note the progress made in implementing the Connecting Communities programme, particularly the establishment of the three Connecting Communities Forums in the Keynsham, Chew Valley and Somer Valley areas
- 2.2 Note the removal and reduction in duplication of meetings and therefore savings in staff time arising from this work, as set out in Paragraph 5.3
- 2.3 Continue to develop the work of the Forums in order to:
- a) Better understand local needs and priorities
 - b) Engage effectively with parishes, partners and local people
 - c) Continue to streamline local partnership arrangements and remove duplication
- 2.4 Extend the Connecting Communities Forum approach to Parish Cluster Groups 2 and 3 (encompassing Bathavon North, Bathavon South and Bathavon West wards).
- 2.5 Note that the fourth Bath City Conference is currently proposed to take place in June 2015

2.6 Request officers to begin planning for a “conference”- style event for the parished area, comparable to the Bath City Conference.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

3.1 The delivery of the programme is primarily through existing staffing resources. Support for the Bath City Conference (and any conference for the parished area) and for the Connecting Communities Forums comes primarily from existing Strategy and Performance staff. In addition, officers from Council and partner services contribute to Forum agenda items as appropriate. It should be emphasised that the Connecting Communities Forums have replaced and simplified a number of existing bodies which were absorbing a substantial amount of officer time and which often duplicated discussions. More information on how Connecting Communities has reduced and rationalised staff time spent in community engagement, and the potential to remove duplication still further, is set out in paragraph 5.3.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

4.1 Relevant considerations include the impact of Connecting Communities on the wellbeing of local communities including crime & disorder, sustainability, natural environment, planning, human rights, children, public health & inequalities. Connecting Communities Forums do not have decision-making powers or budgetary resources and therefore do not require any delegations from Council.

5 THE REPORT

5.1 Connecting Communities was agreed by Cabinet in May 2013 as the Council's Local Engagement Framework. It aims to achieve better, more consistent engagement between public services and local communities in Bath and North East Somerset. It does this through:

- Establishing local “Connecting Communities Forums” which involve parishes and elected members and which replace a range of existing locally-based groups, removing duplication and providing a single basis for engagement
- Wider “Conference”- style events, such as the Bath City Conference to encourage broad participation and to celebrate local achievements

5.2 Three Connecting Communities Forums have now been established covering the Somer Valley, Chew Valley and Keynsham areas. These Forums each comprise parish councils, local elected members and community groups and have Director-level sponsors to highlight and champion their work in the Council and with other agencies. Each Forum is drawing on local Area Profiles to assess local need and to identify priorities. The launch event for the Keynsham and Chew Valley Forums was accompanied by an “Ask the Leader” session

5.3 Action Plans for each Forum will draw together partner activity as well as – crucially- utilise the capacity and skills of local communities themselves to

address key issues and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local services. The three Connecting Communities Forums so far have replaced the following previously-existing engagement processes in the areas concerned:

- “Local Partnership” meetings covering these areas (Somerset Valley Partnership and Chew Valley Area Partnership)
- “Parish Cluster Group” meetings covering these areas (Groups 1,4 and 5).
- “Partners and Communities Together” (PACT) meetings covering these areas. These meetings, held quarterly and organised on a ward basis, had previously required significant officer time to attend, with a dedicated Council Neighbourhood officer allocated to each PACT meeting, as well as Police attendance and other agency involvement as required. The Connecting Communities Forums mean that separate PACT meetings are no longer required, saving officer time as well as providing a more “joined up” approach to the public.

5.4 In addition to rationalisation of meetings in this way, Council officers have also been able to use the Forums to co-ordinate consultations- eg on the Placemaking Plan. In this way, as the Forums progress, it is envisaged that the Forums will be the “single point” of engagement for Council officers with local communities. There is also a significant opportunity to work with other partners both to rationalise engagement mechanisms and to create a more integrated local service offer.

5.5 Connecting Communities also provides an important opportunity to join up local needs assessment, engagement and prioritisation by involving a range of partners and the local community. Linking the Council’s research, needs assessment and corporate planning with those of Public Services Board partners will also help with better targeting of resources as well as reducing duplication.

5.6 Within Bath, the Forums have not been progressed, following the Council’s decision to establish a cross-party working group to consider options to strengthen community representation and civic governance within the City. This working group reported to Council in September, where it was agreed that further work would take place on establishing the evidence base. Preparations will also be taking place, working with our steering group, for the fourth Bath City Conference, provisionally planned for June 2015. In addition, the successful Bath City Centre PACT meeting will be retained due to the specific nature of the issues and demands in this locality.

5.7 Parish Cluster groups 2 and 3 (covering the Bathavon North, Bathavon South and Bathavon West wards) are not currently included in the Connecting Communities “Forum” approach. There is therefore an opportunity to extend the Connecting Communities to these areas, including establishing a Forum or Fora, drawing on experience so far and working closely with local parishes and elected members.

6 RATIONALE

6.1 The establishment of Connecting Communities Forums in Keynsham, Chew Valley and Somerset Valley has delivered a significant rationalisation of local engagement and reduced duplication and deployment of officer time at

meetings. It has also laid the basis for longer-term, constructive conversations between Bath & North East Somerset Council, parish councils, partners and local communities. It is therefore considered appropriate to extend the approach to the remaining part of the parished area. In Bath, which is unparished, it is considered appropriate to await the outcomes of the review of community representation in the City before proceeding with the establishment of Forums. However, the Bath City Conference and other local engagement in the City will progress the overall approach to Connecting Communities, for example by “joining up” consultation events.

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

7.1 The option of not proceeding with the Connecting Communities “Forum” approach in the remainder of the parished areas was considered but it was considered that this would lead to less effective engagement with parishes and elected members in these areas.

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 Parishes Liaison received an early in indication of the proposals contained in this report at its meeting of 22nd October. Other consultation was carried out directly with:

Cabinet members

Section 151 Officer

Monitoring Officer

Resources Director

Director of Strategy and Performance

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

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Background papers	Connecting Communities
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	