

# North Yorkshire County Council

## Local Government Reorganisation Transition Overview & Scrutiny Committee

9 November 2022

### Community Networks

Report of the Localities Work-stream  
Sponsor: Paul Shevlin (Craven District Council)

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#### 1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Members with an overview of the work being undertaken in relation to the ambition for the new authority to develop and support Community Networks; to describe how they will fit with the broader strategy and operating model and to highlight any emerging issues and risks.

#### 2.0 Background

- 2.1 North Yorkshire County Council's submission to government for the establishment of a unitary council put forward a case for a locality based delivery model with four strong and interconnected pillars:
- i. Local services and access – locally based and integrated council, partner and community services.
  - ii. Local accountability - 6 Area Committees, political accountability for the discharge of statutory functions and services at local level.
  - iii. Local action – local people, partners and communities coming together in new Community Networks to identify and deliver against priorities.
  - iv. Local empowerment – devolution of powers to community groups and town and parish councils who want to, to run assets and services.
- 2.2 The proposal went on to describe the third pillar – Local Action – as being delivered through Community Networks.

*“Community Networks will act as local agents for economic and social change. They will be places of collaboration between business, public sector agencies and the communities they serve. Our approach will be centred around the significant economic, cultural and social assets of market towns, surrounding villages and natural communities in North Yorkshire. Around twenty-five Community Networks will be formed comprised of community and business groups, town and parish councils and representatives from other local groups and public services including local councillors. This will lead to greater collaboration and will provide the support that helps communities to become more self-reliant and resilient. They will be the engine rooms of local action and ideas and will get things done in local areas. Areas will be*

*subject to consultation with local communities and it is expected that the nature and make-up of them will evolve and flex over time, to meet local needs and priorities. Every network will be supported by a Local Area Coordinator. Their role will be to help, encourage and empower localities by supporting local people and business to take action and tackle local issues and priorities. Each Community Network would also be assigned one of the most senior managers from within the new Council. This will ensure that strategic connections between the economic and social needs of local communities, places and towns are made back into the Council and with partners.”*

### **3.0 Introduction**

3.1 The vision described above has been central to the thinking and the development of the arrangements being made for the establishment of the Networks to date. The work is being led by the Localities Workstream.

3.2 A number of pieces of work have been undertaken including:

- a series of workshops, facilitated by PA Consulting, to establish some key principles and characteristics for the operation of Community Networks;
- a task and finish group was formed, made up of representatives from all eight Councils and reporting to the Localities Board; who together have agreed the draft vision, high level terms of reference; and characteristics;
- mapping of existing networks and partnerships who carry out similar roles to the vision for Community Networks;
- initial conversations with some of the existing networks and partnerships to understand and learn from them both what works well and what some of the challenges are;
- initial testing of proposed geographical areas as part of the Let’s Talk Local engagement campaign – ongoing.

3.3 The work of the task and finish group has been agreed by the Locality Board (staff working group) and shared with the Implementation Board and the Member Working Group as the basis for further consultation with communities and partners – this is detailed in sections 4 - 7 of this report.

### **4.0 Draft Terms of Reference**

4.1 Vision Statement: Community Networks will mobilise the power, resources and partner relationships that exist in our communities to deliver the most appropriate local solutions for their people and place.

4.2 The role of Community Networks is to:

- Mobilise communities, unleash energy and ambition & give them a stronger voice
- Be action oriented, creating the conditions for local action to happen
- Develop local priorities and action plans utilising the skills and assets in communities

- Provide a vehicle for inclusive and effective local engagement with communities
- Provide a vehicle for external investment (e.g. UK Shared Prosperity Funding)

In carrying out that role, they will...

- Have a strong focus on prevention and reducing inequalities
- Be encouraged to look long term to tackle local challenges:
  - improve the local economy and creation of community wealth
  - drive community action
  - improve community, environmental and individual wellbeing
  - Improve community resilience

## **5.0 Draft Characteristics and Principles**

5.1 Community Networks will be developed using a flexible model bound by common principles.

5.2 They will...

- Look different in different places
- Be centred around principal towns and surrounding areas, reflecting natural communities
- Be subject to consultation with local communities and will build on existing assets; it is expected that the nature and make-up of them will evolve and flex over time to meet local needs and priorities
- Connect people and organisations in a community by bringing together on an equitable basis a range of stakeholders that reflect that place (residents, councillors, town and parish councils, MPs, businesses, voluntary sector & community groups and other public sector partners such as health, police, schools etc.) to address local challenges
- Operate independently, having autonomy to elect their own Chair and agree their own priorities and plans
- Be able to influence strategic decision making that affects their communities
- Be inclusive, trusted and recognised by local residents and will encourage local collaboration and involvement

5.3 They will not:

- All happen at the same time, some will take longer to develop than others
- Have devolved budgets but will be supported to explore funding opportunities from a range of sources and opportunities to align partner investment in their communities

## **6.0 Resources and Support**

6.1 Although independent of the Council, the Networks will be connected into the Council through the following relationships:

- a) Area Committees. It is not envisaged that the role of the Area Committees would be to hold Networks to account; instead, the Area Committees would play an important role in empowering and supporting the Networks to deliver their own action plans and would provide a forum for local issues of importance to be raised.
- b) Local Members. as community leaders and members of the Networks.
- c) Senior level sponsorship (Assistant Director or above).
- d) They will be able to draw support from a team of community officers, employed by the Council, to help with local coordination, specialist advice and network development.
- e) They will benefit from being aligned to a network of Community Anchors drawn from local voluntary sector organisations who are well placed to mobilise and galvanise involvement by local community organisations and residents.

### **Community Team**

6.2 It is envisaged that the roles of the community officer team in the new Council will include:

- supporting the development of the network helping to embed the key principles and to help to build cross-sector relationships;
- helping the networks make the links between the strategic agenda of the Council to the place shaping role of the respective Area Committee(s);
- supporting the networks to identify and develop their local vision and develop their own long term action plans that set their priorities for delivery of economic growth, social action & environmental sustainability; and
- assisting with the development of skills, confidence and capacity.

### **Community Anchor Organisations (CAO)**

6.3 There is an opportunity to align the development of Networks to some on-going work being undertaken by the Stronger Communities team in relation to building community capacity through the development of a Community Anchor model. This work is building on the success of the model put in place during the pandemic of a network of place-based Community Support Organisations (CSO). Stronger Communities has been working with the CSOs – and other local community organisations during 2021/2022 to evaluate the CSO model and to identify future opportunities where a place based network of local VCSE anchors could add value and work alongside the new Council.

6.4 The following benefits have been identified for the alignment of this work with the arrangements being developed for both Community Networks and the broader Locality model:

- Community Networks: CAOs who are recognised as a ‘system partner’ would be well positioned to co-ordinate the local VCS/grassroots involvement in their local Community Network and broader ambitions around the new Council’s place based operating model
- Community engagement: as local trusted organisations CAOs can support both the new Council and Networks with wider community engagement/ involvement activities
- Local profiles/needs assessments: CAOs can contribute local knowledge around local needs. CAOs will also anticipate needs and create local solutions
- Governance: as constituted organisations able to hold assets, funding and employ staff they could support the Networks with services such as secretariat roles, bidding for and holding investment
- Devolution: CAOs can help build capacity/confidence in wider local community sector, broker collaborations, pilot new services/ideas
- Growth: CAOs can help to enable transformative change such as community wealth creation.

### **Financial Resources**

- 6.5 As outlined in paragraph 5.3 above it is not proposed that the Community Networks will have devolved budgets, however there will be a requirement for investment in both the development of the Networks and on-going administration of them:
- The work to evolve the Community Support model in to an Anchor model as outlined in paragraph 6.3 is currently funded with non-recurring Stronger Communities grant. Consideration of how this will be resourced in the future will need to be addressed.
  - Financial resources will need to be in place to support the ongoing administration of the Networks. This secretariat function may be delivered by the local Anchor organisations, however it will for each Network to determine what arrangements work best in their areas.

## **7.0 Draft Spatial Proposals**

- 7.1 The target is for circa 25-30 place-based networks across the county with a preference for networks to be centred around principal towns and their hinterlands.
- 7.2 Community teams are consulting with communities on possible spatial options as part of ‘Let’s Talk Local’. 31 areas have been mapped and included on the engagement platform just as a starting point for discussions with local people and organisations.

## **8.0 Emerging issues**

- 8.1 As these proposals and ideas continue to be socialised with partners and the public both through the Let’s Talk engagement and through various public and partner webinars and meetings, a number of issues are being raised.

### Network boundaries

- 8.2 Concerns have been raised that the areas outlined in the spatial option being consulted upon are too large. This is particularly where there are some large rural hinterlands and/or where there are borders with neighbouring authorities. Communities close to those borders may identify with principal towns outside of North Yorkshire with no strong relationships to their closest North Yorkshire town.
- 8.3 The principles outlined in para 5.2 recognises that boundaries are always going to be 'fuzzy' at the edges and it is likely that they will change and evolve over time. It is not essential that these are all definitive in advance of vesting day.
- 8.4 It is also worth recognising that in all likelihood there may be times when networks do things that only apply to part of their area or join together with a neighbouring network on issues of shared interest.
- 8.5 For very practical reasons the new Council can only support circa 30 networks. Additionally a larger number of networks could make active participation by some partners a challenge.

### Parish and Town Councils

- 8.6 A number of concerns have been expressed by some Parish and Town Councils that the imposition of Community Networks are a duplication of their democratic role and that the Networks are un-democratic. There are also concern from smaller parishes that they will be town-centric.
- 8.7 The proposition for this work is to form 'networks', a coming together of willing partners with resources, connections and insights to share these for the common good. It is not about creating a new governance structure for the area and it is not intended to undermine the legitimacy of the role of elected representatives at all tiers of local government.
- 8.8 Networks will not have any powers to fetter the discretion of any of the individual partner organisations. It is likely that there will be priorities that are not shared by everyone. The focus of the Networks will be to bring the collective resources of partners together to deliver on the priorities they share where by working together they can collectively achieve more than if acting alone.
- 8.8 Network partners will have access to resources that councils do not currently have either access to or any control over. Networks can create the opportunity and mechanism for everyone working together on shared priorities for the benefit of local residents.

### Selection processes and governance

- 8.9 As part of the engagement with some of the existing place-based partnerships, those that share some of the characteristics of what is being proposed for Community Networks, enquiries have been made in relation to how the Council will select or appoint networks and whether there are any preferred governance models. No

decisions have been made on this and as outlined in para 5.2 it is anticipated that they will look – and operate – different in different places.

- 8.11 It is suggested that it a sensible starting point therefore is to start exploring this with a small number of willing partnerships in order to bring together some examples and mini case studies, as options with pros and cons for consideration by the Executive on 10 January 2023.

#### Capacity and timescales

- 8.12 This ambition forms part of the post-vesting day ‘transformation’ programme. The work being undertaken by the joint community teams from county and districts pre-vesting day is to inform the model through consultation and engagement with partners and communities. The implementation of the programme will not begin until after vesting day, as it will require the appropriate staff structures and other resources and relationships - as outlined above - to be in place.
- 8.13 It is likely therefore that the model will develop and grow over time with initial activity being focussed on a small number of pilot areas.

### **9.0 Risks**

- 9.1 The following principle risks are highlighted:
- The timetable for establishment of networks is brought forward to pre-vesting day which would have a significant impact on county and district community teams’ capacity to deliver and also continue to manage their business as usual workloads
  - The timetable for development of networks is significantly pushed back beyond vesting day leading to reputational damage for new the council
  - Agreement on spatial options not easily reached leading to delays in establishing networks and possible increase in resource requirements
  - The networks fail to engage and attract the membership from a broad range of local partners or have a narrow agenda
  - The new council seeks to ‘control’ the networks compromising their independence.

### **10.0 Recommendations**

- 10.1 It is recommended that Members note and comment on the progress being made in relation to the development of a framework for the development of Community Networks.

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