

APPENDIX ONE

Connecting Communities: Our Framework for Change

Working Better with our Communities: the Challenge

Connecting Communities is an initiative taken by Bath & North East Somerset Council, Avon and Somerset Police, Avon Fire and Rescue Service, Bath & North East Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group, and Curo- working together through the Public Services Board- for better joint working with local communities. We are doing this in order to meet our shared challenges of declining resources, increasing public expectations and the need for a “joined up” approach to tackle the concerns that local people raise with us.

The Council, as with all public services, is changing. Our refreshed Vision and Values states that we wish to be:

“A listening Council with active citizens that reaches every community and culture”

The Council’s vision is of communities with the strength and resilience to help themselves and each other, with the Council providing support alongside our public service partners where we can make the most difference. As the Council seeks to move from good to excellent, it will increasingly be judged on how well it works with partners to help local people shape the areas they live and work in.

Our communities themselves are also changing. Many of our residents now communicate and engage with public services through digital channels, increasingly through mobile devices. They expect the Council to operate as “one Council” and, increasingly, for all public services to join-up and respond seamlessly. We also know that as well as using new technologies such as social media, people want us to keep (and, where possible, enhance) the “face-to-face” relationships with public service staff that they so value - for example, at our one-stop-shops, through beat surgeries and through resident engagement.

The national context is changing too. The Localism Act and new Community Rights reflect the government’s wider focus on shifting power to local neighbourhoods and encouraging citizens to take action, manage services, and lead on tackling issues that are of the most concern to them. The Equality Act reinforces the need for our engagement to be inclusive in order to be fully effective and the Social Value Act provides an opportunity for us to use procurement to generate benefits to local communities.

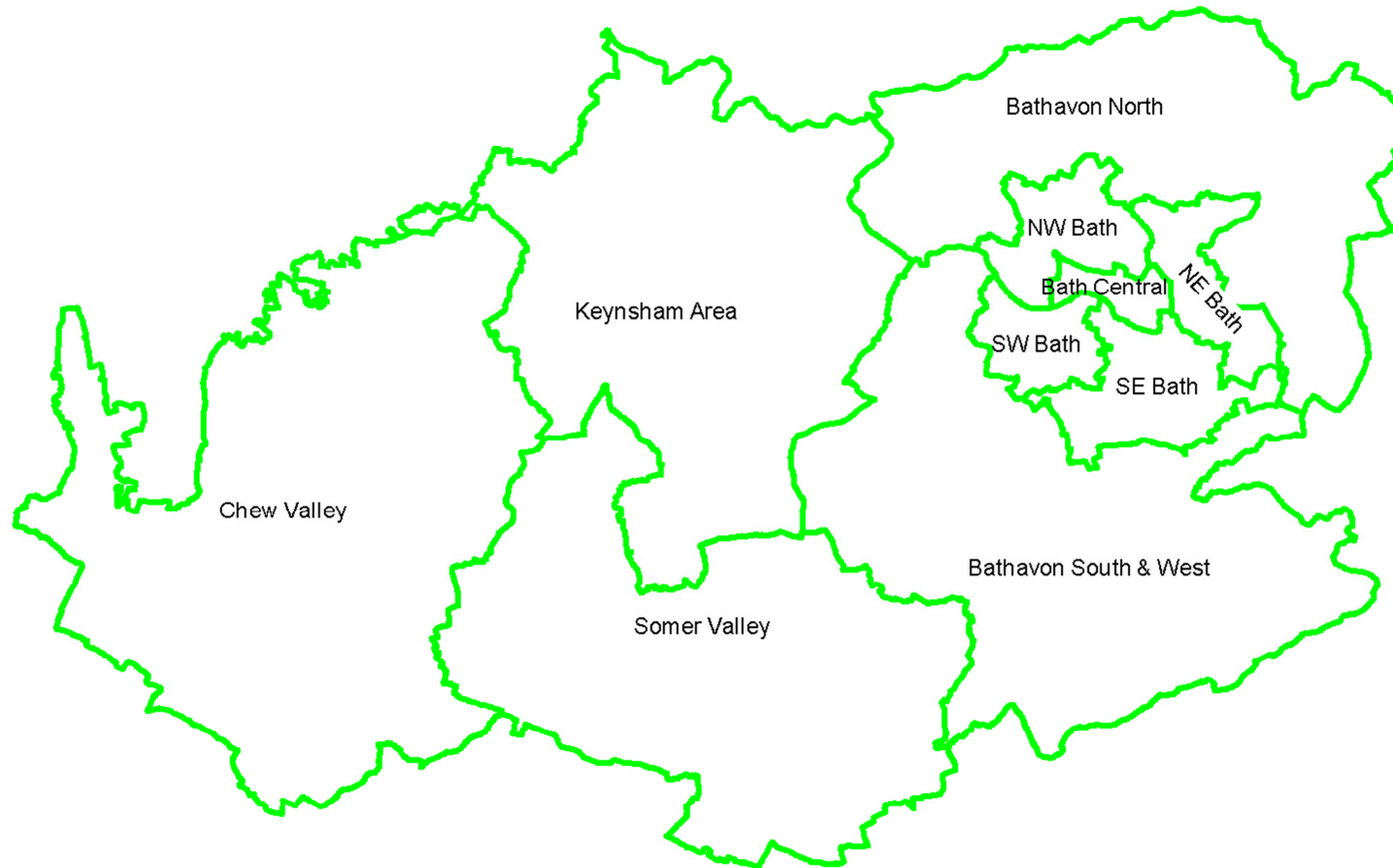
Communities themselves are taking the lead in shaping their areas and in contributing to solutions. Connecting Communities is about public services supporting and enabling local initiative to thrive

Our new approach: “Connecting Communities”

The challenges identified above require our public services to change, and to change together. Our new approach starts from the presumption that the voices and activities of local communities are central to public service design and delivery. This approach can be seen and has been tested through a number of projects supported by the Public Services

However, given the “patchwork” of engagement initiatives that currently exist in our area, there is an urgent need to make it easier for our local communities to collaborate with us and with each other. Connecting Communities therefore is built around a single framework for local engagement to be used by the Public Services Board as well as by other partners and residents. This will be built around “cluster” arrangements and will be rolled out in both the unparished and parished areas of Bath and North East Somerset. These cluster arrangements are set out overleaf.

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES: PROPOSED CLUSTER ARRANGEMENTS



CLUSTER PROFILE

Each cluster will be profiled to include a wide range of information about the area, including:

Policy considerations	Community assets	People	Local groups and partnerships
Including: - Police and Crime Plan - Placemaking Plan - Community Plans - Curo Neighbourhood Plans - Joint Strategic Needs Assessment	Including: - Community Centres - Youth Hubs - Village Halls - Community Libraries - Other community buildings	Including: - Ward Councillors - Local community activity - Town/Parish Councils - Neighbourhood Policing Teams - Curo Neighbourhood roles - Locality Teams	Including: - PACT meetings - Parish Cluster Groups - Residents' Associations - Community roles - VCSE organisations - Area Partnerships

Connecting Communities: Clusters

Each “Cluster Profile” will identify local needs, existing projects and future plans to act as a catalyst for discussions in each cluster. The Council will also

- Continue our programme of asset transfer so that communities increasingly take control of local facilities, with more local community hubs such as at Community@67 in Keynsham and the new Paulton library
- Create “virtual teams” to support clusters

This local activity will be supported by the wider family of Public Service partners operating through groups such as the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Community Safety Partnership, supported by the Public Services Board through the commitments set out below. Partners will work closely with the clusters to highlight key issues locally and work on solutions.

Key outcomes from this new approach are expected to include:

- Less duplication of effort and meetings and quicker responses to local issues
- An opportunity to see the “big picture” of public service budgets within an area
- A single point of contact for local residents and community groups who wish to work with the public services on local solutions
- An expansion of projects more quickly into other areas through better sharing of information about “what works”
- Better use of social networking and other online systems: we currently have around 9000 followers across our 9 Twitter feeds
- More support for local innovation - for example the Proud of Your Doorstep initiative in Whiteway
- An expansion of local community roles such as our Snow Warden schemes

By working through these clusters, we are fortunate in Bath and North East Somerset in being able to build on many assets and strengths including the work of residents’ associations, parish and town councils and voluntary and community groups. For example, the Community Alcohol Partnership in Midsomer Norton is a community-driven initiative which has led to new street wardens in the area. In addition, we already have 15 neighbourhoods taking part in our Snow Warden scheme.

“Connecting Communities” will nurture successful projects, connect them up and provide support where needed. The Connecting Communities Toolkit sets out some of the current examples of good practice locally that we will build on as we develop our approach as well as the range of options available to communities to help improve their areas.

Alongside the offer of support for the Connecting Communities initiative, public services will also stop supporting mechanisms which don’t contribute to tackling local solutions, which create duplication or which don’t fully engage with local

people. The presumption of Connecting Communities is “one conversation” between public services and communities, with the cluster as the place where this happens.

To deliver these ambitions, public services have made a series of commitments as to how they will approach future engagement activity and which can help to shape our work with the clusters. These are set out in the following section.

“Connecting Communities”: Our Commitments

The Public Services Board wishes to work closely with clusters to identify exactly what support is needed and what types of engagement would fit local needs. In doing this, Public Services make the following commitments:

To LISTEN - *always being open to ideas* Our commitment is to understand what it is that communities are asking for, rather than making assumptions based on existing ways of working.

To PRIORITISE - *making sure local needs come first* Our commitment is to work with local communities to identify the different needs of each area, rather than adopting a “one size fits all” approach to deciding priorities. We will support communities to make decisions grounded in the best possible evidence.

To JOIN UP - *working in partnership with our local communities* Our commitment is to act as “one Council”, and increasingly as “one public service”, so that when communities talk to someone who works for a public service they can gain access to all public service resources without duplication of effort

To WORK WITH YOU - *helping communities find the best way to tackle local issues* Our commitment is to always be open to new ideas and to look for solutions rather than obstacles.

To SHARE IDEAS - *building on what works* Our commitment is to share information and best practice across our area and to encourage learning and innovation

These commitments are summarized in the diagram below and set out in more detail in the Connecting Communities Draft Action Plan in Appendix 3.

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES: OUR FRAMEWORK

