

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Somerset 2022 Elections and Potential Electoral Arrangements

August 2021



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Existing electoral arrangements

- County Council elections deferred until May 2022 to elect 55 members for 54 electoral divisions and held every four years
- Four District Council elections scheduled for May 2023 to elect 214 councillors for 127 wards and held every four years
- 278 City, Town and Parish Council elections scheduled for May 2023 and held every four years



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LGR – proposals in Business Case approved by Sec of State July 2021 with south west LGR comparators

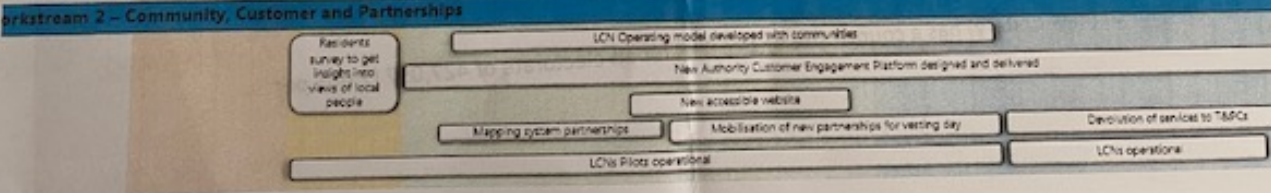
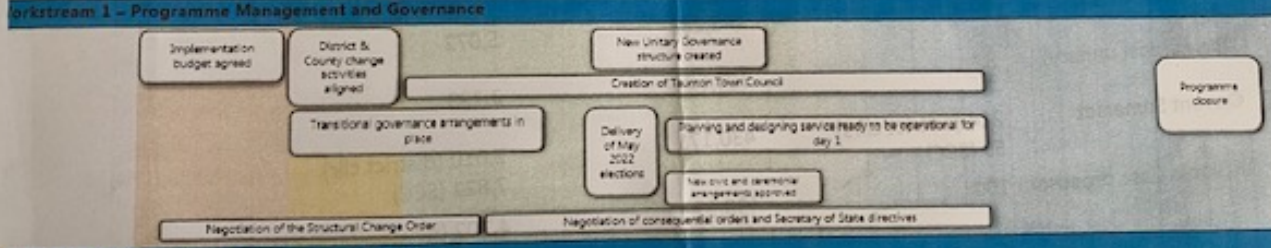
Area	No of Cllrs	Total Electors	Electors per Cllr
Cornwall (in 2020)	123	441,288	3,588
Cornwall (2021)	87	441,288	5,072
Dorset (post unitary)	82	306,624	3,739
Current Somerset	214 (district cllrs) 55 (SCC)	430,171	2,010 (district cllr) 7,821 (SCC)
Business Case proposal	100	430,171	4,302 (new unitary cllr)

Buckingham Council (new unitary) has a council size of 147 Cllrs for an electorate of 427,057 (2,905 per cllr)



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2021				2022				2023																							
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov									
Q4				Q1				Q2				Q3				Q4				Q1				Q2				Q3			



LGR – SCO and electoral changes

- Following Sec of State decision, MHCLG has met with the 5 councils to outline the process and timetable for creating a unitary council for Somerset by 1 April 2023 and the proposed elections in May 2022
- The draft Structural Changes Order (SCO) being prepared by MHCLG by mid October 2021 will include proposed electoral arrangements for the proposed unitary council elections in May 2022. Electoral arrangements are not the same as a formal electoral review.
- The SCO is the responsibility of MHCLG to devise and determine prior to presenting it to Parliament for approval in early 2022.
- As part of that process, MHCLG will be advised by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on the proposals that they set out in a draft SCO. This process does not require MHCLG to do any formal public consultation. **Instead local councils are being invited to submit electoral arrangements proposals by 17 September to help inform / influence MHCLG's proposals.** This is an important distinction when compared to an electoral review where instead local councils are consulted by the LGBCE over a period of between 12-18 months.



LGR – SCO and electoral changes

- The Secretary of State has confirmed his intention for the SCO to set out that elections to the unitary council are held in May 2022 ahead of the vesting of the unitary council on 1 April 2023.
- The SCO is likely to set out that the scheduled district elections in May 2023 would not be held.
- Based on previous SCOs it is likely that the initial term of office for councillors to the unitary council would be five years and therefore the next elections to that council would coincide with other district/unitary councils in 2027.
- The timeline anticipates a draft SCO being considered by Parliament in early 2022 for approval in February / March 2022 which is very close to publication of statutory election notices in late March for the scheduled elections in May 2022.



LGR – SCO and electoral changes

- As part of MHCLG's process, they have invited Somerset councils to develop options for potential electoral arrangements by 17 September. Separately, political groups are able to develop and submit their own proposals directly to MHCLG.
- MHCLG already advised that they do not fully support the Business Case proposal for 100 cllrs and instead would prefer a council size between 80-90 (North Yorks proposing 90). Work is now urgently being jointly undertaken across the 5 councils looking at these options:
 - Option 1: a warding scheme within the strict target range of 80 to 90 councillors (85 cllrs)
 - Option 2: an option that simply doubles up on existing county council divisional arrangements which would provide 110 councillors (easiest option to implement)
 - Option 3: an option between 90-100 cllrs as a variant to options 1 and 2 (100 cllrs to align with Business Case approved by Sec of State)
- MHCLG intend to finalise the proposed electoral arrangements for inclusion in a draft SCO by late October. This therefore provides a very short window of opportunity for local councils to develop and contribute proposals for MHCLG to consider as part of the draft SCO.

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LGR – parish and town council elections

- The SCO is likely to also address the proposed arrangements in terms of city, town and parish elections since they are currently scheduled to be held in May 2023.
- Previous SCOs have always sought to align these elections with the election date for the unitary council. That could mean that the SCO would include the parish council elections being brought forward to May 2022. SALC are currently engaging with local councils regarding this.
- Currently SW&T Council are undertaking a Community Governance Review for the potential creation of a new Taunton Town Council. It would be sensible if possible for any Order to create a new town council to be completed in time for the election to the new town council to be held at the same time as other parish and town council elections in Somerset.



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