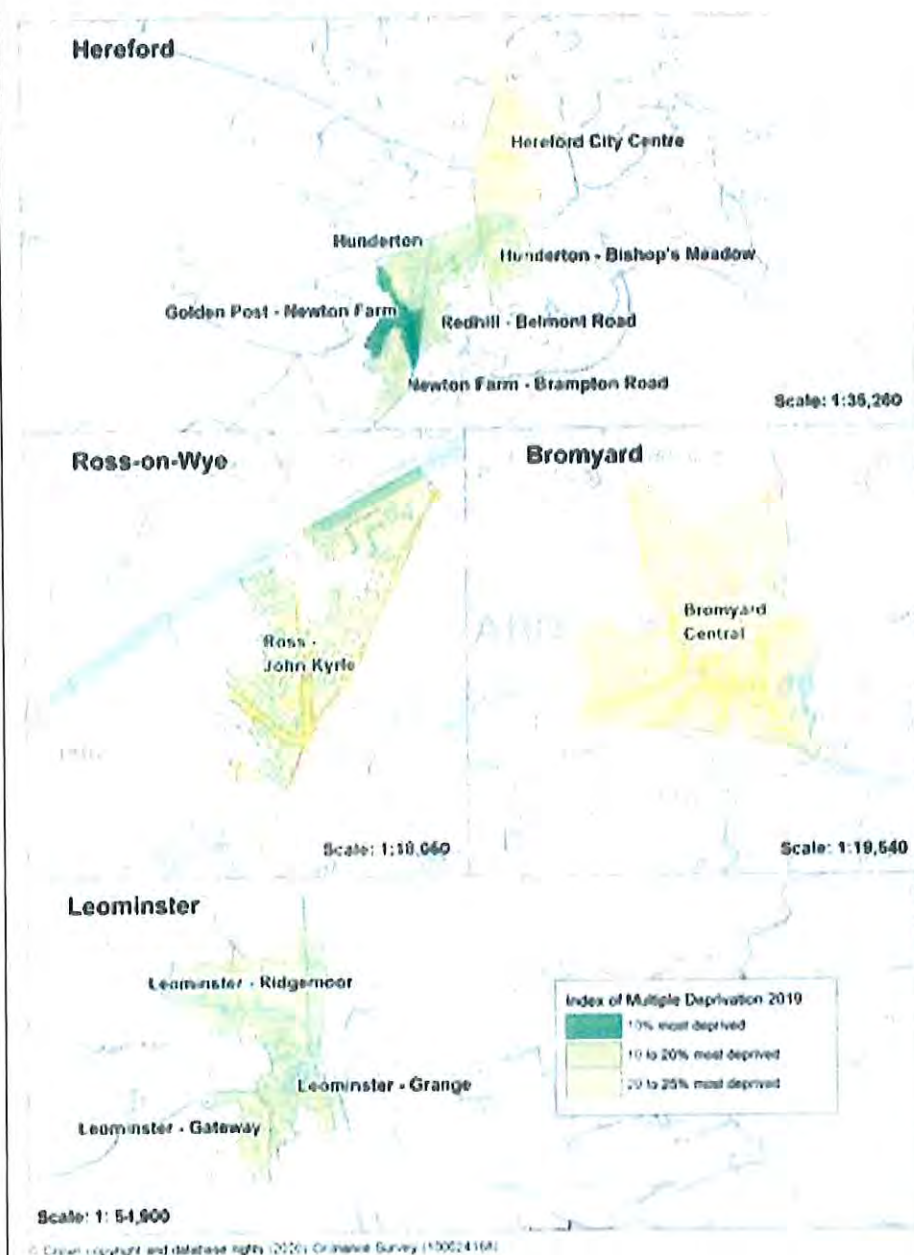**Figure 1: IMD (2019) Most Deprived Areas**

However, within our rural areas we know deprivation is also hidden amongst more affluent households. Much of the county is deprived in terms of access to services, with 46% of the population facing longer journey times to key services than nationally (National Audit Office, 2020). Living costs are typically 10-20% higher for rural households, making these residents more vulnerable to price increases (Herefordshire Council (2021).. The Herefordshire Vital Signs community survey (2018) highlighted that people living in the most disadvantaged communities are more likely to be less satisfied with the area, and levels of wellbeing are lower. Findings from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA, 2021) indicated that:

- Males born in the 10% most deprived areas of the county can expect to live 6.3 fewer years than those in the least deprived;
- People living in the most deprived areas are twice as likely to die of respiratory diseases and 1.3 times more likely to die of heart disease or stroke;

- Older people living in the most deprived areas are three times as likely to be living in income deprivation as those in the least deprived; and,
- There are approximately 4,450 under 16s living in absolute poverty, with the highest rates in parts of Hereford, Leominster and Ross.

Analysis of the impact of the pandemic also indicated that the poorest people in the county were the hardest hit (Herefordshire Council JSNA, 2021), and the pandemic negatively impacted community engagement and interaction, with just over a quarter of residents indicating they talk to friends, family and neighbours less than before the pandemic (Herefordshire Council Community Wellbeing Survey 2021).

Fuel poverty and the rising cost of living
A larger proportion of homes in Herefordshire (16.6%) are in fuel poverty than in the West Midlands (13.5%) and England (11%). This is particularly a concern for older people who are more susceptible to ill health (including the risk of death in the winter) as a result of residing in cold homes. An estimated 60% of people aged 65+ live in rural parts of Herefordshire, where access to mains gas may not be possible, and properties with poor thermal efficiency are more common, both of which increase the risk of fuel poverty. Applying the Government's new 'low-income low energy efficiency' measures, around 17% (14,000) of households in Herefordshire were in fuel poverty in 2019 (higher than England's 13%). The detrimental effects of fuel poverty pose a considerable threat to the health and wellbeing of older people living in Herefordshire (JSNA, 2021).

Figure 2: Incidence of Fuel Poverty (2019)
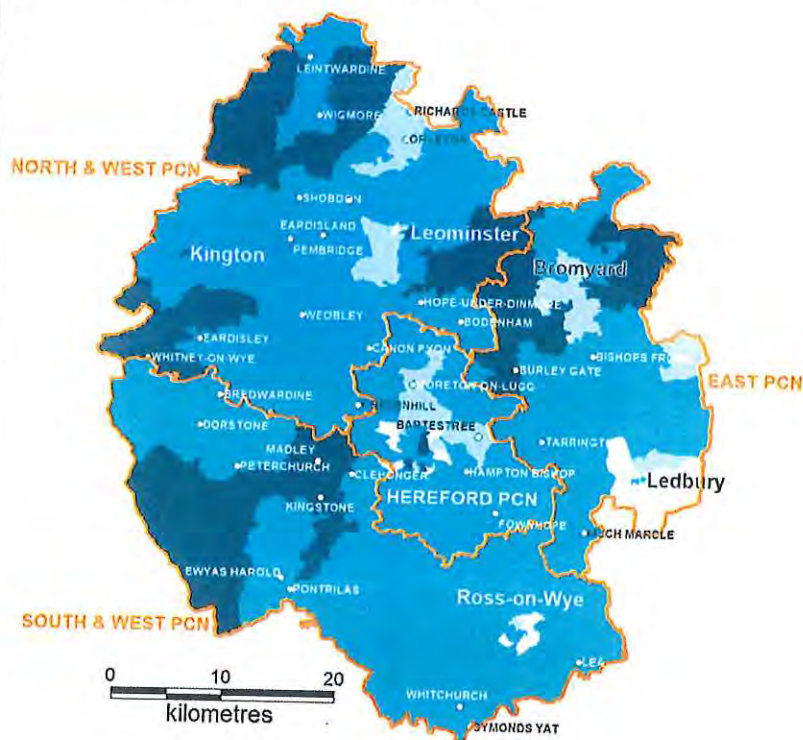
Proportion of households
fuel poor by Lower Super
Output Area in 2019 (%)
Low Income Low Energy
Efficiency (LILEE) indicator
published by Department for
Business, Energy & Industrial
Strategy (April 2021)

- 21% to 28%
- 16% to 20%
- 11% to 15%
- 5% to 10%

There is also a significant risk that without intervention the cost-of-living crisis worsens fuel poverty levels across the county, but particularly amongst more vulnerable communities. Although Herefordshire has had relatively low levels of absolute and relative poverty compared to nationally, there is an increasing trend for numbers living in relative poverty (Herefordshire Council JSNA, 2021). There is also anecdotal evidence from local foodbanks that more people were supported during 2020 than in previous years (Herefordshire Council JSNA, 2021). Recognising that fuel poverty is a particular challenge locally, Herefordshire's Health and Wellbeing Board have made it a priority area.

Retention of young people

The county's natural landscape and quality of life offer attracts retirees, but does not offer the range of high-quality employment opportunities or density of leisure and recreational services that attracts and retains young people and business talent. Young people are more likely to be less satisfied with the local area than the rest of the population, report lower levels of well-being, and feel they have less influence in their local communities (Herefordshire Council Community Wellbeing Survey 2021). Whilst the creation of better paid employment opportunities will be critical to retaining talent (and is a key theme of Supporting Local Business), we need to build the social infrastructure and vibrancy which will support higher satisfaction rates amongst young people, and raise the profile of Herefordshire as a great place to live.

Our focus for investment

In addition to ensuring our older population 'age well', we must take this opportunity to level up the county and ensure everyone enjoys a good quality of life. This is particularly important given the rising cost of living which will disproportionately impact our most vulnerable communities and could exacerbate inequalities.

Alongside a multi-agency approach to service delivery, the Council's approach has been to build the strength of individuals and what they can do themselves with the support of family, friends and the wider community. UKSPF will provide much needed investment in preventative community measures, and draw on the expertise of the voluntary and community sector, as well as our cultural and heritage assets, to engage people in community support, events and activities. Research by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing (2021) has found that culture and social prescribing approaches have a positive impact on wellbeing, and participation can have greater benefits for those living in worse off areas, particularly in relation to measures of happiness and sense of purpose. If tailored correctly, community engagement can also deliver benefits to older populations and other target groups, enabling them to feel connected and providing opportunities for capacity building.

In addition to driving health and well-being benefits, the strengthening of our community infrastructure and delivery of arts, culture and heritage activities will also increase the vibrancy of communities and accelerate the delivery of our Herefordshire Culture Strategy 2019-2029. Where this is targeted as part of wider place-making interventions it will further develop the unique identities of our market town network, and create the conditions which will support the growth of our visitor economy (outlined below).

By supporting people in fuel poverty to reduce their energy costs, investment will not only deliver against health and wellbeing objectives, but will also support the delivery of the county's Carbon Reduction Strategy and upgrade of the building stock, which is being embedded as a cross-cutting theme of Herefordshire's SPF programme.

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES UNDER THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE INVESTMENT PRIORITY THAT YOU INTEND TO SUPPORT?

(If yes) Describe these opportunities, give evidence where possible

Vibrant market towns and recovery of the visitor economy
Given Herefordshire's demographic profile, our network of market towns and rural villages are vital to ensuring accessibility of services and providing the space for community interaction essential to well-being. They are also of importance to the visitor economy which drives footfall, supports local businesses, and facilitates the maintenance and preservation of our heritage assets. Visit Britain data (2019) indicates that day visits alone contribute £99m to the local economy.

Since the launch of Herefordshire's Economic Vision in 2018, the Council and partners have progressed a county-wide ambition of supporting market towns and rural communities to maximise their role in building thriving, distinctive service centres that support their communities and rural hinterlands. Investment has helped to create a sense of distinctiveness and a niche tourism offer. Small scale production, niche retailing, and the growing food, drink and hospitality sectors comprising artisan brewers and food entrepreneurs have also helped to diversify the economy.

However the visitor economy, and vibrancy of our market town networks has been adversely impacted by the pandemic; and its future growth may be at risk due to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on disposable incomes. A key focus of the Herefordshire Covid Recovery Plan 2021 has been to support the recovery of the visitor economy. This included working extensively with the private sector to re-brand the county, redevelop the website, and implement national marketing and PR campaigns for the first time in circa 10 years. This has led to a significant increase in visitors and profile of the county, named as a top 10 staycation location in a wide range of national media. The proposed UKSPF activity will build on this programme, to continue to support the recovery and growth of an important local sector.

Recognising the importance of the market towns to the county's economy, the Council has also led the development of Market Town Investment Plans in Bromyard, Kington, Ledbury, Leominster and Ross-on-Wye, which identifies the barriers and opportunities enabling growth in each town. All the plans identify tourism and place-making as priorities for each market town, aligned to UKSPF priorities.

As the sector is integral to the success and vibrancy of our service centres, it is imperative that we act now to support recovery and mitigate the risk of further decline and job losses. Herefordshire has all the ingredients to accelerate recovery and further develop the sector to provide a year-round offer. Achieving this will enhance our local service centres for residents and visitors – providing activities and enlivenment, attracting new investment within the creative sector and niche retailing (see Supporting Local Business theme), creating the critical mass of leisure and recreational services that can attract younger residents and working age families, and enabling our culture and heritage assets to extend their reach.

We have a strong events programme to build upon to attract visitors, providing opportunities for community engagement and interaction, and putting the county on the national and international tourist map. Herefordshire is home to a number of large-scale events and festivals, ranging from Bromyard Folk Festival, Nozstock and Lakefest music festivals to Ledbury Poetry Festival and, Kington Walking Festival, with the internationally acclaimed Hay on Wye Literary festival just over the border in Wales. Hereford also hosts the revived Hereford River Carnival, the Indie Food Festival, the Hereford Food Festival, the Hereford Mayfair and the Ferrous Festival of Blacksmithing plus the Three Choirs Festival which is hosted in Hereford every three years. We have a range of cultural and heritage assets including the Hereford Cathedral, the Hereford Library and Art Museum, the Courtyard Centre for the Arts, and the Cider Museum. We also have a strong

leisure and recreational offer including water sports on the River Wye, climbing, walking and cycling.

The Hereford Town Investment Plan (2021) identifies the unrealised tourism potential of the city as a key opportunity, with significant scope to build a powerful heritage and visitor offer linked to key assets, as well as improve access to the River Wye for tourism and wider recreational uses. A key focus of the Stronger Hereford Town Investment Plan is place-making with a focus on culture. For example, projects include the £18m redevelopment of Hereford Museum and Art Galley to create a new world class visitor attraction, the £3.5m redevelopment of the Maylord Orchards shopping centre creating a new library and Learning Resource Centre, and the development of the visitor offer along the Hereford riverside. Herefordshire Council has also submitted a £4.5m bid to the Levelling Up Fund focussed on enhancing the visitor offer and place-making in Ledbury and Leominster. Alongside other funding such as Towns Fund and Levelling Up Funding, UKSPF will provide an opportunity to realise this potential.

Our focus for investment
UKSPF investment will add significant value to the development of our tourism offer. It will support the delivery of our culture strategy and Towns Fund programme; providing enrichment opportunities through community and visitor engagement in arts, culture and heritage-based activities. Investment will build the unique identities and place-based assets of towns and communities through enlivenment, visual arts, music, events and festivals, as well as support the creative economy and local craft industries and upgrade the building stock to support the delivery of net zero targets.
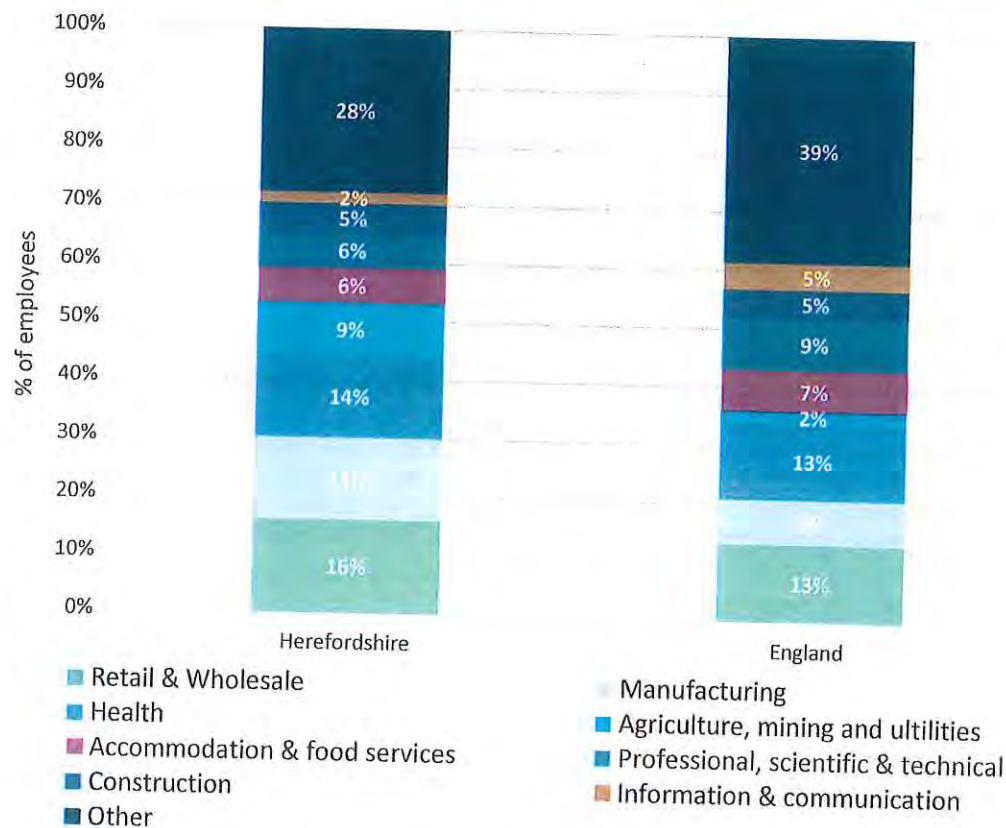

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL CHALLENGES YOU FACE WHICH FALL UNDER THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY?

(If yes) Describe these challenges, give evidence where possible

A low skilled, low wage economy
With a high proportion of employment in low value sectors such as retail, health and agriculture, average earnings are below the national average.

Figure 3: Employment by Sector (2020, BRES ONS)

Chart: % of employees by sector — Herefordshire vs England

Herefordshire:
- Other: 28%
- Information & communication: 2%
- Professional, scientific & technical: 5%
- Construction: 6%
- Accommodation & food services: 6%
- Agriculture, mining and utilities: 9%
- Health: 14%
- Manufacturing: (unlabelled)
- Retail & Wholesale: 16%

England:
- Other: 39%
- Information & communication: 5%
- Professional, scientific & technical: 5%
- Construction: 9%
- Accommodation & food services: 7%
- Agriculture, mining and utilities: 2%
- Health: 13%
- Manufacturing: (unlabelled)
- Retail & Wholesale: 13%

Legend:
- Retail & Wholesale
- Health
- Accommodation & food services
- Construction
- Other
- Manufacturing
- Agriculture, mining and ultilities
- Professional, scientific & technical
- Information & communication

The latest Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ONS, 2021) reveals that the workplace-based median weekly earnings for people who work in Herefordshire is now £536; a 12% increase from the amount recorded for 2020 (£481). Herefordshire's weekly earnings however remain significantly lower than that in England of £613, and the county has the lowest median earnings of all 14 West Midlands authorities. Resident based weekly earnings are also lower compared to England and the West Midlands region. Analysis of the business base indicates that the county has a lower proportion of businesses providing knowledge intensive services than the UK, and a lower proportion of employment in knowledge-based jobs; the proportion of innovation jobs is 2.4% compared to 5% nationally (ONS, 2020). In addition, the county has a lower proportion of working age people qualified at NVQ4+ - 39% compared to 43% nationally (ONS, 2021).

A low wage economy has several negative impacts:

- **Productivity is below the national average**, with GVA per hour worked at £23.79 which is much lower than the average of £35.15. GVA per hour has also grown at a slower rate than nationally which is resulting in the productivity gap widening (ONS, 2019)

- **It restricts the attraction and retention of talent** evidenced by low levels of population growth, a declining working age population and growing proportion of over 65-year-olds (ONS Census, 2021). In addition to the social challenges this creates (outlined above), it also results in recruitment difficulties for businesses. The Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber quarterly business survey (Q4, 2021) noted that 53% of businesses attempted to recruit in the last quarter, and approximately two-thirds of businesses recruiting experienced difficulties doing so. The main problem areas being professional, managerial and clerical positions. Business comments include: "staff recruitment is the single biggest problem for the business", and "the lack of suitable candidates coming forward has

worsened" (Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, Quarterly Economic Report Q3 2021).

- *It impacts social mobility.* The county has been identified as a cold spot by the Government's social mobility index, being among the worst 20% of local authorities in England in terms of children from disadvantaged backgrounds progressing into a good job and secure housing (Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission, 2016). The key driver of this is low wages, with 21% of jobs paying less than the living wage (ONS, 2021).

- *It increases financial vulnerability and reduces resilience.* Residents with lower earnings are more vulnerable to in-work poverty which may worsen as inflation continues to rise. As noted above, although Herefordshire has had relatively low levels of absolute and relative poverty compared to nationally, there is an increasing trend for numbers living in relative poverty (Herefordshire Council JSNA, 2021).

- *It impacts housing affordability.* In 2021 the ratio of lower quartile house price to lower quartile annual workplace-based earnings in Herefordshire was 9.81: significantly higher than (8.04) in England and (7.42) in the West Midlands region as a whole (ONS, 2021).

Slow growth of the business base

Herefordshire's business base is growing more slowly than the UK as a whole. The number of active businesses increased by 6% over the past five years, compared to 13% nationally, and the start-up rate is 9.5% compared to 12% nationally (ONS, 2021).

The county has a higher proportion of people in self-employment (15.8% and increasing compared to 9.5% and declining nationally) and above average 5-year survival rates (ONS, 2021) suggesting there is an entrepreneurial culture to build upon. However, a lower start-up rate suggests there is a need to encourage more business start-ups with growth potential that can create employment opportunities, deliver a step change in productivity and earnings, and provide the diversity of opportunity which will appeal to younger workers.

Carbon reduction

The council is committed to reducing carbon emissions to net zero by 2030. Our carbon reduction strategy has identified that the adoption of energy efficiency measures will be a key factor in delivering our target. We are already making positive progress with our decarbonisation agenda, with data indicating that transport emissions per capita have reduced by 5.6% over the last 5 years, more rapidly than the 4% fall in England (BEIS, 2019), and are now in line with national averages. However our built environment is not energy efficient. We have fewer domestic properties with an EPC rating of A-C, 47% completed to 51% nationally (DLUHC, 2021) and higher incidence of fuel poverty (as outlined in Communities and Place).

In addition to achieving net zero targets, energy efficiency is also vital to the resilience of our business base. Findings from the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber Quarterly Economic Survey (Q4 2021) show that rising energy prices are a major concern to businesses, but 29% of businesses have not made any changes to become more environmentally sustainable or cut carbon emissions in the past year. Businesses indicate that further action would require:

- Funding (69% of businesses);
- Technical and impartial advice (28% of businesses); and,
- Networking with other businesses (27% of businesses).

7% of businesses also noted the importance of skilled employees to support the net zero transition (Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber, Quarterly Economic Survey Q4 2021).

Our focus for investment

Raising productivity and the quality of local job opportunities is a priority within our current Economic Vision and emerging strategic economic plan. UKSPF will help to lay the foundations for our longer-term strategy.

The provision of high-quality business support will raise the capacity of our business base to innovate, diversify and scale, as well as capitalise on new growth opportunities within emerging, high value markets (see opportunities response below). We will also provide support to entrepreneurs to establish and grow new businesses, particularly where this supports the retention of talent and the vibrancy of service centres. As a cross-cutting theme of our SPF programme, funding will help to address two of the key barriers to the adoption of energy efficiency measures within business (funding and advice).

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES UNDER THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY THAT YOU INTEND TO SUPPORT?
(If yes) Describe these opportunities, give evidence where possible

Developing sector specialisms and innovation-led growth
Herefordshire and the wider Marches LEP area has specialisms in several key growth sectors with the potential to attract investment, talent, and create the high-quality job opportunities which will raise pay and productivity. Investments and opportunities to build upon include:

- **A thriving energy efficiency business sector, agri-tech and wider environmental technologies sector** covering renewable energy and waste management, and a local supplier base able to fulfil the county's identified retrofit needs. With capital investments already made in supporting infrastructure such as the Herefordshire and Ludlow College Energy Training Centre, the sector presents an opportunity for innovation-led higher skilled job creation (The Marches LEP, 2022) including green and net zero building skills.

- **Cyber and the Hereford Enterprise Zone** (Skylon Park) which is developing local defence and security specialisms and links to the Malvern Science Park. Skylon Park in Hereford is part of the Herefordshire-Gloucestershire-Worcestershire Cyber Valley; the UK's largest cyber cluster outside London. It is also the home of the Marches Growth Hub. Cyber companies located in Hereford include Serbus, Simtech-IT, ETL Systems and ZoVolt.

- **Food and drink processing and its supply chain** in packaging, materials and preservation solutions; as well as opportunities amongst artisan suppliers. A recent survey by Legges of Bromyard identified more than 120 independent food and drink producers in the county (Stronger Hereford, 2021), including an emerging artisan food quarter in the heart of Hereford's medieval city. Key businesses include Weston's Cider and the Wye Valley Brewery companies.

These sectors offer the opportunity for innovation-led growth and higher skilled employment.

Growth of the creative industries
Research undertaken by the Herefordshire Cultural Partnership (2022) notes that there is significant untapped potential within the county's creative industries and scope for Herefordshire to establish itself as a model for UK rural communities. There are opportunities to expand our creative and digital industries to support innovation and growth across other sectors (e.g. agri-tech and cyber), as well as supporting wider place-making e.g. through niche retailing and craft businesses. The creative industries can provide a focus for interventions to retain young people and grow the business base, building on successful facilities such as Hereford MAKE (see below).

There will also be an opportunity to align UKSPF with the Towns Fund investments such as the Hereford College of Arts' new School of Creative Digital Futures and the Digital Culture Hub.

Case Study Example: Hereford MAKE
Herefordshire has low average wages, and a lack of higher education options and high skill jobs opportunities means about 300-400 young people leave the county each year and do not return.

Herefordshire needs skilled, employed young people and we look to the creative industries to help provide solutions. The county is home to specialist art colleges such as the National School of Blacksmithing and Hereford College of Arts. Hereford MAKE provides affordable space for established artists, makers and creatives as well as students and recent graduates, as well as resources to support the growing creative community, with individual studio spaces as well as a large communal workspace, forges and small bronze casting facility. Business support is provided through mentoring, hot-desking and help with funding to help promote and develop commercial opportunities.

Our focus for investment
A strong business support offer which encourages businesses to invest in innovation will help to realise the potential of higher value-added growth sectors and diversification of the business base. This will include driving incremental innovation and improvement across our major employment sectors, as well as encouraging investment in R&D within priority growth sectors. We are particularly keen to support the growth of the environmental technologies sector where this facilitates our wider net zero objectives. The Hereford Town Investment Plan (2021) identifies a pressing need to trial, test and develop low carbon solutions which our business base is well placed to do with support.

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL CHALLENGES YOU FACE WHICH FALL UNDER THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITY?

(If yes) Describe these challenges, give evidence where possible

A social mobility 'cold spot'
Herefordshire has below average economic inactivity rates (ONS, 2021). However, as outlined in our response to the Communities and Place theme, headline statistics mask hidden inequalities across the county. Analysis of IMD data (2019) indicates that 16 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) in Herefordshire are amongst the 25% most deprived in England in terms of adult skills and of these, five are within the 10% most deprived (MHCLG, 2019). Furthermore, amongst the economically inactive, the county has a higher proportion of people who are suffering from long term ill-health (ONS, 2021).

The county is also a social mobility 'cold spot'. A high proportion of employment is in low skilled and low wage sectors which limits the opportunities for career progression and makes residents more vulnerable to rising costs and in-work poverty (as evidenced in response to the Supporting Local Business theme).

Intervention is therefore required to increase skills and qualification levels where this supports social mobility and removes barriers to employment, education and training, particularly amongst disadvantaged communities and those furthest from the labour market.

Low level of skills and skills mismatches
Skills attainment is lower in Herefordshire than it is nationally, and a lower proportion of the population are qualified at NVQ4 and above (ONS, 2021). Lightcast data indicates a mismatch between the skills most prevalent in job profiles and their frequency in the workforce (Herefordshire Council Intelligence Unit, 2022). This contributes to employer recruitment difficulties (Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, Quarterly Economic Review Q4 2021) and highlights that major employment sectors, particularly health and social care are experiencing particularly acute skills challenges.

Left chart axis: 8%, 6%, 4%, 2%, 0% — **Frequency in Job Postings**

Categories (top to bottom): Nursing, Personal Care, Mental Health, Auditing, Agriculture, Aviation, Clinical Governance, Finance, Accounting, Resourcing

Right chart axis: 0%, 2%, 4%, 6%, 8% — **Frequency in Workforce Profiles**
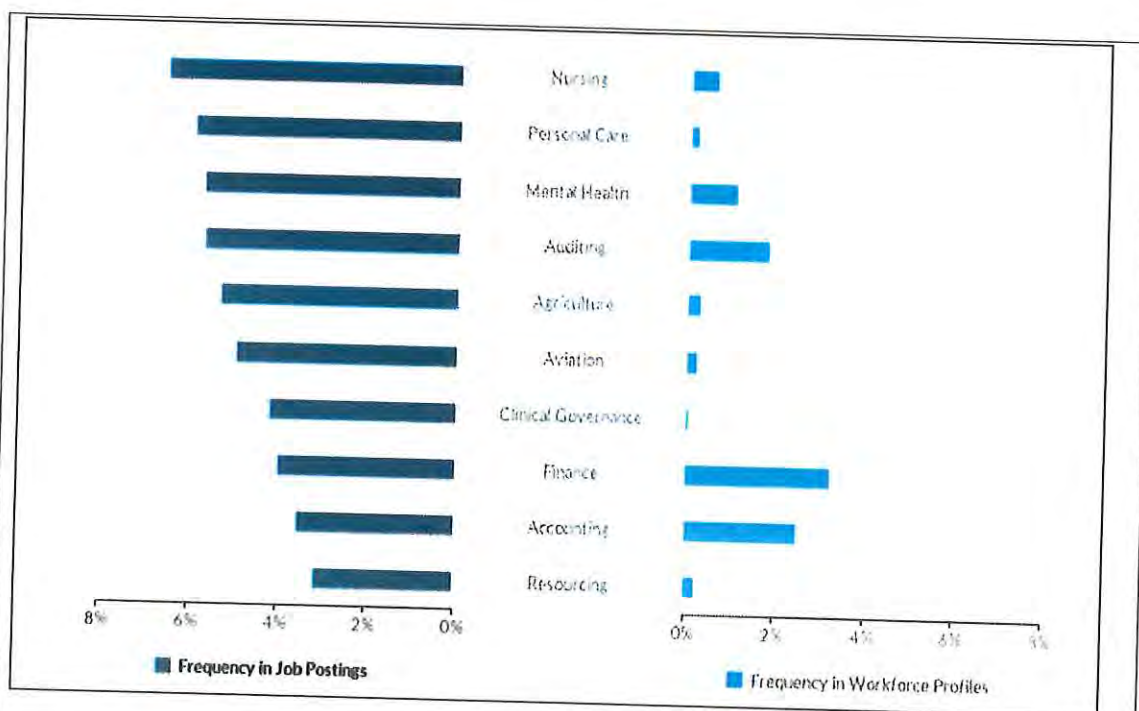
With an ageing population, adult social care is a growing sector. Across England it has increased by 12% since 2012, and in the West Midlands region it increased by 14% over the same period. In Herefordshire there were an estimated 6,000 jobs in adult social care in 2020/21 and if the workforce grows proportionally to the projected number of people aged 65 and over, the West Midlands will see a 24% increase in jobs by 2035 (Skills for Care, 2021). Further analysis by Skills for Care (2021) shows that around half (52%) of the direct care providing workforce in the county hold a relevant adult social care qualification (compared to 46% in England). Their research also suggests that staff retention within the sector improves where employees have access to training and the opportunity for career progression and increased pay.

Our focus for investment

Training programmes and opportunities for upskilling will target working people in low-productivity occupations to help them transition towards higher-skilled work. This would have the potential to increase salary, GVA and employee aspirations for working residents, resulting in a better quality of life. Intervention will also support capacity building and social mobility amongst the socially excluded and those facing financial stress, and build viable pathways for young people to encourage their retention in the area.

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES UNDER THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITY THAT YOU INTEND TO SUPPORT? (In Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland this should also include challenges relating to Multiply)

(If yes) Describe these opportunities, give evidence where possible

Green skills and the future workforce

The delivery of decarbonisation extends across all industries and across broad occupational types. Although the process is more acutely felt in those industries which already have a higher carbon footprint, it is creating another dimension to existing skills gap across the business base and there is now a need to develop specific skill sets to respond to this. Transitioning to net zero is likely to consist of:

- Structural changes leading to increased demand for some occupations and decreased demand for others;
- New economic activity creating new occupations and prompting a need for new skills profiles, qualifications and training frameworks; and,

- 'Greening' of existing occupations and industries requiring adjustments to the current training and qualification frameworks for these occupations.

Specific skills needs brought about by transitioning are expected to include:
- Generic e.g. business skills such as carbon literacy for procurement and resource efficiency skills, appreciation of energy efficiency measures, as well as entrepreneurship to seize new opportunities; and,
- Technical e.g. STEM skills; design skills, low carbon technology and energy efficiency installation.

Herefordshire's commitment to net zero by 2030, and supporting investment, is creating demand for green skills across the business base, particularly in relation to the adoption of energy efficiency measures. The council is currently developing the business case for a major investment in retrofit which will create local employment opportunities and drive demand for green skills. There will also be a requirement to develop generic 'green' skills across the business base and drive a wider behavioural change if our net zero target is to be reached.

Interventions

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES YOU WANT TO DELIVER UNDER THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE INVESTMENT PRIORITY? SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.	
Outcome	Tick if applicable
Jobs created	√
Jobs safeguarded	√
Increased footfall	√
Increased visitor numbers	√
Reduced vacancy rates	
Greenhouse gas reductions	√
Improved perceived/experienced accessibility	
Improved perception of facilities/amenities	√
Increased number of properties better protected from flooding and coastal erosion	
Increased users of facilities / amenities	
Improved perception of facility/infrastructure project	
Increased use of cycleways or paths	
Increase in Biodiversity	
Increased affordability of events/entry	
Improved perception of safety	
Reduction in neighbourhood crime	
Improved engagement numbers	√
Improved perception of events	
Increased number of web searches for a place	
Volunteering numbers as a result of support	
Number of community-led arts, cultural, heritage and creative programmes as a result of support	√
Increased take up of energy efficiency measures	√
Increased number of projects arising from funded feasibility studies	√
Number of premises with improved digital connectivity	
None of the above	

SELECT THE INTERVENTIONS YOU INTEND TO USE WHICH MEET THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE INVESTMENT PRIORITY. YOU CAN SELECT AS MANY AS YOU LIKE.
Intervention
A full list of nation-specific interventions is available in the relevant annex to the Prospectus.
E1: Improvements to town centres and high streets which support carbon reduction

E4: Enhanced support for existing cultural, historic and heritage institutions that make up the local cultural heritage offer	
E6: Support for local arts, culture, heritage and creative activities	
E11: Investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society	
E13: Community measures to reduce the cost of living	
E14: Funding for feasibility studies	

DO YOU PLAN TO USE ANY INTERVENTIONS NOT INCLUDED IN THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE LIST?

State the name of each of these additional interventions and a brief description of each of these

N/A

Explain how each intervention meets the Communities and Place investment priority. Give evidence where possible, including why it is value money and the outcomes you want to deliver.

N/A

Do you consider that any of these interventions may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the intervention's planned activity?
All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as set out in the guidance.

Yes	No

Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the intervention is a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.

N/A

HAVE YOU ALREADY IDENTIFIED ANY PROJECTS WHICH FALL UNDER THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE INVESTMENT PRIORITY?

Describe these projects, including how they fall under the Communities and Place investment priority and the location of the proposed project.

N/A

Do you consider these projects may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the proposed planned activity?
All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as set out in the guidance.

Yes	No

Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the proposed projects constitute a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.

N/A

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES YOU WANT TO DELIVER UNDER THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY? SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.

Outcome	Tick if applicable
Jobs created	
Jobs safeguarded	√
Increased footfall	√
Increased visitor numbers	
Reduced vacancy rates	√

Greenhouse gas reductions	√
Number of new businesses created	√
Improved perception of markets	
Increased business sustainability	
Increased number of businesses supported	√
Increased amount of investment	
Improved perception of attractions	
Number of businesses introducing new products to the firm	√
Number of organisations engaged in new knowledge transfer activity	
Number of premises with improved digital connectivity	
Number of businesses adopting new to the firm technologies or processes	√
Number of new to market products	√
Number of R&D active businesses	
Increased number of innovation active SMEs	
Number of businesses adopting new or improved products or services	√
Increased number of innovation plans developed	
Number of early-stage firms which increase their revenue following support	
Number of businesses engaged in new markets	
Number of businesses increasing their export capability	
Increased amount of low or zero carbon energy infrastructure installed	
Number of businesses with improved productivity	√
Increased number of projects arising from funded feasibility studies	
Increased number of properties better protected from flooding and coastal erosion	
None of the above	

SELECT THE INTERVENTIONS YOU INTEND TO USE WHICH MEET THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY. YOU CAN SELECT AS MANY AS YOU LIKE.

Intervention

A full list of nation-specific interventions is available in the relevant annex to the Prospectus.
E17: Funding for the development and promotion of the visitor economy
E24: Funding for new and improvements to existing training hubs, business support offers, 'incubators' and 'accelerators' for local enterprise
E29: Supporting decarbonisation whilst growing the local economy
E19: Increasing investment in research and development at the local level. Investment to support the diffusion of innovation knowledge and activities.

DO YOU PLAN TO USE ANY INTERVENTIONS NOT INCLUDED IN THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS LIST?

State the name of each of these additional interventions and a brief description of each of these
N/A
Explain how each intervention meets the Supporting Local Business investment priority. Give evidence where possible, including why it is value money and the outcomes you want to deliver.
N/A
Do you consider that any of these interventions may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the intervention's planned activity? **All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as set out in the guidance.**

Yes	No

Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the intervention is a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.
N/A

HAVE YOU ALREADY IDENTIFIED ANY PROJECTS WHICH FALL UNDER THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY?

Describe these projects, including how they fall under the Supporting Local Business investment priority and the location of the proposed project.
N/A

Do you consider these projects may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the proposed planned activity? All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as **set out in the guidance**.	
Yes	No

Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the proposed projects constitute a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.
N/A

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES YOU WANT TO DELIVER UNDER THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITY? SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.

Outcome	Tick if applicable
Number of economically inactive individuals in receipt of benefits they are entitled to following support	
Increased active or sustained participants of UKSPF beneficiaries in community groups [and/or] increased employability through development of interpersonal skills	√
Increased proportion of participants with basic skills (English, maths, digital and ESOL)	
Number of people in supported employment [and] number of people engaging with mainstream healthcare services	
Number of people sustaining engagement with keyworker support and additional services	√
Number of people engaged in job-searching following support	
Number of people in employment, including self-employment, following support	√
Number of people sustaining employment for 6 months	
Increased employment, skills and/or UKSPF objectives incorporated into local area corporate governance	
Number of people in education/training	
Increased number of people with basic skills (English, maths, digital and ESOL)	√
Fewer people facing structural barriers into employment and into skills provision	√
Increased number of people familiarised with employers' expectations, including, standards of behaviour in the workplace	√
Number of people gaining a qualification or completing a course following support	√
Number of people gaining qualifications, licences, and skills	√
Number of economically active individuals engaged in mainstream skills education, and training.	
Number of people engaged in life skills support following interventions	
Number of people with proficiency in pre-employment and interpersonal skills (relationship, organisational and anger-management, interviewing, CV and job application writing)	
Multiply only - Increased number of adults achieving maths qualifications up to, and including, Level 2.	

Multiply only - Increased number of adults participating in maths qualifications and courses up to, and including, Level 2.	
None of the above	

Intervention
A full list of nation-specific interventions is available in the relevant annex to the Prospectus.

E37: Tailored support to help people in employment who are not supported by mainstream provision to address barriers to accessing education and training courses

E34: Courses to support basic, life and career skills

E35: Enrichment and volunteering activities to improve opportunities and well-being

E33: Supporting the economically inactive and socially excluded to move closer to mainstream provision

E39: Green skills courses

State the name of each of these additional interventions and a brief description of each of these

N/A

Explain how each intervention meets the People and Skills investment priority. Give evidence where possible, including why it is value money and the outcomes you want to deliver.

N/A

Do you consider that any of these interventions may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the intervention's planned activity?
All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as set out in the guidance.

Yes	No

Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the intervention is a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.

N/A

ENGLAND ONLY: People and Skills interventions can only be used in 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 if you have identified a local voluntary and community provision, previously supported by the European Social Fund, at risk of closure. If you have not identified a suitable provision, you will not be able to select interventions for 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 and your investment plan will not be approved.

No

Describe the projects for 2024-25, including how they fall under the People and Skills investment priority and the location of the proposed project.

N/A

Do you consider these projects may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the proposed planned activity? All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as **set out in the guidance**.
N/A

Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the proposed projects constitute a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.
N/A

HAVE YOU IDENTIFIED A LOCAL VOLUNTARY PROVISION AT RISK AS PART OF YOUR PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITIES?

Yes	√	

(If Yes) Describe the local voluntary provision at risk and your rationale for supporting it.

Landau ltd is a supported employment and training registered charity. They deliver the ESF funded NEET/Risk of NEET (the In2 project) and Building Better Opportunities Big Lottery projects across Herefordshire, in partnership with a number of local voluntary and community organisations such as HVOSS, Plynlimon Trust (Horizon Training), Red Spark Learning CIC, Vennture, South Wye Development Trust and Herefordshire Wildlife Trust.

Both project contracts end in March 2023, however the In2 project will not be taking on any new starts from December 2022, leaving a gap in provision for our very vulnerable young people to support them into education, employment and/or training.

The In2 project has engaged with over 350 young people aged 15 to 24 who are not in education, employment and or training (NEET) or at risk of becoming NEET, including young people at risk of social exclusion, with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and care leavers. The project focuses on developing young people's employability and key life skills to take control of their own lives and move towards a better future. The In2 programme provides them with the support to move into sustained education, employment, or training, through traineeships or apprenticeships.

The Building Better Opportunities Project aimed at people aged 19 and over, has been reducing levels of economic inactivity through investment in bespoke intensive life and employment support tailored to local need across Herefordshire. The project has used one-to-one keyworker support which has greatly improved the employment outcomes for specific cohorts who face labour market barriers. The project has supported over 1200 participants, and this community led programme shows how local voluntary organisations are able to engage and sustain positive outcomes for this economically inactive hard to reach group.

The project has been supporting economically inactive people, overcome barriers to work by providing cohesive, locally tailored support enabling access to learn new skills and volunteering. Participants have progressed onto further learning and employment. 50% of participants have a disability and 14% come from a single adult household with dependent children. The Project has employed 10 other voluntary sector organisations across Herefordshire employing 36 full time staff and 8 part time staff to deliver provision through wider a range of engagement routes and enabling more intensive innovative provision. In general, referrals have come from the community and have not been reliant on Job Centres where there is a range of support for job seekers.

Herefordshire is a social mobility 'cold spot'. The county has been identified as a cold spot by the Government's social mobility index, being amongst the worse 20% of local authorities in England in terms of children from disadvantaged backgrounds progressing into a good job and secure housing. A high proportion of employment is in low skilled and low wage sectors which limits the opportunities for career progression and makes residents more vulnerable to rising costs and in-work poverty (as evidenced in response to the Supporting Local Business theme).

Intervention is therefore required to increase skills and qualification levels where this supports social mobility and removes barriers to employment, education and training particularly amongst disadvantaged communities and those furthest from the labour market.

Provide the European Social Fund Project Names and Project References for this voluntary and community provision at risk.

- Landau In2 NEET/Risk of NEET project ESF-5090 (More Developed) co-funded by the ESFA

- Landau Building Better Opportunities – Removing Barriers to Work – co-funded by the Big Lottery

What year do you intend to fund these projects? Select all that apply.

| 2022-2023 | √ | 2023-2024 | √ | 2024-2025 | √ |

Describe the projects for 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, including how they fall under the People and Skills investment priority and the location of the proposed project.

Both project contracts end in March 2023, however the In2 project will not be taking on any new starts from December 2022, leaving a gap in provision for our very vulnerable young people to support them into education, employment and/or training.

It is proposed that the project for 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 will reduce barriers to education, employment and training for all ages across Herefordshire, instead of having two separate projects as there are currently.

The project will continue to provide support for young people aged from 15/16 (year 11) to 24 who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET, including young people at risk of social exclusion and young people from marginalised communities. A key group to support through this programme are the increasing number of young people with mental health difficulties including social and behavioural difficulties. It will provide a range of opportunities for young people to engage with employers and undertake a range of learning opportunities to secure a pathway into employment, education or training as well as a range of coaching and flexible support.

The project will be delivered in partnership maximising different organisations' expertise and experience. It will work with communities through for example Talk Community Hubs and social prescribers. It will not duplicate mainstream provision such as DWP/Job CentrePlus activity and the adult education budget. The project aims to reduce levels of economic inactivity through investment in bespoke support tailored to local need across Herefordshire. The project will use keyworker support to move people closer towards mainstream provision and employment.

The project must cover the whole of Herefordshire and must be able to support people living in rural and isolated areas.

The UKSPF will be the main source of funding to support employment provision for economically inactive people and reduce levels of economic inactivity. This project aligns with the following People and Skills Investment priorities as follows:

- E33 Employment support for economically inactive people: Intensive and wrap-around one-to-one support to move people closer towards mainstream provision and employment, supplemented by additional and/or specialist life and basic skills (digital, English, maths* and ESOL) support where there are local provision gaps.

- E34 Courses including basic skills (digital, English, maths (via Multiply) and ESOL), and life skills and career skills** provision for people who are unable to access training through the adult education budget or wrap around support detailed above. Supplemented by financial support for learners to enrol onto courses and complete qualifications.

- E35 Activities such as enrichment and volunteering to improve opportunities and promote wellbeing.

Do you consider these projects may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the proposed planned activity? All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as set out in the guidance.	
	No √
Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the proposed projects constitute a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.	

Assessment comprised three stage test as set out in government guidance[1]:

- Given by a public authority;
- Makes a contribution to an enterprise; and
- Affects international trade.

The project is not considered to affect international trade and does not therefore constitute a subsidy.

Approach to delivery and governance

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Have you engaged with any of the following as part of your investment plan? Select all that apply.

Public sector organisations √	Private sector organisations √	Civil society organisations √

Describe how you have engaged with any of these organisations. Give examples where possible.

As required by the UKSPF guidance, the council has also formed a strategic partnership board to oversee the development of the Investment Plan and to provide engagement with the key sectors: public, private and civil society. The Herefordshire Sustainable Growth Strategy Board (HSGSB) was formed in June 2022, and includes representation from across the county's business sectors, public sector organisations, geographies, the voluntary sector, communities, and the chairs of other local stakeholder groups such as the Herefordshire Business Board, Skills Board and Climate and Nature Partnership.

This cross sectoral, representative group has made sure that the investment plan is fully informed by a wide range of representative stakeholders from across the county as a whole as well as a wide range of interests. The board's full involvement with the investment plan development has included scoping workshops to identify the challenges and opportunities, as well as sessions to identify and form the interventions and the outcomes.

Due to the membership of this board and the council's broader local engagement with representative groups, the plan has had wide stakeholder involvement. Engagement around the initiatives has continued within other activities of the council. This includes corporate plan and the budget setting consultations, in addition to the council's regular engagement of businesses and business representatives this includes the business board, chamber of commerce and over 12 open business engagement sessions held each year through the county. The council's pioneering Talk Community initiative's intrinsic engagement model also links with other public sector partners, civil society and the private sector. This has also been embraced within the development of the plan.

Summarise the governance structures you have in place, including how any advisory panels or associated partnership groups are made up

The Herefordshire Sustainable Growth Strategy Board (HSGSB) will be the partnership/advisory board for the Shared Prosperity Fund within Herefordshire. As outlined above, the newly formed

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[1] Guidance on the UK's International Subsidies Control Commitments (BEIS, 2021)

board includes the county's business sectors, public sector organisations, geographies, the voluntary sector, communities, and the chairs of other local stakeholder groups such as the Herefordshire Business Board, Skills Board and Climate and Nature Partnership.

The board will have a key role in the delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund within Herefordshire. Firstly, the board has overseen the development of this investment plan, including identifying the challenges and opportunities along with the interventions and outcomes. The board will continue to oversee the scoping of competitions and commissioning for delivery of the plan encompassing the project selection. The board will also monitor and evaluate the delivery of, the programme, and make recommendations to the accountable body for the programme.

Herefordshire Council will be the accountable body and the programme will follow the council's constitution, codes and standing orders and guidance. The council's cabinet has taken the decision to approve the submission of this investment plan and subject to the approval by Government, the cabinet endorsed the accountable body role. Subject to the approval of the investment plan and other approvals by government, the council as accountable body will make further decisions around accepting funding and approval of commissioning/competitions and funding awards.

The shared prosperity programme will be accountable to the Executive Programme Board. This is the ultimate level of officer review and authority. The Executive Programme Board has many roles, including exception reporting, final approvals and annual review of the capital programme and Project Management Office (PMO) process. Chaired by Andrew Lovegrove (Director of Resources and Assurance) and attended by Director of Economy and Environment and the Director of the PMO, the Executive Programme Board has overall authority over the day-to-day process and programme. It receives escalated matters and provides solutions to Delivery Boards. Support for the Economic Development Delivery Board is provided by the Programme Management Office (PMO).

The Programme Board provides final approvals for expenditure and undertakes reviews of programme and project management. It receives escalated matters and will provide solutions to the UKSPF Delivery Board (assuming one is created). The UKSPF Delivery Board will provide oversight and guidance to SROs and Project Managers, reporting on escalation/de-escalation of project changes / risks and cost issues on projects identified as Red (Compromised) or Amber (At Risk).

A Project Board will be in place for the project, led by Ross Cook (Senior Responsible Officer, Corporate Director, Economy and Environment). Project updates, including matters requiring more senior approval (e.g. emerging programme and cost risks) will be escalated to the UKSPF Delivery Board.

The council uses Verto, a programme management and collaboration platform which enables effective communication, information sharing and quality assurance. The Council's Delegated Grants Team will manage the financial management and monitoring of the scheme. The team comes with nearly 20 years of experience of administering a wide range of grants (internal and externally funded) and values/complexity. The team has a successful track record in supporting Council-led third-party grants and currently oversees over 30 schemes which includes four complex LEP wide partnership ERDF and ESF schemes all of which have been successfully audited through DLUHC. In addition they were the team to support a lead INTERREG-funded project which was successfully delivered and closed down. The team works with all internal teams of audit, info governance, finance, legal and fraud to ensure that all systems and processes are compliant and have recently restructured to sit in the Corporate Finance Team. They are also leading on the Corporate Grants work for the Council.

Confirm all MPs covering your lead local authority have been invited to join the local partnership group.	
Yes √	
Are there MPs who are not supportive of your investment plan?	
	No √
(If Yes) Who are the MPs that are not supportive and outline their reasons why.	

N/A

Are you intending to select projects in any way other than by competition for funding?

| No | √ |

(If Yes) Describe your approach to selecting projects, and why you intend to do it this way.

N/A

DO YOU INTEND TO WORK WITH OTHER PLACES ON ANY OF THE INTERVENTIONS WHICH FALL UNDER THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE INVESTMENT PRIORITY?

Which interventions do you intend to collaborate on? Select all that apply.

Intervention N/A	Tick if applicable
A full list of nation-specific interventions is available in the relevant annex to the Prospectus.	
N/A	

Describe any interventions not included in this list?

N/A

Who are the places you intend to collaborate with?

N/A

DO YOU INTEND TO WORK WITH OTHER PLACES ON ANY OF THE INTERVENTIONS WHICH FALL UNDER THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY?

Which interventions do you intend to collaborate on? Select all that apply.

Intervention	Tick if applicable
We are in active contact with the Marches LEP and neighbouring areas (such as Telford and Wrekin, Shropshire, and Worcestershire) regarding the future delivery of business support services within Herefordshire, building in a successful history of cross boundary collaborative working on multi-area EU funded grant schemes such as the Marches Business Improvement Programme and the Business Energy Efficiency Programme. Whilst no new collaborative arrangements have yet been agreed, where there are opportunities to secure economies of scale whilst still meeting the specific needs of the local business community, we will consider the merits of collaborative delivery arrangements.	
A full list of nation-specific interventions is available in the relevant annex to the Prospectus.	

Describe any interventions not included in this list?

N/A

Who are the places you intend to collaborate with?

N/A

Which interventions do you intend to collaborate on? Select all that apply.

Intervention No	Tick if applicable
A full list of nation-specific interventions is available in the relevant annex to the Prospectus.	
N/A	

Describe any interventions not included in this list?

N/A

Who are the places you intend to collaborate with?

N/A

PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

How have you considered your public sector equality duty in the design of your investment plan?

Herefordshire Council fully complies with requirements, in the exercise of its functions, including to have due regard to the need to –

a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The Equality Act 2010 established a positive obligation on local authorities to promote equality and to reduce discrimination in relation to any of the nine 'protected characteristics' (age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; marriage and civil partnership; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation). In particular, the council must have 'due regard' to the public sector equality duty when taking any decisions on service changes.

The design of this Investment Plan has taken into account the above requirements and the council, and its partners have established a positive approach to promoting equality and to reducing discrimination within the plan and its interventions and outcomes.

Within the engagement of stakeholders via the representative board, all members have provided a consideration to the positive obligation and the broad representation has been beneficial to make sure the plan makes a positive impact on the needs of a broad range of groups. For example, the investment plan will make sure that support is made available to help those not currently in employment, education and training to develop the skills they need to access employment opportunities. The council will make that the design of these services considers and reflects the need to promote equality and to reduce discrimination during service delivery.

How will you consider your public sector equality duty when implementing your investment plan, including in the selection of projects?

As the accountable body for the fund, the council will ensure that any available grant funding or commissioning of services is open to any and all who wish to be considered for support, that the criteria and selection process are transparent and fair. Herefordshire Council has extensive experience of successfully being an accountable body, for example for the Hereford Towns Fund and delivering a wide range of grant programmes such as the Marches Business Improvement Programme, the Business Energy Efficiency Programme, the LEADER programme, and the Marches LEP funding for the New Model Institute in Technology and Engineering. The council also led the delivery of circa £100m of Covid support grants to businesses over the last two years.

Herefordshire Council also has significant experience in delivering large multi-million capital projects to time and budget, such as the recent Shell Store £7.5m business incubator facility on the Hereford Enterprise Zone funded by ERDF and the Marches LEP.

All delivery partners will be required to comply with the Equalities Act 2010 and will need to demonstrate a policy is in place for protected groups. Equality Impact Assessments will be required by anyone who seeks UKSPF funds from the council, and will be a key consideration in the assessment of grant funding applications.

The council will require delivery partners to gather and monitor information/data on protected groups benefitting from SPF investment to inform long term evaluation.

All staff and delivery partners engaged in the SPF programme are expected to share the council's equality commitment including people, organisations, and companies we work in partnership with and those who provide goods and services on our behalf.

RISKS

Have you identified any key risks that could affect delivery, for example lack of staff or expertise?

Yes

(If Yes) Describe these risks or issues, including the contingency measures you have in place to mitigate them.

Risk management for the programme will follow best-practice guidelines. It will be an ongoing iterative process where risks are proactively monitored and managed throughout the delivery of the programme using a five-stage process of identification, analysis, evaluation, action and monitoring. This is recorded in a working risk register, for which the Project Manager has day to day responsibility. Where appropriate, risk owners will be allocated risks and will be responsible for ensuring the likelihood of their occurrence is minimised. The Project Manager will hold regular risk and performance review meetings throughout the delivery phase with suppliers and delivery partners.

Delivery risks and mitigation include:

No response or limited interest to the grant schemes/competitions/commissioning of activity (subject to investment plan approval)	Assessed impact/likelihood: Low The county has significant experience of successfully delivering previous EU funded schemes, with a high number of organisations indicating they would like to apply for UKSPF. Through the partnership and other channels, the council will build the awareness and communications reach to make sure that there is high awareness to match the identified intervention demand
Herefordshire Council fails to deliver its role as accountable body. Including in the areas of:	Assessed impact/likelihood: Low Herefordshire Council has significant accountable body experience for a wide range of similar programme. For example the council is currently the

• Organisation capacity • Lack of staff capacity & capability • Governance & Decision making • Timescales	accountable body for the £22.4m of Stronger Towns Fund allocated to Hereford. The council's cabinet has taken the decision (subject to approval of the plan) to assume the role of accountable body for the fund. The council will therefore make sure that appropriate resources are made available for delivery and include appropriate project management, reporting and monitoring processes including internal project/programme boards. Teams with experience of external funding delivery will be utilised during the delivery of the programme. Governance requirements have been identified and mapped so that they are in line with the accountable body requirements (including timescales).
Stakeholder support and appropriate independent oversight required for delivery is not available	Assessed impact/likelihood: Low The Investment Plan has been developed with oversight from the HSGSB, a new board with broad representation across sectors, civil society, geography, areas of interest and it includes the chairs of several other groups such as the business board. The board is fully supportive of the investment plan and can provide effective oversight as the plan moves into delivery. The council also engaged a wide range or partners within the development of the evidence base and aligned to other local strategies such as the County Plan 2020 to 2024. This engagement activity will continue into delivery.
The Herefordshire UKSPF Investment Plan is not approved by government.	Assessed impact/likelihood: Medium It is considered that the Investment Plan has been developed in accordance with the national guidance, overseen by the HSGSB, including consultation with a wide range or partners, is based on an evidence base and aligned to other local strategies such as the County Plan 2020 to 2024.
Delayed start/slippage due to funding approval and contracting delays	The council are actively working with the HSGSB to progress Year 1 delivery plans which will ensure quick mobilisation once funding is approved.

Robust project management processes and designated Project Management staff are in place to ensure risks are assessed on an on-going basis and financial control is maintained. Additional control and assurance will be provided by the Economic Development Programme Board chaired by the Corporate Director for Economy and Place who will have ultimate responsibility for financial monitoring.

Have you identified any key fraud risks that could affect UKSPF delivery?	
Yes	

(If Yes) Describe these risks or issues, including the contingency measures you have in place to mitigate them.

Whilst we do not foresee any significant fraud risks, it is possible that SPF funding could be used for ineligible activities. The council have robust financial management and assurance processes in place which will mitigate this risk. This includes procedures for compiling, authorising and ensuring only eligible and defrayed expenditure is included in claims for payment. In addition, the Council

has an internal counter fraud department which is able to investigate instances of alleged and suspected fraud against the authority. As part of this service, the council considers fraud risks across the organisation, delivers fraud awareness training to all internal staff members, has a corporate counter fraud policy and fraud response plan. In the event that suspected fraud is identified within the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, a referral can be made directly to the Council's internal fraud department, who will consider grounds for further investigation and notify the relevant government body where fraud is proven.

The Council adheres to the Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Management of Records under s.46 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The policy stipulates duties and responsibilities for the effective retention of records. All SPF related documentation will be held on the council's document management system and financial system and retained for 7 years (to comply with HMRC regulations) after the final SPF claim has been processed.

This programme will be added to the Council's internal audit programme as well as being subject to external audit – any issues identified through internal audit reports will be reviewed at departmental level and a management action plan developed for corrections. Significant failings will be reviewed by the Council's Audit Committee.

A summary of risks and mitigation is provided below.

Procurement and Commissioning Fraud (to include competitions), including: • Allegations of collusion, bribery and corruption within the pre-tender stages • Or false, intentionally inflated or duplicate claims within the post tender stages.	Assessed impact/likelihood: Medium The council will follow their robust procurement and contract regulations and undertake appropriate "due diligence" checks on all potential third parties involved in delivery. Appropriate claim checks on claims/invoicing will be carried out including to ensure that the services are delivered and are within accordance to the contract. Scheme will be subject to audits, and spot checks will take place during every claim. The council will investigate any fraud concerns that are raised.
Fraudulent applications within approved scheme	Assessed impact/likelihood: Medium/high As above appropriate identify, financial and governance checks will be required from all end applicants receiving funding through the programme. This requirement will be placed on third parties that have been commissioned or were awarded funds via competitions. Toolkits and resources for undertaking fraud and other due diligence checks will be prepared by the council. A reporting system will be established to enable issues to be identified and where appropriate intelligence disseminated to delivery partners.

Capacity and capability

In this section, we will ask you about:

- The capacity and capability of your team to manage funding
- The resources you have in place for work related to UKSPF

Your answers here will help us know how to support you with delivery. They will not affect the amount of funding you will get.

Answer as honestly as possible.

How many people (FTE) will be put in place to work with UKSPF funding?

Subject to the approval of the Investment Plan, Herefordshire Council will ensure that the resources are in place to oversee the implementation of the Investment Plan, including a dedicated Project Manager and drawing on expertise from across the council services. For example the council's grants and programmes team, Project Management Office, and sector specific expertise like the Economic Development Team, Environment team, Growth Hub, post 16 skills team. The 4% admin budget will be utilised to ensure the appropriate capacity is in place to effectively manage the implementation of the programme.

In accordance with our standard governance systems and processes the council will establish a specific project board to oversee the implementation of the funds, identifying a senior manager Senior Responsible Officer (Service Director for Economy), and including representation from the following;

- Finance Officer: The finance officer will be an existing member of the Council's finance team and will oversee and manage the financial claims and evidencing process.
- Legal advisor: The legal advisor will be an existing member of the Council's legal team and will ensure the project is compliant with Subsidy Control and adheres to the Grant Agreement stipulated between the Council and UKG.
- Procurement advisor: The procurement advisor will be an existing member of the Council's commissioning and procurement team and will oversee the procurement of contractors and ensure that the project adheres to the Council's procurement procedures.

Describe what role these people will have, including any seniority and experience.

The Project Manager (likely to be Grade 12, 0.5 FTE) will have demonstrable experience of delivering comparable programmes, successfully managing external funding, and with a detailed knowledge of social and economic development and the policy environment. A suitable project management qualification and relevant professional accreditation will also be expected. The Project Manager will:

- manage the relationship between the Council as accountable body, the partnership group, delivery partners and UKG
- liaise with internal experts as required to support the successful delivery of the programme including procurement, legal and financial teams and Service Directors
- be responsible for ensuring delivery to agreed timescale, budget and quality;
- monitor risks and ensure any complementarity/alignment with other Council investments is maximised
- provide regular progress reports to internal Programme Management and Financial Assurance Board
- review and sign off programme monitoring returns

The Project Manager will be supported by a Project Assistant (Grade 8, 0.5FTE) who will be seconded onto the role from within the Council to provide administrative support. The Project Assistant will ensure that the appropriate evidence and audit trails are maintained in line with government guidance and the funding agreement. The post holder will be expected to have demonstrable experience of programme administration.

- Strong capability: Has extensive experience and/or a proven track record of delivery in this area.
- Strong capacity: High degree of confidence that there is enough staffing/resource to manage funding in this area.
- Some capability: Has previous experience of delivery in this area.
- Some capacity: Confident that there is enough staffing/resource to manage funding in this area.

- Limited capability: Does not have previous experience and/or no track record of delivery in this area.
- Limited capacity: Limited confidence that there is enough staffing/resource to manage funding in this area. Additional resource may be needed to support delivery.

CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

How would you describe your team's current experience of delivering funding and managing growth funds?		
Very experienced		

How would you describe your team's current capability to manage funding for procurement?		
Strong capability		

How would you describe your team's current capability to manage funding for procurement?		
Strong capability		

How would you describe your team's current capacity to manage funding for procurement?		
Strong capacity		

How would you describe your team's current capability to manage funding for subsidies?		
Strong capability		

How would you describe your team's current capacity to manage funding for subsidies?		
Strong capacity		

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

Does your local authority have any previous experience of delivering the Communities and Place interventions you have select?	
Yes	

How would you describe your team's current capability to manage funding for Communities and Place interventions?	
Strong capability	

Describe the key capability challenges (if you have any) for delivering Communities and Place interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.

We do not foresee any capability challenges. Our team have considerable experience of managing and delivering comparable programmes (including LEADER circa £2m, Towns Fund £22.4m Community Renewal Fund £3m, Leominster Heritage Action Zone £3.6m). We also have robust programme management and governance processes in place based on a clear structure with lines of accountability running throughout the delivery team, connecting each part of the team to senior leadership within the Council, enabling monitoring of progress, accountability and the ability to escalate issues where required.

The programme will be led by the council's highly experience Project Management Office according to PRINCE2 principles and methodologies. PRINCE2 is the recognised corporate project management methodology employed by the Council and all project managers are appropriately trained. The programme delivery and management team operate within the Council's very robust rules and procedures. This ensures that the team maintains compliance with current UK legislation.

In addition to thematic expertise within the council, our HSGSB is highly engaged in the delivery of the programme which will provide additional expertise if required and will also ensure opportunities to complement and add value to other activities across the county are maximised.

Describe what further support would help address these challenges.

N/A

How would you describe your team's current capacity to manage funding for Communities and Place interventions?	
Strong capacity	

Describe the key capacity challenges (if you have any) for delivering Communities and Place interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.

We do not foresee any capacity challenges. Our team have considerable experience of managing and delivering comparable programmes (including LEADER circa £2m, Towns Fund £22.4m Community Renewal Fund £3m, Leominster Heritage Action Zone £3.6m), and significant long-term experience of successfully delivering a wide range of similar programmes funded through ERDF, ESF, Local Growth Fund for instance.

We have robust programme management and governance processes in place based on a clear structure with lines of accountability running throughout the delivery team, connecting each part of the team to senior leadership within the Council, enabling monitoring of progress, accountability and the ability to escalate issues where required.

The council is committed to the successful delivery of the UKSPF programme and have appropriate contingency and business continuity arrangements in place should key members of staff become unavailable or unforeseen issues arise. Additional expertise and advisory support will be provided by the HSGSB to ensure successful delivery.

Describe what further support would help address these challenges.

N/A

SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

Does your local authority have any previous experience of delivering the Supporting Local Business interventions you have select?

Yes

How would you describe your team's current capability to manage funding for Supporting Local Business interventions?

Strong capability

Describe the key capability challenges (if you have any) for delivering Supporting Local Business interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.

We do not foresee any challenges as outlined in response above. The council has considerable experience of supporting local business interventions (including the Marches Growth Hub services in Herefordshire, a wide range of ERDF and ESF, Towns Fund, Local Growth Fund, Leader, and Get Building Fund); and has access to professional support through internal procurement, legal and financial teams.

Furthermore, the council has a strategic commitment to supporting and engaging with businesses which will greatly assist within the delivery of the selected business interventions. This includes how the council supports and engages with the Herefordshire business board, made-up of a cross section of key local businesses and the local enterprise partnership. Additionally, the council engages with businesses in Hereford city and the market towns every 6 months via open invitation sessions. Within these sessions, the council listens to issues that businesses have as well as briefs on key initiatives.

Describe what further support would help address these challenges.

N/A

How would you describe your team's current capacity to manage funding for Supporting Local Business interventions?

Strong capability

Describe the key capacity challenges (if you have any) for delivering Supporting Local Business interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.
N/A

Describe what further support would help address these challenges.
N/A

PEOPLE AND SKILLS CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

Does your local authority have any previous experience of delivering the People and Skills interventions you have select?	
Yes	

How would you describe your team's current capability to manage funding for People and Skills interventions?		
Strong capability		

Describe the key capability challenges (if you have any) for delivering People and Skills interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.
We do not foresee any capacity challenges. Our team have considerable experience of managing and delivering comparable programmes (including LEADER circa £2m, Towns Fund £22.4m Community Renewal Fund £3m, Leominster Heritage Action Zone £3.6m), and significant long-term experience of successfully delivering a wide range of programmes funded through ERDF, ESF and Local Growth Fund for instance.

Describe what further support would help address these challenges.
N/A

How would you describe your team's current capacity to manage funding for People and Skills interventions?		
Strong capability		

Describe the key capacity challenges (if you have any) for delivering People and Skills interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.
We do not foresee any challenges as outlined in response above.

Describe what further support would help address these challenges.
N/A

SUPPORT TO DELIVERY UKSPF

All lead authorities can use up to 4% of their UKSPF allocation to support the delivery of their chosen interventions but by exception, lead authorities will be able to use more than 4%. Are you planning to use more than 4%?	
	No

(If Yes) Explain why you wish to use more than 4%.
N/A

<u>Approvals</u>

Before submitting your investment plan, you should have approval from your:

- Chief Executive Officer
- Section 151 Officer
- Leader of your lead authority

Do you have approval from your Chief Executive Officer for this investment plan?

o Yes

Do you have approval from your Section 151 Officer for this investment plan?

o Yes

Do you have approval from the leader of your lead authority for this investment plan?

o Yes

| **If you do not have approval from any of these people, please explain why this is:** |
| N/A |

<u>Additional documents</u>

You will have received an email giving you access to a folder where you will need to upload supporting evidence to your investment plan. All applicants must complete and upload the following spreadsheet to the folder prior to submitting their investment plan:

- UKSPF Expenditure Profile spreadsheet
- UKSPF Indicative Deliverables spreadsheet

Your investment plan submission will be considered incomplete without the required documents.

Have you completed and uploaded the two spreadsheets to the SharePoint folder as requested?

o Yes

Herefordshire Council

Rural Prosperity Fund: Addendum to the UKSPF Investment Plan

Your Area	Herefordshire
Name of Person Submitting the REPF	Roger Allonby, Service Director for Economy, roger.allonby@herefordshire.gov.uk
Alternative Contact Name and E-mail	Nadine Kinsey, Economic Development Manager, Nadine.Kinsey@herefordshire.gov.uk
UKSPF Investment Plan Reference Number	ANON-QPA8-9PHM-R

Local Context
You have already submitted your UKSPF investment plan. Here, we would like you to provide any additional information about specific rural challenges, market failures, and opportunities for rural businesses or rural communities in your area that you would like us to consider.

As set out in the Herefordshire UKSPF Investment Plan, Herefordshire is one of the most sparsely populated areas of the UK, with an ageing population and connectivity challenges characteristic of rural areas.

The overall population of Herefordshire has increased by 2% over the past 10 years compared to 6.6% in England, and between 5.2% and 6.4% in neighbouring areas. This increase has been primarily amongst the over 65 population; an increase of 24.1% compared with a decline in the working age population by 4.1% (ONS, 2021).

Much of the county is deprived in terms of access to services due to rurality, with 46% of the population facing longer journey times to key services than nationally (National Audit Office, 2020). Living costs are typically 10-20% higher for rural households, making these residents more vulnerable to price increases (Herefordshire Council (2021). The Herefordshire Vital Signs community survey (2018) highlighted that people living in the most disadvantaged communities are more likely to be less satisfied with the area, and levels of wellbeing are lower.

A larger proportion of homes in Herefordshire (16.6%) are in fuel poverty than in the West Midlands (13.5%) and England (11%). This is particularly a concern for older people who are more susceptible to ill health (including the risk of death in the winter) as a result of residing in cold homes. An estimated 60% of people aged 65+ live in rural parts of Herefordshire, where access to mains gas may not be possible, and properties with poor thermal efficiency are more common, both of which increase the risk of fuel poverty. Applying the Government's new 'low-income low energy efficiency' measures, around 17% (14,000) of households in Herefordshire were in fuel poverty in 2019 (higher than England's 13%). The detrimental effects of fuel poverty pose a considerable threat to the health and wellbeing of older people living in Herefordshire (JSNA, 2021).

The county's natural landscape and quality of life offer attracts retirees, but does not offer the range of high-quality employment opportunities or density of leisure and recreational services that attracts and retains young people and business talent. Young people are more likely to be less satisfied with the local area than the rest of the population, report lower levels of well-being, and feel they have less influence in their local communities (Herefordshire Council Community Wellbeing Survey 2021).

The Herefordshire business base is predominantly small companies and micro-enterprises. Self-employment is high, with micro-businesses accounting for 90% of companies based in Herefordshire. In 2022 there were 10,620 enterprises in Herefordshire. Similarly to nationally, the majority (90%) of these were 'micro' enterprises employing 9 or fewer employees whilst 8% were 'small' (employing 10 to 49 people), and 1.3% were 'medium' size enterprises employing 50 to 249 employees. Enterprises

classified as 'large' (employing 250 employees or more) accounted for a very small percentage (0.1%).

The latest Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ONS, 2021) reveals that the workplace-based median weekly earnings for people who work in Herefordshire is now £536; a 12% increase from the amount recorded for 2020 (£481). Herefordshire's weekly earnings however remain significantly lower than that in England of £613, and the county has the lowest median earnings of all 14 West Midlands authorities. Resident based weekly earnings are also lower compared to England and the West Midlands region. Analysis of the business base indicates that the county has a lower proportion of businesses providing knowledge intensive services than the UK, and a lower proportion of employment in knowledge-based jobs; the proportion of innovation jobs is 2.4% compared to 5% nationally (ONS, 2020). In addition, the county has a lower proportion of working age people qualified at NVQ4+ - 39% compared to 43% nationally (ONS, 2021).

Productivity is below the national average, with GVA per hour worked at £23.79 which is much lower than the average of £35.15. GVA per hour has also grown at a slower rate than nationally which is resulting in the productivity gap widening (ONS, 2019)

Businesses across Herefordshire state their single biggest issue is the lack of a skilled and available workforce, with significant challenges in terms of recruitment and retention. This is further impacted on rural areas where many required roles are seasonal. Investment in innovation and automation, for example agri-tech, is likely to be one of the required solutions to this issue, and to improve efficiency and productivity.

Agriculture is facing an uncertain future as direct payments are phased out and with the introduction of the Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMs), which will not be a full substitute for the EU Basic Payment Scheme. The reduction in support for farm businesses, and the end of the wider Rural Development Programme for England, is likely to have an impact across the whole of the rural economy.

Around 10,200 people work directly on farms across the county and around 3,700 of these are casual workers. Herefordshire has the third highest number of people working in agriculture in England, behind Cornwall and Shropshire. Defra statistics for Herefordshire show that there are around 300 cereal farms in the county, covering nearly 30,000 hectares, while general cropping accounts for nearly 430 farms, covering 34,000 hectares. There are around 240 horticulture farms in Herefordshire, the highest number across the West Midlands' counties. These cover an area of nearly 13,000 hectares, which is more than the combined area of all other West Midlands' counties (NFU Home Grown Heartland report June 2019).

Overall the rural areas of the county are predominately a low skilled, low wage economy with a high proportion of employment in low value sectors such as tourism and agriculture, average earnings are below the national average. There is a significant lack of available skilled workforce. Existing sectors are also more restricted in terms of the potential to innovate/ add value, and significantly enhance productivity. The high numbers of micro businesses need access to advice and finance in order to grow.

Opportunities
Through the UKSPF and REPF support there are wide range of opportunities to address the above challenges;

- Business growth/ added value – capital grants to rural micro and small businesses providing the finance required to catalyse growth. 98% of county's business base is micro (90%) or small (8%), often requiring access to grant funds to enable growth through for example accessing new

equipment, extending premises, improving customer/ visitor facilities. The previous Leader and Rural Development Programme for England 'Growth' schemes had a high take up and impact across the rural economy.

- Improving productivity and energy efficiency – capital grants to support businesses to improve productivity through automation and innovation, and meet spiralling energy costs whilst supporting decarbonisation. The Herefordshire UKSPF Investment Plan prioritises revenue support for energy audits, this will be complimented through REPF capital grants helping rural businesses to implement the measures that will make the most significant impact to them and the environment. Grants can also help farm businesses consider new opportunities such as use lower grade lands for possible energy generation either directly by them or by community owned energy projects.

- Visitor Economy/ Place-Shaping – enhancing the welcome and environment for visitors, including visitor information points, enhancing the visitor experience and infrastructure across the rural areas. Herefordshire has a strong visitor offer, but tourism in the county pre-Covid was underperforming compared to similar destinations across the country. Through targeted investment and support, this important local sector can achieve significant growth.

- Place shaping/ improved connectivity – As a large rural county, transport is a significant barrier for many accessing work, public/ community services, and training. Capital grants will improve to mobility through building on best practice community transport initiatives, as well as cycling an walking networks, and building on our current network of community hubs will enable people to access employment, training/ education and critical services.

Interventions – Rural Businesses	
Please choose the interventions you wish to use under the rural business investment priority. Select as many options as you wish from the menu. The list of interventions can be viewed here.	
2023-2024 interventions:	• Funding (capital grants) for small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas. Including capital funding for net zero infrastructure for rural businesses, and diversification of farm businesses outside of agriculture to encourage start up, expansion or scale up of these businesses where this involves converting farm buildings into other commercial or business uses. • Funding (capital grants) for the development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy (Corresponds to UKSPF Intervention E17)
2024-2025 interventions:	• Funding (capital grants) for small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in

| | rural areas. Including capital funding for net zero infrastructure for rural businesses, and diversification of farm businesses outside of agriculture to encourage start up, expansion or scale up of these businesses where this involves converting farm buildings into other commercial or business uses. |
| | ⊛ Funding (capital grants) for the development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy (Corresponds to UKSPF Intervention E17). |

Please explain how the interventions selected will address local rural business challenges, market failures, and opportunities (max 300 words)

Funding (capital grants) for small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas.

The vast majority (90%) of the county's business base are micro enterprises with more limited turnover and access to finance for innovation, investment and growth.

Building on the successful impact of LEADER, the Rural Development Programme for England Growth programme, and the Marches Business Improvement Programme (funded to date through the European Regional Development Fund), the provision of small scale capital grants to rural businesses will enable them to grow. The capital grants will be open to micro and small businesses to apply to, for example to improve productivity, innovation, energy efficiency, enhance the visitor offer. The grants will add value to the UKSPF proposed support for example in terms of the revenue funded advice for energy audits and business support packages, with REPF providing capital support to implement thereafter.

Funding (capital grants) for the development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy (Corresponds to UKSPF Intervention E17).

The visitor economy is critical to the Herefordshire in terms of employment, income generation and raising the profile of the county as to live, work, study and visit. Visitor economy businesses were severely impacted by Covid 19. A STEAM economic impact assessment identified undertaken in 2020 identified a 66% reduction in visitor numbers and 53% reduction in visitor spend compared to 2019.

Although compared to similar rural destinations Herefordshire has in the recent past underperformed in terms of tourism potential. This has largely been due to a lack of co-ordinated marketing/ promotion, and limited investment in place-shaping and wider infrastructure.

Complementing the UKPF intervention E17 to support the promotion of tourism, the REPF funds will provide capital grants to enhance the visitor economy offer of the county, realising the opportunity for growth.

Please rank the interventions selected in order of expected value added

1. Funding (capital grants) for small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas
2. Funding (capital grants) for the development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy (Corresponds to UKSPF Intervention E17).

Interventions – Rural Communities	
Please choose the interventions you wish to use under the rural communities investment priority. Select as many options as you wish from the menu.	
2023-2024 interventions:	○ Funding (capital grants) for investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups. ○ Funding (capital grants) for active travel enhancements in the local area. (This intervention corresponds to the UKSPF intervention E70).
2024-2025 interventions:	○ Funding (capital grants) for investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups. ○ Funding (capital grants) for active travel enhancements in the local area. (This intervention corresponds to the UKSPF intervention E70).

Please explain how the interventions selected will address local rural community challenges, market failures, and opportunities (max 300 words)
Funding (capital grants) for investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups (this intervention corresponds to the UKSPF intervention E11). Herefordshire Council has established over 70 Talk Community hubs across the county, focal points for local communities to access advice and support (health, finance etc) and address issues of isolation. In future community hubs can also provide support in terms of to those seeking training and employment support. Building on this network the capital grants will be utilised to support community energy schemes, particularly where benefitting community hubs. The funding will also be utilised to establish EV charging points at key locations to support the ability for local residents and visitors to travel around the rural areas of the county in electric vehicles. **Funding (capital grants) for active travel enhancements in the local area. (This intervention corresponds to the UKSPF intervention E70)** Walking and cycling is a key element of the county's rural tourism offer and attraction, as well as providing alternative means for local people to utilise active travel to move around the county. As highlighted above, the county faces significant challenges in terms of access to public services with 46% of the population facing longer journey times to key services than nationally (National Audit Office, 2020). The lack of available transport options is also a significant barrier to people accessing training, further and higher education, and employment. Capital grants will utilised to enhance trails and cycleway, enhancing the tourism offer and active travel options for local people. Grants may also be used to build on best practice community transport schemes, assisting local communities to access public services, training/ education and employment.

Please rank the interventions selected in order of expected value added
1. Funding (capital grants) for active travel enhancements in the local area. (This intervention corresponds to the UKSPF intervention E70)

2. Funding (capital grants) for investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups (This intervention corresponds to the UKSPF intervention E11)

Intervention Outcomes
Please select what outcomes the interventions selected in the rural business investment priority are expected to achieve

- Jobs created
- Jobs safeguarded
- Number of new businesses created
- Number of businesses adopting new to the firm technologies or processes
- Number of businesses with improved productivity
- Number of businesses experiencing growth
- Number of businesses reducing carbon emissions
- Jobs created
- Jobs safeguarded
- Number of new businesses created
- Number of businesses increasing their turnover
- Increased visitor numbers

Please select what outcomes the interventions selected in the rural communities investment priority are expected to achieve

- Improved perception of facilities or amenities
- Increased users of facilities or amenities Improved perceived or experienced accessibility
- Improved perceived or experienced accessibility • Number of new businesses created
- Number of new businesses created increased use of cycleways or paths
- Improved perception of facilities or amenities

Delivery
Please set out the indicative spend profile of your REPF allocation, additional to that of your UKSPF investment plan. Please detail the indicative budgets at investment priority level and at Intervention level, for the 2 years of the fund, including if REPF money will be used to complement UKSPF funded projects. (300 words max)

Funding (capital grants) for small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas indicative profile. Will complement UKSPF outcomes E17, E19, E24.

2023/24	2024/25	Total
£500,000	£500,000	£1,000,000

Funding (capital grants) for the development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy indicative profile. Will complement UKSPF outcomes E17.

2023/24	2024/25	Total
£125,000	£125,000	£250,000

Funding (capital grants) for active travel enhancements in the local area indicative profile. Will complement UKSPF outcomes E70.

2023/24	2024/25	Total
£125,000	£125,000	£250,000

Funding (capital grants) for investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups. Will complement UKSPF outcomes E11.

2023/24	2024/25	Total
£100,000	£100,000	£200,000

Please set out how you intend to select projects to support, detailing including how you will ensure they deliver value for money, including additionality. Please also set out how you will determine that projects cannot be funded by private finance. (500 words max)

Whilst the £1.7m of additional capital funding is very welcome, it is disappointing that government has not provided any additional funds to administer what will be a resource intensive scheme. The council will deliver the REPF alongside the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Herefordshire Council has significant experience of delivering a wide range of publically funded grant schemes, including two previous LEADER programmes, a wide range of European Regional Development Fund grant schemes such as the Marches Business Improvement Programme, and is currently the accountable body for the government funded £22.4m Hereford Towns Fund programme.

In line with the national REPF guidance, and building on the experience of delivering the above schemes which have been subject to previous audits, the council will deliver the REPF through the following process;

- Open Grant Calls – the council will publish open grant calls for projects in accordance with the Addendum which will clearly specify (in accordance with the national guidance/ contract) who is eligible to apply, what they can apply for, the maximum intervention level/ match funding requirements, output/ outcome requirements, timescales for delivery, criteria for selection and transparent decision making process.

- Project Application – applicants will be asked to complete a detailed application/ business case form setting out the need for public intervention, how the project meets the requirements of the call/ strategic fit, the outputs/ outcomes that will be delivered, how the project will deliver value for money/ additionality, and how the project meets subsidy control requirements.

- Project appraisal – each application will be independently assessed, reviewing how it meets the project call/ strategic it, scored against all of the grant scheme criteria. The appraisal will consider the case made for public funding/ why the activity is not commercially viable, and include an assessment of the financial position of the applying business, as well as risks, compliance with subsidy control, and the value for money/ additionality that will be delivered. The appraisal will fully consider the possible risk of displacement of trade through supporting the project. Should more applications be received than budget those that achieve the highest score against the grant fund criteria (including value for money) will be selected.

- Approving applications – All application appraisals will be considered by a senior council officer in accordance with our constitution/ scheme of delegation.

- Contracting – each project will be subject to a specific grant funding contract detailing the use of the grant funds, any specific conditions, timeframe for delivery, output/ outcomes, monitoring/ reporting requirements and the basis for clawback should the project fail.

- Grant claims/ Monitoring – as per the previous LEADER and other grant funding schemes we have successfully implemented, projects will claim funding in arrears against defrayed expenditure through a grant claim form and supported by evidence that expenditure has been incurred in line with the contract, and that outputs/ outcomes have been achieved. The claim form will be assessed by the council prior to the payment of grant claims.

Subject to approval of the Addendum, grant calls will be developed and launched in early 2022/23, to complement the revenue support services due to be launched through UKSPF, and providing most time possible for people to apply and then deliver their respective projects.

Have you identified opportunities to work with other places on specific interventions and/or projects for the rural business interventions?	
Intervention(s) you intend to collaborate on:	The council will work with the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, and surrounding counties of Shropshire, Worcestershire, Powys and Telford and Wrekin in implementing all elements of the funds. We have a long history of working collaboratively together in implementing grant schemes.
Place(s) you intend to collaborate with:	Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Telford and Wrekin and Powys. As grant schemes are further developed we will engage our surrounding partners to explore opportunities for joint working.
Have you identified opportunities to work with other places on specific interventions and/or projects for the rural communities interventions?	
Intervention(s) you intend to collaborate on:	As above, the council will work with the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, and surrounding counties of Shropshire, Worcestershire, Powys and Telford and Wrekin in implementing all elements of the funds. We have a long history of working collaboratively together in implementing the grant schemes.
Place(s) you intend to collaborate with:	Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Telford and Wrekin and Powys. As grant schemes are further developed we will engage our surrounding partners to explore opportunities for joint working.

Engagement
Further to your UKSPF Investment Plan engagement, have you engaged or consulted with rural stakeholders, or expanded your UKSPF local partnership group, to inform the information you have submitted above? If yes, please give details. You should also use this section to tell us about planned future engagement with rural stakeholders.
As per the development of the UKSPF Investment Plan, the development of the Addendum has been overseen by the Herefordshire Sustainable Growth and Strategy Board (HSGSB) who are our UKSPF local partnership group. Due to the predominately rural nature of the county the Board has strong rural representation already. The board includes a wide range of representation including a wide range of rural based businesses (tourism, agriculture, housing etc), colleges, Herefordshire Business Board etc. Separate consultation workshop session held with key rural partners such as the CLA, NFU and Herefordshire Rural Hub. Further one to one meetings held with a wider range of rural tourism, agriculture and food and drink businesses. The draft Addendum has also been circulated to partners and stakeholders for review and comment. It has been subject to a Herefordshire Council cabinet decision in accordance with our constitution in order to submit to government

Are there aspects of your plans to use your REPF allocation that are not supported by rural stakeholders and the rural community? If yes, please provide more detail.
N/ A
Are there MPs who are not supportive of your investment plan? If yes, please list which MPs are not supportive and outline their reasons why.
N/A

Confirmation of Approval	
Please provide the names of who has approved the submission of the additional information provided	
Chief Executive	
Elected Leader	
Section 151 Officer	

Local service delivery and place-shaping: A framework to support parish and town councils

This document presents a framework for principal councils looking to support parish and town (local) councils to play an increased role in local service delivery and place-shaping. While it is aimed at principal councils, the research has also been steered by interviews and discussion with representatives of the local council sector.

Executive summary

Town and parish (local) councils can be an integral part of vibrant communities, along with voluntary and other community sector organisations. However, harnessing this potential is difficult. Town and parish councils have a wide range of powers, but limited duties. They also vary greatly. Size, capacity and appetite are different from local council to local council. Many parishes are small, with a part-time clerk and have little in common with the largest and most active town councils. This means that the roles they undertake reflect their local appetite and capacity. Even in neighbouring parishes, individual councils may choose very different roles.

Principal councils (district, county, unitary etc) also vary in their approach to working with parish and town councils. Some have been very proactive in working with the local council sector to build ambitious programmes of delegation and devolution. Others have less enthusiasm, sometimes shaped by examples of negotiations that have failed, or by concerns about capacity.

At their best, and whatever the scale of their activity, town and parish councils bring:

- a close knowledge of the needs of their communities, with ability to tailor activity accordingly
- an ability to mobilise their communities, coordinating and harnessing individuals and groups to address local priorities
- action that is backed by an ability to raise money locally through a precept.

A key finding of this work is that successful deeper engagement of town and parish councils cannot be imposed by a principal council

> **Local action must involve leadership from both principal and local councils and will evolve through experience.**

Local action must involve leadership from both principal and local councils and will evolve through experience.

This document sets out a framework to guide principal councils who are interested in supporting parish and town councils to play an increased role in local service delivery and place-shaping. It focuses on three areas:

- Building trust - the underlying principles, shared commitments and ongoing dialogue. The key components are:
  - a clear statement of intent, ideally co-produced with the town and parish councils in the area, about the purpose, scope and mechanisms for delegation or devolution to the ultra-local level

- scoping and listening, to build an understanding of the town and parish councils in the area
- providing clear information and technical detail about current services or assets as part of a negotiation
- provision of material support, or funding, to ensure sustainability.

- An implementation toolkit – practical approaches and material for how devolution/responsibility shifts will be achieved. This includes:
  - a clear process to manage expectations and set a road-map
  - clarity about legal or contractual mechanisms for delegation or devolution arrangements
  - forms and criteria to ensure transparency
  - capacity building – a set of considerations to help local councils build their capacity for success.

- Other enabling factors for supporting a context of partnership. These cover:
  - collaboration between counties, districts and town and parish councils in "three tier" areas
  - the concept of parish clusters.

This framework has been built from insights from members and practitioners in both the principal and local council sectors and is supported by a selection of case studies to illustrate how it can be applied in practice.

However, the framework must be applied with realism. The diversity of aspiration among both principal and town and parish councils means that it is not realistic to expect a 'big bang' of empowerment. A consistent theme of the research undertaken for this project is that success rely on dialogue; patient building on achievements and learning from experience; and careful balancing of policy and softer political and personal relationships. Local action must involve leadership from both principal and local councils and will evolve through experience.

Introduction

This document presents a framework for principal councils looking to support parish and town (local) councils to play an increased role in local service delivery and place-shaping. While it is aimed at principal councils, the research has also been steered by interviews and discussion with representatives of the local council sector.

Shared Intelligence was commissioned to create this framework by the Local Government Association's (LGA) People and Places Board which represents non-metropolitan areas in England. As a result, the research for this framework has focused specifically on the non-metropolitan experience. Many of the concepts in the framework should nevertheless be relevant to urban councils which have town or parish councils in their areas.

The document includes some reflections about factors that may need to change in national policy to make this framework successful.

Why the focus on town and parish councils?

The potential of parish and town councils to contribute to vibrant and successful local and community governance has grown noticeably in the last decade. The Localism Act 2011, which created a power of general competence for parish and town councils that meet set criteria is one important factor in that. It also created the concept of neighbourhood planning and rights for communities to bid to take on responsibility for assets and services from principal local authorities. **Over 270 new parish or town councils have been created in the last 15 years [https://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council]**. A further indicator of increased activity is the growth in parish precepts which have risen by more than 50 per cent among English parishes from 2014/15 to 2020/21, an increase of £207 million. The creation of some large unitary councils has also been a factor in promoting creative thinking about their role, but activity has not been confined to single tier areas.

Over the last decade, and as part of their approach to delivering with reducing resources, many principal councils have sought to delegate or devolve assets and services to town and parish councils. Cost saving will remain an important context factor for principal councils, but, as this work reflects, it is also an increasing motivation for redesigning local delivery of services in a way that empowers town or parish councils and ensures residents receive efficient and effective services. At its best, this is highly empowering, enabling communities to exercise fine control of factors that affect the wellbeing and appearance of their places.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further shown the importance

of communities for harnessing local action

The COVID-19 pandemic has further shown the importance of communities for harnessing local action and there are many examples from right across the country where parish and town councils have been prime movers in this work, acting with other community and voluntary sector organisations. This sits alongside work to maintain the very local infrastructure that sustains people in their communities, such as green space and local libraries.

It is also clear that existing systemic challenges, such as promoting inclusive growth or tackling social isolation have been made more acute by the pandemic. With deepening financial strains, harnessing continuing community action, as part of sustainable service design, will need to be part of the local recovery response.

This all fits into a context where, in summer 2020, ministers had set out that levelling up and economic recovery would involve strengthening of local institutions, including town and parish councils. After several more months of the pandemic, and two further national lockdowns, ministers' priorities will be with promoting economic recovery. However, the factors that were linked to the parish and town council empowerment statements are likely to remain part of the response, particularly encouraging local action without increasing costs to the taxpayer.

The role of town and parish councils today

A major difficulty in devising a framework for principal councils to work with town and parish councils is defining what they do. They have discretionary legal powers and rights to take action. This means that some of the most active town and parish councils have taken on wide ranging responsibilities from town centre management to running leisure centres and are proactive with social impact initiatives. Others are much more limited and focus on a range of very local amenities, such as litter bins, public seats, their duty to provide allotments, and representing the views of their communities, especially in the planning process.

The National Association of Local Council's (NALC) Devo+ report (2017) cites a Local Government Chronicle 2016 survey about what town and parish councils provide, would like to provide and have the capacity to provide. This establishes that the most widespread functions concern the provision of recreation, public seats, litter bins, small community grants, bus shelters and allotments. The survey also highlighted a list of services that many would aspire to deliver. The top five were listed as: activities for older people; economic growth and business support; highways; traffic calming measures; and youth services and activities. This aspirational list points to an increasing interest in place-shaping and using the local delivery roles that they have to influence outcomes for their communities.

Place-shaping is also a consistent theme of the engagement we have undertaken with the town and parish council sector. It can apply at different scales:

- In Saxilby with Ingleby in Lincolnshire, the parish council receives some support from the district council for emptying bins and litter picking; and from the county council for amenity grass cutting. The parish team is able to be more responsive and can remove fly-tipping quickly. The amenity grass cutting means the parish can ensure consistency in cutting and timing with the work it undertakes through its own grounds team to cut other grass areas around the village, helping it to meet it vision of being 'an area that is attractive for people to live, work, and visit.' The county council also provides some funding for the parish council to operate a community library.
- Dunstable Town Council runs several services under contract from Central Bedfordshire Council, including a community football centre, numerous amenity and high profile town centre bedding areas, as well as older people focused community services. This enables a tight focus on the needs of the town. It has developed several income generating activities and a third of its operations are supported through non precept sources.
- In Audlem in Cheshire East, the parish council has supported a local charity, Audlem and District Community Action, which was set up ten years ago to provide locally based welfare support to vulnerable and socially isolated adults. This promotes social inclusion, community participation and independence; and part of its work is to support carers with respite and mutual assistance. Its role increased during the COVID-19 lockdowns and it now works with five parishes as well as other local public services. The parish involvement helps to provide governance and practical grant application support and roots its work firmly in the community.
- The Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils is working on the role for parish councils in assisting with shaping and driving the very local offer from cross-agency wellbeing teams that can promote prevention.

There are various documents which capture the role of local councils. These include:

- The National Improvement Strategy for Parish and Town Councils identified five themes of parish and town council activity, and recognises that individual councils may choose to fulfil one or all of these roles:
  - service deliverer – using their range of discretionary powers in areas from local transport to local economy
  - culture creator – creating opportunities for local people to come together and participate in cultural, community-focused, and recreational activities
  - place shaper – whether through neighbourhood planning or in maintaining local land and property
  - builder of community resilience – for example by facilitating community participation in action on local issues
  - community leadership – exploiting their representative mandate.
- Documents from county associations that draw a distinction between roles that are delivered on the basis of 'partial' or 'full' engagement and with or without "accountability". This points to the different mechanisms through which town and parish councils can take on their different roles.
- Recent business cases for unitary local government. For example, the single county unitary cases for Somerset and North Yorkshire show a menu of assets and services that could be devolved or developed as roles for town and parish councils. The list from the 2020 One Somerset case for a single county unitary council is reproduced in Appendix II. This provides a possible list of areas where the role of local councils may develop. It is not exhaustive but covers a range of classic town and parish council roles and more complex delivery and place-shaping drawn from both county and district functions, such as local town economic development; local green transport schemes; community libraries; social housing liaison and monitoring; wider health and wellbeing support; and enforcement of environmental health matters.

For the purposes of this framework, we consider that there is a spectrum of the potential nature of local council activity. This tries to blend the outcome focused themes from the National Improvement Strategy with the concept of the extent of engagement from the county association documents. The table below identifies five broad categories of activity and indicates some potential roles that sit within them.

Five broad categories of activity and their roles

Influence and respond	Place-shaping	Community activation	Service/asset delivery	Service/asset accountability
- Comment on planning applications. - Respond to principal authority consultations. - Representing the town or parish at area boards. - Influence service levels of principal authority contracts that affect their areas (eg grass cutting).	- Neighbourhood planning. - Affordable housing. - Running local events. - Encouraging local commercial activity eg pop up cafes at community events or seasonally. - Vision for local parks, land and buildings. - Community shops. - Community centres.	- Co-ordinating volunteers. - Support to community action (as in COVID-19 pandemic) and community support. - Befriending services. - Grant and fundraising eg to support libraries - Economic development, including job clubs - Climate change initiatives. - Youth projects.	- Community libraries. - Grounds maintenance. - Sports facilities. - Minor highways functions (eg footpaths, signs and verges, cleansing). - Car park provision and management. - Leisure and arts centres.	- Allotments. - Bus shelters. - Cemeteries and church yards. - Community centres. - Litter bins/litter picking. - Markets. - Museums. - Parks/open space. - Play areas. - Public conveniences. - Tourist information centres.

This illustrates that there are multiple ways through which town and parish councils can support and release the capabilities of their communities. Delivering services and having responsibility or accountability for assets can have a very important role to play in supporting that work, but parish and town councils can be active without needing to be involved in taking on devolved delivery roles.

An understanding of the spectrum of what town and parish councils may take on, and the range of ways of achieving this, is fundamental to effective local council engagement. This creates a context for creative discussion allowing consideration of how to obtain the best value for money as well as improving outcomes for local people. However, the sheer range also illustrates a central problem for a principal council – how to allow creative discussion to take place, but while keeping this within manageable parameters for its own capacity and priority objectives. This is delicate balancing act. The framework here aims to serve as a practical guide to some of the key considerations.

The need for a framework

Town and parish (local) councils can be an integral part of vibrant communities, along with voluntary and other community sector organisations. However, harnessing this potential at scale is difficult. Town and parish councils have powers, but very limited duties. This means that everything is affected by local variables and even in neighbouring parishes, individual councils may choose very different roles.

Central to this is the huge variety in the town and parish council sector. Size, capacity and appetite vary from local council to local council. Many are small, with a part-time clerk and have little in common with the largest and most active town councils. One indicator is that 67 per cent of the 10,000 local councils in England have a precept of £25,000 or lower while 66 have a precept of more than £1 million. **The median precept is £11,683 and the mean is £61,751 [https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-council-tax]** . Reflecting the spectrum of activity described in the previous chapter, a neat universal view of what town and parish councils do, or should do, does not exist.

he way in which principal councils engage with town and parish councils is also highly varied. Approaches to localism continue to evolve in response to different drivers, including financial, political and priorities about place-focus and community engagement. Structural diversity is also a factor here. In two tier areas, many counties have engaged town and parish councils in delivery of libraries and minor highway maintenance and improvement and will see a growing role for them in assisting in preventative functions that can reduce the burden on social care. For many districts, the emphasis has been on giving town and parish councils responsibility for local assets and a role in a range of services including leisure, parking and tourist provision. Ambitious towns and parishes in 'three tier' areas will need to work with both their county and district councils.

A further point is that town and parish councils do not exist everywhere - about 30 per cent of the English population live in areas with town or parish councils, with much less coverage in metropolitan areas. Many unitary councils are seen as leaders in delegating or devolving to their parish councils. It is notable that examples such as Cornwall and Wiltshire are fully parished, and in Northumberland eight new town or parish councils were created in parallel with the transition to the new unitary council, and almost doubled the 'parished' population of the county.

Many areas have delivered service improvements for residents through programmes of working together to find the right level for delivery or asset management. However, in many other areas, principal councils are more reticent about working with town and parish councils, or extending their role beyond the large town councils:

There is resistance to arrangements that are likely to lead to a patchwork of provision. One interviewee said: "We don't have universal coverage of town and parish councils, so it's difficult to apply a consistent method. The issue is economy of scale."
- There is concern about transferring responsibilities with the risks of retaining accountability.
- There are also issues of perception of the capacity of small or medium local councils, or a fear of creating alternative power bases on larger town councils.
- Fears that delivery in small parishes relies on a very small number of key individuals, and providing a risk to continuity of delivery. One interviewee told us: "Even if they look well managed, there are too many single points of failure".
- Concern at the high incidence of uncontested seats in parish elections, with resulting questions about how representative the most local tier of local government is.
- Concern that increasing parish precepts creates a burden of 'double taxation' for the residents in an area that takes on responsibilities from a principal council and has to raise tax revenue locally to pay for it.

The research for this project has also identified frustrations among town and parish councils:

- Frustration about examples where principal councils were unable to provide clear financial or contract information about current services that were devolution candidates.
- A concern that principal councils do not always recognise the diversity of the sector and where a flexible approach (for example in relation to retention of car park income, or freehold asset transfer) would enable a strong town or parish council to deliver outcome benefits.
- Concern that financial pressures on principal councils mean that many can no longer invest in the resources needed to engage with town and parish councils and find the most creative approaches.

We have, however, identified many examples of very effective joint working. At their best, and whatever the scale of their activity, it is clear that local councils bring:

- a close knowledge of the needs of their communities, with ability to tailor activity accordingly, particularly for quality of life services
- an ability to mobilise their communities, coordinating and harnessing individuals and groups to address local priorities
- action that is backed by an ability to raise money locally through a precept.

> **There is great potential here and for many principal councils there is great interest in investing in relationships with town and parish councils.**

There is great potential here and for many principal councils there is great interest in investing in relationships with town and parish councils. They can be part of an approach to dealing with financial pressures, while also supporting a focus on the different needs of places and of engagement with communities. The idea of a framework is to identify the elements of practice that contribute to enabling town and parish councils to fulfil their potential. It aims to be realistic, however. A consistent theme of the research undertaken for this project is that success relies on dialogue; patient building on achievements and learning from experience; and careful balancing of policy and softer political and personal relationships. The diversity of aspiration among both principal and town and parish councils means that it is not realistic to expect a 'big bang' of empowerment. However, where there is an interest in encouraging parish and town councils to play an increased role in local service delivery and place-shaping, this framework aims to set out the practical steps that can support it.

The framework

This framework aims to set out a practical set of actions and considerations for a principal council that is considering working more closely with its town and parish (local) council sector. It is written with an understanding that just as appetite varies in the local council sector, so principal councils vary in their appetite to transfer responsibility to local councils. However, for those that are considering pushing this agenda further:

- It aims to address some of the barriers – how to engage such a disparate sector; work with them effectively and build capacity.
- It takes a broad view of the role of local councils. Some of the detail focuses on complex aspects, such as asset or service transfer, but recognises there is a multiplicity of ways to work with local councils, from place-shaping to active devolution.
- It draws on experience and highlights some in case studies, but its content will need to be adapted to local context.
- It provides some examples illustrating the time and costs that may be involved.

The framework's principal components are shown in the diagram below.

Building trust

The underlying principles, shared commitments and ongoing dialogue.

Implementation toolkit

How devolution/responsibility shifts will be achieved?

Other enabling factors

Supporting a context of partnership

Building trust

The underlying principles, shared commitments and ongoing dialogue.

Intent: What do you want to achieve?

Scoping and listening: Understanding the variation in the local council sector.

Information: Providing clear information

Material support: Support for sustainable arrangements

Discussions with leaders and practitioners have repeatedly highlighted that it is open dialogue between principal and local councils which provides the foundation for effective engagement, whether that is about transfer of assets or services, or encouraging highly local interventions on social or environmental problems. This dialogue needs to take place in a context of mutual trust. Trust cannot be designed, but good building blocks include:

- Having mechanisms for trust based long-term dialogue between the principal and the local council sectors in the area. If they do not exist, consider establishing regular local council forums or involving the local council sector in meetings of local strategic partners.
- Jointly build clear joint working principles with the local council sector. One approach is to create a charter. This will commonly cover some of the basic principles of how these different members of the local government family work together. The charter concept is familiar and was discussed in the LGA and NALC's 2013 publication Modelling Devolution.

However, ultimately, it is successful action and outcomes that will sustain progress and engage more local councils. It is therefore important that the building blocks of trust are designed in an action focused way. There are two aspects here that are important for principal councils to consider as part of the way that they frame the agenda: intent and how they listen to local councils.

Intent

Fruitful dialogue requires clear messages about what concrete actions or changes can be contemplated. From the point of view of a principal council, this first requires it to have a clear understanding of whether delegation/devolution to local councils will be a core operating principle of the principal council or a looser aspiration. Understanding this purpose should shape the approach and the structures, processes and investment put in place to support it. Different responses are possible, for example, depending on the desired balance of savings, localism, key outcomes, or unlocking resource at ultra-local level.

Three indicative possible approaches and their implications are shown below.

Intent: Three approaches

Localism transformation	Service led delegation/devolution	Place led
- Clear outcomes sough (eg for health and wellbeing) - Programme style: range of pilots; review; roll out more widely. - Dedicated resource eg localism team to co-ordinate cross council response - Community governance review for unparished areas. - Also working with other community groups. - Common when a new council is created.	- Targeted scope eg highways, public realm assets, but emphasis on achieving economy of scale. - Service/property/legal led. - Focus of activity when large contracts renewed. - Efficiency an important focus.	- Focus on key locations and on town councils, as well as community groups in target areas. - May emphasise key local assets and buildings. - Can help make real actions on targets such as net zero carbon. - Case by case response to initiative from smaller town and parishes.

These are illustrative approaches and principal councils will need to develop one that fits with their own aspirations, understanding of the local council sector's capability and their own resources and capacity to manage the process. Other factors that affect this include type of principal council and extent to which the area is parished. A large unitary council, with ability to look across all service areas, is most likely to see benefit in the localism transformation approach and this has been a focus of the unitary councils created in 2009 and subsequently. A place led approach may work for a district council that is not fully parished and wishes to focus on key locations.

We recommend that this approach is developed into a published statement of intent, as a way of framing conversations with individual parish or town councils. The evidence from the qualitative research for this project is that it is the conversations that make a difference, but they need to be catalysed. It is important to say that the process of developing the statement is also a key opportunity to engage the local council sector and build joint ownership. A statement of intent is a helpful guideline and joint development mitigates the risk of it being seen as the principal council imposing its view.

A statement of intent can embrace charter type principles but should be an action-focused document. For a principal council, it sets a context for realistic discussions to match where it can devote capacity to processing them and can reflect economy of scale considerations. For local councils, a clear statement of intent will help to manage expectations and signal a direction of travel against which an individual local council can set its own vision.

What should a statement of intent cover?

Potential scope

- Purpose – objectives of greater delegation or devolution to town and parish councils and setting this in the context of local strategies and partnerships.
- The wider localism context – how other groups (voluntary or community sector) may be engaged.
- An indication of the areas or core area of focus:
  - Whether predominantly one service area or multiple.
  - The range of potential mechanisms of delivery.
  - The spectrum of relationships envisaged – for example, from collaborative place-shaping to full devolution or asset transfer, but with frankness about the current emphasis. Managing expectations means being clear about what is not on offer.
- Principles about funding: for example, tapering support, ongoing support, continuity of grants, retention of income; the potential of package approaches to balance costs and income opportunities.
- How the principal council will provide support.
- Examples of short case studies to bring the concepts to life.

Examples

Cornwall Council: this was stated as part of the then county council's 2007 bid for unitary status and identified potential to delegate environmental services, but also aspects of community development, small affordable housing projects and support to their influencing role in planning, licensing and highways decisions. Details have evolved and later documents have described different potential levels of town and parish council role (from influence and joint delivery through to devolution); assessment criteria; and an approach to standards assurance. The council's 2020 strategy document **Localism in Cornwall - The Power of Community [https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/people-and-communities/localism/localism-vision-and-strategy-2020/]** describes four core principles for a localist approach, applying to town and parish councils and to wider community and voluntary groups. These are re-enforced with a description of how the council will support them and measure success.

Milton Keynes Council: has published a document: **Working Together: An Approach to Devolution of Assets (Facilities) and Services. [https://milton-keynes.cmis.uk.com/milton-keynes/Document.ashx?czJKcaeAi5tUFL1DTL2UE4zNRBcoShgo=jVqZC17qT9bXYO5cZSFBWlpedBhYLc1wi6tzF9VE8F9UYnw1%2F4Y21A%3D%3** This sets out the potential benefits of devolving assets and services to local communities and parish and town councils, noting both local ownership and financial aspects. It describes the learning from previous programmes and the scope for the focus of the current programme. It is a practical document, which also sets out a range of possible mechanisms for asset and service devolution; criteria for considering applications; and some successful local case studies.

Wyre Forest District Council: has a published **Localism Strategy [https://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/community-wellbeing-and-environment/localism-in-wyre-forest/localism-strategy.aspx]**. This sets out a context of building on five years of work with town and parish councils and other local organisations, supporting them to take ownership of assets or services. It sets out the principles that will be used in guiding a negotiation and the extent and nature of financial support that may be available. It also lists the delegation and devolution arrangements currently in place with town and parish councils and other local organisations.

Engaging individual local councils

The statement of intent idea is an inherently technocratic concept. It cannot alone create action. This will only come from engagement. For areas with many parish or town councils (some large unitary councils have more than 200 and several districts have more than 100) this is challenging. The difficulty of working with so many individual local councils was cited as a barrier to town and parish council engagement by some of our interviewees. With this in mind, we suggest two components to engagement – scoping and listening – which should be followed in tandem.

Scoping

A principal council will want to take a view about where to focus its outreach to the local council sector. Size may be a factor here – a large town council, with a large tax base has far more levers to build the income and capacity to take on more responsibility than a small parish council with a few hundred electors, five members and a part-time clerk. **Some large town councils charge precepts that are higher than their district council's share of a band D council tax bill [https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-council-tax]**, and are clearly very different from small parishes. However, size is not the only determining factor and there are examples of small parishes that have taken on responsibilities to fit a vision for their area. For example, Sheviock Parish Council in Cornwall has a tax base of 335 and has completed a devolution arrangement where it has taken on responsibility for a range of assets around Portwrinkle Harbour.

We recommend using a range of indicators pragmatically. For example:

- In a service led approach, key considerations may include priority engagement with outlying parishes because those are the ones which involve the greatest travel time (and hence delivery cost) for grounds maintenance teams.
- In a localism led approach, identifying areas where there is a priority need to improve outcomes, perhaps in areas such as rural isolation.
- In a place-based approach, thinking through the indicators of potential. For example, locations that are attractive to tourists may offer potential to discuss how the local council can use assets creatively to bring in more commercial activity. In a place-based approach, with an emphasis on mutually beneficial asset transfer, it may mean focusing on those areas where assets are located.

Listening

A key message we have heard is the need to 'follow the energy'. No amount of careful scoping or segmenting on the basis of data and desk analysis will produce a true picture of where there is interest in taking on new responsibilities. This means that principal councils do need to invest in how they connect with the local council sector and their communities:

- Where they have been established, local area forums and networks are helpful in providing a line of communication for all local councils, whether large or small, to raise issues of local importance, and to highlight their ambitions, to the principal council.
- Helping members with community empowerment, ensuring they understand the spectrum of potential roles and mechanisms, so they can help to channel local energy. Creating consensus between town or parish councillors, ward councillors and principal council leading members is a crucial component of successful engagement.
- Creating a corporate front door for town and parish councils to discuss opportunities or raise concerns. This is a consistent message from the principal councils that have been most active in promoting the role of their town and parish councils. More detail in the next chapter.

One of the sensitivities in this agenda is the concern that devolution or delegation will mean giving local councils an ultimatum – that either they take on a service or an asset or it will close. We fully accept that what is now an increasingly strained financial context may require difficult choices of this nature. However, wherever possible, early structured scoping and listening should aim to facilitate identification of areas of mutual potential. It is needed in order to create the conditions for purposeful dialogue.

Provision of information

Several of our interviewees from the town and parish council sector highlighted the difficulty of gaining information about assets or services that they were considering taking on from principal councils.

This is a problematic area. There are several examples of policies and charters that commit principal councils to providing transparent information. However, in practice it is often difficult to disaggregate detail about the true costs that will be relevant for town and parish councils. For example:

- Do grounds maintenance costs include travel time or just time spent?
- Isolating costs of an individual building in a wider complex.
- Isolating costs that are bundled into a contract.

Principal councils should commit to providing as much information as possible, and assistance in interpretation of it, but this is an area that in some cases will remain as a risk.

Material support

This is a key message. Reaching a sustainable arrangement where a service or asset is taken on by a parish or town council often involves the provision of some support. In many cases principal councils will offer dowries or grants to assist a local council in taking on services or assets. Examples include:

- libraries – ongoing provision of access to book stock and county IT support to community run libraries
- time limited grants, for example for a five-year period, or grants which taper off over time
- capital grants to assist in renovating an asset to enable better use or to make it fit for current environmental expectations and requirements.

One approach is for principal councils to negotiate delegation or devolution packages with town or parish councils. This can be a means to create an arrangement which collectively is revenue neutral – for example passing on the ability to retain car park revenues alongside transfer of an asset is a means for providing a revenue stream that can offset the costs that a town or parish council may incur as a result of the transfer.

Toolkit for developing and implementing the framework

Implementation toolkit

How devolution/responsibility shifts will be achieved?

Process: Managing expectation about what is needed.

Forms: Structured provision of information

Mechanisms: Type of agreement used

Approval criteria: Transparency about the considerations

Capacity building: Creating the infrastructure for success

One of the messages from our qualitative research is that a balance is needed between consistency of process and flexibility in agreeing a devolution arrangement with a town or parish council. There is no single toolkit but we highlight some approaches and materials that principal councils should consider developing, or adapting, in order to support efficient discussions and to manage expectations. This is most relevant for the service and asset parts of the spectrum of activity described in the table of activities set out above. In many cases, principal councils' community asset transfer policies (established under the Localism Act 2011) will provide a strong starting point and it is a matter of adapting or extending them to the anticipated scenarios with town and parish (local) councils; and then in communicating with the sector about it.

Process

For the purposes of managing expectations, it is helpful to set out a process. Some national resources exist to help with this – for example, Locality has produced a range of guidance notes, funded by the then Department of Communities and Local Government under the MyCommunity programme, which help to set out the legal requirements of Community Asset Transfer. But in addition, what is needed to facilitate dialogue locally are simple explanations of the main stages. For example, it is helpful to set out steps such as:

- expression of interest and associated decisions and timescales
- full business case creation and approval (both principal and local council)
- political decision
- proceed to head of terms and transfer.

One problem we have heard of is effort being spent in negotiation but failing at a late stage on relatively minor details – such as whether a principal council can provide grounds maintenance equipment. This is a risk for both parties, but a clear process with accompanying documents, moving through stages with more detail being added, provides some mitigation, aiming to highlight potential stumbling blocks as early as possible.

Mechanisms

As the noted in the table setting out five categories of activity, [] service delivery and asset management aspects of town and parish (local) council roles can take place through different types of arrangement with different levels of responsibility or accountability. The arrangement chosen will depend on a range of factors, including policy and appetite but also where powers and duties reside between principal council and local council. Detailed analysis of this is beyond the scope of this framework, and legal and/or expert property management advice should be sought. However, some high-level observations are offered about the range of possibilities.

Some of the main options are shown below.

For services

- **Joint delivery, or topping up [https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/LGR-report-by-Mel-Usher-final-1.pdf]** –parish and town councils may choose to enhance an existing service provided by the principal council by funding additional work or fundraising on behalf of it. This could take the form of contributions to a principal council run community library, encouraging community participation with support/sponsorship; coordinating volunteers or purchasing additional grounds maintenance services through an existing principal council contract.
- **Service delivery delegation**
  - In the case of a discretionary service this is likely to be a service delegation agreement which the principal council will monitor to ensure the terms of the contract are met. Such arrangements may be used, for example, in the case of community library provision, or running sports facilities under delegated authority form the principal council.
  - In the case of a statutory service, monitoring is likely to be tighter and the principal council will be able to terminate if the statutory responsibilities are not being met. This may be used, for example, in the case of minor highways functions, where accountability remains with the principal council.

In both cases, contracts could detail arrangements for funding – for example whether the town or parish can retain income; and any funding from the principal council; and the term of the agreement.

Note in some cases agency agreements may be used – sometimes as a way of enabling a parish to carry out a function for which it does not have a power.

For assets

- **Leasehold transfer of assets.** This may be made with or without funding.
- **Full transfer of assets.** Transfer of the freehold of land or assets.

Forms

Many principal councils have forms that they use to capture expressions of interest and applications from town or parish councils who are interested in taking on services or assets. These are closely linked to the community asset transfer process.

Links to example application forms

Milton Keynes - an expression of interest form and an asset / service transfer form [https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/leisure-tourism-and-culture/leisure-and-community-activity-hub/an-approach-to-devolution] .

Wiltshire – an asset transfer application form. [http://pages.wiltshire.gov.uk/planningapplication-transfer-council-asset.rtf]

Forms are no substitute for dialogue and ideally no application should be a surprise to a principal council. However, the discipline of the questions they require addressing helps to focus attention on to the practical considerations that need to be addressed. The use of an initial expression of interest form is a good way to create early engagement and ultimately to avoid nugatory work.

Approval criteria

Again, it is helpful for managing expectations to be clear what criteria need to be satisfied for a devolution or delegation arrangement to go ahead, from the point of view of the principal council. Common features we have found include the following:

Approval criteria

Criterion area	Rationale

Criterion area	Rationale
Revenue implication	Value for money. Revenue neutrality is often stated as a criterion and this guides decisions about the extent of any ongoing or tapering financial support that accompanies a delegation or transfer arrangement. This can also be used creatively to package up different components – for example allowing a parish council to keep car park revenue to offset taking on other roles that have a cost implication.
Business case for both local and principal council	Ensuring that there is a business case for both the principal and local council involved is a helpful step for checking on the sustainability of the proposal.
Outcome benefit	Ensuring that service quality is at a minimum maintained, but ideally enhanced by a new arrangement. Do both parties see outcome benefits from the proposal?
Governance	Does the proposal have local support (especially if there are precept implications)?
Capacity	Does an application demonstrate capacity to deliver on a sustained basis, and to meet any monitoring standards?
Practicality	This includes the impact on the principal authority's service provision – what impact does it have on economy of scale of existing contracts?
Equality, diversity and community cohesion	Evidence the project will meet all the relevant requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and assist in promoting community cohesion.

This is a guide to criteria only. Assessment criteria have been set out in Cornwall (specific to town and parish council work) and by several principal councils as part of their community asset transfer processes. An important message is that criteria should allow for flexibility in the design of agreements, potentially enabling a package of different services and arrangements as a way to achieve the best outcomes form local people.

Capacity building

One of the barriers to greater delegation and devolution to town and parish councils is the question of capacity. The Local Government Chronicle special report from 2016 clearly shows a gap between the aspirations of local councils and their perception of their own capacity to deliver. From the principal council point of view, our interviews highlighted concerns about local councils and 'single points of failure'. In essence this is a concern that a small organisation may rely on the enthusiasm of key individuals, or that delivery may rely on a small number of individuals. If they move away, cease to be involved with the town or parish (local) council or become sick, there is a risk to continuity of service.

For individual cases of service or asset transfer, an assessment about risks and mitigations about continuity of service will need to be taken on a case-by-case basis and can be part of the assessment criteria.

However, the local council sector has made a strong effort in the last decade to promote standards. The **Local Council Award Scheme [https://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/improvement-and-development/local-council-award-scheme]** provides a framework of peer assessed accreditation for individual councils to they meet standards set by the sector, and to set the conditions for continued improvement. **In October 2020, 743 town or parish councils had achieved or were listed as working towards one of the three levels (Foundation, Quality and Quality Gold). [https://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/our-work/lcas/2940-lcas-accredited-councils-list/file]**

Town or parish council clerks and other officers can also work towards several bespoke qualifications at different levels, from Introduction to Local Council Administration (ILCA), through the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CLICA), and beyond to Community Governance qualifications. The scheme is administered by the Society of Local Council Clerks and the CILCA qualification is at level 3 of the National Qualifications Framework. Having a CILCA qualified clerk helps a town or parish council to gain the power of general competence and contributes to a Quality or Quality Gold Award level.

The sector also has an independently chaired Improvement and Development Board, which was established in 2013. It oversees and steers the award and qualifications programmes and involves stakeholders from across the sector, and from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the LGA in shaping an overall improvement approach for town and parish councils.

There are a number of county associations across England, generally representing all local councils within a principal council area. These bodies act as representatives for their membership and for local councils within the area and support their local councils through the provision and implementation of assistance and guidance.

However, beyond this any move to a greater drive to engagement of local councils does need consideration of local arrangements for capacity building and how the local council sector and principal council sector can work together on this. Exactly how it is provided will depend on local circumstances and available resources. We recommend that it is developed in close liaison with the local county association of local councils who normally itself offers training and other resources. It is helpful to build a shared understanding of the capacity that needs to be built and why. Examples we have heard include:

- Highways – Devon County Council run a scheme to support town and parish councils which provide highway repair services within their area on behalf of the county council. Devon helps to facilitate their involvement by providing public liability cover for the work, as well as training, guidance and risk assessments for councils partaking in the scheme.
- Social value – support with how to demonstrate social value when making grant applications.
- Engagement and communication – guidance on how to engage with local people, including on issues such as the rationale for proposed precept increases.
- Advice and clear information about the process and implications of staff transfers.

Single point of contact

Increasingly transferring responsibilities to town and parish councils will involve multiple principal council teams and packages of agreements. The interviews we have undertaken have highlighted the importance in this context of a single point of contact, or gateway team, into principal council. This has a number of positive impacts:

- it can provide signposting to responsible officers in the council
- it is important for accountability – a gatekeeper for the overall principles and ways of working agreed to support the overall policy
- outreach. A single point of contact can help to negotiate a cross-cutting arrangement that meets the approval criteria. It is this role that provides the practical work to bring principles and statements of intent to life.

A message we have heard from county associations is that financial strains in principal councils have led to reduction or loss in localism officers, which in turn has reduced the capacity to engage with the local council sector.

Change management in the principal council

Particularly in the case of a localism transformation approach, a principal council will need to consider how it undertakes change management in its own organisation to create a culture that supports its vision of working with town and parish (local) councils. This includes:

- ensuring established middle managers learn how to work with a developing culture of engagement or delegation/devolution to local councils
- promoting the message to all service areas, including the legal and property teams who will have a central role to play
- large principal councils that have adopted a localism transformation approach have established senior level boards to provide strategic direction, set policy and oversee the programme.

Other issues to consider

Other enabling factors

Supporting a context of partnership

Supporting a context of partnership

County - district collaboration	Clusters
Working together across all the tiers	Town and parish cluster arrangements

Collaboration between counties and districts

We have not found an example of a detailed action focused statement of intent for delegation or devolution to town and parish (local) councils owned by all the principal councils in a two-tier area. This may reflect the practical difficultly of agreeing a common approach across different councils with different responsibilities. However, counties and districts do work together in agreeing details of individual delegation or devolution schemes (for example where they both own land in close proximity). **There is also an example of a principles-based charter from Warwickshire [https://www.walc.org.uk/component/edocman/other-documents/public/warwickshire-local-councils-charter?Itemid=]** which is agreed between the county council, county association and all the parished districts.

Joint working is helpful for allowing dialogue to flow beyond service delivery and into creative place-shaping/community activation, and joint work undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic may provide a platform. However, it is important to be realistic and focus energies where they are likely to be most fruitfully deployed and this may be on a case-by-case basis. Such an approach would be consistent with one of the findings of a previous LGA report examining the drivers of collaboration between the county and district tiers of local government. This noted that effective collaboration need not involve every district in a county area and that there is often a case for adopting different arrangements in different parts of a county. The same report noted the importance of a mobilising topic or initiative in focusing on outcomes for people, places and communities. An issue such as the climate emergency or rural isolation may prove to be a powerful force for dialogue across all three tiers of council together.

Parish and town clusters or hubs and spokes

One potential solution to the question of capacity and critical mass in local councils is to encourage them to work in clusters. **Several principal councils encourage it through their parish charters (for example Bath and North East Somerset [https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/final_parish_charter_-_may_2018_1.pdf]**) or with statements on their websites (**for example, West Berkshire, which refers to the potential role of clusters in community interest companies [http://parish.westberks.gov.uk/article/33942/Clustering-and-Community-Interest-Companies]**). There are some examples of parishes coming together around contracts, for example:

- Stewkley Parish Council in Buckinghamshire. Building on a devolved grass cutting scheme, the parish council set up a company, Stewkley Enterprise Agency, to deliver the contract through employing young people and other residents as 'part time mowers'. It then used resources through a government programme, Our Place, to promote the Stewkley model to five other parishes, known as the Stewkley cluster.
- In Hampshire, the county council has distributed small amounts of funding to parish clusters to support shared parish lengthsman schemes to carry out straightforward highways maintenance tasks requested by a parish council.

However, a constant message from our engagement with stakeholders is that clustering is difficult. It is clear that many parishes are determinedly sovereign and are often reluctant to enter into arrangements with neighbours. We have also heard concerns about the lack of clarity about the legal framework that governs the ability of town and parish councils to enter into clustering arrangements or joint committees. A practical suggestion is to link the drawdown of budgets delegated to area boards to parish cluster arrangements. There is some experience of this in Cornwall. This can be a helpful early step in building trust and collaboration.

Conclusion

The role of town and parish councils in very local service delivery and place-shaping is one that is developing and has great potential. However, the pattern is highly uneven and in some areas principal and local councils have yet to find the most productive way to engage. The huge variation in the town and parish council sector, where the largest town councils really have very little in p

common with the smallest rural parishes, exacerbates this uneven pattern. It is further complicated by variation in the principal council sector – while many two-tier areas have entered into delegation and devolution arrangements with towns and parishes, it is in unitary areas where the most activity has been seen.

The framework presented in this document aims to describe some building block actions that can be taken to encourage engagement and to allow this to take place in as transparent and open a context as possible. It will need tailoring to local context and priorities. However, some key messages emerge:

- **Dialogue**. Fruitful action results from active dialogue and this needs to involve members and officers. The components of this framework are best seen as representing actions that can be taken to create a platform for discussion and engagement. Delegated or devolved arrangements cannot be imposed by a principal council. Local action must involve leadership from both principal and local councils and will evolve through experience.
- **Investment**. The case studies that follow aim to share some experience about the level of resource that is needed to make delegation and devolution arrangements succeed. While delegating and devolving services and assets to town or parish councils can be used as part of a strategy to deliver with increasing resource pressures, it does require investment. This may be financial (such as grants or other payments associated with asset transfers) and in staff time. There is a clear link between successful engagement with town and parish councils and having community development teams and senior staff providing a corporate front door to local council partners.
- **Flexibility**. Policies set direction but should be expected to change. Success relies on finding agreement between different sets of members – town or parish council members; ward councillors and council leadership, as well as between officers. These softer criteria require flexible and creative thinking.
- **Patience**. The LGA and NALC's joint publication Modelling devolution uses the expression 'evolution not revolution' in describing one of several lessons about the experience of devolving more responsibility to local councils. This message remains relevant. Experience builds up over time and good experiences can be used to sell concepts to more town or parish councils. It is unrealistic to expect change to happen quickly.

Reflections

Carrying out this work has highlighted the great potential of the role of town and parish councils in delivering services closely tailored to the needs of communities. The framework offers some practical steps for encouraging more delegation and devolution to the most local level of local government.

However, successful application of the framework will ultimately depend on the appetite of individual town or parish councils and principal councils to explore devolution options.

There are a number of factors that would need to be addressed to promote wide take up:

- **Legal framework**. We heard that one barrier to delegation or devolution to town and parish councils is whether all parties consider that they have the legal power to carry out particular functions. Given that the power of general competence only applies to towns or parishes that meet certain criteria, many potential activities rely on interpretation of powers provided in very old statutes. We recommend that the LGA and NALC maintain a log of cases of ambiguity so that they can work with Government to find opportunities to address these if suitably related legislative opportunities arise, or through private members' bills.
- **Election of parish and town council members**. The high number of uncontested seats creates a negative perception of the local council sector among some principal council members. Particularly in the context of the trend for rising precepts, parish and town councils need to be encouraged to work with their communities to encourage local people to present themselves for election. As the most local rung of local democracy, town and parish councils can also be a gateway into representative democracy for councillors. Encouraging more contesting of elections should also be used as a means to encourage younger and more diverse representation.
- **Clustering**. This is an area of unfulfilled potential. Some guidance was jointly produced by the Commission for Rural Communities and NALC in 2009. It would be helpful for this to be updated; to provide recent examples of successful clusters or joint committees; and to highlight whether any change is needed to the legal basis for joint working between parishes.

It is also important to recognise factors that sustain successful work. Town and parish councils' ability to set precepts is part of this. There are concerns about 'double taxation, and some principal councils actively design transfer schemes with packages to avoid this. However, a clear message we heard was that any move to cap precepts would 'kill off localism'.

Diversity of size and aspiration is a strength in enabling parish and town councils to respond closely to the needs of their communities. However, it does not encourage the consolidation of town and parish councils as a level of local governance that can consistently take on assets, services or wider place-shaping roles. With the local council sector's current structures, asymmetry in provision is an inevitable result of any drive to promote more involvement of town and parish councils. Addressing this would need

change to the structure of town and parish councils. First, with very large numbers of parishes in several principal council areas, detailed dialogue of the sort that we know is essential will be very resource intensive and effectively places a ceiling on the extent and pace of delegation and devolution. Secondly, smaller parish councils will always be limited in potential by the size of their tax base, particularly given the practical difficulty of clustering. Finally, for principal councils that are partially parished, there is the further barrier to devolution of concerns about economy of scale. Any serious attempt to promote a more consistent role of town and parish councils would need to be associated with consideration of structural change in the sector – evening up the size and capacity variations.

Case studies

Milton Keynes Council

A cooperative council working to deliver stronger, more sustainable local communities through devolution

Milton Keynes Council

Number of parishes	Total parish precept levied (2021/21)	Per cent of population covered by parishes
48 (Town or Parish Councils or Parish meetings)	£8,501,088	100%

Milton Keynes developed a toolkit to support Community Asset Transfer in 2012, following the implementation of the Localism Act 2011. After a period of community engagement, and the transfer of five pilot assets, the toolkit was adopted by the council and used to support transfer of some assets to parish councils within Milton Keynes.

Between 2016 and 2018, in response to budget pressures, the council discussed with the town and parish councils whether they would be interested in taking over landscape and grounds maintenance services in their areas. Six parish and town (local) councils had previously taken on devolved landscaping services in 2014 prior to the council putting landscape and grounds maintenance services out to tender at that time. Building on this, and in consultation with the town and parish council sector locally, a framework was developed to outline the potential for wider devolution of services. This framework was adopted by the council in 2018, initially to sit alongside the Community Asset Transfer programme, and subsequently, in 2019, rolled together into a single asset transfer and service devolution programme for working with town and parish councils.

The toolkit for this combined programme: **Working Together: An Approach to Devolution of Assets (Facilities) and Services [https://milton-keynes.cmis.uk.com/milton-keynes/Document.ashx? czJKcaeAi5tUFL1DTL2UE4zNRBcoShgo=jVqZC17qT9bXYO5cZSFBWlpedBhYLc1wi6tzF9VE8F9UYnw1%2F4Y21A%3D%3D&** supports ambitious local councils in approaching Milton Keynes council and asking for the devolution of assets or services.

Asset transfers/devolution

The programme is currently focused on supporting town and parish councils with the devolution of the following types of asset:

- Amenity Land
- Play Areas
- Public Toilets
- Parks and Open Spaces
- Seats
- Footway Lighting
- Depots
- Bus Shelters
- Monuments
- Litter Bins
- Grit Bins

These transfers are, in many cases, freehold transfers from the principal council. To date, Milton Keynes Council has transferred the freehold to 35 assets. Up to around 2015, many of these were smaller assets, such as small pieces of land, but as confidence in the devolution has grown, several town and parish councils have taken on larger assets, including a leisure centre.

Service devolution

This programme focussed at first on devolution of landscaping and ground maintenance, with six parishes taking this on in 2014, and a further six in 2020. Generally, these examples of service devolution have required the development of a services contract between the two bodies, detailing the requirements and any funding. There is an opportunity for different contract and contract monitoring approaches being taken depending on whether a service is statutory (and Milton Keynes Council remains accountable) or a discretionary service. As current large-scale contracts with commercial providers to operate services on behalf of Milton Keynes come to an end, there will be the potential for further opportunities for devolution of services.

There are occasions where an asset or service cannot be devolved, such as where there is the potential for redevelopment; the service being a part of a wider council contract; or issues around land, either historically, or where adjoining land is not being transferred. However, in general, the council will work with town and parish councils on a case-by-case basis.

There have been significant benefits from the transfer of assets from Milton Keynes Council, to the town or parish councils and to the community. These benefits include both value for money for Milton Keynes Council, and a number of beneficial outcomes for communities.

Value for money

Overall, there have been a number of savings generated from the transfer of assets through the devolution programme.

While the specific savings from individual transfers have often been small, such as the transfer of the Frank Moran Centre to West Bletchley Council, which saves £2,294 per year, there are some devolved assets which have generated larger savings. These include Stony Stratford Library, transferred to the town council, which saves Milton Keynes Council £27,500 per annum. Similarly, Medbourne Pavilion, transferred to Shenley Church End Parish Council generates £36,000 in revenue savings.

In terms of the overall cumulative savings achieved as a result of the programme up to February 2021, Milton Keynes generated total revenue savings (without accounting for programme costs) of £359,728 per annum. This is likely to grow, as more savings are generated through further devolution.

The programme itself generated a number of costs, which total £228,442. At the end of 2016, there were legal costs of around £1,474 per transfer and property costs of around £4,084 per transfer. By 2021 these had fallen considerably as a result of experience and the shift in the types of assets being devolved, with legal costs per transfer significantly reduced. There are a number of other costs associated with the transfers; however, as the programme has matured these have, in many cases, reduced. For example, the programme's direct staffing costs were £86,999 in 2013, but dropped to £23,884 in 2016. Since then, there have been no extra direct staff costs. This change has been as a result of efficiencies in the programme, and the change in focus towards devolving open land, as many assets were devolved earlier in the process.

The council estimates that the total annual revenue benefit from the programme up to February 2021 to be £132,286.

Outcomes for community

The programme has aimed to create local delivery of services and management of assets that meet the wider needs of local communities. The programme has been of significant benefit to local communities in Milton Keynes, with the local provision of services and assets helping to prevent the closure of assets that would otherwise be under increasing cost pressure. This programme has been successful in ensuring that town and parish councils have a sustainable base from which to operate the service or asset.

Furthermore, there have been a number of other beneficial outcomes. As local councils have begun to run assets and services, there have been cases of investment, maintenance and upgrades that Milton Keynes would not have been able to provide otherwise. This is particularly relevant in the cases of Stony Stratford Library and Medbourne Pavilion, both of which have had work carried out in improvements, turning the library into a 'knowledge hub', while the pavilion has seen resurfacing of the hall floors, a revamping of the kitchen and repairs and redecoration.

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Chippenham Town Council and Wiltshire Council

Working with the principal council to gain control essential assets and service for the benefit of a local area

Total precept	Population of parish
£3,406,852	Over 40,000 (urban area population: 45,620)

Chippenham Town Council has 24 councillors representing eight wards and a resident base of over 40,000 people, making it the largest in Wiltshire. As an active town council, Chippenham has been ambitious in pursuing the devolution of assets and services from the principal authority, which have important historic and place significance for the town. This includes Monkton Park, the large park in the centre of the town. To this end, in 2018, **the council established a Working Party and a 'Basket of Opportunity' [https://www.chippenham.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Chippenham-TC-article-from-The-Clerk-August-2019.pdf]** to help commence devolution negotiations with Wiltshire Council.

On 1 June 2019, a finalised package of services and assets was transferred from Wiltshire Council to Chippenham. The package involved the devolution of the grounds maintenance and street scene services; responsibility over amenity land hard areas and assets; and the management of the Friday and Saturday market. Alongside this, **several freehold assets were devolved from the principal council to Chippenham Town Council [https://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/documents/s157739/Service%20Devolution%20and%20Asset%20Transfer%20Package%20-%20Chippenham.pdf]** including Neeld Hall, the Fifteenth century Yelde Hall, Monkton Park, several play areas and Patterdown Allotments. There was no transfer of funding from Wiltshire Council as part of this package, however, Chippenham was asked to make a financial contribution of £350,000 per annum to Wiltshire Council in lieu of a novated contract with IdVerde. This arrangement commenced in June 2019 and was set to continue until June 2020, or until the contract expired. Although, in the end, the requested contribution from CTC was waived.

Value for money

Chippenham's long-term aspiration [https://www.chippenham.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/CTC_0547_Corp_Strategic_Plan_2018-22.pdf] of improving the quality of town life, as well as responding to budget pressures and the costs brought on by COVID-19, has necessitated precept rises as the council has taken on more responsibilities. This has, at various points necessitated larger rises in town council precept, including a rise of 37.5 per cent, or £65 per Band D equivalent household in 2018/19 to prepare for the incoming devolution. More recently, Chippenham has committed to rises of 3.20 per cent for the 2021/22 year, bringing the total precept income from £3,236,261 in 2020-21 to £3,406,852 in 2021-22. For a Band D household, this now means a precept of £270.44 per annum. The council has also increased its spending by circa £500,000 per year specifically around the road sweeping service, where it has purchased additional equipment including a 17-tonne road sweeper, a smaller precinct type sweeper, pickup trucks and ride on mowers as well as expanding its outdoor workforce by 10 new employees, who will be responsible for maintaining various services and assets.

Outcomes for community

Overall, the town council is ambitious and has no limits on where it wants to go with the devolution agenda, as long as it has the support of residents and councillors. In the future, the council aims to establish a capital fund, recognising that it will need to generate savings to ensure that long-term maintenance spending can be carried out, such as the replacement of bridges in Monkton Park.

The delegation of responsibilities and the devolution of assets and services has brought a number of positive benefits to local community in Chippenham, allowing the town council to make services more responsive to local needs. **This has helped enhance service delivery around the town's street cleaning operations [https://www.chippenham.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CTC-CPC-Report-for-council-Oct-2019_FINAL-1.pdf]** and green space maintenance as well as securing the long-term sustainability of freehold assets.

The council has kept a good dialogue with residents over the precept and other changes, with a recent neighbourhood planning survey of 660 people indicating that residents are pleased with the current administration and how the town is progressing.

Wiltshire's perspective

Wiltshire have been willing to work with ambitious town and parish councils within its area on a programme of devolution which suits their individual needs. Supported by their **Community Ownership of Assets Toolkit [https://lgadigital-my.sharepoint.com/personal/michele_omalley_local_gov_uk/Documents/1%20Attachments/wiltshire-community-ownership-of-assets-toolkit.pdf]**, Wiltshire have negotiated for the transfer of assets and services to a number of town and parish councils, including Chippenham. The devolution of responsibilities, assets, and services to Chippenham Town Council, has also resulted in a net saving of around £300,000 for Wiltshire Council.

While Wiltshire have found some of the process challenging, with legal challenges around land ownership to overcome, there have been a number of benefits to local communities. Wiltshire has been willing to invest in assets or services before delegation, if that brings good results for communities.

Devolution in Wiltshire will continue with reviews on an ongoing basis to ensure packages of devolved services represent good value for money and deliver better services through town and parish councils like Chippenham.

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Wyre Forest District Council

Achieving savings and improved outcomes through a flexible localism approach

Number of Parishes	Total parish precept levied (2020/21)	Per cent of population covered by parishes
13	£1,317,479	100% (one small parish does not have a parish council)

Wyre Forest District Council in Worcestershire has been fully parished since the establishment of Kidderminster Town Council, with the backing of residents, in December 2015. Wyre Forest has a commitment to ensure that local communities can best serve their residents through local delivery of assets and services, in the context of increasing financial and budgetary pressures. As a result of this, the council has worked with the 12 local councils in the area, the three town councils of Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport-on-Severn and nine parish councils, on a programme of devolution, which has led to the successful devolution of several services and assets.

The devolution work has been carried out over a number of years. However this has been crystallised with the development of **Wyre Forest's Localism Strategy [https://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/news/2019-news/february-2019/town-council-to-take-over-historic-town-hall.aspx]**, published in late 2019. This document acts as a framework for devolution within the district, reaffirming the council's commitment to devolution, outlining the opportunities and methods by which this can take place, as well as the future devolution ambitions of the council.

The process that Wyre Forest has put in place sets out several opportunities for town and parish councils to take on assets or services through the transfer of the freehold in the case of assets, and full management of services. However, the council is also flexible, and agrees to identify opportunities for devolution and how best to carry this out, using leasehold transfers where parish or town councils would prefer this.

Devolution within Wyre Forest has had a number of benefits, for residents, for the town and parish councils and for the district council. Wyre Forest Council tracks a number of factors to ensure that the devolution continues to be successful. These include the long-term viability of assets and services financially, and more local control of assets and services, as well as value for money as a result of devolution. Tighter financial pressures on the district mean that these types of devolution are necessary, but only where it can be demonstrated that the local councils can sustain the service.

Value for money

Wyre Forest has generated considerable savings as a result of devolution. During the 2019/20 year, a total localism saving was £254,480 compared to the expected expenditure without devolution. This represents a significant saving. Much of this saving has come as a result of devolving services or assets, for example, the transfer of Kidderminster Town hall has generated considerable savings, both from the transfer of the management, including reductions in spending on events including the Christmas Event which costs £8,000 per year, as well as support in legal, finance and ICT for the operation of the asset, which generates income of more than £15,000 per year. Additionally, the transfer of the asset itself will generate further savings over the next few years, as Wyre Forest pays a decreasing grant over the next five years, eventually saving Wyre Forest £117,250 per year as the grant payment ceases.

There have also been opportunities for Wyre Forest to save money more widely as a result of devolution, including the transfer of six members of staff as a result of devolution of the management of Kidderminster Town Hall.

There have been a number of benefits from this devolution. The civic hall in Stourport, which was transferred, was not well used previously, but this has now improved. Additionally, securing the long-term future of the assets, one of Wyre Forest's ambitions in the context of devolution, has been secured through this work. This has provided opportunities for investment in assets and the maintenance of services, as well as being able to ensure services are more responsive and adapt to local need. This is true at all levels of asset or service, where even down to litter picking there has been far greater responsiveness in comparison to the service the district council was previously able to offer.

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Cornwall Council

Extensive transfers of assets and services achieved over more than a decade, in the context of a deepening policy of localism

Number of parishes:	Total parish precept levied (2020/21)	Per cent of population covered by parishes
213	£26,367,775	100%

Since becoming a unitary authority in 2009, Cornwall has deepened its commitment to localism and worked to support parish and town councils to use their powers and actions to improve their communities. It has undertaken over 400 transfer of assets and services. The devolution of assets has played a role in meeting the council's reduced budget position whilst safeguarding and in some cases, enhancing, local service delivery. One example of a transfer is given below.

Par Running Track

The future of Par Running Track was looking in doubt in 2016 with acute budget pressures facing councils, meaning that difficult decisions about prioritising service provision were being made. Luckily a group of enthusiastic and committed residents, track users and the local parish council, Tywardreath and Par Parish Council, came forward to co-develop a proposal that would lead to the site being leased from Cornwall Council into local management, via Par Track Ltd, a Community Benefit Society, established to oversee the implementation of the ambitious plans for the site.

As a future for the track and its facilities became more certain, Cornwall Council was able to invest a significant sum in resurfacing the track, important as there are limited options for track based sports and training within the Duchy. The transfer was undertaken as a 125 year lease arrangement and Cornwall Council also supported the project with a one-off capital grant to assist with other plans and costs that were necessary to ensure the site was transferred in a suitable condition from which the Society could further enhance the assets.

The vision of the local community was to create a hub at the site, with the provision of library services, a café, a gym, after school sports and a programme of ambitious events and investment that has seen the skate park being replaced, a green exercise trail installed and a BMX pump track to attract and support the health and well-being of a diverse range of residents and users.

The project has been recognised by MCHLG as a real success in its report 'By deeds and their results: How we will strengthen our communities and nation'. The role of local leaders has been instrumental in driving and delivering the project and together with a lot of hard work from the community has turned the site into a vibrant local facility that is at the heart of the community. The society has recently been able attract a new chair to sustain and continue the work to date and the project is a really good example of local 'people power' organising and contributing time and commitment to create a community led project that Par Track and its users can rightly be proud of.

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East Devon District Council and Beer Parish Council

Developing a process to encourage creation of packages of asset and service transfers to support sustainable provision by town and parish councils.

Number of parishes	Total parish precept levied (2020/21)	Per cent of population covered by parishes
68	£4,258,413	100%

East Devon District Council and Beer Parish Council have been involved in a local pilot to explore opportunities for asset devolution within a locality.

A package of transfer measures has been agreed for Beer, designed to allow the community to make better commercial and cultural use of seafront assets. It involves a mix of new responsibilities, including transfer of play areas, open spaces and public toilets, with initial support for costs, including retention of car park revenue, on a reducing taper.

Challenges arose in initial discussions as there was no clearly defined procedure; there was limited financial and running cost data about the assets; and it took time to create a sound business case which supported the transfer of assets and worked for both the district and parish councils. After further work and discussion, the transfers were agreed in October 2019. Over 10 years this is estimated to offer £300,000 in revenue savings to the district council. The parish council intends to seek rental income by exploiting a variety of commercial opportunities, building on the seafront location. As this will take time to ramp up, the district council is providing a dowry on an eight year reducing taper and retention of the car park revenue.

Building on the experience of the pilot, the district council is now consulting locally on a new procedure to provide a clear structure, indicative timetable, fundamental principles and expectations, to encourage other towns, parishes and community groups to apply for asset transfers. Part of the process will involve robust checking that there is a credible mutual business case to do so.

One aim of the new procedure will be to make it easier to negotiate a package approach with a local council, enabling cost implications to be balanced with the aim of achieving revenue neutrality and better outcomes for local people.

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Durham County Council

Working with town and parish councils to achieve positive results for residents.

Number of parishes	Total parish precept levied (2020/21)	Per cent of population covered by parishes
104 (with 22 additional parish meetings)	£13,637,511	c85%

Durham County Council's relationship with parish and town councils has developed from practical arrangements between the principal council and individual parishes to the signing of a charter between local councils and the county council to 'maximise a joint approach of local councils and the county council working together for the benefit of local people'. [https://www.durham.gov.uk/media/999/Local-councils-charter/pdf/LocalCouncilsCharter.pdf?m=636967187479000000] These benefits include: generating real service improvements; meeting the public's expectation that services are joined up; achieving better value for money for residents; improving recycling resources within the local economy; and reducing budgetary pressure.

Devolution and delegation to local councils in Durham has followed an incremental approach tailored to the needs and characteristics of each parish. The choice of approach is dictated by ambition and an assessment of how to generate the greatest benefit for the council, the place and residents. There are four levels of collaboration, each of which provides additional autonomy for a parish wanting to take on a service.

- Collaborative assistance: working together when the principal and local council need to do so, particularly for urgent matters such as snow clearance.
- Reciprocal arrangements: broadly revenue neutral agreements where, for example, a town or parish can work on tending to flower beds in their area, while the county council cuts the grass. This has been used in areas such as Murton.
- Commissioning: where the parish or county pays the other party for extra work to be carried out. For example, Stanley Town Council commissions neighbourhood wardens through the county council, so ensuring that they have access to access vetting, police radios and other economy of scale benefits. Equally, the county council may pay town and parish councils to run local events.
- Devolution: which has been used to transfer a range of assets and services across the area to parish or town councils, such as community halls, parks and open spaces, and cemeteries.

Durham has been successful in delivering devolution with a small county council investment as part of the process. This has increased the appetite for and incentivised further devolution with participating parishes, and with others who had previously been more reluctant.

Benefits

There have been genuine benefits to local communities because of devolution. An example is Shotton Parish Council. After considerable negotiation, the county council agreed to transfer the freehold for the community centre in the village to the parish council. The parish council was then able to invest some of its own money, along with investment from Durham County Council, funding from a section 106 agreement and from the Big Lottery fund, to finance the development of the centre as a new community hub. The building now hosts an IT resource centre which is available for residents of Shotton to book to use for job hunting or upskilling through the provision of courses focused on IT and other skills. The new hub opened early in 2020, and also benefits the community through activities such as youth clubs, dementia clubs and providing accessible community space.

In 2015, the council ran the Delivering Differently programme. This aimed to support town and parish councils to take on the delivery role of local environmental services through greater partnership working or through devolution. In total £90,000 in grant money was received from the then Department for Communities and Local Government to support this form of devolution.

The criteria for the Delivering Differently programme included a value for money element in deciding which proposals to take forward. The highest scoring proposal was from Barnard Castle Town Council, which took on the maintenance of some grassed areas. They also proposed to take on the maintenance of a play area and a TUPE transfer of one member of staff for cleaning toilets. This has generated revenue savings for Durham County Council. Similar projects have also been put in place in Sedgefield and in Brandon and Byshottles, also generating savings.

Contact

Oliver Sherratt, Head of Environment, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change, **o.sherratt@durham.gov.uk** **[mailto:o.sherratt@durham.gov.uk]**

Appendices

Appendix I
Method

This framework was developed by consultants from Shared Intelligence. The section below sets out their methodology, drawing on three main areas of activity:

- Literature review. Shared Intelligence have reviewed a wide range of national and local documents about the role of town and parish councils. This includes an extensive range of publications NALC, its independent Improvement and Development Board, the LGA, some academic papers, and policy statements and guidance notes produced by individual local authorities.
- Interviews. Shared Intelligence have undertaken a series of qualitative interviews with principal and local council members and officers and representatives to understand their experience and messages for this framework. Several interviewees, as well as LGA People and Places Board members and LGA and NALC staff joined a workshop discussion, held on a Chatham House basis, which reviewed the contents of an early draft of this framework.
- Case studies. Shared Intelligence have had more detailed discussions with a number of areas to produce the case studies that feature in this report.

Appendix II

List of potential town and parish council roles in the One Somerset unitary business case.

Assets	Services

Assets	Services
	Minor highways functions such as minor road and footpath repairs, lining, signage
	Minor development control functions, planning
	applications (using neighbourhood planning and neighbourhood development orders), tree preservation orders and listed building consents (for example one or two new house developments and residential extensions, applications for smaller work spaces but
Cemeteries and church yards	not applications for residential housing estates or large industrial development)
Crematoria	
Community centres	
Allotments*	Grass cutting and open space maintenance (gullies, verges, drainage, closed churchyards)
Public toilets	Fly tipping
Local parks	Street cleaning
Open spaces - including both greenspaces	Abandoned vehicles
as well as 'hard' open spaces	Recycling management
Sports grounds	Health and wellbeing - isolation/volunteering/
Swimming pools	befriending
Play areas	Community libraries, premises
Off and on-street car parking provision and	Community transport
management	Community safety/neighbourhood watch
Memorials	Footpath lighting
Volunteering (co-ordination; health, social	Community grants
care, fostering, etc)	Local tourism
Roadside verges and other small open spaces	Local town economic development
	(. eg job clubs)
Leisure and arts centres	Local climate change initiatives (for example local green transport schemes while ensuring unitary has strategic overview)
	Homelessness and social housing liaison and
	provision
*Note allotments is the one service area town and parish councils have a duty provide if demand is unsatisfied	Monitoring and enforcement of environmental
	health matters
	Control of markets
	Street naming
	Licensing -- event notices, street trading etc

More publications about Devolution

🖨 Print   ⌃ Top

From:	SLCC Membership <membership@slcc.co.uk>
Sent:	25 January 2023 14:38
To:	LTC Clerk
Subject:	The Future of Local Councils

SLCC
For Local Council Professionals .

Dear Angela,

SLCC has collaborated with the Local Governance Research Centre (LGRC) at De Montfort University (DMU) to conduct an important survey of parish, town and community council clerks across England and Wales; **the first comprehensive, national survey of the local council sector in more than thirty years**. It reveals how these local councils, the tier of government closest to the people they serve, have changed, taking on so much more and being central to the running of their communities.

It's not clear where local councils fit into levelling up and devolution plans, seemingly an oversight when there are more than 10,000 of them working at hyper local level. Today, these statutory democratic bodies run parks, play areas, sports grounds, community centres, public toilets, manage events and took the lead in local efforts during the pandemic.

The report, compiled by the research team at DMU in collaboration with colleagues from Staffordshire University and the Open University, highlights changes and challenges, making some crucial recommendations about the future of local councils and their increasingly pivotal role, particularly around revisiting antiquated legislation, sector professionalisation, the importance of better collaboration with national government and further improvements on standards. It also makes suggestions about improved democratic representation, better discourse with principal authorities, more focused engagement with young people and makes a call for a strategic review of the sector and its role within local government.

We're pleased to see the evidence of increased professionalisation of the clerk's role over the last thirty years, with over half of clerks surveyed having a university education. There has been a positive increase in the number of clerks receiving sector related training or qualifications, which offers essential knowledge and enhanced confidence for the sector. It's testament to the progress that the sector has made to

see that only a third of those surveyed in 1991 had specific training, compared with 89% today.

Jonathan Rose, co-Director of the LGRC at DMU says: 'Our survey shows parish and town councils are a microcosm of the broader local governance community. Like many other tiers of local government, they face similar challenges around collaboration with other levels of government, maintaining standards, and ensuring that they fully represent the communities they serve. Our results also show an increasingly professionalised sector who are used to managing complex assets in a way that supports their communities. Local councils therefore represent an under-appreciated and under-utilised opportunity to bring decisions closer to our communities.'

With such valuable data direct from those working in the profession, the report will provide important input into the changing shape of the sector, offering an insight to all those working towards more relevant local government.

Click here to read The Future of Local Councils survey.

Sincerely,

Rob Smith

Our mailing address is:
SLCC, Suite 2.01, Collar Factory, 112 St Augustine St, Taunton TA1 1QN
The Society of Local Council Clerks is a company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales with company registration number 10566132. Registered office as above.

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The Future of
Local Councils

A Survey of Parish, Town and
Community Councils in England
and Wales

CONTENTS

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. National associations across the sector should work in collaboration with national government to deliver a public information campaign on the role of local councils, targeting in particular support to widen the pool of those individuals willing to stand for election as a councillor.

2. The government should offer financial support to local councils to support and ensure the holding of elections for local councillors.

3. In keeping with the Civility and Respect Project, supported by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), One Voice Wales (OVW), the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) and county associations, further training should be provided to local councils on the Seven Principles of Public Life. Importantly, complaints over behaviour should be advanced by the chair of the council or the council as a whole, thereby giving valuable and necessary support in such circumstances to the role and responsibilities of clerks. Monitoring officers in principal authorities require further capacity if they are to be in a position to support local councils in addressing standards issues.

4. Training budgets across the sector should be increased to support the building of organisational capacity within local councils. All local councils should dedicate resources to training and skills development for councillors and for their workforce.

5. Local councils should review their engagement of, and communication with, young people and different communities, evaluating the need in their area for youth councils and community forums as part of an investment in neighbourhood planning processes. As part of this review, they should evaluate their use of social media as a tool to connect and engage with communities.

6. National associations should come together to establish a career path that encourages a diverse graduate entry into the profession of clerks. This career path should offer attractive contractual terms and conditions that align with other tiers of local government and public sector organisations. Mentoring schemes and leadership development programmes should target equality across the profession, particularly the equal advancement of women into the posts of clerks in larger councils.

7. Supporting the work of the Local Government Association (LGA) and others, local councils and principal authorities should negotiate frameworks for collaboration between the different tiers of local government. These frameworks should be accompanied by the publication of statements of collaborative intent that establish a duty to consult local councils and/or the putting into place of local council forums between principal authorities and parish and town councils.

8. Collaboration between local councils should be facilitated. The government should make funding available for the generation of 'good practice' guidance and collaborative projects between local councils.

9. The 2011 Localism Act gave local councils a range of new powers. Local councils should re-evaluate their use of these powers, while central government should consider the attribution of such powers to all local councils as part of a national review of the legislation governing the sector.

10. Parts of England and Wales remain unparished. Such inequalities of democratic representation risk accelerating as devolution deals bring into being new tiers and arrangements for local government across different regions and counties. To counter such risks, government should launch a national consultation on the future roles and responsibilities of local councils as part of a strategic review of the organisation of local government.

THE FUTURE OF LOCAL COUNCILS

For many communities across England and Wales, parish, town, and community councils are the first tier of elected local government. Yet, the roles and responsibilities of these local councils, like other tiers of local government, remain poorly understood by many members of the public.[1] Local councils can raise their own funds. They can act as stewards of communities. They hold in trust halls and buildings, provide playgrounds and sport facilities and manage greenspaces. They deliver and support local services. And they represent and empower community voices in local planning and neighbourhood development.

The demands of austerity, climate change and Covid recovery, as well as support for localism, have heightened calls for the strengthening of the place-shaping powers of local councils. In fact, parish and town councils have increasingly taken on responsibility for community services, often in collaboration with principal authorities seeking programme improvements and efficiencies.[2] At the same time, this first tier of local government has become increasingly bound up with the negotiation of devolution deals, with new roles and responsibilities for local councils often viewed as a means of ensuring local democratic representation as counties and districts are restructured into large unitary authorities.[3]

But it remains a diverse sector. There are 10,000 local councils across England and Wales, ranging from rural parishes with budgets of a few thousand pounds to large town and city councils with budgets in the millions.[4] Any future reform arguably has to acknowledge or work with such diversity, and in the absence of a comprehensive evidence base of the capacities and resources at the disposal of local councils, there is a risk that programmes of reform will be clouded by prior assumptions and gaps in understanding. Indeed, writing in 1992, academics at Aston University, reflecting on the previous 30 years of local government research, underlined that 'there have been few large-scale surveys of local councils.'[5] Many across the sector would argue that little has changed since.

This report aims to address such gaps in understanding by presenting the evidence of the first comprehensive survey of local councils across England and Wales for almost 30 years. The study is modelled on the survey of parish and town councils in England which was undertaken in 1991 by the Public Sector Management Research Centre at Aston University. This 1991 survey was reviewed through detailed discussions with a working group of clerks and officers from the SLCC in order to identify changes to the roles and responsibilities of local councils. As in the 1991 survey, the aim was to provide policymakers with a national picture of the activities of local councils, their leadership and conduct of council business, their engagement with communities, and their collaboration with other tiers of government and public organisations.

The data in this report was subsequently collected from a survey of 591 council clerks working in England and Wales. The survey was conducted between 23 September 2021 and 22 October 2021, with data collected online. Council clerks were invited to participate by the SLCC, with invitations being sent via email and additional reminder messages disseminated through other media. The sample represented over 10% of the SLCC membership, and approximately 7% of all local council clerks in the country. The sample aimed to be as representative of local council clerks as possible. Because we did not specifically over-recruit from Wales, the Welsh sample made up only 6.1% of respondents, which is approximately in line with the population distribution. Council clerks surveyed represented councils ranging in size from less than 100 registered voters to more than 64,000, with the most common size being 2001-4000 registered voters.

The main body of the report sets out the findings of this survey. It is divided into three overarching sections. The first section examines the local council, its councillors and its clerks, and standards in public life. The second turns to the work of the council, analysing council meetings and the functions of local councils before turning their engagement with communities and the collaborations between councils and tiers of government and other actors and public agencies. The final section examines the areas of expenditure of local councils, their staffing, and their assets. The report concludes with an assessment of emerging lessons from the survey and recommendations for change.

THE COUNCIL AND ITS COUNCILLORS

Council membership

In our survey, the membership of local parish and town councils in England and Wales ranged from 5 to 31 councillors. The average size of local councils was 12 councillors, whilst the most common size of council was that of 7 councillors. Over a third of councils, 38%, had between 5 and 9 seats, while approximately a third (35%) had between 10 and 14, and a little over a fifth (23%) had between 15 and 19 seats. Less than 5% of all councils had more than 20 elected members, with the majority of local councils (approximately 61%) having between 6 and 12 elected members. However, the proportion of councils having 13 or more seats has almost tripled in recent years, increasing from approximately 13% in 1991 to 36% in 2021.[6]

Representative mandate

The representative mandate of local councillors has transformed in recent years. In approximately half of local councils (52%) councillors continue to be elected to represent the whole parish or council constituency. But just under a half of local councils (47%) councillors are now elected to individual wards. This proportion of councils divided electorally into separate wards has more than doubled since the 1990s, when only 19% of local councils were divided into wards in 1991.

Parish and town councils are, our survey return suggests, increasingly run on national party political grounds, with almost a quarter of all councils (23%) controlled by national parties (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru). Such findings stand in marked contrast to the situation at the turn of the 1990s. In 1991, 10% of councils reported that members declared party political affiliations while only 4% of councils reported being run on party political lines, although this was considerably higher in larger and more urban councils where 34% were said to be run along party lines.

Gender of councillors

The representation of women on public bodies influences decision-making outcomes, framing the agenda of policymaking and the engagement with different policy issues.[7] In 2021, women councillors represented between a quarter and a half of all elected members in approximately two-thirds (62%) of local councils.

The number of councils where women represented less than a quarter of councillors had fallen to approximately 1 in 4 or 26%; a figure that compares favourably to the gender balance of councillors in 1991 when men represented over three-quarters of councillors in almost half of all local councils. In fact, the proportion of councillors who are women across parish and town councils is comparable with other tiers of local government where 35% of councillors are women.[8]

However, women remain under-represented. In 2021, male councillors continued to outnumber their female counterparts in 76% or over three quarters of all local councils. Women represented three-quarters or more of councillors in less than 2% of local councils, while 2% of local councils reported no female representation on the council. In 1991, men were in the majority of all but 9% of local councils.

Histogram of the Percentage of Women Councillors in English and Welsh Councils

Percentage of Women Councillors
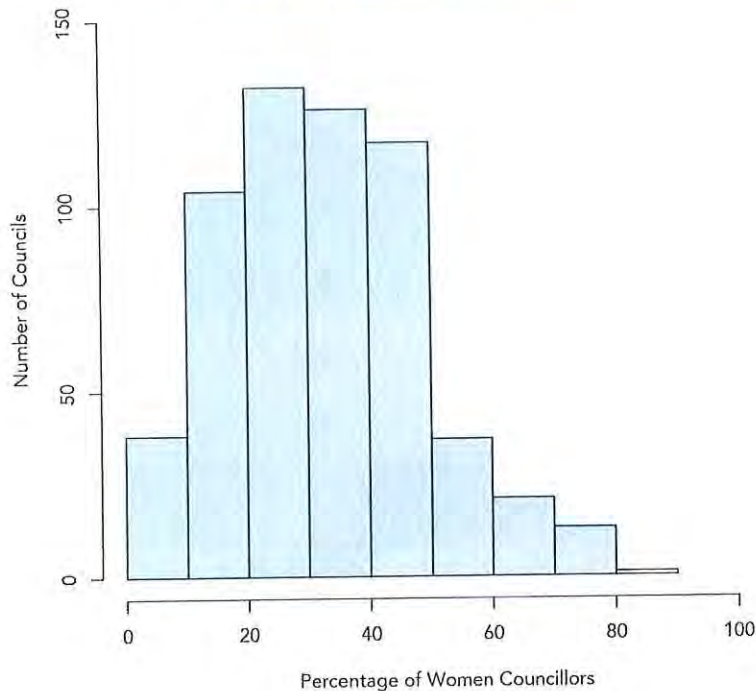
Co-options

Co-option is where the council decides to appoint councillors to vacant positions on the council in the absence of an election. The overall level of co-option remains high and has arguably increased since 1991. In 2021, approximately three-quarters of local councils (74%) co-opted members onto their council. In 1991, the proportion of local councils engaging in any form of co-option stood at just over half, some 56%, 18 percentage points lower than levels of co-option in 2021.

The extent of co-option varies, as might be expected, from council to council. Across all councils, the average proportion of elected members reported as being co-opted onto the council was approximately a quarter (24%), while 34% of councils reported co-opting less than 10% of councillors; 37% co-opted between 10 and 30% per cent of councillors; and 29% co-opted more than 30% of councillors. However, one in seven local councils (14%) reported co-opting half or more of the elected members on their councils. Indeed, a significant proportion of all councils, approximately 6%, reported co-opting more than 70% or more of members onto their councils, with 3% of councils reporting that they co-opted all of their members without election.

9

Such findings tell us little of the potential rationales behind such practices, which may be down for example to a paucity of candidates coming forward, efforts to increase representation from different groups in communities, or the meeting of the time-limited needs of the council. Equally, our evidence suggests that the size of the council has little or no impact on the extent of processes of co-option.

Histogram of the Percentage of Co-opted Members in English and Welsh Councils

Percentage of Co-opted Members
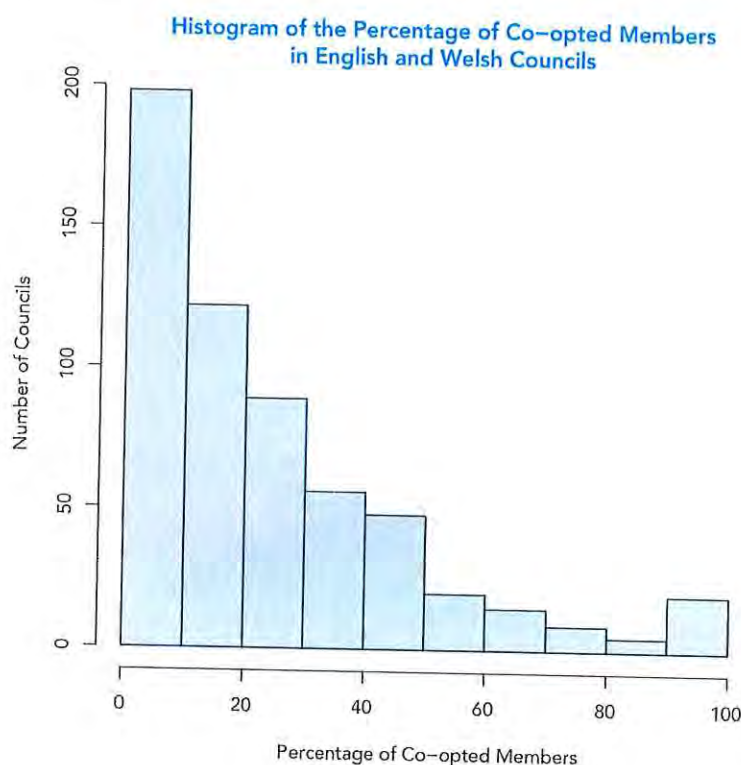
Dual representation

Just under half of local councils (45%) had councillors who exercised a dual role, by also holding office on a district or county authority. The overall number of councils with at least one councillor with a dual role thus appears to have grown in recent years, increasing from 34% of all councils in 1991. However, in those councils reporting councillors exercising dual roles, the average proportion of so-called 'double hatters' on the council was 18%. It is notable that so-called 'double hatters' accounted for 20% or less of the councillor body in 69% of those councils with councillors exercising dual roles. Indeed, local councils where 'double hatters' represented 40% or more of the body of councillors were in the minority, accounting for approximately 7% of councils reporting councillors exercising dual representation. The highest proportion of 'double hatters' reported was 80% (although such calculations need to be considered in light of the relative size of local councils where an individual councillor can represent a fifth of councillors on the council).

Approximately 15% of all local councils had councillors with a triple representative role, holding office on local, district and county councils. In those councils where at least one councillor was exercising a triple role, the average proportion of so-called 'triple hatters' on the council was 9%. As such, this is rare within the council system, both in the sense that it is rare for councils to have anyone fulfilling this triple role, but also that even in councils where some people are 'triple hatters' it is uncommon to see other councillors doing the same. The highest proportion of 'triple hatters' reported on any council was less than 20%.

Histogram of the Percentage of Members who are 'Double Hatters' in English and Welsh Councils
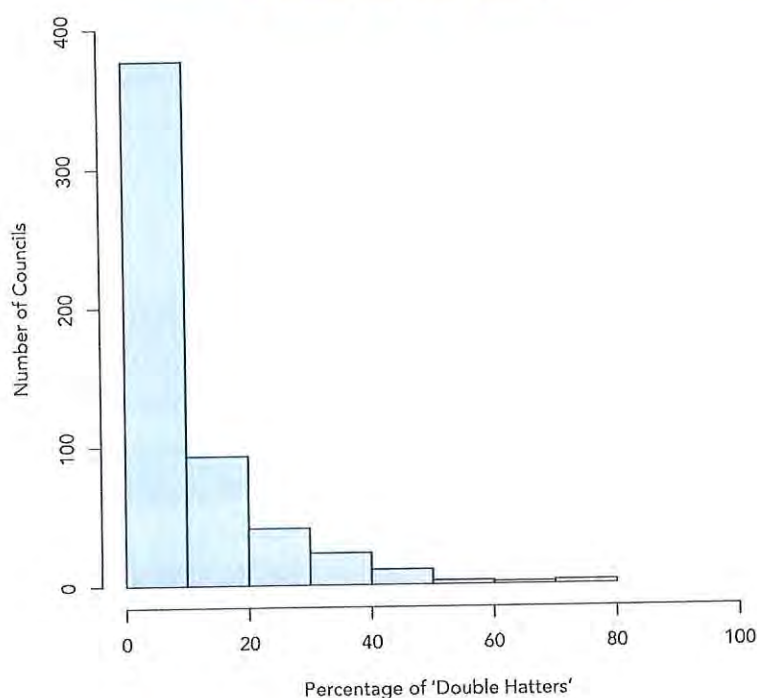
Length of service of chairpersons

The majority of chairs of local councils were relatively new in post. Just over a third of chairs (36%) had been in post for less than a year, while a further third (33%) had been in post between 1 to 3 years. In contrast, a quarter (25%) had been in post for between 3 to 10 years, while only 7% of chairs had been in post for over 10 years.

11

THE CLERK

Increasing numbers of women

Three quarters of clerks (74%) who responded to our survey were women, compared to 59% in 1991. The proportion of women clerks varied according to the size of local councils. In local councils with populations between 8,001 and 16,000, women represented 67% of clerks, as opposed to 54% in councils with populations of 16,001 to 32,000; 57% in councils with populations from 32,001 to 64,000; and 60% in councils with populations above 64,000. Men remain relatively over-represented across the posts of clerks in larger councils when considering the overall number of men in the role. However, it is no longer the case that in larger councils the typical clerk is a man employed full-time. In 1991, the proportion of full-time clerks increased with council size, as significantly the number of women clerks declined – only a quarter of clerks to councils with populations over 10,000 were women.

Increasing professionalisation

One-third of all clerks (34%) worked full-time as clerks. This is a significant increase over the last 30 years – 96% of clerks were employed part-time in 1991. Some two-thirds of clerks continue to work part-time, but of those working part-time, 49% considered the role of the clerk to be their main occupation, while only 15% declared themselves to be part-time clerks working in another paid post (compared to 41% in 1991).

Councillors may take up the role of clerk to the council temporarily to cover a short-term vacancy or in an emergency. In 1991, a small minority (some 5% of clerks) reported being councillors for the council for which they were the clerk. This number had fallen to less than 1% in 2021, virtually eradicating what some might see as a potential clash of roles and responsibilities.

Approximately three quarters of clerks (76%) worked for one local council. Approximately a quarter (23%) worked for more than one council (compared to 10% in 1991). Of those clerks who worked for more than one council, approximately 69% worked for 2 councils; 18% worked for 3; 7% worked for four; and 2% for five. In 1991, 75% of clerks working for more than one council worked for one additional council.

Approximately one third of clerks (34%) held a university undergraduate degree as their highest qualification, while a fifth reported having a postgraduate qualification. In contrast, 12% claimed that their highest qualification was GCSE/O-levels, while a further fifth of clerks reported A-levels to be their highest qualification.

The proportion of clerks either having had a previous post or having another job in a professional or managerial occupation was 72% (an increase from 56% in 1991). Accordingly, the number having held or holding supervisory or clerical posts has fallen from 40% in 1991 to just below a quarter (23%) in 2021, while those having held or currently holding a skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled manual job was 2.5%. Approximately 2% of clerks had no other or previous employment.

Training and Qualifications

About nine in ten clerks (89%) reported having had specific training for their post as clerk. This stands in marked contrast to the situation in 1991, when only approximately one third of clerks had had specific training for their role as clerk.

Roughly a quarter of all respondents (23%) reported having completed the Introduction to Local Council Administration (ILCA), whereas six in ten (59%) had completed the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CILCA). Some 10% of clerks had undertaken a sector specific higher education award.

Of those clerks who said that they had completed the ILCA programme, approximately one fifth (19%) had done so in the last 12 months, while 41% had done so more than five years ago. Similarly, of those clerks who reported having completed the CILCA programme, close to half (46%) had done so more than five years ago, compared to 15% who had completed it in the last 12 months. Of those clerks having undertaken a sector specific higher education award, a third (32%) had graduated in the last 12 months, while 39% had graduated more than 5 years ago.

Approximately 22% of clerks who worked in Wales reported having undertaken a OVW accredited award. Of those clerks, over half had completed the award in the last 1 to 2 years.

Clerks engaged in training programmes from multiple providers – with 71% reporting having undertaken day or evening courses organised by the County Association of Local Councils (CALC). Three quarters of clerks (57%) had undertaken day or evening courses organised by the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC). Over a third (16%) reported having undertaken other forms of training.

Importantly, of those clerks who stated that they had undertaken training courses delivered by CALC, approximately seven in ten had done so in the last two years: with 45% reporting having participated in training provided by CALC in the last twelve months and 24% in the last 1-2 years. However, approximately 19% or one in five of clerks who reported having completed a course provided by CALC did so between 2-5 years ago, while over one in ten (12%) last accessed such training more than 5 years ago.

Such patterns of training were more or less mirrored in the take-up of the courses and programmes offered by the SLCC. Eight out of ten clerks who had accessed SLCC training had done so in the last two years (61% in the last 12 months, 19% between 1 and 2 years ago). However, 17% of clerks who reported having accessed SLCC training programmes had done so between 2 and 5 years ago, although only 3% of clerks who reported attending SLCC courses had done so more than five years ago.

Training budgets

Over eight in ten local councils (82%) reported having a training budget to support the development of staff and councillors. The average annual training budget for these councils was £1918 a year. Reflecting the diversity of the sector, the lowest reported training budget was £30 per year, while the highest was £28,000.

Strikingly, 17% of local councils had no training budget to support the development of staff and councillors.

Challenging demographics?

Approximately 27% of clerks who responded to our survey were aged between 61 and 70, with around 8% aged over 70. In contrast, only 5% were aged between 31 and 40 years old, while about a fifth (21%) were aged between 41 and 50 years old. The predominant age group of clerks, representing 39% of all clerks, is that of 51 to 60 year olds.

Such evidence is perhaps not surprising given that many clerks have entered the profession after other forms of employment and careers in different sectors. However, even allowing for recent ageing of the workforce in the UK, it remains that as a professional body the demographics of clerks is not representative of the broader working population or the communities in which they work.

Importantly, our evidence also points to a significant lack of diversity across the profession. Less than 1 per cent of clerks who responded to our survey identified as being from ethnic minorities.

STANDARDS OF PUBLIC LIFE

Eight in ten local councils explicitly introduced the Seven Principles of Public Life (also known as the Nolan Principles) as part of the induction process for councillors. In 71% of local councils, the codes of conduct were the same as those in principal authorities, any necessary amendments notwithstanding. In 59% of cases, the codes of conduct were the same as the Local Government Association's Model Councillor Code of Conduct. Over half of council clerks (58%) had had specific training on the Seven Principles of Public Life.

In the event of a potential issue with the behaviour of a councillor in their council, 89% of clerks reported that there was a named person at their principal authority who could be contacted in such an event.

However, little more than one quarter of clerks either 'strongly agreed' (7%) or 'agreed' (20%) with the statement that the principal authority's monitoring officer had the resources and time to support them in addressing standards issues in their council. In contrast, approximately 16% 'strongly disagreed', while 21% 'disagreed', with the statement.

In fact, approximately a third of clerks either 'strongly agreed' (12%) or 'agreed' (23%) with the statement that they had a good working relationship with the monitoring officer of their principal authority (compared to 10% of clerks who 'strongly disagreed' and 8% who 'disagreed'). Yet, 43% of clerks when asked did 'agree' that they would be 'happy' approaching their principal authority's monitoring officer for advice. Indeed, a further 27% 'strongly agreed' with this statement, while 7% disagreed and 8% strongly disagreed.

In the event of a formal standards complaint about the conduct of a councillor, only half of clerks (49%) expected complaints to be made by the chair of the council or the council as a whole rather than by themselves as clerk.

In the last four years, over half of local councils had experienced behavioural issues from councillors, such as bullying and disrespect towards other councillors or clerks. 11% of local councils had experienced at least one incident so serious that it prevented the council or its officers from carrying out some or all of their functions. One in five councils (19%) had experienced at least one serious incident which did not, however, prevent the council or its officers from carrying out their proper functions, while one in four councils (25%) had experienced behavioural issues which were deemed not to be serious. Just under half of local councils, 44% reported that they had not experienced any notable behavioural issues in the last four years.

COUNCIL MEETINGS

Number of meetings

Respondents were asked how many times the full council met in the last 12 months. 91% of councils met 6 or more times (with 8% meeting between 3 and 5 times, and less than 1% meeting only twice). It is important to note that the time-period for the survey covered the Covid pandemic and its impact on communities and the running of councils.

Attendance at meetings

Attendance of councillors at these meetings was high, with 83% of councils reporting that all or almost all councillors regularly attend full council meetings. Less than 2% of councils reported that fewer than a half of councillors usually attend full council meetings, with 16% reporting the regular attendance of between half to three-quarters of councillors. Such findings compare favourably with the findings of the 1991 survey in which 31% of councils reported regular attendance of all councillors at meetings of full council, with 92% reporting regular attendance of over three-quarters of their members.

Figure 1: Important issues discussed by local councils in last three years

Location of meetings

More than half of local councils (52%) do not have offices in which to meet. This absence of offices has changed little since 1991, when 59% of councils reported meeting in a village hall or community centre, although the majority of larger councils met in their own offices or a town hall.

Public notification and access to meetings

Councils continue to use multiple means to publicise the date and venue of meetings. However, information technology and the internet has changed the communication tools at their disposal. While almost all councils (97%) continue to advertise meetings by displaying information on local noticeboards, the most common method used to publicise meetings in 2021 was through the local council website (98%). The practice of advertising local meetings in leaflets, council newsletters or parish magazines remained, with 34% of councils reporting using such channels to publicise meetings, a similar proportion to 1991.

Under half of local councils (48%) used social media to publicise the date and venue of meetings. However, it was common practice to use social media as part of broader communication strategies. Almost three quarters of local councils (74%) had a presence on Facebook. Use of other sites or platforms of social media was, however, less widespread. Under a third of local councils (27%) reported using Twitter, while only 13% used Instagram and 12% used YouTube. Approximately 1 in 20 local councils (4%) were present on LinkedIn and less than 1% were present on TikTok. 98% of local councils have a dedicated council webpage.

Importantly, 99% of councils reported in 2021 that they met the legal obligation of publishing agendas in advance of council meetings. In 1991 only two-thirds of councils published the agenda for meetings in advance, although this rose to 96% in councils representing over 20,000 people.

Public participation at meetings

Public participation at meetings remained widespread. Approximately 8 in 10 councils (83%) reported that members of the public attended meetings of the full council, compared to 92% of councils in 1991.

Public attendance at meetings varied considerably according to the issue under discussion. Typically, councils reported a handful of members of the public attending meetings regularly. But councils also underlined how such numbers could expand fourfold or more when meetings addressed issues of local concern such as housing development and planning. More than one council reported 150 people or more attending individual council meetings. Yet, as noted above, there were approximately 17% of councils where members of the public did not attend meetings of the full council.

There was no clear pattern as to how the pandemic and lockdown constraints had impacted on public attendance at councils meetings: for some councils, the move to online meetings during the pandemic had increased attendance, for others it had led to falling attendance.

Over 9 in 10 councils (92%) reported that it was the practice for members of the public to speak at council meetings, leaving a significant minority of local councils (7%) where members of the public do not typically speak at council meetings. Overall, however, there has been a significant increase in members of the public speaking at meetings: in 1991 only half of councils stated that it was the practice for the public to speak at meetings of the council (although 92% did report regular attendance of the public at council meetings).

Only one in ten local councils live streamed council meetings. Of those councils who did not live stream meetings, 86% did not have the capacity to do so, while 14% had the capacity but chose not to do so.

Over three-quarters of local councils (77%) reported that the local press did not attend council meetings. In fact, as little as 3% of local councils stated that representatives from the local press attended all council meetings, while 5% said the local press attended 'most' meetings and 14% reported that representatives of the press attended a 'few' council meetings. This is a substantial fall in press attendance when compared to the findings of the 1991 survey in which 36% of local councils reported press attendance at council meetings.

FUNCTIONS OF LOCAL COUNCILS

Use of powers

Whatever the limitations of the Localism Act 2011, it provided (some) local councils with a general power of competence, ushering in Neighbourhood Planning, as well as the Community Right to Bid, and the Community Right to Challenge.

Over a third of local councils (38%) had used the general power of competence, although almost one fifth of councils (18%) had not used the power even though they were eligible to do so. Under half of councils (44%) remained unable to use the power because they were not eligible to do so.

Turning to the other powers of the Localism Act, only 6% of local councils reported having used the Community Right to Bid, while less than 1% had used the Community Right to Challenge. The Community Right to Bid had been, our findings suggest, used successfully and unsuccessfully to challenge proposed changes to land use and to protect local community assets such as village pubs, community centres and open spaces. It had also been used to take over the direct management of grass cutting services and play park and recreation grounds.

Finally, less than a third of local councils (31%) had completed a Neighbourhood or Place Plan. Of the local councils who reported not having completed a plan, close to a third, 32%, said that they were in the process of completing one – some 60 per cent were not.

By-laws

In the last three years, only 1% of councils reported having made any by-laws. Over nine in ten councils (95%) had not exercised such powers.

Planning applications

As a general rule, all local councils (98%) received information on planning applications affecting their area. However, the information received by local councils varied between councils and between applications. A third of councils (33%) reported receiving listings with only brief details of the applications, while almost half (47%) reported receiving lists and locations of applications. Only 40% of local councils received copies of planning applications themselves. Others reported receiving email notification with weblinks to online applications and planning portals.

Importantly, 96% of local councils reported that they were always consulted on planning applications in their area, with only 3% of local councils reporting that they were sometimes consulted, and less than 1% stating that they were rarely or never consulted.

Approximately half of councils (52%) made representations on planning appeals in the last twelve months (although it follows that almost half did not).

Enforcement and compliance

In the last 12 months, approximately 3% of local councils had taken action to enforce their own by-laws. Local councils were only marginally more active in taking action to enforce other by-laws, with 4% stating that they had taken such action.

No local council who responded to the survey reported taking court action to enforce their by-laws. Those councils who undertook action to enforce by-laws opted to make representations or use other means. Making representations or other actions were also the preferred mode of action to enforce other by-laws with once again none of our respondents reporting having taken court action to enforce other by-laws.

Notably, approximately half of local councils (47%) had acted to ensure compliance with planning laws or planning conditions in the last 12 months. Less than 1% of local councils resorted to court action to enforce compliance with planning laws or conditions, with 40% of councils deciding to make representations and 4% pursuing other actions.

Similarly, 45% of local councils took action to maintain rights of ways in the last 12 months, with a quarter (25%) resorting to making representations and 13% pursuing other actions. Almost half of councils (45%) also ensured compliance with other regulations (for example speed limits and licensed premises), with 27% of councils making representations on such issues and 14% undertaking other actions. Taking court action was rare across all these instances of enforcement and compliance.

Table 1: Local councils and use of powers

(% of all councils) Taking Action to Ensure...	Yes	Types of action		
		Representation	Court action	Other
Own by-laws	3	1	0	2
Other by-laws	4	2	0	2
Planning laws or conditions	47	40	1	4
Maintain rights of way	45	25	1	13
Other regulations	45	27	1	14

WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES

Consultation and public referendums

In the last 12 months, 6 out of 10 local councils (61%) had undertaken one or more consultation exercises or surveys with local communities. In contrast, the 1991 survey reported that reported that 28% of local councils had held a local survey or consultation in the last 12 months.

Practices towards engagement did, however, vary across the sector, with 31% of local councils undertaking one consultation exercise or local survey; 18% undertaking two such exercises; 6% undertaking three; and 5% taking four or more. However, four out of ten councils, 39%, reported not having undertaken a single consultation exercise or local survey in the last year (although it has to be noted that these 12 months covered the Covid pandemic).

Figure 2: Local councils and areas of consultation in last 12 months

Formal public referenda were, as might be expected, less common across local councils. Approximately 93% of local councils had not undertaken any formal referenda in the last 12 months. Less than one in twenty councils, 5%, had undertaken a single referendum and less than a half per cent of local councils had undertaken two referenda. Referenda were primarily held to validate Neighbourhood Plans, with 72% of councils who held referenda reporting that they were held to validate Neighbourhood Plans.

Youth councils and neighbourhood forums

As little as 5% of local councils reported having a youth council, and although approximately one fifth of local councils (22%) had alternative forums and strategies in place to engage young people, more than three-quarters (77%) did not. Similarly, more than eight out of ten local councils (85%) did not hold community or neighbourhood forums.

Representation on community bodies

Over half of local councils (52%) nominated or appointed trustees to local charities. These charities incorporated diverse organisations addressing multiple needs across communities. Indeed, local councils reported nominating or appointing trustees to charities engaged in the management of amenities (24% of all local councils); poverty reduction (17%), and education (15%). Equally, approximately half of local councils (44%) were formally represented on village hall committees, with under a fifth (16%) represented on the Board of Governors of local schools, and three in ten (27%) sitting on the boards and committees of other local organisations.

COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Across tiers of local government

Over three-quarters of local councils (77 per cent) reported collaborating or working with other tiers of local government (be it district, county or unitary authorities). Collaboration took multiple forms from the purchasing of services, joint projects and engagement in competitive funding bids, asset transfers, delivery of Section 106 agreements, and the provision of services through service level agreements with other authorities. Typically, it covered services or initiatives in the field of the public realm and green spaces from grass-cutting and verge maintenance to litter picking and public footpaths through to the management of nature reserves, the provision of play areas and public toilets. It also included collaboration around planning and neighbourhood plans, highways and traffic calming, libraries, market town initiatives, as well as leisure and recreation and the provision of youth services.

Over half of local councils (54%) collaborated or worked with other parish, town or community councils. Again, this collaboration took on multiple forms, with local councils working collectively to deliver joint neighbourhood plans, create food banks and support community bus services, as well as tackling anti-social behaviour and addressing climate change, air pollution and flooding. Collaboration was notable among respondents in areas such as youth services and the public realm (including grass cutting and grounds maintenance) where some councils had service level agreements with other councils and shared community support officers and community wardens. Importantly, there was evidence of networking among parishes and town councils, with informal sharing of information and advice, collective responses to major planning applications and joint lobbying of principal authorities.

Six out of ten of local councils (65%) reported that they had often engaged with the county council and the district council in the last 12 months, be it through being asked for information, providing information, or consulting with or lobbying these local authorities. Approximately a third of local councils (29%) reported that they had often engaged with unitary authorities.

However, notwithstanding good examples of regular engagement, over a fifth of local councils were largely disconnected from county councils. Approximately 13% claimed to be rarely engaged with their county council in the last 12 months, while 15% reported that they had had no engagement at all with the county council over the same period. Similar patterns of engagement were reported with district councils: almost a fifth of local councils (19%) stated that they had had no engagement with district councils in the last 12 months, while 6% claimed to have been rarely engaged with district authorities in the last 12 months.

Finally, almost a half of local councils (48%) had had no engagement with unitary authorities in the last 12 months.

Significantly, engagement with other local councils was also mixed. On the one hand, only 4% of local councils stated that they were had not been engaged with other councils in the last 12 months. But on the other hand, only half of local councils (55%) reported that they often engaged with other local councils in the last 12 months, while 38% claimed to be rarely engaged with other local councils.

Overall, these findings paint a mixed picture. Some local councils are actively engaged with other tiers of local government and other local councils, and yet a worryingly large number may miss crucial broader engagement.

Table 2: Local councils and engagement across tiers of local government

Over the last 12 months how often has your Council engaged with... (% of local councils)	Often	Rarely	Never
County Councils	65	13	15
District Councils	65	6	19
Unitary Councils	29	7	48
Other Parish, Town or Community Councils	55	38	4

Engagement with central government, MPs and public bodies

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

Only a small minority of local councils (4%) reported being 'often' engaged in the last 12 months with what was then the Ministry of Housing, Communities and MHCLG (now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities). Over half of local councils (52%) had had no contact with the central government department over the same period, with some 37% reporting being 'rarely' engaged with or by it.

Department for Finance and Local Government (Cymru/Wales)

Similarly, only a minority of local councils in Wales (8%) reported being often engaged with the Department for Finance and Local Government over the previous 12 months. The majority (83%) stated in contrast that they were rarely engaged with the Welsh government department.

Members of Parliament

Approximately a fifth of local councils (19%) had been 'often' engaged with local MPs over the last twelve months. But, equally, about a fifth of local councils (21%) had had no contact with local MPs. In fact, the majority of local councils (56%) had been only 'rarely' engaged with local MPs.

Members of the Senedd

28% of local councils in Wales reported engaging 'often' with local members of the Senedd over the last 12 months. In contrast, 69% considered that they rarely engaged with members of the Senedd.

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)

The vast majority of local councils (76%) had no contact with LEPs over the last 12 months. In fact, only 2% of local councils reported being 'often' engaged with LEPs, while 12% claimed to be 'rarely' engaged with local economic partnerships over the last 12 months.

Public Service Boards (Cymru/Wales)

Over half of local councils in Wales (56%) reported that they had rarely engaged with their local Public Service Board over the previous year. This contrasted with little more than 6% of respondents who stated that they were often engaged with their local Public Service Board.

Police

Local councils had regular contacts with the police, with 55% of local councils claiming to have been 'often' engaged with the police over the last 12 months. Only a minority of local councils (6%) reported having had no contact with the police. Nonetheless, there remained 37% of local councils that were 'rarely' engaged with the police over the last 12 months.

Clinical Commissioning Groups

Notwithstanding the ongoing pandemic at the time of data collection, levels of engagement with clinical commissioning groups stood in marked contrast to those with the police. Only 4% of local councils reported having been often engaged by clinical commissioning groups, while a quarter of local councils, 25%, that claimed to be rarely engaged with clinical commissioning groups. Approximately two-thirds of councils, 62%, had had no contact at all with clinical commissioning groups over the last 12 months.

Housing Associations and Public Service Providers (water, gas and electricity)

Similarly, local councils were, on the whole, not engaged with the work of housing associations, with approximately nine in ten councils reporting that they were either 'rarely' (41%) engaged by local housing association, or not engaged at all (44%) in the last 12 months. Engagement with and by service providers (water, gas and electricity companies) was only marginally more developed, with approximately three-quarters of local councils claiming to be either 'rarely' engaged by service providers (51%) or not engaged at all (21%) in the last 12 months.

Local Government Boundaries Commission (LGBC)

Some two-thirds of local councils (60%) had had no contact with the LGBC in the last 12 months, with approximately one-third (29%) being 'rarely' engaged with or by the Commission. Merely 2% of local councils reported being 'often' engaged with the Commission.

Membership of representative organisations

Approximately eight out of ten local councils (77%) were members of the National Association of Local Councils. 85% were members of a County Association of Local Councils. Engagement with county associations of local councils (CALC) was higher over the last 12 months than the national association (NALC). In those councils who were members of a CALC, almost three-quarters (71%) had had a member or clerk attend a County Association conference, seminar or course in the previous year. However, this figure dropped to approximately a third where the National Association was considered, with 31% of local councils who were members of NALC having had a member or clerk attend a National Association conference, seminar or course in the last 12 months.

Almost all local councils and clerks (94%) were members of the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), although it has to be taken into account that the survey was largely publicised by the SLCC and will therefore have disproportionately drawn a sample from SLCC members. 60% of local councils and clerks who were members of the SLCC reported that a clerk or member of the council had attended SLCC conferences, seminars or courses in the last twelve months.

Three quarters of local councils in Wales were members of OVW. Of these councils, 58% reported that a clerk or member of the council had attended OVW conferences, seminars or courses in the last twelve months.

Contact with regional and national representative organisations

National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and County Associations of Local Councils (CALCs)

Approximately a third (32%) of local councils were 'often' engaged with NALC over the last 12 months. Almost half of local councils (49%) had 'rarely' engaged with NALC, and a fifth (21%) had had no engagement with the national association. However, in contrast, 64% of local councils had had regular contact with the CALC, with approximately a quarter (24%) reporting having been 'rarely' engaged with the county association, compared to 14% who had had no contact in the last 12 months.

One Voice Wales (OVW)

The majority of local councils in Wales (61%) claimed to be often engaged with OVW, either in terms of being asked for, or providing information, or consulting or lobbying.

Rural Community Council (RCC)

Two thirds of local councils (70%) had had no contact with the RCC in the last 12 months, while 18% reported being 'rarely' engaged with the Council. Indeed, only 5% of local councils reported being 'often' engaged with the Council.

Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC)

Over half of local councils (57%) were 'often' engaged with or by the SLCC over the last 12 months, while over a third (36%) engaged with the SLCC, albeit it 'rarely. In fact, only 4% of councils claimed to have no engagement with the SLCC over the last 12 months. It must be noted, however, that survey returns were completed by clerks who were members of the SLCC.

EXPENDITURE

Respondents were asked to list the three largest non-staff areas of expenditure in their council. Local councils were left to categorise funding themselves, such that certain councils acknowledged different forms of expenditure on, for example, maintenance and repair of assets, while others grouped activities together. Respondents were not asked to estimate how much funding such activities accounted for, either as a percentage of their budget or as a monetary value.

Responses revealed the diverse financial issues and experiences across local councils. Areas of expenditure identified varied from public clock maintenance, pest control and beach cleaning through to support for a police community support officer and the provision of community cafes and libraries onto to grass cutting, youth services and the delivery of a

Covid recovery fund. However, broadly speaking, spending by local councils coalesced around four functional areas: the custodianship of local community assets; the management of the public realm; support for communities; and running costs of the authority itself.

Table 3: Local councils and areas of expenditure

What are the three largest non-staff areas of expenditure in your Council?	Areas of expenditure	Local councils (%)
Custodianship	Grass cutting, trees and hedges	26
	Grounds maintenance	25
	Building maintenance	23
	General Maintenance	13
	Cemeteries and crematoriums, churchyards	9
Public Realm	Play areas, recreation grounds, sports facilities	28
	Green spaces, parks, reserves	11
	Street scene	10
	Highways, traffic calming, transport facilities	7
	Public toilets	6
	Streetlights and public lighting	6
	Waste, litter and dog fouling	5
	Allotments	3
Community	Grants and donations	20
	Events, including festivities	14
	Services (community focused)	8
	Projects	4
	Youth provision	3
	Newsletter, magazine and noticeboards	3
	Neighbourhood plan	2
Running costs	Office costs	11
	Insurance	8
	Loan repayments	4
	Staffing	4
	Other costs	4
	Subscriptions/memberships	3
	Legal and professional fees	3
	Rates	1

Notably a quarter of local councils reported grounds maintenance to be one of their primary spending commitments, while 23% identified building maintenance and repairs, and 13% listed general maintenance and repairs. The activities associated with such areas of spending varied, with some councils deciding to group activities under broad categories and others focusing on more specific activities. Spending on property maintenance and repairs covered a wide range of assets and resources, from town and village halls to community and conference centres onto tea rooms and listed buildings. 26% of local councils listed grass and hedge and tree cutting as one of their three largest financial commitments, while 9% listed the maintenance and running of cemeteries and crematoria and the upkeep of cemeteries as one of their biggest spending commitments.

Importantly, in terms of improvements to the public realm, over a fifth of local councils (28%) listed the upkeep and improvements to playing fields, recreational grounds and children's play areas as one of their three largest areas of expenditure. Equally, spending on green and open spaces, parks and nature reserves, was one of three largest spending areas in approximately 11% of local councils. 5% of local councils listed waste management, litter picking and dog fouling as one of their top three spending commitments in the last 12 months, while 6% listed public toilet provision, and 5% listed streetlights and public lighting.

Approximately one fifth of local councils listed grants and donations to community groups as one of their three highest areas of funding in the last 12 months. This sat alongside spending on community events and festivities as the two most reported forms of expenditure in what we have called community support. Such evidence underlines the role of local councils in offering support for the social fabric of their communities, directly supporting local groups and adding to the sense of place within these communities.

ASSETS OF LOCAL COUNCILS

Growing organisational assets

Local councils continue to act as stewards of extensive assets across local communities. These assets include land holdings, buildings, and facilities. Approximately seven in ten local councils (68%) own, lease, or hold on trust children's playgrounds. Nearly two-thirds (62%) provide parks and open spaces for local communities, while 60% provide recreation grounds and sport pitches. Over half (52%) make available to communities the use of allotments. And importantly, many local councils own such assets. Half of all local councils surveyed (51%) own children's playgrounds; 48% own parks and open spaces; 42% own recreation grounds and sports pitches, while over a third (37%) own local allotments and 31% own cemeteries or burial grounds.

Table 4: Local councils and assets

Does the council own, lease or hold on trust? (% of all councils)	Yes	Own	Lease	Trust
Council Offices/Town Hall	44	28	13	1
Village Hall/Community Centre	46	30	8	9
Sports Hall/Centre	14	9	2	2
Swimming Pool	1	<1	0	<1
Recreation Ground/Sport Pitches	60	42	10	10
Children's Playground	68	51	12	5
Skateparks/BMX	27	19	4	2
Parks/Open Spaces	62	48	11	5
Allotments	52	37	14	1
Village Green	31	23	2	2
Car/Cycle Park	28	20	4	2
Public Convenience	23	16	5	1
Cemetery/Burial Ground	36	31	1	1
War Memorial	55	41	1	5

In contrast, only 14% of local councils owned, leased or held on trust a sports hall or sports centre, while only approximately 1% provided a local swimming pool. An estimated one in ten local councils (9%) owned a sports hall or a sports centre.

Management of land and buildings

In the last 12 months, less than 3% of local councils sold land or buildings under their management or stewardship. Only a minority of local councils either granted a licence for the use of land, granted easements over land, or granted a lease or tenancy. Similarly, a minority of councils purchased land or buildings, took on a lease or tenancy, or were given land or buildings. No council reported acquiring land or buildings by compulsory purchase order.

Table 5: Local councils and management of land and buildings

Do your council do any of the following in the last 12 months? (% of all local councils)	Yes
Sell land or buildings	3
Grant a licence for the use of land	15
Grant easements over land	9
Grant a lease or tenancy (land or buildings)	25
Purchase land or buildings	7
Take on a lease or tenancy (land or buildings)	13
Was it given land or buildings	8
Acquire land or buildings by compulsory purchase order	0

STAFFING

Growing capacity

94 % of local councils employed paid staff. This is a slight increase since 1991 when 91% of local councils employed staff, although only 7% of councils at that time employed full-time staff.

In 2021, 92% of local councils employed a clerk, with 25% of local councils also employing a deputy clerk and 31% employing administrative staff. Importantly, only 88% of councils had a paid clerk in 1991.

Equally, local councils continue to employ a variety of staff across multiple occupations. Approximately a third of local councils (32%) employed grounds staff, a quarter (25%) employed a building caretaker, 7% employed burial grounds staff, while 27% employed other staff. In many ways, this marks a clear progression from the findings of the 1991 survey when the most frequent paid posts were grounds staff, employed by only 15% of councils, and street cleaners employed by only 10% of councils.

Table 6: Local councils and staffing

Local councils employing...	% of all local councils	% for less than 15 hours per week	% for between 15-34 hours per week	% for more than 35 hours per week
Clerks	92	29	35	27
Deputy clerks	25	4	12	9
Administrative	31	8	19	14
Building caretaker	25	11	11	6
Burial grounds staff	7	1	1	5
Grounds staff	32	10	11	18
Other	27	15	11	10

Reliance on unpaid staff

Only 1 in 5 councils (19%) reported having unpaid staff on a regular basis in the last 12 months. This compares to over a quarter of local councils (27%) who reported relying on volunteer workers in 1991. More importantly, reliance on unpaid staff in core functions was limited. Only 5% of local councils relied on the support of unpaid grounds staff, while 3% of councils relied on unpaid clerks, 2% relied on unpaid administrative staff and less than 1% on unpaid building caretakers and burial grounds staff. Notably, the largest category of unpaid staff supporting councils was the broad category of 'other' where 12% of councils relied on regular unpaid staff undertaking work for the council.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Local councils as community leaders

The findings of this survey confirm the rich tapestry of town, parish and community councils that make up the first tier of local democracy in England and Wales. Indeed, our evidence underlines the multifaceted dimensions of the community leadership exercised by local councils. Local councils are connected to the communities they serve, able to identify local needs and targeting services and resources efficiently and effectively. As such, they act as place-shapers in their management and provision of the public realm and the delivery of local services. They are stewards of community assets. They identify and give voice to local needs and demands, engaging communities in neighbourhood planning, and building community identities. They award grants and donations to local groups and organisations, strengthening community networks and community resilience. In fact, outside the running costs of the council itself, spending by local councils coalesced around three functional areas of community leadership: the custodianship of local community assets; management of the public realm; and support for local communities.

Table 7: Exercising community leadership

Approximately a third of local councils have completed a Neighbourhood or Place Plan.
Approximately seven in ten local councils manage children's playgrounds, while six in ten manage parks and open spaces.
In the last 12 months, 6 out of 10 local councils have undertaken one or more exercises in community consultation.
Over half of local councils nominate or appoint trustees to local charities.
One in five councils listed community grants and donations as one of their top three areas of spending.
Approximately 8 in 10 councils report members of the public attending meetings of the full council.

Growing organisational capacity

Over the last thirty years, the organisational capacity of local councils to exercise community leadership has increased. First, the role of the clerk has professionalised. One-third of all clerks now work full-time, with over half of clerks having a university-level education and almost three-quarters having experience of work in another professional or managerial occupation. Notably, nine in ten clerks reported having had specific training for their post as clerk.

Second, more councils now employ staff across a range of occupations. Nine in ten councils employ a clerk, with one in four employing a deputy clerk and one in three employing administrative staff. Three in ten councils employ grounds staff while one in four employ building caretakers. In 1991, grounds staff were employed by only approximately one in seven local councils, while one in ten employed street cleaners. Only 1 in 5 councils reported having unpaid staff on a regular basis in the last 12 months, compared to over a quarter of local councils that relied on part-time volunteer workers in 1991.

Changes to political leadership

The political leadership of local councils is central to the democratic legitimacy of their engagements across communities. Eight out of ten councils reported all or almost all councillors regularly attend council meetings, while nine out of ten councils met six times or more in the last 12 months. Importantly, the proportion of councils having 13 or more seats has almost tripled since 1991. Women councillors represent between a quarter and a half of all councillors in approximately two-thirds of councils.

At the same time, the political leadership of local councils has further aligned with patterns of political leadership in principal authorities. On the one hand, half of elected members on local councils are now elected to individual wards within parish and town councils. On the other hand, approximately a quarter of all councils are now controlled by national parties (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru).

CHALLENGES AHEAD

'Levelling up' powers

Our survey suggests that the legislation governing local councils, and the powers at their disposal, requires review. The Localism Act gave local councils a general power of competence, alongside the Community Right to Bid and the Community Right to Challenge. It also ushered in neighbourhood planning. However, the take-up of these powers is at best inconsistent, while many councils, approximately a half, remain unable to use the general power of competence because they are not eligible to do so. Less than a third of local councils had completed a Neighbourhood or Place Plan.

The reasons for this inconsistent use of the powers at the disposal of local councils are no doubt complex. Neighbourhood plans, for example, can involve a considerable level of resource. Alternative powers may be able to be use instead of the general power of competence. However, it remains the case that the powers at the disposal of local councils are not evenly distributed and that the range of their powers are to be found in multiple pieces of legislation, some of which were designed to meet the demands of different historical contexts.

Improving collaboration across the spaces of local governance

Our evidence suggests good examples of regular collaboration between local councils and other tiers of local government. However, it remains the case that such patterns of collaboration are not consistently found across the sector. Over a fifth of local councils were largely disconnected from county councils and district councils. Almost a half of local councils had had no engagement with unitary authorities in the last 12 months.

Similarly, engagement with central government departments, clinical commissioning groups, and local enterprise partnerships was at best sporadic. Such a mixed picture of active engagement with other tiers of local authorities and central government, and indeed public sector agencies and organisations, implies that the organisational and place-making capacities of the so-called system of local governance are not being effectively mobilised as they might.

Engaging communities

Our evidence suggests that local councils have become increasingly pro-active in seeking the views and identifying the needs of local communities. They have the potential to further build such connections and engagements within their communities. Many councils have not put in place the 'institutional hardware' that embeds community engagement in the running of the council. Only 5% of local councils reported having a youth council. Over eight out of ten did not hold community or neighbourhood forums. The appropriateness of such forms of engagement needs, of course, to be decided locally.

However, our evidence also contributes to existing studies which call for alternative methods of communication by local councils, particularly the innovative use of social media as a means of engaging young people.[10] Almost three quarters of local councils had a presence on Facebook and its social media platform, although it was recognised that the use of other sites or platforms was less widespread. Moving forward, the challenge of engaging communities, and particularly young people, may well arguably rest on how effective local councils are in making use of such social media platforms.

Building the capacity of local councils

Despite the professionalisation of clerks in recent years, most clerks remain part-time, with a sizeable minority clerking for more than one council and many still undertaking another job. Of those councils employing a clerk, 29% did so for less than 15 hours a week. Male clerks remain relatively over-represented in larger councils when considering the overall number of men in the profession. In larger councils, men still remain over-represented across the posts of clerks. Indeed, the demographic profile of clerks remains challenging for workforce planning across the sector. The predominate age group of clerks, at 39%, is that of 51 to 60 year olds. And, across the board, the profession lacks diversity, for less than 1% of clerks who responded to our survey were from BAME communities.

In terms of skills development, the average training budget for those local councils with a training budget was only £1918 a year. The lowest reported was £30 per year, while the highest was £28,000. Strikingly, 17% of local councils had no training budget to support the development of councillors and staff.

Notably, collaboration with other local councils is also mixed. Only half of local councils (55%) reported that they had often engaged with other local councils in the last 12 months. Over a third (38%) claimed to be rarely engaged with other local councils. In other words, the collaborative capacity of the sector as a whole remains a resource that may well be further tapped and exploited to the benefit of local communities.

Strengthening political leadership

Women, our survey confirms, remain under-represented in the body of elected members across local councils. In 2021, male councillors continued to outnumber their female counterparts in over three quarters of all local councils. Such findings confirm previous studies of the socio-demographics of local councillors which have underlined the gender imbalance of those serving as elected members, as well as the under-representation of young people and those from ethnic minorities.[11]

Moreover, the democratic legitimacy of local councils remains challenged by the absence of competitive elections to seats on local councils. In 2021, approximately three-quarters of local councils (74%) co-opted at least one councillor onto their council. Once again, the reasons or drivers of practices of co-opting are complex and diverse. However, our evidence suggests that such practices have remained stable, if not increased, since 1991.

Finally, in just under half of local councils (45 %) there remains the potential for confused accountabilities from 'double hatted' councillors who exercise a dual representative role, holding a seat on the local council as well as one on, for example, the district or county council. Approximately one in ten local councils even reported 'triple hatted' elected members who held seats on three different tiers of local authority.

Addressing standards in public life

Our survey suggests that the large majority of local councils endorse or advance the Nolan Principles, while codes of conduct in local councils were often aligned with those of principal authorities, demonstrating a certain consistency of practices across the system of local government. However, little more than one quarter of clerks either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the principal authority's monitoring officer had the resources and time to support them in addressing standards issues in their council.

Importantly, in the last four years, approximately one in ten local councils had experienced at least one incident of behavioural issues from councillors so serious that it prevented the council or its officers from carrying out some or all of their functions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Local councils are characterised by their diversity. On the one hand, this diversity is one of the strengths of the sector, enabling local councils to contribute in different ways to the well-being of communities across contrasting rural and urban economic, political, and social geographies. But, on the other hand, variations in size, accompanied by differential access to financial resources and assets, arguably militates against 'one-size-fits-all' roles and responsibilities for local councils. As such, further harnessing the potential of local councils may well be best served by the putting in place of a revised regulatory framework of tools and instruments that enables bottom-up and multiple speed solutions to emerge within them.

With this in mind, we conclude with a call for a national dialogue over the future of local councils. This should not simply be across local councils themselves but also among the tiers of local and central government, embracing a re-consideration of how central government and principal authorities work in partnership with parishes and town councils. We seek to focus this dialogue on a programme of evidence-based strategic recommendations and commitments which we set out below. Many of these lessons and recommendations will be known to those leading and working in the sector. They have been widely acknowledged for some time by councillors and clerks engaged in the everyday running of local councils across the country. However, as our evidence suggests, implementing such recommendations requires investment, both financially and politically. It is not simply the responsibility of local councils.

1. National associations across the sector should work in collaboration with national government to deliver a public information campaign on the role of local councils, targeting in particular, support to widen the pool of those individuals willing to stand for election as a councillor.

2. The government should offer financial support to local councils to support and ensure the holding of elections for local councillors.

3. In keeping with the Civility and Respect Project, supported by NALC, OVW, the SLCC and county associations, further training should be provided to local councils on the Seven Principles of Public Life. Importantly, complaints over behaviour should be advanced by the chair of the council or the council as a whole, thereby giving valuable and necessary support in such circumstances to the role and responsibilities of clerks. Monitoring officers in principal authorities require further capacity if they are to be in a position to support local councils in addressing standards issues.

4. Training budgets across the sector should be increased to support the building of organisational capacity within local councils. All local councils should dedicate resources to training and skills development for councillors and for their workforce.

5. Local councils should review their engagement of, and communication with, young people and different communities, evaluating the need in their area for youth councils and community forums as part of an investment in neighbourhood planning processes. As part of this review, they should evaluate their use of social media as a tool to connect and engage with communities.

6. National associations should come together to establish a career path that encourages a diverse graduate entry into the profession of clerks. This career path should offer attractive contractual terms and conditions that align with other tiers of local government and public sector organisations. Mentoring schemes and leadership development programmes should target equality across the profession, particularly the equal advancement of women into the posts of clerks in larger councils.

7. Supporting the work of the Local Government Association (LGA) and others, local councils and principal authorities should negotiate frameworks for collaboration between the different tiers of local government. These frameworks should be accompanied by the publication of statements of collaborative intent that establish a duty to consult local councils and/or the putting into place of local council forums between principal authorities and parish and town councils.

8. Collaboration between local councils should be facilitated. The government should make funding available for the generation of 'good practice' guidance and collaborative projects between local councils.

9. The 2011 Localism Act gave local councils a range of new powers. Local councils should re-evaluate their use of these powers, while central government should consider the attribution of such powers to all local councils as part of a national review of the legislation governing the sector.

10. Parts of England and Wales remain unparished. Such inequalities of democratic representation risk accelerating as devolution deals bring into being new tiers and arrangements for local government across different regions and counties. To counter such risks, the government should launch a national consultation on the future roles and responsibilities of local councils as part of a strategic review of the organisation of local government.

NOTES

[1] Local Government Commission 2030 (2021) Local by Default, Manchester: Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE), p. 47.

[2] Wills, J. (2019) A New Geography of Local Government: The Changing Role of Town and Parish Councils in Cornwall, UK, available at: https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/37848/A%20new%20geography%20of%20local%20government%20in%20Cornwall.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y accessed 17 August 2022.

[3] See for example Treadwell, J., Tanner, W., Stanley, L. and Krasniqi, F. (2021) Double Devo: The Case for Empowering Neighbourhoods as well as Regions, London: Onward.

[4] Jones, A. (2020) The Resurgence of Parish Councils Powers in England, London: Palgrave Pivot Cham.

[5] Ellwood, S., Nutley, S. Tricker, M. and Waterston, P. (1992) Parish and Town Councils in England: A Survey, London: HMSO, p.9.

[6] Throughout the report, figures from 1991 are drawn from Ellwood, S., Nutley, S. Tricker, M. and Waterston, P. (1992) Parish and Town Councils in England: A Survey, London: HMSO.

[7] Local Government Commission (2017) Does Local Government Work for Women?, Fawcett Society, LGiU and Barrow Cadbury Trust, London: Fawcett Society, p. 19.

[8] Fawcett Society (2019) Women's representation in local government "at a standstill", press release, 02 July, available at: https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/new-fawcett-data-reveals-that-womens-representation-in-local-government-at-a-standstill accessed 17 August 2022.

[9] For an outline of the Seven Principles of Public Life, see https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2 accessed 17 August 2022.

[10] See Willett, J. and Cruxon, J. (2019) 'Towards a Participatory Representative Democracy? UK Parish Councils and Community Engagement', British Politics, 14: 311-27.

[11] See for example, National Association of Local Councils (2018) Diversity in Local Councils in 2018, London: NALC.