Report for:	**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE SHADOW EXECUTIVE**
Meeting Date:	**3 December**

Title of Report:	**Community boards**
Shadow Portfolio Holder:	Martin Tett
Responsible Officer:	Sara Turnbull, Localism Workstream Lead
Officer Contact:	Sara Turnbull, email sturnbull@buckscc.gov.uk

Recommendations:	1. **To agree to set up 16 community boards, with terms of reference as set out in Appendix 2, and boundaries as set out in Appendix 4.**
	
	2. **To agree to allocate funding to community board areas to support local projects in accordance with the funding framework as set out in Appendix 3. In 2020/21 there will be three funding streams:**
	
	   • **Community Area Priorities Fund**
	   • **Health & Wellbeing Fund (one year only)**
	   • **Local Infrastructure Fund**
	
	3. **To agree to give delegated authority to the portfolio holder for localism to appoint community board chairmen, normally the term of office shall be two years.**
	
	4. **To agree to review the performance of community boards annually, following the production of annual reports by each board, and to review boundaries in light of any future changes in electoral divisions.**

Corporate Implications:	Community boards have significant corporate implications. For all services they provide an opportunity to enable:
	
	   • Consultation on major service changes;
	   • Local input into the design and development of local commissioning arrangements; and
	   • A mechanism for facilitating partnership working on solving local issues.
	
	The Council's senior leadership team will all have important roles to play in providing strategic advice to community boards, through their role as lead area officers.
	
	Financial Implications
	The introduction of community boards will deliver a £5.17m gross investment with a net additional investment within the MTFP of

	£1.5m in 2020/21 and £2m from 2021/22, after taking into account existing resources that can be re-allocated. This net additional investment can be accommodated within the MTFP. **Legal Implications** This proposed approach enables Buckinghamshire Council to meet Government expectations for the set-up of the new Council, as outlined in the Structural Changes Order 2019 and the single business case. Community boards are proposed as informal bodies of the Council and therefore non-decision-making. This means that legally community boards will make recommendations for formal sign-off by relevant decision-makers in line with the Council's scheme of delegations.
Options: (If any)	The option of having no community boards was considered and is not recommended as it would restrict the ability of Buckinghamshire Council to ensure strong connections with local communities. A wide range of options have been considered in regard to the detail of how community boards would work. This report provides a proposal in response to detailed consultation feedback.
Reason: (Executive only)	The recommended approach enables the Shadow Authority to deliver a key part of the intended benefits of single business case as set out in the Structural Changes Order for the establishment of Buckinghamshire Council.

1.   Purpose of Report

1.1   This report sets out a proposed approach in setting-up community boards following consultation feedback. In addition to this main report there are seven appendices:

- Appendix 1: Consultation Findings Report
- Appendix 2: Terms of Reference
- Appendix 3: Allocated Funding Framework
- Appendix 4 Community Boards Geographies
- Appendix 5: Community Boards Map
- Appendix 6: Community Boards supporting data
- Appendix 7: Equalities Impact Assessment
- Appendix 8: Community Boards Overview

2. Executive Summary

2.1 This report sets out a proposed approach for the establishment of community boards following consideration of the consultation results. The public consultation took place between 12th August and 30th September 2019. 525 responses were received in total.

2.2 The consultation highlighted the following key findings:

- A clear majority of respondents agreed with the proposed aims and objectives for community boards.
- Respondents supported and suggested a wide-range of people and organisations to be involved in community boards. In addition to Buckinghamshire Council councillors, this included town and parish councils, the voluntary and community sector, the police and residents.
- With regards to funding, a strong majority of respondents (79%) thought that each board should receive different amounts of money which would be allocated according to the needs of the local population.
- Respondents were asked who should be able to vote on community boards. A strong majority (92%) thought Buckinghamshire councillors and others such as town and parish councillors and other community representatives should have a vote.
- Respondents were asked for views on all options for the number of community boards from zero to 19 plus. The most popular response was for 14 (29%), followed closely by 19 (27%).

2.3 This report recommends setting up community boards and taking consultation feedback into account through the following key responses:

- Setting up 16 rather than 14 community boards, with revised boundaries.
- Agreeing a terms of reference that confirms that community boards should work by consensus wherever possible, however where voting is required that Buckinghamshire Council councillors will formally vote, with chairmen having the discretion to take an indicative vote from organisational representatives present (with one vote per organisation).
- Agreeing funding rules that ensure that funding allocations per board to reflect local needs.

3. Content of Report

Background

3.1 On 1 April 2020 there will be a new single unitary council for Buckinghamshire with 147 councillors elected in May 2020. The new Buckinghamshire Council will replace the county council and four district councils. This provides a unique opportunity to strengthen local democracy, as well as improve services and outcomes for the people of Buckinghamshire.

3.2 Setting up a new single council on its own will not deliver better outcomes for our communities. Better outcomes for local communities will be achieved through ensuring that the new council works together with partners, strategically and locally, to meet the needs of our diverse rural and urban populations.

3.3 Community boards are proposed as a key mechanism for ensuring that the new Council, and its councillors, have strong connections with its communities through regular dialogue to understand and respond to local needs; and facilitate local community working.

Consultation Process & Promotions

3.4 A public consultation took place between 12 August and 30 September 2019. The consultation options and questions were informed by stakeholder engagement. This included taking into account feedback from five workshops held with town and parish councils in June 2019 where discussions on community boards took place.

3.5 The purpose of the public consultation was to gain the views of residents and other stakeholders on community boards and in particular on the issues of their aims & objectives; number and geographies; who should be involved; how decisions should be made; and funding.

3.7 An online survey was available on the Shadow Council's website and was widely promoted through a variety of channels. Stakeholders were made aware of the consultation through direct mailings to all county and district members, town and parish councils, as well as wider promotions. Advertisement to residents included through the press, social media, posters and leaflets displayed in libraries and other venues. In addition, six drop-in information sessions where held across the county and two member briefing events. Further information on the consultation process and promotions are detailed in the consultation findings report (Appendix 1).

3.8 In total 525 respondents took part in the consultation. This comprised: 393 (75%) residents, 107 (20%) town/parish councillors or clerks responding as individuals, and 46 (9%) district/county councillors. 100 (19%) were representatives of organisations. Of those 100 organisations, 38% were representing town or parish councils and 63% representing other organisations. Note that just over a fifth (21%) of respondents selected multiple options. 512 responses were received online, with an additional 13 respondents submitting a letter.

Consultation Findings & Proposed Response

3.9 A detailed consultation findings report is set out in Appendix 1. The following table sets out the key issues and proposed consultation response:

		Key Finding	Proposed Response
a		Strong support for the proposed three aims and objectives for community boards (over 70% agreement from organisations & individuals)	To recommend those aims and objectives are agreed with an updated version to also reflect clarity on their legal status.
b		The top three issues that respondents felt community boards should focus on addressing were: environmental, transportation and improving community facilities.	To agree a terms of reference that gives community boards the power to locally determine area priorities and a work programme to address those different priorities.
c		A wide range of organisations identified to be involved such as town and parish councils, the voluntary and community sector, health, the police and young people. This is in addition to resident involvement.	It is proposed that each community board develops a communications & engagement plan to maximise community involvement in different ways in its work. All key partners will be invited to attend the board meetings.
d		A strong majority of respondents thought Buckinghamshire councillors and others, such as town and parish councillors and other community representatives should be able to vote on community boards.	Having considered these issues, it is recommended that community boards operate wherever possible by consensus and not by voting. Collectively the boards will have a stronger voice of influence where it reflects the united views from within an area. They will also be simply more effective in getting things done to address area priorities. Occasionally, for example in relation to funding decisions a vote may be needed. Community boards will be supported in prioritising applications that meet the area priorities set. It is anticipated that key stakeholders, including town and parish councils, would be actively involved, possibly in a sub-group, to consider applications before any decisions are taken. It is proposed that Buckinghamshire Council councillors only formally vote, to strengthen the accountability of the new councillors for decision-making on Buckinghamshire Council funding. The Chairman may call for an indicative vote of organisational representatives present prior to a formal vote.
e		With regards to funding, the vast majority of respondents thought that each board should receive different amounts of money which should be allocated according to the needs of the local population.	An allocations formula has been developed to reflect the majority view on this issue, so that each community board is allocated different amounts depending upon needs. Appendix 3 outlines how this would work in practice.
f		With regards to the overall number of community boards, the most popular response was for 14, followed closely by 19.	16 rather than 14 community boards are recommended in light of this feedback.
g		A range of specific and detailed comments were made in regard to specific proposed boundaries. These included suggests on separating or combining specific boundaries, alignment with the Primary Care Network boundaries or considering maintaining the existing County Council Local Area Forum boundaries.	Detailed consideration has been given to all responses received. A copy of the anonymised dataset has been made available to Shadow Executive members upon request. See Appendix 4 for further details on how feedback has been incorporated into the revised proposal for 16 boards.
h		Some specific comments were also made in regard to the names of community boards.	Names have now been updated for the proposed 16 community board areas to take account of feedback.

Aims & Objectives

3.10 The vision for community boards is to improve outcomes for residents through ensuring strong connections between Buckinghamshire Council with its diverse communities.

3.11 The proposed aim & objectives for community boards received strong support from consultees. The objectives below set out the different elements of the work of community boards, as well as updated to provide clarity on the legal status of community boards:

a) *Local Issues*: Enabling Buckinghamshire Council councillors to make recommendations on local issues, alongside community organisations, such as town and parish councils.

b) *Influence:* Empowering Buckinghamshire Council Councillors and communities to influence service design and delivery on local issues.

c) *Partnership:* Facilitating communities to come together with Buckinghamshire Council Councillors and partners to find solutions to local issues.

Core Governance rules

3.12 The terms of reference proposed (see Appendix 2) enable a core common and consistent framework, whilst also enabling each community board to flexibly response to meet different local needs.

3.13 Core governance rules for all community boards include:

- Formal membership of each community board to be all Buckinghamshire Council councillors from that area.
- Standard invitees to meetings to include 1 representative from each town and parish council; the Thames Valley Police; and the lead Primary Care Network operating in the area.
- Additional invitees from other statutory partner organisations, community groups and/or residents to be included at the discretion of the chairman.
- Chairmen appointed every two years by Buckinghamshire Council Portfolio Holder.
- Meetings five times per year.
- Expectation that each community board will set-up action groups to deliver area priorities (a maximum of three at any one time).
- Each community board to agree area priorities and an action plan based upon evidence and data on local needs.

3.14 Whilst the local issues considered by each community board will vary, the core governance rules will apply to all. For example, the High Wycombe Community Board will provide a mechanism for Buckinghamshire Council councillors to collectively discuss and make recommendations on local issues. This would carry out the functions of the previous separate bodies in Wycombe of the County Council run Wycombe Community Partnership (Local Area Forum) and the District Council run High Wycombe Town Committee.

Resident Participation

3.15   The success of community boards will depend upon their effectiveness in engaging with residents and community groups to take action on local issues, and enable people to have their say. Community board meetings will be open to the public to attend and to participate in accordance with the terms of reference (Appendix 2).

3.16   Attendance and participation in traditional committee style evening meetings alone is often a challenge. Community boards will be supported and encouraged to consider different engagement mechanisms to enable people to get involved.

3.17   To support community boards to be effective the following infrastructure will be provided:

- Online forum opportunities for people to have their say by community area.
- Online grants application process.
- Dedicated staff based in localities to support community boards with engagement in different ways e.g. participatory budgeting; special events; partnership working.
- Community area e-newsletters so that tailored information relating to each locality is provided regularly to support engagement.
- Other corporate communications support to promote community boards, including through social media.

3.18   Each community board will be encouraged to pro-actively engage with communities to maximise the opportunities for local people to have their say and get involved. This includes an expectation that each board will hold an annual community event will be held to understand area priorities, and have a communications plan to maximise resident involvement, and other groups such as young people, in the work of the board.

3.19   Each community board will also be encouraged to explore different options for young people's involvement including:

- Building links with local youth councils and clubs to ensure that young people are able to have their say on key issues;
- Allocating some funding specifically for participatory budgeting by young people;
- Holding special events;
- Going into schools and discussing area issues and seeking ideas and action on addressing those issues;
- Enabling online opportunities for participation; and
- Developing and supporting specific projects for young people.

Town and Parish Council Participation

3.20 Community boards will provide town and parish councils with the following key benefits:

- A regular two-way communication mechanism on local issues with Buckinghamshire Council and councillors.
- Opportunities to influence how public sector services are run locally.
- Opportunities for joint working on common issues.
- A named dedicated community link officer as a contact to help joint working between Buckinghamshire Council and community organisations, including town and parish councils.
- Opportunities for maximising the impact of local council funding through pooled funding opportunities with the community board funding streams.
- Opportunities for grant funding.

3.21 The participation of town and parish councils, as grassroots democratically elected bodies, will be vital for the success of community boards. To help make participation from town and parish councils easier the respective boundaries of parishes have been used as the basic building blocks for the community board areas. All the respective town and parish councils will be invited to attend community board meetings, and relevant action groups.

Partner Participation

3.22 Feedback from partners reflected positive support for community boards and the opportunities for strengthening local partnership working to improve outcomes for communities. Community boards will need to work closely with a range of partners in the not-for-profit sector, Thames Valley police, Primary Care Networks, and local business community, in particular to be successful in addressing issues. It is envisaged that how partners are involved will vary according to the local issues, however it is expected that community boards will:

- Ensure partners have the opportunity to get involved in setting area priorities.
- Invite partners to participate in meeting as required.
- Co-design action plans with partners to ensure effective joint working.
- Maximise opportunities for the not-for-profit sector to secure grant funding and increase impact through match-funding.

Allocated Funding

3.23 Community boards provide a fair and transparent mechanism for allocating Council, and potentially funding by partners, to meet local needs. It is proposed that at least £2 million of Buckinghamshire Council's budget is allocated to community boards each year. The exact amount of overall funding allocated is anticipated to vary annually, as individual services and specific one-off funds may be given to community boards to allocate.

3.24 In 2020/21 it is proposed that there are three funding streams allocated to community boards:

- Community Area Priorities Fund.
- Health & Wellbeing Fund (one year only).
- Local Infrastructure Fund.

3.26 Key funding rules include:

- Eligible applicants must be from organisations not individuals.
- Evidence must be provided on how the local project will improve outcomes to address area priorities.
- Projects with match-funding will be prioritised in order to maximise community benefit. Opportunities for organisations to collectively pool resources and for community boards on projects which span more than one community board area will be welcome where this supports local initatives.

Community board areas and boundaries

3.27 A key part of the formal consultation was seeking views on all options for the number of community boards, from 0 to 19 plus. A preferred option of 14 community boards was identified as the option for consultation, with other potential options and maps published of 11, 12, 14 and 19 community board areas.

3.28 Following detailed consideration of the consultation feedback, a revised map and boundaries for 16 rather than 14 community boards is proposed. Appendix 4 sets out further details. The increase to 16 takes into account feedback, from town and parish councils in particular, on the distinct identity and different needs of communities in South Bucks and mid-Chilterns areas. The change also takes into account feedback that the area previously proposed as covering Wendover was too large, and therefore a smaller area is now proposed.

3.29 The proposed boundaries use town and parish council boundaries as the basic building block and then overlaying consideration of a range of other factors:

- Ensuring that natural communities/settlement are respected and grouped together where this makes sense to do so.
- Consultation views of all respondents.
- Consideration of the fit with the boundaries of the newly formed Primary Care Networks and the Thames Valley Police Local Policing Areas.
- A desire to minimise the number of electoral division splits (so that Buckinghamshire Councillors are in one area).
- Consideration of the resource implications of supporting new structures to ensure sustainability.

3.30 A balance has been struck between these factors identified above in designing the map. Some of these factors are conflicting e.g. it is not possible to ensure complete alignment to electoral divisions or primary care networks without splitting key

settlement areas. The overarching consideration in setting boundaries has been to come up with a framework that provides the best chance of success in enabling community boards to fulfil their objectives.

4. **Financial Implications**

4.1   The introduction of community boards will deliver a £5.17m gross investment and a net additional investment within the MTFP of £1.5m in 2020/21 and £2m from 2021/22, after taking into account existing resources that can be re-allocated. This net additional investment can be accommodated within the MTFP.

Community Boards	2020/21 £000	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000
Community Board operations			
Delivery model (staffing)	1,265	1,265	1,265
Grant / Priority Funds			
Community Area Priorities Funding	1,500	2,000	2,000
Health & Wellbeing Fund	500	-	-
Local Infrastructure Projects*	1,900	1,900	1,900
Total Expenditure	5,165	5,165	5,165
Funding of Boards			
Re-allocated existing staff resources	-334	-334	-334
Re-allocated grants	-920	-920	-920
Public Health reserve	-500	-	-
Allocation from Spending Round review (NHB)*	-1,900	-1,900	-1,900
Total Funding	-3,654	-3,154	-3,154
Overall MTFP requirement	**1,511**	**2,011**	**2,011**

*Future year's funding (New Homes Bonus) is not confirmed

4.2   The financial assumptions on in-scope resources from the county council and district councils are based upon a small number of existing staff whose role primarily relates to functions which in future will be carried out via the community board team, and existing grant funding streams which in future will be amalgamated into community board grant funding streams (and where they relate to grant funding which is one-off and not committed). This will provide an opportunity for greater leverage of funding, simplify funding streams for applicants, and provide administrative efficiencies. Existing funding streams incorporated are:

- LAF priorities funding (BCC)
- Highways Member Priority Funding (BCC)
- Community Leaders Fund (BCC)
- Revitalisation Projects Grant (CDC)
- Small Grants & Community Chest/Lottery (CDC)
- Small Grants & Community Chest/Lottery (SBDC)
- Ward Budgets (WDC)

4.3   This investment in communities will provide benefit opportunities to communities, partners, and Buckinghamshire Council strategically. This includes:

- Greater resident and community group involvement in tackling local issues that the Council would be unable to tackle alone e.g. homelessness, social isolation of older people, or flooding prevention.
- Opportunities for prevention initiatives to be supported in creative and locally responsive ways that enable a cost-saving to Buckinghamshire Council through reducing pressures on statutory services. For example, if community boards invest in universal activities for children and families then this may reduce the need for targeted interventions and social care.
- A mechanism to support Council service areas in understanding the views of communities to inform commissioning plans.
- Opportunities to maximise the impact of grant funding through pooling resources with other agencies.

5. Legal Implications

5.1   Community boards are proposed to be set-up as informal groups of the Council. This means that they have the power to make recommendations only to the relevant decision-makers (either council or partners).

5.2   In regard to the allocated funding, it is proposed that each community board makes recommendations on funding which are formally signed-off by the relevant senior officer. Approval will be in accordance with agreed funding policy and governance requirements.   It is anticipated that officer approval would not be refused where a compliant funding submission was recommended by a community board.

6. Risks

6.1   Community boards are a new initiative and as such there are a range of implementation challenges. A key initial challenge for the community boards will be in collectively agreeing area priorities and an action plan with specific initiatives and projects, so that there are tangible outcomes from their work, in addition to providing a voice to the local communities on issues. Officers will provide support to the community boards in all aspects of their work including through providing area data profiles on local needs and advising on potential initiatives and projects.

6.2   A further key challenge for the boards will be in securing the active participation of residents, town and parish councils, the not-for-profit sector and statutory partners. Community participation will enable a stronger collective voice for the community boards as an influencer; as well as enabling opportunities for joint working to solve local issues. Officers will provide support to the community boards in engaging stakeholders and promoting participation.

6.3   Overall a key risk mitigation in setting up community boards is that the experience of other councils, in particular Durham, Wiltshire and Cornwall Councils has been looked at in-depth through research and visits to ensure that Buckinghamshire is able to benefit from their experiences and understand the pros/cons of different localism models.

7. Communications Plan

7.1 A detailed communications plan will be put in place to promote community boards in the lead up to their launch. This will include:

- Website Information
- Development of localised e-news by community area
- Content on community boards included in a town and parish council conference
- Content on community boards included in Member Induction
- Promotions of first meetings & launch events

8. Equalities Implications

8.1 An equalities impact assessment has been completed and set out in Appendix 7. This report highlights the opportunity in setting up community boards to consider different and pro-active community engagement approaches to ensure that all residents have the opportunity to have their say and get involved.

9. Data Privacy Implications

None.

10. Performance and Monitoring

10.1 Community boards are a key strategic initiative and as such it is envisaged their performance will be monitored and reviewed. It is anticipated that working practices will evolve over time, and that boundaries will be reviewed in light of electoral division changes.

10.2 Each community board will be expected to produce an annual action plan with specific measurable targets, as well as an annual report presented to full council. All community board chairmen will also be expected to attend regular chairmen's meetings with the Cabinet Member portfolio holder.

10.3 The overall performance of community boards will be overseen by the Cabinet portfolio holder for localism. Officer progress reports will be provided as required to the Cabinet Member and relevant scrutiny committee. The key critical success measures for community boards overall will include:

- Improved outcomes for communities from local projects/initiatives.
- Public services tailored to meet local needs as a result of feedback.
- Participation of residents, community organisations, partners.

11. Next Steps

11.1 A detailed implementation and communications plan will be developed to deliver community boards. Key next steps are:

Last meetings rounds of Buckinghamshire Council Local Area Forums. LAF attendees informed of decision to set up community boards. Any funding applications received for 2020/21 to be considered by the relevant community boards.	December 2019
Staff team recruitment process	Jan-March 2019
Staff team (community link officers) in place	April/May 2020

Webpages live	April 2020
Member Induction	June 2020
First round of community board meetings & local launch events	June/July 2020

12. Background papers

Background Papers	A range of materials to support the consultation process were published in August 2019 and are available for background here: https://shadow.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/consultations/previous-consultations/communityboards/