

# Appendix Q

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## Focus Groups delivered by Action Hampshire

# Focus Group 1: Communities of Interest

The groups involved represented:

- Carers (including young carers)
- Disabled people
- Children and young people
- People with dementia
- People who are blind or visually impaired

# Focus Group 1 Themes: Benefit

## **Enable service delivery**

LGR provides an opportunity to improve service delivery and address some of the current inequity in delivery. This could be made possible by some of the perceived potential benefits of the LGR such as opportunity to share resources, positive financial implications (although this has not yet been confirmed), and opportunity to partner with the VCSE sector.

“So if it's already inequitable, will the reorganisation of local government create an opportunity to talk about equity and to talk about opportunity for investment where there isn't currently.”

# Focus Group 1 Themes: Benefit/Concern

## **Accessibility**

Linked to service delivery was the theme of accessibility. Some felt LGR could potentially reduce confusion on how to access services as it could mean only one place to go to. However, concerns were raised around if service users would need to reapply for services and re-explain their circumstances, having to get used to changes, if access to services would become more difficult (despite already being difficult); overall this can be summarised as concerns that local needs will become lost in the structure.

“one good thing I can think about is people will know what Council to go to, because at the moment you got to think well is that a borough council service or is that a county council service. What council am I actually contacting”

So I think one of the concerns if you're amalgamating services and making things bigger, you are then possibly bringing

people in who don't know what's happening with the families. And actually someone is having to tell their story again and again to someone else. And actually you lose trust in that service and people will get lost”

# Focus Group 1 Themes: Concerns

## **Continuous provision**

There is a need to ensure service delivery continues but there has been no confirmation that current provision will remain.

“There's nothing there to say, you know, we will make sure that everyone we currently support will stay supported. You know the way that they need to be.”

## **Service delivery in practice**

Concerns about how services will work in practice and how services that work across different boundaries will integrate, particularly if they currently have different processes and systems. It was felt those in decision making positions are concerned about structure but communities care more about the implications for them/the services they need to access. Being able to access services based on geography and things becoming “a postcode lottery” was a concern.

“I'm concerned that we will end up with multiple different processes and systems between those different authority areas and you know, take a, you know, looked after child who quite often moves between counties...those children and young people I think could get inconsistent support and make it more complex”

# Focus Group 1 Themes: Concern/Engaging with communities

## Communication

People will “fall through the cracks” if communication about the proposed changes is not done properly. Communication has not always been clear so it’s important for local authorities to understand the implications for different demographics of people so they can appropriately signpost when asked questions. Going into communities and directly speaking to people was seen as the best way to engage.

“But my fear is that they’re going to be communicating and asking or telling us things they don’t know and and I think that’s the problem. You know people are anybody will asking questions. What does this mean? Where do I access my services? And they’re not going to know for a period of time. So it’s I think there’s a lot of work to do to actually sort of understand the systems, understand what they’re building, understanding what they going to put in place. So that they can tell people”

# Focus Group 1

How this group, and the people they work with, currently support engagement with local councils

**Engagement with vulnerable people is often indirect and conducted through third parties**

“...the people who we're supporting are carers and people with dementia and people with dementia. So they still have a voice, you know, they're not at all incapable of having their voice”

**Some councils rely on charities or other third parties to reach the public. This was sometimes viewed as useful, but some felt it shouldn't be the only way council engage with the public.**

“I just was thinking about what we're saying about charities being a good way to get the message out there, but I don't want for the new districts to then think well, that's our, that's our out. We don't have to do it. We don't have to get the word out because we'll tell the local community centres, the local charities, the local groups and they will pass on the word”

# Focus Group 1

Barriers that prevent people from talking to councils about things that are important to or concern them

## **Accessibility issues for the digitally excluded**

"I think that older generation that are still relatively technophobe. So the Internet is a bit sort of ancient to them. You know they do the old phone calls. They might be lucky to get through. They might not...So they'll fall away quite quickly and keep on their own"

## **Confusion over which council is responsible for what in a two-tier system**

"...at the moment you got to think well is that a borough council service or is that a county council service? What council am I actually contacting? So payment for instance, is Hampshire County Council but not a lot of people know that. So they go to a borough council"

## **Lack of trust, or expectations that they will be ignored**

"...there's quite a lot of mistrust amongst some of our service users, some child young people we come across with statutory organisations, so police included, but also local authorities. And that's partly because they've been really let down badly over time"

# Focus Group 1

## Suggested ways for local councils to engage with and empower people

### **Face-to-face engagement in community spaces**

“They actually have to go out and be in the schools, be in the local health centres, be in the local community hubs and prepare to answer the questions”

“You can’t engage with that community by just sending out a survey”

### **Make community engagement a key principle of service delivery**

“...there needs to be a willingness by the local authorities to speak, to reach out...they need to want to do that because otherwise it's not going to happen”

“These kind of meetings that we're doing now that should be...a county wide conversation, not just [with] the industry and the services, but the people that are going to be affected. It should be them making the decision, not the government saying, well, we're going to do this whether you like it or not, it should be those people you know”



# Focus Group 2 Themes: Hampshire Leadership Forum

## **The groups involved represented:**

- Adults with learning disabilities
- People affected by domestic abuse
- Disabled people
- Local infrastructure organisations
- Climate activists

## Focus Group 2 Themes: Benefit

### **Equitable service delivery**

LGR provides an opportunity to improve service delivery and address some of the current inequity in delivery. This could be made possible by some of the perceived potential benefits of the LGR such as finances coming together, abolishment of a two-tiered system, and opportunities to build partnership/relationships with VCSE sector.

“we have a chance of evening up, even evening up some of the services”

“That the abolition of two tier government in the Hampshire County Council area is a very, very good thing and was definitely a benefit because it's inefficient and financially wasteful.”

# Focus Group 2 Themes: Concerns/engaging with communities

## Engaging with communities

Some felt residents have not been put at the heart of decision making, with a lack of grassroots engagement. Suggestions that engagement could be done by Hampshire County Council directly with communities in the form of going to community centres/points of interest in addition to a survey. However, some acknowledged communities haven't engaged with the consultation process and others understood why engagement was not always possible.

"I'm speaking for the learning disability community, I think if they want to be engaged then don't just send out a survey. You know, have some focus groups, be present, let people meet you. Have all the information in easy read. Have the organisations there to support, so it's a kind of partnership working"

## Focus Group 2 Themes: Concerns

### Incorrect geography

Concerns that the geography/areas aren't split well, which will result in local communities not being prioritised. Some concerns about the population sizes within these geographical areas/splits having an effect on service delivery. Approaches need to focus on place and ensure this is done correctly.

"For an example, Test Valley seems to be in anyone's proposal seems to be the one that nobody really wants. They seem to be being dumped, tipped, tipped on anywhere"

"I think what the issue is is that some of the geography feels clunky and unhelpful and...it feels like maybe some of those areas won't be prioritising their local communities."

# Focus Group 2 Themes: Concerns

## Service delivery in practice

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One size fits all approach should be avoided and LGR provides an opportunity to provide more localised services that meet the needs of local people, as long as it is resourced properly. People felt there was a danger that investment would go into the areas of most pronounced need, whilst areas of more hidden need might lose out. Additionally, there were questions about what will happen in the meantime whilst change is occurring and the implications of this on service delivery and progress that has already been made. It was particularly noted that neurodiverse people find change difficult and it will be important to build relationships and trust back up. Currently it is not clear what is going to happen and many fear they will lose good quality care/services.

"I would hope that when you look at those costings that that they would be really being able to target services for their local people. Recognising what the need is and all you know, and actually at a local level, whatever that new authority looks like recognising, you know in Aldershot there's pockets of deprivation and that certain services need to be targeted. There. I mean, I know that's not for every service, but I think anything any of the services that we deliver that are focused on people who have specific needs."

"I think for most disadvantaged communities it is really tough. People who don't have the resources to be hanging on a telephone who don't...if English is a second language, this whole e-mail correspondence this time frame in responses, you know, I know that my clients like to turn, you know, turn up and be seen and have a conversation. They don't deal well with challenging conversations over the phone. They don't deal well with lengthy e-mail correspondence with bits of legislation being quoted at them. They want face to face interaction and...It doesn't happen and I think local government reorganisation is gonna make it even harder."

## Accessibility

Councils are not currently accessible and LGR will make this harder. For example, moving or reducing offices will mean less people able to access face-to-face communication which is a concern for some communities where English is not their first language and those concerned about climate change (as more people will have to drive).

# Focus Group 2

Barriers that prevent people from talking to councils about things that are important to or concern them

## **Lack of face-to-face contact and digital exclusion**

“...it's a post COVID thing. Council offices have not reopened. Accessibility for all people to officers is really hard, but I think for most disadvantaged communities it is really tough. People who don't have the resources to be hanging on a telephone who don't have literacy, if English is a second language”

## **Councils are seen as inaccessible and unresponsive, or not interested in communities' issues**

“It's too hard, it's too complicated to get to the place where you can talk to somebody”

“They've only ever consulted on things that are important to the Council”

# Focus Group 2

Suggested ways for local councils to engage with and empower people

## **Use multiple channels for engagement**

“...have some focus groups be present, let people meet you. Have all the information in easy read. Have the organisations there to support, so it's a kind of partnership working, but it has to be done in that way. You can't engage with the [disabled] community by just sending out a survey”

## **Focus on maintaining the trust of stakeholders**

“Everything must be built around trust, and people will align to different services according to their needs and according to those that they trust as well. So I think I would really bring that to the forefront of how”

## **Do not lose relationships and good practice during the transition phase**

“...everything stops while they reorganise themselves. And...everything that they did before reorganisation is completely lost. You know, all the agreements are lost, all the decisions are lost, all the consultations are lost and you have to go through the whole laborious”

# Focus Group 3: Geographical Communities

## The groups involved represented:

- North East Hampshire
- Rushmoor
- New Forest
- Gosport
- Fareham
- Meon valley
- Alton
- Bordon
- Liphook
- Hart
- Aldershot
- Farnham
- Basingstoke and Deane
- Hayling Island
- General Hampshire area

# Focus Group 3 Themes: Concerns/engaging with communities

## Having their voice heard

Concerns around how community voices will be heard by those at decision making levels. Currently expectations are low due to previous experiences of being ignored. This was particularly felt by those in Rushmoor because they are geographically located on the border of Hampshire.

"I think the thing that prevents people, a lot of the people that we deal with is that they just feel that they don't get anywhere. So they feel that it's it's wasted energy trying to have a conversation in the first place because they're just going through red tape and bureaucracy or they're they're not a priority, so they they don't meet enough criteria to be a priority or they're constantly on the fence of feeling like a priority"

"I don't think the young people are invited to to attend sort of council meetings and stuff, so that could be a way forward, actually engaging the young people, meeting with them, holding focus groups or just, you know, getting councillors on board and just having a chat."

## Communication

Some participants shared their communities' previous negative experiences of communication with councils and felt it was an area that needs improvement. As a result of poor communication, there is a lack of community awareness on the LGR. Again, face-to-face communication was encouraged and there were concerns that moving council hubs/offices would make councils less accessible to local residents.

"I think a lot of our young people on Hayling are probably quite ignorant to what's going on. I must admit, this is the first I've heard of it."

"when the local council office isn't, you know, short drive away, short walk away it that gap of communication is going to be even bigger"

"what prevents people talking to the Councils is actually the way the information available in an easily digestible form and that's not helped by although we have regular councillor coffee mornings, even that is patchy and the response is poor."

# Focus Group 3 Themes: Concerns

## **Ensuring correct geography**

Concerns that the geography needs to be the right size - how will engagement happen if the population size is too big and how will decisions be made to benefit all communities (particularly where there is a diverse demographic). Smaller areas, such as Rushmoor, are concerned that their local needs might get lost if they are absorbed into a bigger area and that this could result in a loss of identity for smaller communities. However, some felt there may be opportunities to influence decisions if the geographic areas were made smaller.

"if you look at the area that's been put together for, for. For us, it's a massive area that's predominantly rural, so it's how are you going to engage with those communities from any sort of central point, and are you actually going to manage to engage with them and get their opinions, or are they going to feel well? I'm just one small bit in a massive area, so nobody's really interested in me."

"I think speaking sort of from a Rushmoor perspective, the size of the unitary that's been proposed. It's a bit frustrating simply because we've always been tiny and always been out on the edge surrounded more by Surrey than what we are Hampshire, and so our voice is often, you know, not heard"

## **Concerned about change**

Concerns about change because there is a current unknown/uncertainty and had previous negative experiences. Communities want to know what LGR means in a tangible way/local level. For example, what will the transition period look like? Will they have to reapply for things? What are the every day implications?

"I think what people will want to know is how it's if they've gone ongoing situation that's being dealt with by their borough council, what happens. And I think for a lot of families that we deal with, they're already, they already have a negative perception. So for and if you take service families of which obviously Hampshire has a huge population of service families. They've already had experiences potentially of relocating and having to start a process again, for example DHCP, where it doesn't get transferred with all of these changes. What's gonna happen?"



# Focus Group 3

Barriers that prevent people from talking to councils about things that are important to or concern them

## **Lack of belief in the benefits of engagement**

“I think the thing that prevents people, a lot of the people that we deal with is that they just feel that they don't get anywhere. So they feel that it's wasted energy trying to have a conversation in the first place because they're just going through red tape and bureaucracy, or they're not a priority”

“Local people are thinking, well, you know. We're so insignificant. We're so powerless. We're not gonna have any effect on any of this anyway. So why should we bother actually taking part?”

## **Inaccessible communication channels**

“what prevents people talking to the Councils is actually the way...information [is not] available in an easily digestible form”

“...one of the key questions once again for chunk of our community is because they don't have the language facility or the IT or Internet capability...to and to do that engagement”

“...everything that is digital over the phone, it just drives these people crazy, you know, press 1, press 2, press 3”

# Focus Group 3

Suggested ways for local councils to engage with and empower people

## **Provide clear, plain-language information**

“Plain language with some real examples... Because English is not [some people's] first language”

## **Provide face-to-face contact**

“You're going to have to do a bit of blend of social media and digital and clearly some face to face. And as I say, where you have your non-English speaking communities...you're going to have to have some form of interpretation for that”

## **Create meaningful opportunities for community leadership and input**

“I think the best way for local councils to engage with empower people is...citizens assemblies that are with carefully...arranged people who can actually represent in a a better way than just the usual subjects”

“There is usually a lot of leadership when those communities already. And if we're talking about any way of, you know, uplifting people's voices and powering them to be present in that decision, making you actually have to allow them, enable them to be present in decision making”

# Consistent themes across all focus groups

## **Benefits**

Equitable service delivery

## **Concerns**

Ensuring correct geography

Accessibility

Service delivery in practice

## **Engaging with communities**

Communication – clear/simple communication, face-to-face (not just having online and telephone which people have had negative experiences of), importance of local offices.

# Consistent themes across focus groups

## **Barriers to people from talking to councils about things that are important to or concern them**

Accessibility of engagement channels, such as language issues or digital exclusion

Trust in organisations or the benefits of engagement

## **Suggested ways for local councils to engage with and empower people**

Suitable channels of engagement, including face-to-face methods

Demonstrate the Council's commitment to providing real opportunities to participate in decision making