

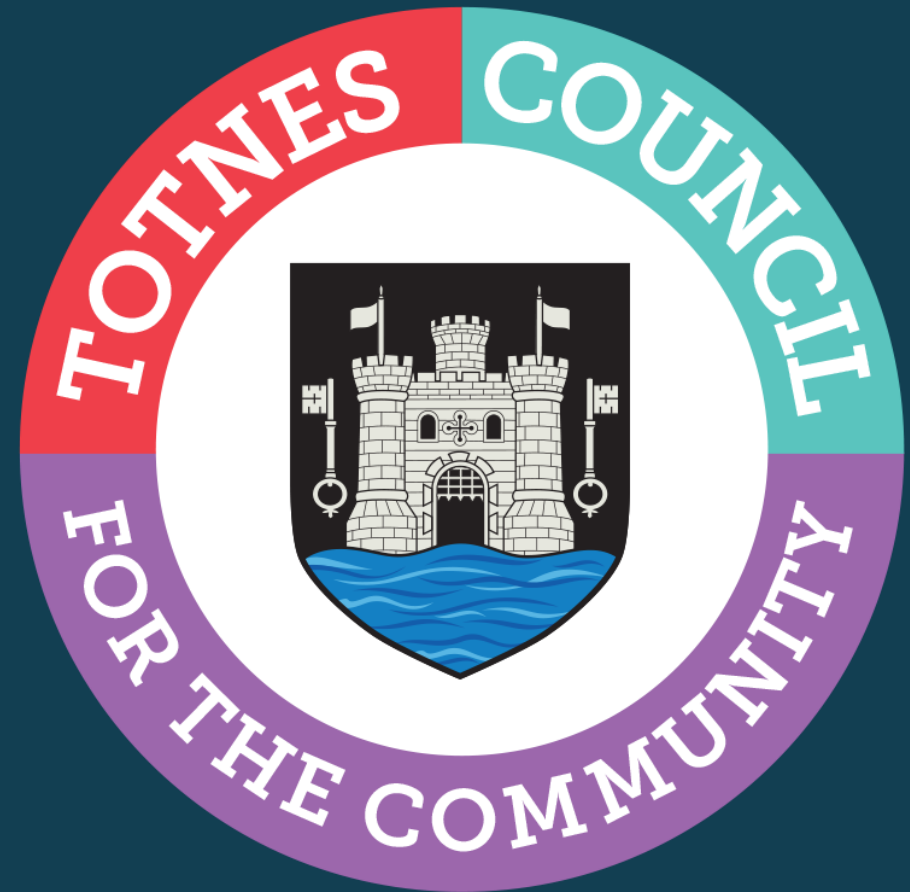
STRONGER TOGETHER

Building partnerships from the ground up

Catherine Marlton PSLCC, Town Clerk

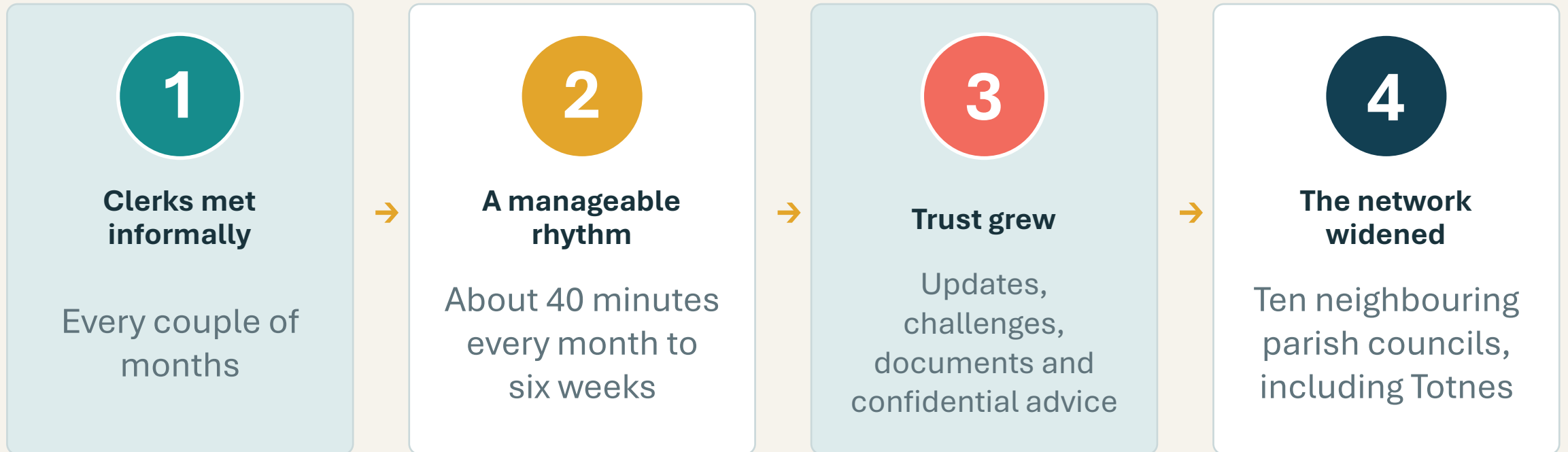
Cllr Tim Bennett, Mayor of Totnes

Clerk perspective + Member perspective



It started with 40 minutes and a conversation

No grand design. No new tier of governance. Just a chat.



Start small enough that people can keep turning up.

What the cluster actually gives us

The practical benefits are modest individually, but powerful in combination.

Share early

Updates before issues become surprises

Borrow wisely

Policies, templates and documents

Ask safely

Confidential peer advice

Spot patterns

Shared pressures across boundaries

Build confidence

You are not dealing with it alone

Save capacity

Less reinvention, quicker routes to answers

LGR changed the scale, not the principle

We added quarterly, in-person meetings for clerks and councillors.

OFFICERS

- operational reality
- professional advice
- risks and capacity
- continuity and follow-through

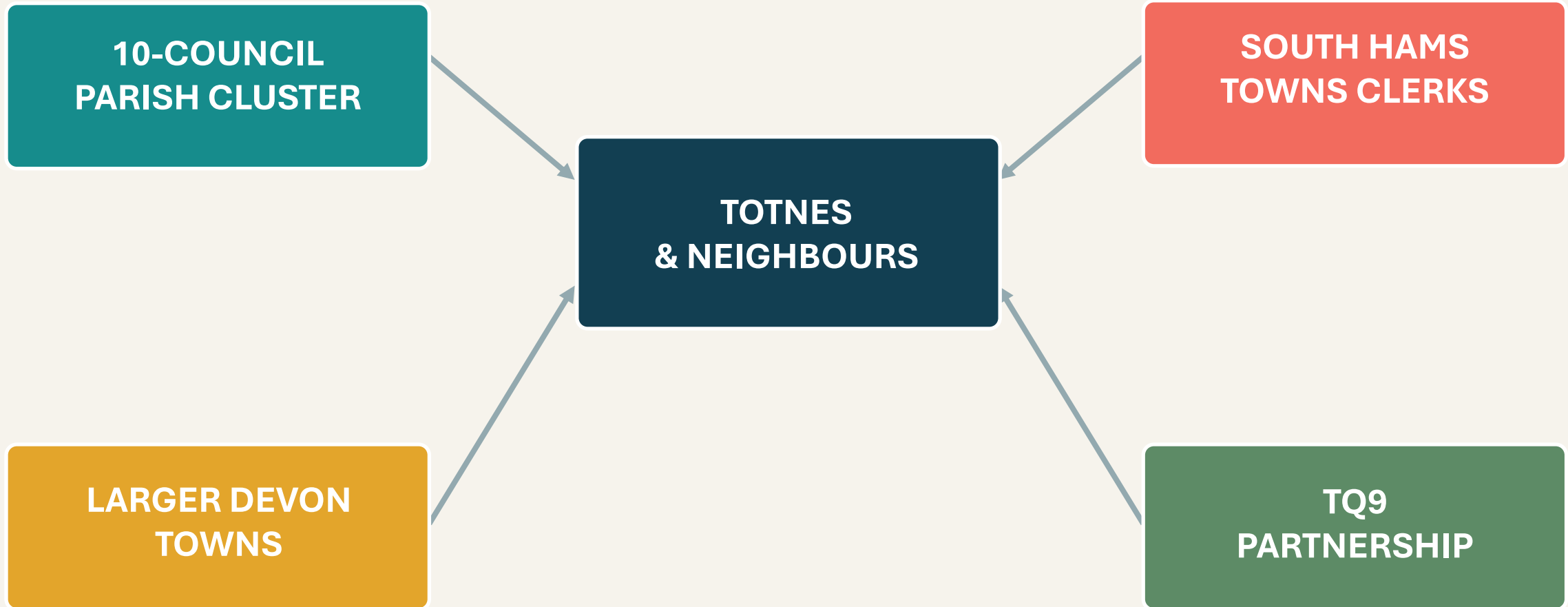
**TRUST
+
SHARED
PURPOSE**

MEMBERS

- democratic mandate
- community priorities
- political leadership
- permission to collaborate

A network of networks

Different geographies and purposes, connected by relationships.



Local → area-wide → strategic → cross-sector

From emergency response to long-term partnership

The TQ9 Partnership shows how an immediate need can become civic infrastructure.



COVID RESPONSE

GPs, schools, charities and community partners

REGULAR PARTNERSHIP

Share challenges, funding opportunities and ideas

INDEPENDENT AUDIT

A clearer picture of the local VCSE ecosystem

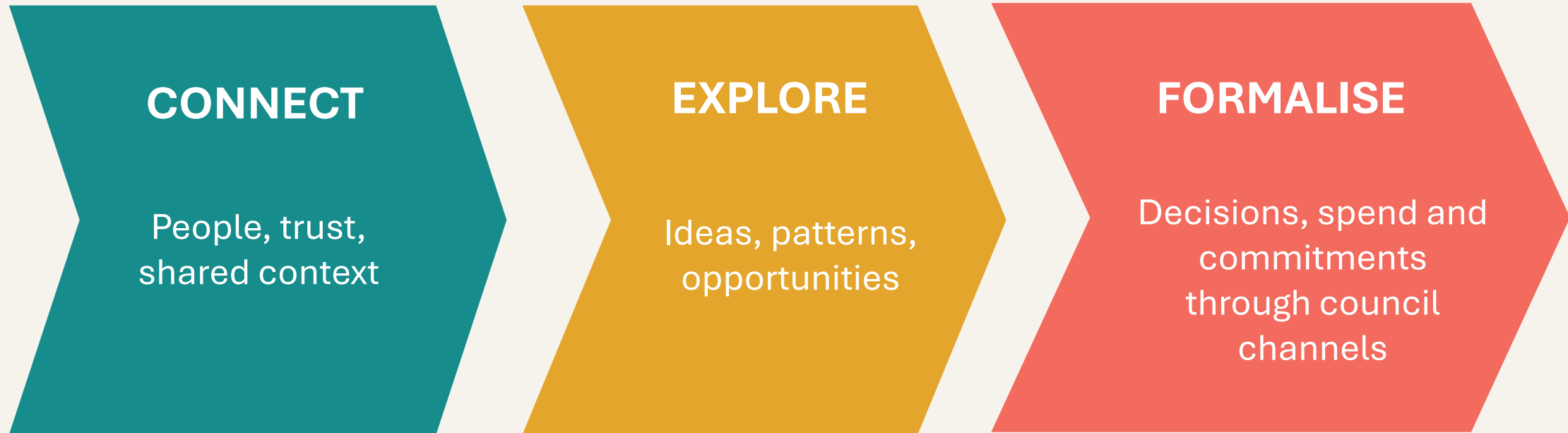
BETTER DECISIONS

Funding follows need; priorities reflect evidence

150 groups identified in and around Totnes • stronger engagement • funding aligned to high-need priorities

Keep it human before making it formal

Relationship first. Governance when the work needs it.



Do not let a perfect terms of reference prevent the first useful conversation.

Capacity: make collaboration sustainable

The network cannot depend on one heroic clerk or one enthusiastic mayor.

WORK SMARTER

**Short
meetings**

Protect the diary and manage expectations

**Copilot
summaries**

Capture decisions and actions

**Member
support**

Share facilitation and follow-up

BUILD RESILIENCE

**Budget
resilience**

Room to respond outside the annual cycle

**Staffing
resilience**

Make the time

**Specialist
support**

Bring in expertise where it adds value

The opportunity is bigger than LGR

MAYOR

Neighbourhood working, health, assets and services all need strong local relationships.

PLACE

Communities should not be designed only from administrative maps

VOICE

A united local sector is easier to hear and engage

SERVICES

Local knowledge can shape delivery closer to communities

FAIRNESS

Transfers must be sustainable, resourced and transparent

The LGR pause doesn't mean devolution and change isn't needed

Our five practical lessons

What we would encourage other councils to try.

- 1 Start with one useful conversation
- 2 Keep the rhythm and commitment realistic
- 3 Bring officers and members together
- 4 Follow relationships, not just boundaries
- 5 Build capacity before the opportunity (or challenge!) arrives

Small, consistent acts of collaboration become local resilience.

FROM “DONE TO” TO “BUILT WITH”

The relationships we build now will
shape the choices we can make later.

Start small. Stay human. Build together.