

Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Minehead and Watchet

Date: Thursday, 19 October 2023

Time: 7.00 pm - 9.00 pm

Location: West Somerset House

Chaired by: Andy Sully (Chair)

LCN core membership attendance:

Name:	Representing
Mandy Chilcott	Somerset Council
Andy Hadley	Somerset Council
Rosemary Woods	Somerset Council
Cllr Mike Rawle	Bicknoller PC
Cllr Brenda Maitland Walker (Vice Chair)	Carhampton PC
Cllr John Passingham	Combe Florey PC
Cllr Tony Brooks	Crowcombe PC
Cllr Robin Wichard	Nettlecombe PC
Cllr Ian Duncan	Old Cleeve PC
Cllr Jan Swan	Sampford Brett PC
Cllr John Irvin	Watchet Town Council
Cllr Maggie Forkes	West Bagborough PC
Cllr Peter Payne	Williton PC
Cllr Robert Hall	Withycombe PC

Other attendees:

Name:

Jacquey Newton (Clerk)
Alan Parslow
Geoffrey M Williams
Julian Russell
Maggie Philipson
Paul Mote
Richard Barnhams
Loretta Whetlor
Simon Stanford
Sgt Jon O'Connor
Mark Shields / Emily Bishop
Bel Derring
Ray Tew
Martin Stevens
Katrina Midgely
Barbara Middleton
Fiona Toms
Sylvia Jeromson
Ian Aldridge
Hester Watson
Rev. Andrew Tatham
Samantha Westmacott

Representing

Combe Florey PC
Crowcombe PC
Old Cleeve PC
Sampford Brett PC
West Quantoxhead PC
West Quantoxhead PC
Withycombe PC
Somerset Association of Local Councils
At West
Avon & Somerset Police
Village Agents (CCS)
Somerset Rivers Authority
Minehead Coastl Develop Trust
Watchet Coastal Community Team
Minehead & WS Food Cupboard
Accessible Transport WS
Minehead People Place Partnership
Williton & District Business Assoc.
Member of the Public (Williton)
West Somerset Green Forum
Quantock Deanery
Member of the Public (Watchet)

Virtual attendees:

Name:

Cllr Craig Palmer
Zara Aitken
Paul Matcham
Sarah Burnett
Debbie Telling

Representing

Minehead Town Council
Minehead Coastal Development Trust
Minehead Eye / Connect Somerset
Co-op Community Transport
Lydeard St Lawrence & Tolland PC

Officers from Somerset Council

Emma Plummer (LCN Development)
Pip Hughes (LCN Interim Link Officer)
Kali Martin (Area Highways)
Emily Window (Administrator) Online
Sam Murrell (Clerk)
Ollie Lindsall (ICT Specialist)

Summary of discussion:

Agenda Summary of key points of discussion and outcome: Action by: item:

Item 9: Apologies for Absence

Somerset Cllrs Christine Lawrence, Marcus Kravis and Mike Rigby, Jon Richards (WACET), Amy Wigglesworth (National Trust – Dunster Castle) and Paul Matcham (Minehead Eye / Somerset Connect).

Paul subsequently attended in a virtual capacity.

Item 10: Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by those present.

Item 11: To approve the minutes from the Previous Meeting

The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed as a true record by a show of hands from those present. The Chair signed and returned a copy to the clerk.

Item 12: Public Question Time

Katrina Midgely, Trustee of the Minehead Food Cupboard raised a concern about the lack of basic support from Somerset Council for vulnerable families, and an increasing reliance on the voluntary sector. The Food Cupboard was being approached by a variety of vulnerable people with complex needs and did not have the capacity or resources to help them long-term. It was considered that with the demise of West Somerset Council, the staff had pulled away to Taunton, and now with the onset of Somerset Council, there was a dearth of housing staff actually

resident in the county! West Somerset was feeling forgotten, and the temporary staff currently employed lacked basic local knowledge of the rurality of the LCN area. Although the Food Cupboard tried to help, they were unable to provide sustainable options to tackle some of the more difficult cases. Pippa Hughes agreed to feed back the concerns to the Somerset Council Housing Team, and then liaise with the Food Cupboard independently on a way forward.

Ian Aldridge, Trustee of West Somerset Advice Bureau (WSAB). Asked Somerset Councillors to be mindful when awarding grants, that they didn't overlook the very necessary work of the WSAB. The WSAB is independent from the Somerset Citizens Advice Bureau and as such is funded separately. Could this please be borne in mind, if grant funding is allocated to ensure that the WSAB gets a share.

Item 13: **Highlights of themes discussed at the last meeting**

A presentation of the topics and themes that were discussed at the last meeting can be viewed [here](#).

It was suggested that another tile should be added to the list on the subject of employment – covering access to further education, apprenticeships and training.

A breakdown by post-code would be helpful.

Item 14: **An introduction to the data available**

Data sets based on the Minehead /Watchet LCN were shared.

Ray Tew (MCDT) asked what additional data was available that could also inform decision making and analysis.

A request was made to dig out further data specific to the Minehead & Watchet LCN. Attendees in the room felt it would be important to establish why people moved to the area, and whether they were economically active or moving to West Somerset to retire. A working group was requested to research and analyse this data. (Emphasis on age, income and employment status).

Item 15: **Discussion:**

Each table outlined what their concerns were around the highlighted themes. Some tables made the point that the topics/themes were all interlinked and were difficult to separate such as Young People, Education Health and Wellbeing, Climate/Environment and Flooding. The main discussion points are captured below in no particular order: -

Public Transport

- Heavy reliance on 1 bus route (No28) to Taunton. This is the only public service on the main road A39/A358. Villages off this route are cut off. Cuts in the service and timetable have major impact on residents.
- No28 has subsidised fares until March 24. What happens after this point? What has been the take-up and has the reduced fare encouraged greater use of the service?
- No 28 needs to be reliable as access to education and employment.
- Limited tourism offer. Some days full of Butlins passengers and others travelling empty.
- Sometimes the service is pulled without notice due to staff shortages.
- Shouldn't just be confined to public transport and emphasis on the bus service – all transport should be considered.
- Need to raise awareness on alternative transport solutions.
- More subsidies needed to support bus services in rural areas. (Minehead Town Council currently subsidise the Minehead to Porlock service).

What is already in place?

- Wivey Link provide a valuable service to residents but reliance on volunteers who cover a limited area. Is there an opportunity to expand this service? Or duplicate it further afield?
- Community Transport Group – Again limited service as reliant on volunteers, but could this offer workable solutions for hospital appointments? Currently serves dementia patients and the elderly/Infirm.
- AtWest Shuttle bus service.

Communication: including broadband

This also linked with public transport, business and employment.

- Broadband – better connectivity needed.
- Openreach is moving towards digital connectivity with fibre and plans to phase out the copper landline. This will mean heavy reliance on electricity supply to maintain the service. If there is a power cut, then land-line telephone communications will go down as a result. In areas with no mobile signal this could remove resilience in the event of civil emergencies. Leaves the elderly and vulnerable at significant risk.

Business / Employment

Business and Employment were considered interlinked

- Not just relating to young people. Also applies to older people who are trying to re-enter the job market.
- More data required – Need to identify the gaps. How many businesses, where are they and how many people do they employ? Broken down into industry categories.
- What can the LCN area offer to make businesses want to come here and create employment opportunities.
- Local employment centres mainly around agriculture and tourism and is low paid.
- There are jobs being advertised but some remain unfilled. What are the barriers to employment – health issues? Lack of transport? Lack of skills? Lack of qualifications?

Highways

This was linked strongly with Flooding, Climate Change and the Environment

- More joined up services would be beneficial at preventing ongoing problems. Examples – Hedge-cutting (more than just 1 cut and using a wider swathe), followed immediately by the street sweeper to prevent debris falling into the gullies. If the gullies are not blocked then there is less need for gully emptying and jetting. Will mean road does not flood, freeze and general integrity of the surface is maintained. Less pot-holes and less response maintenance required.
- More transparency on contracts and policies, works and costs.

- Better communication between Highways and the parishes. Knowing who the contractors is so that contact can be made at early stages and prevent need for repeat visits.
- Cutting back growth around signs – sign washing and maintenance.
- Hedge cutting – more than just 1 cut a year. A wider swathe is required to ensure a higher cut and prevent pedestrians/cyclists having to use the central carriageway of the road.

Flooding / Climate and Environment

Linked with Highways

- Learning from recent flooding incidents. Gathering the data so that resilience can be improved. Examining the causes and mitigate accordingly. Inviting residents to share their experiences.
- Better highway maintenance – regular gully clearance, surface water drains unblocked. Removal of debris from ditches and grips.
- Communication between street sweeping contractor and parishes so that residents' vehicles etc can be moved to facilitate better access.
- Riparian owners being held to account on their responsibilities towards stream/riverbank maintenance.
- Educating landowners/farmers on good agricultural practice to prevent water run-off from fields and flooding the Highway.
- Somerset Council working with the West Somerset Flood Group to share good practice from the bottom up. This used to work well under the former West Somerset Council but has since been disbanded and the links broken.

Health and Wellbeing

- Very difficult to access NHS dental services and GPs are stretched.
- No A&E hospital – patients need to go to Taunton.
- Due to lack of transport routine medical appointments in Taunton can be missed.
- Ambulance waiting times are long.
- Lack of a public swimming pool.

- Cultural provision – not just physical needs. Mental health is important too. Volunteering benefits people through working together and combats loneliness. Community assets such as the Regal Theatre need to be promoted as ways of bringing people together.
- Low social mobility and areas of deprivation.
- Better utilisation of Minehead Hospital – could it be used as a health hub?
- Data for Health & Wellbeing can be gathered by linking in with “Living Better” (GP surgeries).

Housing

This was linked very strongly with Health & Wellbeing as a basic need.

- Clearer understanding on Homefinder letting policy. There is no transparency and local connection is often overlooked in favour of people from outside the parish.
- Better infrastructure management at the planning stages to ensure that new housing development has adequate services such as bus stops, access to GP/dental care, schools and employment. Flood plain management also to be taken into consideration.
- Where do people go for advice and support? There is no local service provision and heavy reliance on voluntary sector. No housing service offered locally.
- No temporary accommodation in local area. Homeless families are signposted/transferred to Taunton or Bridgwater, Highbridge Travelodge as nearest option. This takes them away from local support network, employment and schools.
- All Somerset Council housing options staff are temporary – nobody with local knowledge!
- Very large catchment area to deal with homelessness.
- Lack of council housing and affordable housing in the private rented sector. More families resorting to expensive private rented market.
- Second homes / Airbnb take local housing out of the market. What can be done to prevent this?
- Magna Housing is the biggest social housing provider in the LCN area. Need greater accountability.

Young People / Education

All attendees considered young people and education to be interlinked.

- Limited education opportunities. Only one option in LCN area for GCSE provider – West Somerset College. If parents/children dissatisfied only other choice is home education.
- Lack of Special Educational Need (SEN) provision.
- Long bus journeys to access training and further education 16+ opportunities in Bridgwater and Taunton.
- Social exclusion and isolation. High area of deprivation as highlighted in the West Somerset Opportunity Area report.
- Due to lack of transport, many children cannot attend after school activities. Few opportunities to mix with friends out of school.
- Limited employment opportunities which force young people out of the area. (They have no incentive to train and work here). We need more health professionals as GP surgeries/dentists are struggling.
- More youth club provision, training and opportunities needed.

Planning Enforcement

- Lack of planning enforcement in the area. No accountability on developers.

Item 16: Next Steps

At the end of the discussion time, each table was asked to prioritise their 3 main themes. This was to reach a consensus on the way forward. It was agreed that the LCN team would take away the worksheets and evaluate via a scoring system the top 3 themes that the meeting had wanted to prioritise. Working groups could then be established to explore these issues.

The Chair advised that drop-in meetings could be facilitated in Minehead and Carhampton for members of the public to report in on the recent flooding incidents. These would also help to increase resilience, advice and support and a number of partner agencies such as Somerset Rivers Authority, Environment Agency and emergency services could be on hand to provide

advice. Attendees considered this to be a good idea, especially if data on recent flooding incidents could be collated and shared. There was consensus that the West Somerset Flood Group should also be included in the discussions. Cllr Ian Aldridge requested that a meeting should also take place in Williton as it was the focal point of the district and also suffered regularly from flooding. It was agreed to feed the information back to the community resilience team.

Post Minute Note:

Flooding Drop In Meetings have now been booked for :-

- Wednesday 9 November at Carhampton Village Hall from 4-7pm,
- Wednesday 15 November at Minehead Community Centre, Alexandra Road, Minehead 4-7pm.

The Chair also advised that he wanted to convene a Homefinder presentation to update the LCN on the local lettings policy and housing allocations in Somerset. It was hoped that this could be done via Teams so that the presentation could be recorded, and members of the LCN could watch at their leisure.

Item 17: Dates for future meetings

Tuesday 5 December 2023
Wednesday 7 February 2024

Attendees asked if the West Somerset House Council Chamber could again be booked for future meetings.

Contact officer for meeting: LCN Team lcn@somerset.gov.uk