



Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Vale of Frome

Date: Thursday, 7 December 2023

Time: 7.00 pm - 9.05 pm

Location: Due to bad weather this meeting will be held online

LCN Core Membership in Attendance:

Frome Town Councillor Max Wide (Chair)

Somerset Councillor Adam Boyden

Somerset Councillor Dawn Denton

Somerset Councillor Helen Kay

Somerset Councillor Theo Butt Philip

Beckington Parish Councillor Kevin Bishop

Buckland Dinham Parish Councillor Sarah Barnett

Frome Town Councillor Anita Collier

Norton St Philip Parish Councillor Ian Hasell

Nunney Parish Councillor Bill Stock

Rode Parish Councillor Mike Salmon

Wanstrow Parish Councillor Michael Gay

Other Attendance:

Buckland Dinham Parish Councillor John Reckless

Nunney Parish Councillor Sally Foster

Vicar Ian Snares

Charlie Bonham-Christie, Marston Park

Diane Sleigh, Buckland Dinham

Lucy Travis, Bath and North East Council

Officer Attendance:

Matthew Reed, Avon and Somerset Police

Daniel Jefferies, Avon and Somerset Police

Jeremy Fry, Service Manager, Area Highways

Nick Cowling, Service Manager, Transport

Richard Selwyn, Service Director, Commissioning and Performance
Emily Window, LCN Team
Kate Hellard, LCN Team
Adrian Moore, LCN Team
Debbie Haines, LCN Team
Claire Dicken, Democratic Services

Summary of discussion:

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

Item 22: Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Anthony Battersby, Tellisford Parish Meeting, Somerset Councillor Martin Dimmery, Rode Parish Councillor Peter Travis and Somerset Councillor Barry Clarke.

Item 23: Welcome to Wanstrow

The Chair said the Network had been looking forward to meeting in Wanstrow. However, the weather warnings had meant this meeting would be held online.

Item 24: Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

Item 25: Notes from the Previous Meeting

The notes of the previous meeting held on 5 October 2023 were approved as a correct record, subject to the addition of Mike Salmon who had been in attendance online. And the correction of Max Wride, which should read Max Wide.

Item 26: Actions since the last meeting

The Network had agreed that a Community Plan would be developed. A questionnaire had been prepared for parishes. The results of which would help the Network understand the shared priorities and thus create themes for the Community Plan

and the agenda for future meetings of the Network.

Item 27: **Somerset Council Financial Update**

Somerset Council had declared a financial emergency. The Chair explained what a Section 114 Notice would mean for the Somerset Council.

Somerset Councillor Theo Butt-Philips, Executive Lead for Transformation and Human Resources, was invited to speak. He explained the Council's increasing costs. There was currently a financial gap in next year's budget, in the region of, £87million. The Council was looking at how to change services in order to balance the accounts. Changes included the disposal of assets, the cutting of some services and the devolution of others.

He confirmed the Somerset Council would not force any Town or Parish Council to take on services.

During the discussion that followed these points were raised:

- Some Parish Councillors were disinclined to offer help at this stage because the services had not been costed yet. The Network noted Somerset Council had begun costing the services that had attracted the most interest from parishes.
- There was concern that residents could end up paying twice if the parishes began providing services which had previously been costed into the Somerset Council services.
- The Network noted the finance gap was not expected to be as high in future years.
- Taking on services would be permanent, but the financial crisis would only be temporary (over a few years).
- It was noted that it was possible for the Council to avoid a Section 114 Notice, but it would be incredibly hard to achieve. Confirmation of the situation would be known at the budget setting stage in February 2024.
- Parish Councils would be wise to set aside some contingency funds.
- It was noted that larger Parish Councils were in a better position to take services.

- Smaller parishes may have useful contacts. For instance, they may have local sports clubs who could be paid to carry out some maintenance.
- Some parishes may not need to take on any services themselves because the community could rally around (like mowing the grass etc).
- Some Parishes were proud of their low precepts. And the value for money they had been able to offer in the past. There was concern that large increases in the precept were already necessary just to cover existing costs.
- Some parishes may wish to get together with neighbouring parishes to create 'clusters' to deliver some services.
- Somerset should ask for fines for early re-payment of PWLB loans to be delayed or not imposed.
- Parish Councils should be given more guidance on what services might be particularly under threat. In the Vale of Frome there was perhaps less to cut than other parts of Somerset. Members required more detail.
- Members queried how much the Somerset Council currently spent in the Vale of Frome on services. The concern was parishes could spend a lot of energy devolving services from the Somerset Council to save a small amount of money. Members felt they needed more data before any decisions could be made.

The Chair asked the Network to complete a Poll which had been based on a letter which the Leader of Somerset Council had sent to parishes. Some Members were not able to complete the poll. The LCN team agreed to send the poll separately afterwards.

On the whole parishes were interested in having greater control over some assets within their parish. As well as projects which contributed to community wellbeing.

Item 28: **Public Questions (not covered on the agenda)**

None.

Item 29: **Road Safety and Highways presentation, discussion and ways forward**

Consideration of road safety and highways at previous meetings of the Network had resulted in questions for discussion.

Nick Cowling, Service Manager Transport Data, Road Safety and Traffic Control was invited to speak.

He said the Vale of Frome LCN had recorded the largest number of fatal collisions during the period under analysis with a total of 14 incidents which equated to 12% of the total for the whole of Somerset.

Matthew Reed, Avon and Somerset Police said the Police were aware of the statistics. He said the Police and partners were working together to change behaviours and improve road safety. Speed watch community groups were particularly useful for recording number plates and speeds. Other work carried out by the Police included enforcement, increased visibility of Police Officers and road safety education in schools.

In response to questions, he confirmed that apart from letters and personal visits there was no further formal action the Police could take as a result of information given to the Police by speed watch groups.

The Chair of Rode Parish Council asked the Network to note that an agreement had been made to reduce the speed limit on the A361 in Rode. However, they were still waiting two years later for the TRO to introduce the limit. The Service Manager agreed to investigate the issue and report directly to Rode Parish Council.

Members of the Network agreed that the installation of safety cameras and the introduction of new speed limits were very slow to achieve. It was noted that any changes to road safety measures were heavily driven by data, rather than local requests.

There was a discussion about Section 106 money and how this was protected for the purposes for which it was intended, which often meant road safety improvements.

Members noted a new Highway Steward scheme. This was based on a pilot which had been carried out in Exmoor. For a cost, the Steward would visit parish and towns to carry out maintenance works to the highways. This would give parishes greater control of the maintenance in their area. Members were

interested to know whether the Steward could help with incidents of fly tipping.

Members requested that the slides be sent to them after the meeting, including the map which showed the collision hotspots in the area. And details of the Highway Steward Scheme.

The Chair thanked the guest speakers. He encouraged discussions to carry on outside of the meeting. He said the Vale of Frome LCN Steering Group would also continue to meet to prepare for the next meeting.

Item 30: **Actions from this meeting**

As noted in the minutes.

Item 31: **Dates of future meetings**

The Chair advised that the provisional future meeting dates were:

- Thursday, 8 February 2024 Beckington Village Hall
- Tuesday, 23 April 2024(venue to be confirmed)

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