

Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Minehead and Watchet

Date: Tuesday, 5 December 2023

Time: 6.33 pm - 8.29 pm

Location: West Somerset House, Council Chamber

Chaired by: Andy Sully (Chair)

LCN core membership attendance:

Name:	Representing
Cllr Hugh Davies	Somerset Council
Andy Hadley	Somerset Council
Rosemary Woods	Somerset Council
Cllr Brenda Maitland Walker (Vice Chair)	Carhampton PC
Cllr John Passingham	Combe Florey PC
Cllr Tony Brooks	Crowcombe PC
Cllr Craig Palmer	Minehead TC
Cllr Robin Wichard	Nettlecombe PC
Cllr Ian Duncan	Old Cleeve PC
Cllr Jan Swan	Sampford Brett PC
Cllr Chris Bramall	Stogumber PC
Cllr John Irvén	Watchet TC
Cllr Sue Sherry	West Quantoxhead PC
Cllr Ian Aldridge	Williton PC
Loretta Whetlor	SALC
PCSO Katherine Williams	Avon and Somerset Police
Bernard Maynard Smith	Minehead Coast Development Trust
Izzy Silvester	CCS Village Agent
Paul Matcham	Minehead Eye / Connect Somerset
Martin Stevens	Watchet Coastal Community Team

Officer attendance:

Pippa Hughes, (Interim LCN Link Officer), Sam Murrell (Clerk), Tom Parkinson (ICT Specialist), Kali Martin (Highways),

Other attendees:

Name:

Cllr Theo Butt Philip, Lead Member for
Corporate Resources and Transformation

Wendy Philipson

Sue Smith

Alan Parslow

Mimi Palmer

Ben Parker (Clerk)

Geoff Williams

PCSO Zack Howe

PCSO Melanie Cherrington-Firkins

Maya Clayden

Jan Ayers

Kevin Francis

Hester Watson

Katy Attwater

Allan Jeffery

Maureen Smith

Representing

Somerset Council

Member of the Public (W. Quantoxhead)

Carhampton PC

Crowcombe PC

Minehead TC

Minehead TC

Old Cleeve PC

Avon and Somerset Police

Avon and Somerset Police

CCS Village Agent

Watchet Coastal Community Team

Williton and District Business Association

West Somerset Green Forum

Member of the public (Speaker)

Member of the public

West Somerset Community Land Trust

Virtual attendees:

Ray Tew

Zara Aitken

Fiona Toms

Iain Porter

Paul Elliston

Kate Hellard

Minehead Coastal Development Trust

Minehead Coastal Development Trust

Minehead People Place Partnership

Quantock National Landscapes

Somerset Rivers Authority

Somerset Council

Summary of discussion:

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

Item 18: **Apologies for Absence**

Somerset Cllrs Mandy Chilcott, Christine Lawrence, Marcus Kravis and Mike Rigby. Rev. Andrew Tatham (Quantock Deanery).

Item 19: **Declarations of Interest**

None were declared.

Item 20: **Notes from the Previous Meeting**

The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed as a true record by those in attendance.

Item 21: **An update on Somerset Council's Financial Position**

Cllr Theo Butt Philip, the Lead Member for Transformation and Resources took questions about the Council's current financial position. This followed a letter being sent to the parishes from the Leader Cllr Bill Revans, addressing the subject of asset and service devolution. (A copy of the letter can be viewed [here](#)).

A slide pack explaining the Council's financial position and where the budgetary pressures lie can be viewed [here](#).

Questions from the floor were raised as follows:-

Crowcombe PC – The parishes were very small, with limited funds and small precepts. Even with an increase on the precept, how could some of these assets and services be financed? And what would happen to them if the parishes didn't have the capacity or capability to take them on?

A: *It will depend on demand for the asset and or service and will be tailored to suit the work and parish needs. Services are provided in different ways across the county, so this will need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. In some instances, if the parish does not take on the work required, then this service is*

likely to be cut.

West Quantoxhead PC – The smaller parishes don't employ full time staff, and some clerks only work a few hours a week. All of the parish councillors are volunteers, and don't want the responsibility of managing staff. How will this be managed if assets/services are devolved and staff are TUPEd across?

A: *Parish Councils are different sizes and already have varying responsibilities. Somerset Council will offer advice and assistance to those parishes who wish to take on additional assets and services.*

Old Cleeve PC – Cllr Ian Duncan: Why did it take so long for the Council's financial position to come to light, and then why such a rush to get out the letter about devolution? It has landed very badly!?

A: *The new Council has been winding up the financial affairs of the 5 legacy councils and has been working with a new finance system. Somerset Council was aware there was an issue but not the scale of the problem until it started actively looking at the budget setting process for the next financial year. It also had to consider what grant would come in from central government and any reserves that it held. Once the problem was identified it was important to let the parishes know as soon as possible, especially in light of their precepting process. It was recognised that it might not have been great timing, but if it had waited, then most parishes would have already submitted their precept application for the 2024/25 Financial year. The letter was sent out to give the parishes an awareness of the current challenges.*

Watchet TC – Cllr John Irven - The timing of the letter landed badly. Watchet TC already ran a youth club (following SCC withdrawing the youth service in 2012), a community library, the Esplanade and the former WSDC public toilets in the town. It was very late in the precepting process to advise the parishes that they may need to raise additional precept, especially with no hard financial figures to back up the fact. It was not ethical or legal to precept on "fresh air" or to precept for reserves that may or may not be needed. Much more information was required, if Watchet TC was to consider taking on this work.

A: *Any parish that wished to find out more needed to contact the devolution team devolution@somerset.gov.uk expressing an*

interest.

Cllr Rosemary Woods – Asked what was being done for good fiscal management? Had concerns that the democratic process and the Executive set-up itself may be draining much needed money. (One example being the payments to Executive members, and their deputies, and the special duties costs).

A: *All current systems, processes and costs are being scrutinised across the Council. Executive members don't have deputies, and the set-up of the Executive is being examined. The Council is looking to identify savings, right across its services which will include the democratic processes as well as the ones identified in the letter.*

Minehead People and Place Partnership – Online – Fiona Toms asked what was being done with premises and staffing? These were the biggest costs in the delivery of services and where most savings could be made.

A: *It was true that premises costs had significant impacts on the budget especially around the payment of utilities. This was being addressed in that there was a rationalisation process taking place which would look at the sale of some of the Council's buildings. In the short term, parts of County Hall, and some areas in Shepton Mallet were being "mothballed" over the winter and the staff who worked there, relocated to alternative sites. This was to reduce the utility bills and make savings on heating and lighting during the winter months.*

Old Cleeve PC – Cllr Ian Duncan - The service costs of the suggested services that may be devolved need to properly costed. The parishes will absolutely NOT precept where there is no business case stating how the costs are broken down and what they will be expected to cover. It is unlikely that this will be received in the available remaining time, and as such they are likely to be lost.

Minehead Coast Development Trust – It was difficult to understand how splitting and fragmenting the service was going to be more cost effective overall. It was very sobering to consider that it was going to be the Council Taxpayers who were going to be hit hardest in the pocket.

SALC – Loretta Whetlor said that in the rural areas, the only possible way of delivering services was through the clustering of parishes and working in collaboration. This was effectively creating a “mini district council” but without the benefit of paid staff and a reliance on volunteers. Assets could be transferred but there would be legal implications and it would take time.

Williton PC – Cllr Ian Aldridge asked what was happening with the former Somerset West and Taunton Council commercial property investment portfolio? He was aware that the former district council had bought commercial properties to the tune of nearly £100million and used the income generated to fund revenue services. Was this likely to continue or were these likely to be sold?

A: *All the 4 district councils had assets that are being assessed. These are made up of the main Council buildings, as well as commercial properties. These are still performing and bringing in a small profit, but it is likely that the Council will have to use capital receipts to reduce deficits. Central government is unlikely to help especially if there are perceived assets to sell. Capitalisation will be achieved through selling these properties and not via borrowing. Any sales must be managed sensibly to ensure the properties are not sold at a loss.*

Carhampton PC – Cllr Brenda Maitland Walker – the former WSDC had already devolved a lot of assets to parishes, and there were only a few left. It would be sensible to set up a working group to look at how the remaining ones could be managed. It was recognised that it was very uneven across the county, because different districts had different methods of delivery. Cllr Brenda Maitland Walker asked who would be responsible for picking up the legal costs? This would be a consideration and would make the parishes reluctant to pick up the bill. (Historically in West Somerset, the former district council picked up the legal fees when it transferred the public toilets across).

A query was raised on running the LCN meetings and how much was budgeted for this? There were a number of officers in attendance and this must impact the cost.

A: *The annual budget for all 18 LCNs in the first year was £300k. Two of the staff highlighted by the questioner were not employed by Somerset Council but were in fact CCS village*

agents. Kali Martin (Highways) was in the room and advised that he attended LCN meetings in his own time as a point of interest and was not obliged to be there. There was a lot of goodwill involved in the facilitation of LCN meetings across Somerset.

Item 22: **Public Question Time**

Katherine Attwater and

Alan Jefferies, members of the public who attend the Hinkley Point C Community Forum asked the following question:-

“I would like to ask if the LCN members are aware of a Consultation being run, starting on the 9th January 2024, by EDF on their desired Variations to the DCO for Hinkley C which include; the methods of storage of Radioactive Nuclear Waste and Removal of the Acoustic Fish Deterrents from the cooling water intake heads.”

Katherine was concerned that since the demise of Somerset West and Taunton Council, there was no statutory consultee Council to follow up residents’ concerns at a local level.

The Chair responded:-

I can confirm that the Parish Councils that are adjacent to the Hinkley Point C site are listed as Non-Statutory Consultees.

However if there are any Clerks who wish to contact you on behalf of other parishes, please let me know a contact email address and we will forward this on.

Katherine agreed to follow this up after the meeting.

Cllr Sue Sherry from West Quantoxhead PC asked for more information, as they were a neighbouring parish and would like to participate in the consultation.

Maureen Smith – West Somerset Community Landtrust (WSCL)

Asked that attendees consider the lack of affordable housing in West Somerset for local people and was concerned to see that Housing had not been considered a priority by the Minehead and Watchet LCN. She represented the West Somerset Community Landtrust who hoped to work with landowners in identifying prospective development sites. Cllr Sully suggested that she

provided a resume of the work and report to the next LCN meeting in February.

Item 23: **Feedback from Flooding Recovery Drop In Events**

Paul Elliston, Somerset Rivers Authority Community Engagement Officer presented some slides which outlined the events of Sunday 17 September. Two drop in events had subsequently taken place to gather information on how local communities had been impacted. These had taken place in Carhampton and Minehead.

The presentation slides can be viewed [here](#).

Questions arising:-

Williton PC – Cllr Ian Aldridge asked what could be done when housing was being developed over a flood plain, and there appeared to be no constraints placed on the developers. Could Somerset Council please put pressure on the landowner to relieve the channel of the Flood Relief Scheme. If this was covered over it could potentially have a catastrophic effect on the rest of West Somerset, as it would cut off access for all vehicles and traffic including the emergency services.

A: Paul Elliston asked that his concerns were emailed to flooding@somerset.gov.uk so that they could be followed up.

Cllr Brenda Maitland Walker agreed to follow up some of the issues raised in the drop-in events directly with the Area Highways office.

Item 24: **Result of the prioritisation exercise from the previous meeting**

At the previous LCN meeting, each of the groups had discussed local priorities and themes. The results of the exercise had been scored and evaluated, in order to determine where the Minehead and Watchet wanted to focus attention. The data table can be viewed [here](#).

Public Transport – in particular the loss of the No28 Bus Service had been identified as the main area of concern. Although the

Exmoor LCN had little influence on commercial transport operators it was recognised that it could support the work of the Somerset Transport Group. A slide pack that had been presented at a meeting of the Somerset Bus Partnership in October 23 is available to view [here](#). Cllr Sully also advised that there were plans to turn the former Taunton bus station, into a mobility hub once the NHS had vacated it.

Sam Murrell provided some additional insight and explained that some of the themes were considered interlinked or of equal importance. The table had been colour coded where this had been stated.

As such “Climate Change” had not been prioritised but three of the groups highlighted that Flooding was a concern to them. It was also stated that this was specific to the Highway especially around the main arterial routes along the A39.

Health and Wellbeing was impacted by lack of basic needs such as Housing being fulfilled. The groups had interlinked these themes.

Education and Young People were considered interlinked. It was important that young people had access to more opportunities.

The themes of Business, Employment and Communication were considered interlinked.

Interestingly none of the groups had identified Crime and Disorder and anti social behaviour concerning young people as an area of concern.

Although some tables had listed Planning Enforcement, none of them had made this a priority.

In light of the findings some events had already taken place.

- A Homefinder Somerset online presentation which explained how housing allocations were decided, along with a presentation on the new Somerset Council Housing development at Rainbow Way, Minehead.

- Two flood drop-in events in Carhampton and Minehead to gather data on the flooding which occurred on Sunday 17 September. Paul Elliston had already provided feedback on this.

Item 25: **Feedback from Homefinder Somerset Presentation**

On Tuesday 14 November, the Somerset Council Housing development team carried out a presentation on the Rainbow Way Scheme, via Microsoft Teams.

On the same day, Homefinder Somerset presented slides on their choice based letting scheme, explaining how it works and how properties are allocated.

It was agreed to circulate the slide pack with the minutes, but with the agreement of the Chair, this item was removed from the agenda.

Item 26: **Action and next steps?**

- To establish a Highways Working sub-group with representatives from the parishes, supported by Highways officers from Somerset Council. This would look into the viability of setting up a Highway Steward scheme and possibly partnering with the Exmoor LCN to finance it.

Kate Hellard said the cost of the Highway Steward Scheme would be £50k which would be shared across 2 LCN areas. (Sam Murrell provided an overview on how the pilot scheme had worked on Exmoor and signposted to information available online). This can be viewed [here](#).

- To assist parishes with updating their flood plans. Paul Elliston offered his services to facilitate this.
- Support the Somerset Transport Group and obtain an update on the No28 service.

Item 27: **Dates of Future Meetings**

Wednesday 7 February 2024 commencing at 6.30pm

Date in April 2024 to be confirmed.

These will take place at West Somerset House.

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