

Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Hestercombe

Date: Monday, 11 December 2023

Time: 7.00 pm - 8.55 pm

Location: Britton's Ash Community Hall, Bridgwater Road, Bathpool, Taunton, TA2 8FT

Chaired by: Stuart Haskins (West Monkton Parish Council) (Chair)

LCN core membership attendance:

Name:	Representing
Cllr Dixie Darch	Somerset Council
Gibbins, Kingston St Mary Parish Council	Kingston St Mary Parish Council
Liz Leyshon	Somerset Council
Heather Shearer	Somerset Council
Shepherd, West Monkton Parish Council	West Monkton Parish Council
Councillor Julian Taylor, North Petherton Town Council	North Petherton Town Council
Wilson, Broomfield Parish Council	Broomfield Parish Council
Helen Barrington, Thurloxtton Parish Council	
Hendrick Coombs, Thurloxtton Parish Council	
Charlie Cudlip, Creech St Michael Parish Council	
Alan Hall, West Monkton Parish Council	

Kate Welsh, West Monkton Parish Council

Alan West, Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council

Officer attendance:

Name:	Representing
Max Perry	Democratic Services, Somerset Council
Jonathan Hallows	Democratic Services, Somerset Council
Kate Hellard	LCN Team, Somerset Council
Emmaline Kay	LCN Team, Somerset Council

Apologies:

Name:	Representing
Cllr Tom Deakin	Somerset Council
David Fothergill	Somerset Council
Bill Revans	Somerset Council

Summary of discussion:

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

Item 17: **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from the following individuals:

- Cllr Norman Cavill
- Cllr Tom Deakin
- Cllr Lee Baker
- Cllr Bill Revans
- Cllr Alan Bradford
- Andrew Williams – Clerk to Creech St Michael Parish

Council

Item 18: **Declarations of Interest**

There were no new Declarations of Interest raised at this time.

Item 19: **Notes from the Previous Meeting**

The notes were approved as a true and accurate record on the meeting held on the 2nd of October 2023.

Item 20: **Update on Actions from the Previous Meeting**

There were no updates on actions from the previous meeting.

Item 21: **Public Question Time**

Public Questions were raised at the item that was discussed, rather than this item.

Item 22: **Update on Somerset Council Financial Situation**

This item was presented by Cllr Liz Leyshon (Lead Member for Resources and Performance), on behalf of the Leader of Somerset Council, Cllr Bill Revans.

- Cllr Leyshon explained the background information as to how the current financial circumstances had impacted on Somerset Council. She then discussed details of last year's budget and how that has fed on into this financial year, describing what has been a 'catch up year' to make up for the impact of inflation on services/funding.
- With the positive that the minimum living wage had risen, Somerset Council had then been hit over the course in the last few year, by soaring costs of Adult Social Care across the county as a result of the abandoned Fair Cost of Care exercise.
- The Councillor then discussed the implementations put in place since the declaration of Somerset Council's financial emergency, particularly focusing on the creation of the 3 'Spending Boards', that have the final say on all spending going out of the authority above a certain limit. Then raising that the threats would come from attempting

to set the program of reserves for next year, and that would push us closer to the option of having to declare a Section 114.

- The further impacts on the Council were then discussed with it likely to be slimmed down, with fewer officers and offices to conduct its business.
- Cllr Leyshon then discussed the recent letter sent out by the Leader of the Council, reassuring Parishes that they were not be forced to take on assets that they could not support, but meanwhile stressing the importance of working together to find a solution to allow for the delivery of essential services.

A discussion followed about the issues raised:

- Whether a crucial area such as Highways would be devolved or stay with Somerset Council, to which the Lead Member confirmed that due to its importance it would stay as a responsibility of the Unitary Authority.
- This prompted a discussion of the creation and trial of 'Highways Steward' posts, that would operate in and around several Parishes, identifying and fixing any issues, and carrying out general maintenance on Highways across their attributed area.
- The job description for this role will be available as soon as possible so that they can gauge interest from Parishes
- How good was the response to the Leader of Council's letter had been from the Parish Councils? The response was mixed, many big town councils are keen on taking on different services/facilities, but a few smaller Parish have raised concerns about their capabilities and whether they were being pressed to take on than they could handle.
- Officers/Councillors then debated the idea of Parishes putting some of their Parish Precept income into a 'Village Improvement Fund'.
- A further discussion was held on the question of who held the responsibility for the staff providing services Parishes may take on. The response was that it was dependent on how the services were provided under the pre-Unitary authority, as there are several different ways they are handled around the county.

- The next question, focused on Buses, inquiring whether the financial situation would have an impact on Rural Services? The answer given stated that the future of the at the present time was unclear, but it must be acknowledged that once current funding runs out that it will be a challenge to maintain frequency of some services.

Item 23: **Updates from Flood Resilience Meeting (20th October)**

This item was presented by attending Parish Councillor Alan Hall, who is Vice-Chair for West Monkton Parish Council.

- A broad description was given regarding the impacts of recent flooding in Bathpool, and other places within the Hestercombe LCN area. Research had been conducted in these areas, working with agencies and neighbours to find sites effected.
- Through this, the Quantock Hills had been identified as the prime area for concern. Engineers have been visiting the land around the area to analyse what mitigations can be put in place.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- Who is paying for this ongoing work? The response was that the Environment Agency had provided funding for it.
- There were concerns raised that the mitigations in the Quantocks would lead to later problems. There was an offer to visit the Somerset Rivers Authority and learn more about their work.

The action was then taken that Local Community Networks (LCNs) should write a coordinated letter to all Members of Parliament (MPs) that have a flood-affected area of their constituency within the Hestercombe LCN boundary in order to try and request support in tackling the issue.

Amendment: It was noted that there had been a significant reduction in the EA maintenance budget for the Wessex Region, including Somerset.

The rivers still needed dredging and the banks maintained. The

river channels are narrowing and trees growing in the banks.

Natural flood management would have very little impact on flooding events on the moors.

Item 24: **Action and Next Steps for Youth Provision**

- The Chair made an opening statement, asking the about whether they felt there was enough Youth provision in their areas, and informing them that there are 12 schools within the boundary of the Hestercombe LCN.
- The representative from SPARK Somerset spoke on the importance in such an area that people are brought together, helping secure vital funding and connecting different organisations and professionals within the LCN.
- There was a need identified for more knowledge and awareness of the work that SPARK Somerset are doing.
- Representatives from the Parishes of Creech St Michale and North Petherton raised their interests in how to involve their communities.
- There was a consensus across the attending group regarding issues with provision for Youth Support across the LCN area, particularly with indoor/outdoor venues to hold these sessions in. it was suggested that the LCN good look into seeing what facilities are available in an area and sharing that information.
- It was suggested that the way to proceed was to gain the direct opinions of young people, either in person or via a survey.
- The LCN were asked in liaison with SPARK Somerset to help Parishes understand what funding is available to help improve facilities, and where it can be found.

Item 25: **Dates and Topics of Future Meetings**

The date of the next meeting of the Hestercombe LCN is the **21st of February 2024.**

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