

Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - South East Somerset (Wincanton)

Date: Wednesday, 6 December 2023

Time: 6.30 pm - 8.10 pm

Location: Virtual

Chaired by: Ewan Jones and Judi Morison

LCN core membership attendance:

Councillor Nicola Clark	Somerset Council
Councillor Henry Hobhouse	Somerset Council
Councillor Tom Power	Somerset Council
Councillor Lucy Trimnell	Somerset Council
Councillor Kevin Messenger	Somerset Council
Dominic Savage	Abbas & Templecombe PC
Robin Cave	Abbas & Templecombe PC
Tina Chapman	Abbas & Templecombe PC
Ruby Coombes	Ansford PC
Ewan Jones (Joint Chair)	Bruton TC
Stuart Anderton	Bruton TC
Judi Morison (Joint Chair)	Castle Cary TC
Lisa Davis	Castle Cary TC (Clerk)

Robin Bastable	Charlton Musgrove PC
Tim Adams	Compton Pauncefoot & Blackford PM
Charles Evans	Ditcheat PC
Pam Griffiths	Ditcheat PC
Ken Courtney	Henstridge PC
Adrian Gaymer	Henstridge PC
Ronnie Smith	Henstridge PC
Denise Finch	Henstridge PC
Norman Purcell	Lydford on Fosse PC
Tim Carty	Milborne Port PC
Simon Pritchard	Milborne Port PC (Clerk)
Andy Keys-Toyer	North Cadbury PC
Mareike Beyer	North Cadbury PC
Mark Hutton	Pitcombe PC
Annette Hobhouse	Pitcombe PC
John Brendan	Queen Camel PC
Alison Willasey-Wilsey	Shepton Montague PC
Julia Hunter	Shepton Montague PC
Cherry Toop	South Cadbury & Sutton Montis PC
Richard Squires	Sparkford PC
Howard Ellard	Wincanton TC
Emma Hix	Wincanton TC
Stefan Wing	Wincanton TC
Lizzy Ralph	Wincanton TC

Sue Place

Connect Somerset

Rosanna Green

Avon & Somerset Police

Ann Diment

Somerset Association Local Councils

Officer attendance:

Name:

Representing

Kate Hellard, Somerset Council LCN

Somerset Council

Terena Isaacs, Locality Officer, Somerset Council

Somerset Council

Somerset Council

Paul Elliston

Somerset Council

John Nicholson

Somerset Council

Gary Warren

Somerset Council

Jo Boucher

Other attendees:

Name:

Representing

Councillor Theo Butt-Phillip (Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources)

Somerset Council

Barry Taylor

Paul Williams

Lucie Reader

Elaine Owen

Dechen Chodron

Caroline Donald

Chris Edwards

Apologies:

Name:	Representing
Di Hammet	Cucklington PC
Ken Flood	Sparkford PC
Tom Howe	Wincanton TC
Cllr Claire Sully	Somerset Council

Summary of discussion:

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

Item 19: Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Claire Sully, Tom Howe of Wincanton TC, Di Hammet of Cucklington PM and Ken Flood of Sparkford PC.

Item 20: Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made by the Somerset Councillors present at the meeting.

Item 21: Notes from the Previous Meeting

The notes of the previous meeting held on 4 October 2023 were approved as a correct record by those present.

Item 22: An update on Somerset Council's current Financial Position

The Chairman introduced Cllr Theo Butt Philip (Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources) who provided an update on the financial position of Somerset Council. He noted the authority needed to reduce spending as there was a projected

overspend in the current year and pressure to close a forecast £100million budget gap (now approx. £87 million) for the coming financial year. He briefly explained how the majority of funding gets allocated, and noted the authority would be asking parishes and communities to look at helping to deliver some non-statutory services if they wish to protect that service in their community. He confirmed the Leader of the Council had recently written to all town and parish councils and that future details would be coming forward over the next weeks and months regarding how this may be taken forward and how parishes may be able to work together to provide some of these services. Somerset Council would need to seriously look at what services it could continue to provide into the future, and there were some difficult decisions to be made.

During a question and answer type session, Cllr Theo Butt Philip (Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources, Kate Hellard (Service Manager LCNs) provided some responses to points of detail. A summary of some of the points and responses are provided below:

- *How will parish councils especially smaller ones or parish meetings going to provide or deliver these services and when will we get more information in order to set our budgets?*

Acknowledged the challenges the town and parish councils face but as yet were unable to provide a further detailed list. More details would be sent out as soon as possible including what services the parishes have already taken an interest on and costing surrounding these services. He anticipated the role of the LCN being a forum going forward to help parishes work together.

- *How will the Council help us assess these services and identify the costs involved?*

Ask that parishes look at the services that are most important and contact the devolution team at devolutionteam@somerset.gov.uk to let them know what services they are interested in taking on. It was noted some parishes already allocate a special projects fund

which enables them to manage funds if things are needed quite quickly. Appreciate some things are easy to put into place and others are not.

- *This financial situation hasn't happened overnight and will LCN's carry on as they are as they are only a discretionary service?*

Explained process of a 'deep dive' into the finance situation which had begun back in the summer regarding in particular the adult services and timings involved.

- *As well as finances there is a need to ensure that an administrative infrastructure is in place before parishes take on these services to help everyone collectively work together?*

Colleagues across the county services are looking to create some 'how to' guides for example: rights of way checklists and explained the highway steward scheme as an example.

- *Parishes in this LCN area vary greatly in size. There are several Parish Meetings and they have very limited powers to spend money or raise precepts?*

Acknowledge these concerns as parish meetings are in a different position from parish councils. However, believe there is a provision to vary this and that there may be an opportunity to work with other nearby parish councils. Nonetheless this is a fair point and further work needs to be done on this issue.

- *Assume Council Tax will have to go up and the parishes precepts?*

Yes unfortunately due to the financial situation there are some services that the Council will simply not be able to afford to provide and therefore the parish precept will need to go up to help fund and provide these going forward.

- *What about insurances and liability of these services – who will provide this?*

This will be dependent on service by service. However, a list of contractors can be provided, although it is understood the provider would need to have these insurances in place to be able to provide these pieces of work.

- *Why has the social care bill gone up so dramatically?*

Explained the main issue has been the process relating to the Fair Cost of Care initiative which was started and then with central government not funding the gap. He explained the reasons why the care costs have considerably increased on a demand led service.

- *Had been told that the unitary proposal would make savings – this doesn't seem to have happened?*

Process has taken longer than had hoped and now with the financial situation the business case is no longer fit for purpose and therefore are needing to find substantially more savings going forward which will involve further streamlining of services and staff restructuring.

- *In the small parishes with limited manpower and with the worry that many councillors may give up their role going forwards, how are we meant to provide this work?*

This would be led on a community by community basis with smaller parishes more likely to have to rely on volunteers in comparison to the larger towns. However, he stressed none of this would be compulsory for the parishes and they would not be expected to provide any services that they could not meet. Further work is needed to support parishes on this going forward.

- *Will devolution of services be a permanent arrangement and how will these services be safeguarded if in the future parishes cannot provide them?*

Unsure exactly as uncertain of local government funding in the future but based on recent history most areas of devolution will be on a permanent basis. Would need to

look at it on a case by case service around the continuation of services should no one be able to provide the service and unfortunately this may mean they have to stop.

- *What communication have you given to the public and parishes to tell them that their precepts will need to go up?*

Quite a lot of publicity has been done around the Council's current financial situation but noted concerns and would take this away to ensure this is fully communicated.

Acknowledged the frustrations expressed that not all information needed is currently available. Slides showing the current financial graphics would be circulated with the notes of the meeting.

The Chairman noted that discussions about the financial situation would obviously continue and asked that a recent presentation regarding relative precepts be sent out to all the LCN parishes. He also asked parish representatives to take away thoughts of what services they could work to deliver and email the LCN team (and the devolution team) using the highway steward scheme as an example.

ACTION: LCN team –presentation regarding parish precepts and the financial graphics slides to be circulated.

Contact for the LCN team – southeastlcn@somerset.gov.uk

Item 23: **Public Question Time**

There were no public questions.

Item 24: **Discussion regarding Highways and Transport Issues**

Gary Warren, Somerset Council Service Manager –Traffic Engineering gave a brief overview of the service. He explained they were a front-line operation dealing with all traffic and safety engineering issues throughout the county, for example parking, speeding, HGV issues and responsible for the sign and line assets on the highway.

He reiterated it was a challenging time for all with a limited

budget but highlighted what he considered a statutory service which was essentially anything that assist the moving public and the safety of the network.

John Nicholson, Somerset Council Assistant Highway Service Manager also gave a brief overview and responsibilities of the service. This included highway drainage, verges including cutting and visibility splay, resurfacing of roads and officer support and assessment reacting to issues raised with online reporting.

In response to a comment made he confirmed the verge cutting alongside the A roads and most of the B roads would still be carried out under planned maintenance. The hedges are generally the adjacent landowner's responsibility.

They also provided the following contact email and asked that parishes contact them with any issues or questions they may have trafficmanagement@somerset.gov.uk

Kate Hellard (Service Manager LCN) explained that a Transport and Highways working group is to be set up to further explore any specific issues. She used the current drainage and flooding issues and the Highways Steward scheme as examples and felt it was an opportunity to discuss and address these issues further with representatives of the South East LCN.

Judi Morrison expressed her thanks to the excellent service provided to the town and parish councils and highlighted the pilot LCN in West who have the opportunity in the pilot to offer a highway steward. It was suggested a parish representative from West be invited to the South East LCN to share their experience.

ACTIONS: Volunteers who wish to be on the Transport and Highways working group for the South East LCN - any expression of interest be sent to the following email address:

southeastlcn@somerset.gov.uk

Item 25: **Update on working groups**

Terena Isaacs provided an update on the footpaths working group including:

- She had sourced footpath maps for all parishes in the South East LCN and would circulate these out in due course.
- A further meeting will be arranged for Jan/Feb 2024 and invited all parishes to attend to increase participation. Please contact southeastlcn@somerset.gov.uk

Ewan Jones provided an update on the flooding working group that had met in November. He said it had been widely attended with excellent discussions taken place with officers and representatives from parishes, especially those effected by the recent flooding. Discussions involved emergency flooding, community flood schemes, emptying of gullies and working with landowners to ensure ditches are drained /cleared. He explained a bid submitted regarding the DEFRA natural flood management scheme. He also confirmed an Emergency Plan workshop is to be held on Monday 8th January in the Market House at Castle Cary 10.30 – 12.00 and invited parishes to attend.

Councillor Henry Hobhouse also wished it noted that a meeting has been arranged for all parishes on the Cam valley on the 31st January 2024 at 7pm Queen Camel to help support a River Cam Flood system and Flood Defence plan to help and support parishes in the future.

Item 26: **Planning for future meetings**

Kate Hellard acknowledged the need to further look at children and young people and health and wellbeing in our communities. She felt there was opportunity in the new year to look at what other impacts and needs there are on the residents and how we can work together in the future.

Judi Morrison asked that focus be on the adult social care and solutions to tackle loneliness. During discussion it was agreed that a lot of good work had taken place in previous pilots around this and agreed there was a lot to build on and that these key points be readdressed.

In response to comments made it was suggested that working groups were the way forward to help support parishes in the

devolution of services either individually or collectively and with the LCN helping to facilitate and bring all these groups together to deliver tangible actions.

Item 27: **Dates of future meetings**

The next meeting of the South East Somerset LCN is scheduled for 22nd Feb 2024 at 6.30pm at Charlton Musgrove Village Hall.

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