

## Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Cheddar and Axbridge

Date: Tuesday, 9 January 2024

Time: 6.30 pm - 8.07 pm

Location: Fairlands Middle School Hall, Marsons Way, Cheddar, BS27 3PG

Chaired by: Councillor Pauline Ham

Vice Chair: Councillor Francesca Mitton

### LCN core membership attendance:

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Danielle Hardaway	Avon & Somerset Police
Councillor Pauline Ham	Somerset Council
Councillor Bob Filmer	Somerset Council
Councillor Matthew Martin	Somerset Council
Councillor Heather Shearer	Somerset Council
Councillor Roz Wyke	Somerset Council
Councillor Theo Butt Philip	Somerset Council
Councillor Francesca Mitton	Axbridge Town Council

### Officer attendance:

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Julie Cooper	Somerset Council
Kate Hellard	Somerset Council

Tom Parkinson

Somerset Council

Debbie Widdows

Somerset Council

### Other attendees:

#### **Name:**

Fiona Torrens-Spence

Councillor Derek Bradley-Balmer

Derek Bradley-Balmer

Paul Fineran

Corran Fineran

Peter Colton

Christina Brown

Gill Davies

Claire Settle

Delia McCarthy

Sam Peake

Frances Cartwright

Lindsey Baker

Jacky Farley

Lynne Goodfellow

#### **Representing**

Chapel Allerton Parish Council

Cheddar Parish Council

Cheddar Parish Council

Cheddar Parish Council

Cheddar Parish Council

Cheddar Parish Council

Cheddar Parish Council

Cheddar Parish Council

Compton Bishop Parish Council

Compton Bishop Parish Council

Shipham Parish Council

Shipham Parish Council

Wedmore Parish Council

Wedmore Parish Council

### Virtual attendees:

#### **Name:**

Kate Benyon

Lynne Myland

Liam Human

Sarah Catling

Doreen Smith

#### **Representing**

Badgworth

Weare

Mark Parish Council

Cheddar Parish Council – Clerk

The Space (Somerset) and Connect

## **Summary of discussion:**

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

Item 18: **Apologies for Absence**

Councillor Tony Grimes attending another parish meeting.

Emily Window

Val Bullen

Item 19: **Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

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

The Notes from the meeting held on 26 October 2023 were approved as a true record of the meeting.

Item 21: **Update on Actions from the Previous Meeting**

There were none.

Item 22: **Update on Somerset Council's current financial position -  
Q&A**

Theo Butt Philip gave an update on the Somerset Council financial emergency and what this meant for the communities, the role of LCNs and this Parish and Town Councils.

He highlighted that:

- When it became apparent that there was financial pressure of £100M, the officers put forward a number of suggestions and as a result the Executive were taking a robust approach to manage the situation.

- The amount owed was principally owing to the increasing cost of delivering adult social care and children services – approximately 63% of the budget came from this. It was a colossal increase caused by the additional cost of placing people in care and historically this had not been high in Somerset.
- The Executive were looking at where they could save money in all areas of what the council did, e.g. discretionary services (optional) as opposed to statutory services (legally required) this equated to £35M in savings.
- This meant that Somerset Council would not be able to deliver all of the services the community was used to receiving.
- An application had been made to Central Government to increase council tax by an additional 5% this year which would bring Somerset Council tax to just below national average for a unitary council.
- The Executive would also look at using some of the council's reserves to plug the gap.

Councillor Butt Philip mentioned the papers which were published last week that included a list of facilities which were being considered for cuts. Among the list were facilities such as:

- Public toilets. He suggested that these may be something that Town or Parish Councils may wish to take on.
- Spend on highways would be considered.
- The viability of continuing to provide tourist centres.
- The number of household waste recycling centres is likely to be reduced.
- The delivery of services to parks etc.

Councillor Roz Wyke explained that children and adult care are a statutory requirement, and it must be done. She further explained that this was indeed vital spend supporting vulnerable people and that it was being paid for from council tax, which was not a sustainable decision as this was based on property tax and a valuation which was done in the early 90's and central government have not yet resolved it.

Councillor Matt Martin pointed out what was happening in Somerset was not an isolated incident. It had also recently

happened in Birmingham and other Councils around the country.

### Questions

Councillor Matt Martin asked for clarification on what would happen in the next 5 – 10 years regarding the continuation of a financial emergency.

### Answer

Councillor Theo Butt-Philip explained that the next stage in the process was called “right-sizing” the organisation. This means reviewing all Council services which would inevitably mean a reduction in staffing and changes in the way in which services are delivered.

It was mentioned that passing on the additional service costs and management to the Town and Parish Councils was not feasible and are the Council considering the knock-on effect of passing on services.

It was notes that perhaps local businesses could open up their toilet facilities to fill the void if public toilets were closed but this would have to be decided by the local community.

### Question

How many adults receive social care?

Councillor Roz Wyke explained that there was a difference in providing services at the government level and council level. The Government nationally restricted the amount of money that local authorities can raise down to 3% plus 2% for social care which is very constrained. However, she pointed out, that Parish and Town Councils were not constrained. The fact was that the Parish and Town Councils can decide exactly what services they wish to provide and then decide how to raise the money to do this.

Councillor Roz Wyke further confirmed that the budget consultation runs until the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January and responses to the

consultation will take into account in the reports and decision making and will be submitted to Scrutiny, which is a public meeting, and there will be opportunities there to make comments. It was not a tick box exercise; it is a genuine consultation exercise. More information can be found on, [budget consultation](#).

Providing services, how to pay for them and how much this would save the Council was further debated.

The Chair confirmed that any further questions may be emailed to the LCN team who will pass them on to Councillor Roz Wyke or Councillor Theo Butt-Philip to answer.

### Item 23: **Public Question Time**

#### Question

If Parish and Town Councils moved to pay the extra money suggested for the services of grass cutting, public toilets and the Highway Steward service, by how much will this reduce the deficit for Somerset? Would this prevent the Chief Financial Officer being required to notify Government with a Section 114 notice?

#### Answer

Councillor Theo Butt-Philip confirmed that the Council did not want to cut the services but there was no money to pay for them. The budget is very complex and devolution of some services is only a part of the overall savings package. The Council is in constant discussion with National Government and is doing all it can to avoid issuing a section114 notice.

He informed everyone that the date to set the budget was 20<sup>th</sup> February and if it was felt that the delivery of the savings was not feasible and that the negative implications were too great and if the Council could find a way of continuing to deliver the service then this would be explored. However, this was a colossal mountain to climb.

He further pointed out that if the Council had to issue a S114 Notice then Government Commissioners would come in and

they would make all of these cuts and more.

Other issues raised from the smaller parishes were that they only had a precept of a few thousand pounds and di not have full time clerks.

Councillor Frankie Mitton explained that the LCNs offered an opportunity for parish/town councils to work together to share resources and reduce costs to individual Town and Parish Councils.

#### Request

Danielle Hardaway, Somerset, and Avon Police, asked for a list to be emailed to her of community touchdown points where she would be able to use WiFi. Her contact details are: [Danielle.hardaway@avonandsomerset.police.uk](mailto:Danielle.hardaway@avonandsomerset.police.uk).

Item 24: **Discussion: What can we do/want to do locally regarding asset and service devolution?**

Item 24.1: **What are the opportunities and risks?**

What are the opportunities and risks?

Kate Hellard, Service Manager for LCNs, gave a presentation on the Highway Steward Scheme highlighting the fact that this was an opportunity to provide enhanced highway maintenance within the LCN area.

She explained that it would be a skilled operative which came with a branded vehicle and would be employed through Kier which is the new highways contractor. This will start in April this year.

They will be responsible for delivering minor works within the capability of a single operative.

These would possibly be deployed to clusters of Parishes. However, if a Parish needed a Highway Steward just for themselves, they would be able to buy into that scheme.

They would also have some responsibility for statutory and safety related work and these would be reported back and inspected by the Highways Authority.

The scope of the work would be low tech and high value, such as previously discussed services like grass cutting and verge pruning etc.

Item 24.2: **What information do we have and what do we need?**

What information do we have and what do we need?

Kate Hellard, Service Manager for LCNs, confirmed that if more information about particular assets or services was required, to email the Devolution Team at [devolution@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:devolution@somerset.gov.uk) and the queries will be logged and picked up.

Kate Hellard further confirmed that as Somerset Council was looking to become smaller and more streamlined, many Parishes were setting a precept which would include a Parish Improvement Fund on the basis that they may well look to buy into some services this year and possibly next year.

She further verified that it was suggested to keep the money locally as some of the services which Somerset delivered were contracted to bigger contractors and Parish/Town Councils were looking at how they could support their local companies.

The cost of a Highway Steward for a Parish/Town or cluster of Parishes, for two and a half days a week, would be £25 000 annually and could start from any point from 1 April 2024 and there was no limit to the number of Highway Stewards which would be recruited through Kier during the course of a year. The minimum term of the contract needed to be at least a year.

Item 24.3: **How can we work together to achieve agreed actions?**

How can we work together to achieve agreed actions?

This was an opportunity, if highways issues were a priority for an LCN, a highways working group needed to be created to talk to the Council's colleagues in the highways team in more detail and to think about how, as a collective of Parish/Town Councils,



they can buy into this scheme.

Slides with more information will be sent out with these notes.

Item 25: **Dates and topics of future meetings**

- Look at the devolution list because the Executive Committee meeting was the next week and then there would be further Council meetings up till the end of February.

Pertinent dates in this process were:

- 15 January. Meeting of Executive Committee to discuss Budget Update Report, which included savings proposed and approach to bridging the funding gap.
- 22 January. Budget consultation closes.
- 25 January. Audit Committee to discuss technical budget papers and make recommendations to the Executive Committee.
- 1 February. Meeting of the Corporate and Resources Scrutiny Committee. Due to discuss the budget, including savings proposals and make recommendations to the Executive Committee.
- 7 February. Meeting of Executive Committee to consider feedback from Scrutiny Committee and results of budget consultation before recommending budget for decision at Full Council.
- 20 February. Full Council meets to agree final budget for 2024/25.

**Topic for next meeting: continue devolution discussions with more detail around the Highway Steward scheme and how this has worked in other areas.**

Issues to consider as part of devolution discussions:

- Can local business associations, if they profit from tourism, help by funding something? The Tourist information Centre in Cheddar is currently run by a voluntary group.
- Comments which were made at this meeting can be discussed more fully and include costing.
- Capital Projects which would be considered for the area.

These were assets which were retained as Capital and permission needed to be obtained from Central Government to move some of the capital into revenue, known as a capitalisation directive. These could be found at:

[SCC Land and Property Transparency List](#)

The assets obtained from the legacy districts can be found here:

**Mendip District Council:** [MDC Land and Property Transparency List](#)

**South Somerset District Council:** [South Somerset Land and Property Transparency List](#)

**Somerset West & Taunton Council:** [SW&T Land Transparency List](#) and [SW&T Property Transparency List](#)

**Sedgemoor District Council:** [Sedgemoor Building Asset Transparency List - 2016-02-08](#)

Suggested venues for next meeting:

- Draycott Village Hall
- Compton Bishop Village Hall

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> March with start time at 6:30.

Contact details for the meeting:  
[cheddarandaxbridgelcn@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:cheddarandaxbridgelcn@somerset.gov.uk)

Contact officer for meeting: LCN Team [lcn@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:lcn@somerset.gov.uk)