

Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Crewkerne and Ilminster

Date: Wednesday, 15 November 2023

Time: 6.30 pm - 8.25 pm

Location: Shrubbery Hotel, Station Road, Ilminster TA19 9AR

Chaired by: Mike Best (Chairman)

LCN core membership attendance:

Name:	Representing
Steve Ashton	Somerset Council
Mike Best	Somerset Council
Adam Dance	Somerset Council
Val Keitch	Somerset Council
Sue Osborne	Somerset Council
Jo Roundell Greene	Somerset Council
Jason Crocker	Ashill Parish Council
Steve Neate	Broadway Parish Council
Geraldine Wills	Chaffcombe Parish Council
Kathy Head	Crewkerne Town Council
Gemma Hughes (Deputy Clerk)	Crewkerne Town Council
David Light	Donyatt Parish Council

William Porritt	Donyatt Parish Council
Zanette Bougourd (Clerk)	Donyatt Parish Council
Pippa Reynolds	Hinton St George Parish Council
Julie Chant (Clerk)	Hinton St George Parish Council
Ray Buckler	Horton Parish Council
Leanne Taylor	Ilminster Town Council
Mark Tredwin (Clerk)	Ilminster Town Council
Lorraine Pike	Ilton Parish Council
Billy Vance	Ilton Parish Council
Merietta Raymond	Knowle St Giles Parish Meeting
David Aslett	Merriott Parish Council
David Shillibier	Merriott Parish Council
Tom Winder	North Perrott Parish Council
Jim Pendleton	Seavington Parish Council
Chris Reyland	Seavington Parish Council
Frank Freeman	West Crewkerne Parish Council
Paul Elliston	Somerset Rivers Authority
Hannah Snowdon	Spark Somerset
Hannah Thurston	Community Council for Somerset

Officer attendance:

Name:

Nathan Turnbull

Kate Hellard, Somerset

Representing

Somerset Council / LCN

Somerset Council / LCN

Becky Sanders

Somerset Council / Democratic Services

Sam Crossman

Somerset Council / ICT

Other attendees:

Name:

Representing

Steve Gray

Crewkerne Community Church

Theo Butt Philip (Cllr)

Somerset Council (Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources)

Virtual attendees:

Name:

Representing

Oliver Patrick (Cllr)

Somerset Council

Roger Bulley

Chiselborough Parish Council

Martyn Hamlin (Clerk)

Chiselborough Parish Council

Hugh Williams

Haselbury Plucknett Parish Council

Ben Jenner-Hurford

Ilminster Town Council

Nick Jones

Lopen Parish Council

Lisa Wilson (Clerk)

Lopen Parish Council

David Bourn

Shepton Beauchamp Parish Council

Fiona Day

Stocklinch Parish Council

Emily Window

Somerset Council / LCN

Apologies:

Name:

Representing

Paul Bradly

Misterton Parish Council

Summary of discussion:

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

Item 1: Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Paul Bradly of Misterton Parish Council.

Item 2: Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest from Somerset Council Councillors present at the meeting.

Item 3: Notes from the Previous Meeting

The notes of the previous meeting held on 21 September 2023 were agreed as a correct record by those present.

Item 4: Update - Somerset Council 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 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. 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:

- *Assume Council Tax will have to go up and parishes possibly their precepts – so public getting a double whammy?*

Finance have already factored in a 5% increase in the Somerset Council element of Council Tax into the £100m shortfall figures. If communities want to see level of services continue as have done until now it will require more money.

- *The £100m gap hasn't happened overnight – how many years has this situation been building up?*

The £100m isn't a current deficit – it's what is being forecast for the next financial year. Part of the issue has been the process relating to the Fair Cost of Care exercise which was started, and then postponed with central government not funding the gap – care costs have considerably increased from approx. £500 to £900 per week per person/placement.

- *Have looked at some data since reading the Leader's letter to parishes. Parish precepts vary hugely depending on the size of the parish. People look at percentages more than the actual figures sometimes. Groups of parishes could group together to share resources. Not sure can just justify increasing parish precepts.*

There is limited scope for manoeuvre. Somerset Council may not be able to continue to provide some non-statutory services as no budget. Parishes and communities may need to consider how much they value a specific service, and if the want is great enough, do the parish look to provide/resource that service in their locality.

- *The Leader's letter only refers to cost cutting with little mention about possibilities to increase income. Would like to see a cost cutting side but also a proactive regeneration side.*

We are looking at all the council services including any that

people / parishes can buy into.

- *Using the Parish Ranger Scheme as an example (acknowledge the service has been withdrawn) – many people didn't seem to know about it. There needs to be more promotion of services the council provides to help improve income.*

Acknowledged and noted.

- *The council is in serious financial trouble. Larger towns may need to look to the support the nearby smaller parishes – for example arranging a Highway Steward which surrounding parishes could buy into. Parishes need to be more proactive rather than reactive.*

Acknowledged and noted.

- *In the small parishes it's not only finance that's an issue but also manpower. Worry that many councillors may give up their role going forwards.*

Acknowledged and noted.

- *Parishes in this LCN area vary greatly in size. There are several Parish Meetings and they are unable to precept – if they need a budget they would have to undertake a Community Governance Review which takes considerable time.*

Acknowledged and noted.

- *There is no mention of cost reduction – what's happened about the savings in the unitary proposal?*

The unitary proposal was for £18.5m savings and we are on course for that. The budget gap we are now facing has happened as costs have dramatically increased and income from central government reduced. Local government is funded far less than previously – this is a national problem with multiple councils in a similar position.

- *It would be helpful if Somerset Council could communicate what the statutory services are and the level of discretionary service provided. Parishes need to know the costs of the non-statutory services provided in their areas so that they can understand what the costs might be.*

Acknowledge comment made – we are working on gathering the information and will share with parishes. Neighbouring parishes and the Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) may also be able to give some support.

- *Parish councillors are all working at a maximum and worry how many will retire. Some parishes can do very little to raise money as they have no assets.*

We are having discussions across all LCNs about the Council's financial position. Many comments have been made about delivery of services locally - there are other partners who can be involved to try and make some of these activities happen. There are also networks of volunteers to help and can all work together to achieve economies of scale. Need to work with other stakeholders.

- *This has all been left very late as parishes have a deadline of mid-January to submit their precept information.*

Somerset Council are in the same position as won't hear from central government about the local government finance settlement until mid-December.

- *There are a number of uncertainties of which we have no control over. Getting information to residents is essential. Will be recommending my parish increases its precept.*

None of us want to be in the position we are in – we are committed to do all we can. Acknowledge the frustrations expressed that not all the information needed is currently available.

- *There are fortnightly update meetings with parish and town clerks via Teams. Could a reminder about these meetings*

be circulated?

Noted.

The Chairman noted that discussions about the financial situation would obviously continue and reminded that people were able to email officers and members with any specific queries. He acknowledged the frustrations of the smaller parishes.

ACTION: LCN team - Reminder about the fortnightly update meetings for parish and town clerks to be circulated.

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

Item 5: **Public Question Time**

The Chairman of Horton Parish Council referred to the consultation document – ‘Creating Places for People’, which he had mentioned at the previous meeting. He noted he had recently spoken to a developer who didn’t seem to know anything about the document or consultation. He queried how many responses had been received to the online consultation and asked why the deadline had not been extended to enable discussion by all LCNs?

In response, Kate Hellard (Service Manager LCNs), explained that she didn’t know the response rate for the consultation as the LCN team were not a statutory consultee. In agreement with the Chairman of Horton Parish Council, she noted she would put him in contact with the correct person in the planning team to discuss directly his queries and concerns regarding the Creating Places for People consultation.

Item 6: **Updates from Highways**

The Chairman briefly reminded everyone of the discussion with colleagues from Highways at the previous LCN meeting. He noted there had been further conversations since that meeting and a suggestion out forward is that this LCN forms a sub-group

that meets with Highways officers on a regular basis to discuss issues and take things forward – the sub-group would be a conduit between the LCN and Highways. The suggestion was for 6 or 7 volunteers to form the sub group (from across the LCN area) and to meet during the daytime virtually via Teams. A date for an initial meeting was proposed for Tuesday 5 December at 2.00pm. The Chairman asked if those present thought this would be a good idea.

During a short discussion, there was no indications against the idea but some questions and points of details were raised – Kate Hellard (Service Manager LCNs) responded to the comments made and referred to the Exmoor LCN model which had a Highways Steward, and the additional benefit that forming a sub-group might have.

A comment was also raised regarding training of volunteers to undertake some Highways works and the costs and bureaucracy encountered by parishes when doing this. The Chairman acknowledged the frustrations, and noted he had had a discussion with Highways about delivering some specific (rather than broad) local courses specific to the needs of parishes for local issues and tasks.

ACTIONS: Volunteers to be on a Highways Sub-Group for the Crewkerne and Ilminster LCN – any expressions of interest to be sent to crewkerneandilminsterlcn@somerset.gov.uk
Noting the first meeting of the Highways Sub-Group is proposed for 2.00pm on Tuesday 5 December 2023 as a virtual meeting via Teams.

Item 7: **Discussion on future topics**

Kate Hellard showed a slide highlighting the nine themes which had been raised at the first meeting of the LCN. In seven breakout groups, attendees were asked to agree their top three priority themes and whether any other themes had been missed. For each of the three priority themes, groups were also asked to consider what data may be needed, what do residents say and how could they be consulted, who else might the LCN need to talk to and what was already happening.

Priorities:

1. Lack of public transport, Highways, active travel
2. Environmental Issues, lack of public transport, Somerset Council
3. Environmental issues, Highways (flooding), lack of public transport
4. Highways
5. Communications for residents
6. Support for children and young people, environmental issues (resilience planning), health and well-being
7. Services / environmental issues, Highways (including speeding and flooding), Transport

Some attendees felt that support for children, cost of living, housing, health & well-being, and crime & community policing were topics that possibly could be themes, but it was acknowledged these may be included under the 'services' theme.

Comments noted under each priority / theme included:

Transport:

- Lack of public transport especially in the rural villages
- Lack of public transport links to social / rural isolation and difficulty accessing services – reliance on a car. Some people struggling to access medical appointments due to lack of transport.
- Could there be discussions with Tesco about provision of transport to their local store?

Highways:

- Footpaths – many might be used more if better access – some have steep steps and are slippery. Need links for onward travel.
- Disappointment about withdrawal of the parish ranger service – how might parishes seek an alternative.
- Flooding linked to highways, plus drainage and sewerage.
- Recent flooding - the Environment Agency had recently sent some useful information to Lopen with links to a reporting tool online and other information.
- One parish had recently experience severe flooding –

could the water companies be invite to the LCN so that a better understanding from both sides can be heard?

- Believe a council somewhere has purchased a speed camera which can issues fines – is this an option?
- Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs) – several parishes struggle with locations approved by Highways, there have also been issues with revenge vandalism.
- Linked to communications – regarding contingency planning parishes need contacts for when highways blocked by flooding or fallen trees etc.

Active Travel:

- Stop Line Way – used for pleasure but also commuting to Ilminster and Chard from some locations. Several outstanding issues regarding access and permissions in some areas which have been ongoing for several years and need to be resolved as there is the wider opportunity to link more parishes.
- Has links to climate / environmental issues too.

Environmental issues:

- Bins, grass, lighting and dog bins

Somerset Council:

- Need effective communications from Somerset Council
- For contingency planning - parishes need direct contacts for when highways blocked by flooding or fallen trees etc.
- Parishes need a list of statutory services which have to be legally provided by Somerset Council, so that parishes can cost any discretionary services that may be wanted locally.
- Could clerks have a separate point of contact for Somerset Council.
- Points of contact for the public for Somerset Council need to be promoted.

Support for children and young people:

- Cold weather – need warm spaces (links to health & well-being)
- Are the population figures known in the LCN area?
- Not much happening for young people.
- The Somerset Youth Work Alliance (facilitated by Spark Somerset) were willing to help map youth provision as in

the other areas.

- No youth club in Ilminster due to lack of funding.

Miscellaneous:

- Housing – social housing is over subscribed – there is a housing shortage.
- Cost of living – many issues with people having insufficient money for heating and food.
- Stocklinch have a village Whats App group which works well for keeping residents informed of local issues.
- Would be helpful to know which communication methods other parishes find successful for gaining input from residents on what is important to them.
- Shepton Beachamp and Lopen would be keen to establish links with neighbouring parishes to discuss jointly contracting or accessing a replacement for the Parish Ranger Scheme.

In response to comments made during a brief feedback session, Kate Hellard (Service Manager LCNs) noted:

- There was one contact phone number for Somerset Council
- 0300 123 224 – calls were then prioritised and the call or a message forwarded to the appropriate officer / department – this was the most efficient way for dealing with phone calls.
- In an emergency people could also contact the Police via 111 as they have links to the out of hours teams.
- Local emergency plans would provide some contacts for communities. A collective emergency plan for parishes within the LCN may be something that could be taken forwards if there was a wish to do so.

Note – the presentation slides for this meeting can be viewed at the end of the printed minutes pack or online at: [Document Crewkerne and Ilminster LCN - Modern Council \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/document/crewkerne-and-ilminster-lcn-modern-council)

Item 8: **Action and next steps**

The Chairman reminded everyone of the discussion earlier in the meeting regarding setting up of a Highways sub-group, and

requested that any volunteers for the group to contact the LCN team at crewkerneandilminsterlcn@somerset.gov.uk

Item 9: **Dates of future meetings**

The dates for future meetings of the Crewkerne and Ilminster LCN were noted as:

- Thursday 18 January 2024
- Thursday 21 March 2024
- Thursday 13 June 2024 (AGM)

The LCN team also reminded everyone about suggesting venues for future meetings, noting that good wifi was essential.

Contact officer for the meeting – LCN team:
crewkerneandilminsterlcn@somerset.gov.uk