

## **Local Community Network Meeting Notes**

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Avalon and The Poldens

Date: Monday, 27 November 2023

Time: 7.00 pm - 9.00 pm

Location: Shapwick Pavillion, Northbrook Road, Shapwick, TA7 9LN

Chaired by: Matthew Martin (Somerset Council) (Chair)

### **LCN core membership attendance:**

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Simon Carswell	Somerset Council
Liz Leyshon	Somerset Council
Harry Munt	Somerset Council
Heather Shearer	Somerset Council
Geoff Barnett & James Hall	Catcott Parish Council
John Clasby	Cossington Parish Council
Julia Welch	Edington Parish Council
Laura Sorenson & Lindsay McDougall	Glastonbury Town Council
Chris Bennetts & Gayle Richards	Meare & Westhay Parish Council
Phillip Jay	Stawell Parish Council
Helen Moore	Walton Parish Council

## Officer attendance:

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Kate Hellard	Somerset Council
Dawn Rogers	Somerset Council
Helen Bowen	Somerset Council
Tom Parkinson	Somerset Council
Nathan Turnbull	Somerset Council

## Virtual attendees:

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Suria Aujla	Somerset Council

## Summary of discussion:

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

#### Item 18: **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence had been received from Somerset Councillor Ros Wyke, Ashcott Parish Councillor Gus Wans, Baltonsborough Parish Councillor Mary Phillips, Barton St David Parish Councillor Simon Jackson and Street Parish Councillors Bryan Knickerbocker and Laura Wolfers.

#### Item 19: **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

#### Item 20: **Minutes from the Previous Meeting**

It was proposed by Councillor Heather Shearer and seconded by Councillor Harry Munt to approve the minutes of the meeting of the LCN Avalon and The Poldens held 9 October 2023.

Item 21: **Update on Somerset Council's Financial Position**

Somerset Councillor Liz Leyshon, Lead Member for Resources and Performance gave an update on the financial emergency declared by Somerset Council. She advised that the forecast deficit for the current financial year had improved and now stood at £18.7 million but this was mainly one-off savings. She explained there was a daily meeting at the Council to tackle the emergency and that things were moving at pace. One option would be to declare a S114 notice but advised that this was not designed for when councils run out of money and it wasn't fit for purpose. Another consideration was a Capitalisation Direction, which is the means by which the Government permits local authorities to treat revenue costs as capital costs. Other areas being explored are the sales of assets including some council offices which have very low occupation. Also, to do a proper restructure of the council and slim it down.

She spoke about the options surrounding increases in Council Tax and explained that the base rate in Somerset was low in comparison to other nearby councils. The maximum that Somerset Council could raise Council Tax by was 5%. To increase by more than this would need Government permission.

Councillor Leyshon made reference to the letter sent by the Leader, Councillor Bill Revans, to all Parish and Town Councils in Somerset, asking if any would be willing to take on some of the services to assist with the financial emergency. It was recognised that Parish Councils would be setting their precepts shortly and so would need to consider requests for extra funding if they were to take over some services.

During the discussion, there were a number of comments made, including:

- What are the insurance implications for Parish/Town councils if they were to take on some services?
- It would be wrong to sell council assets.
- Query over the amount of unpaid council tax and how it could be recovered.
- How many quotes were obtained before the contract awarded to Newton Europe was made?

- Why was there not a contingency plan for a financial emergency?
- What is the situation with potential staff redundancies?
- Will libraries or leisure facilities be included in the sale of assets?

In response to some of these, the following was advised:

- A “Rights of Way” guide was being put together to assist Parish Councils with details on insurance, equipment required etc and would be delivered to all parishes very shortly.
- The unpaid council tax has accumulated since 2002. It is the accumulated amount of the 4 district councils. Various reasons it has remained unpaid including no estate or no wills after a resident passes away.
- The Newton Europe contract is a shared risk contract. There is rigorous scrutiny within the Council as well as internal and external auditors, so it has been closely scrutinised.
- The Fair Cost of Care exercise revealed that Somerset Council were on a low fee structure compared to neighbouring counties so their councils were using care home beds in Somerset. The increase in care home costs, along with the cost-of-living crisis has all occurred together, meaning expenditure was running far ahead of income. There was contingency and some reserves, which can only be spent once.
- Library services are statutory and so can not be sold or closed.
- An asset of community value will only buy some time, it does not protect the asset forever.
- A clear infographic regarding the finances and costs would be distributed to Parish and Town Councils.

Item 22: **Public Question Time**

There were no public questions raised.

Item 23: **Update from the Health Working Group**

It was advised that there were 6 members of the working group

and that PCNs and local networks had been discussed. It was noted that the distribution of leaflets giving details of care available and useful information pertaining to health did not appear to have happened. This would be something that the working group could pick up at their next meeting. Village agents were also discussed and it was agreed that information on these should be collated by the working group and shared. There was a suggestion that a website containing the information gathered by the LCNs would be of benefit. Kate Hellard advised that there was already a page on the Somerset Council website for LCNs and the intention was to populate these and include links to the websites of various health initiatives and directories.

**Item 24: Discussion on Future Topics**

In light of the financial emergency letter to Parish Councils from the Leader, Cllr Bill Revans, the planned discussion regarding active travel and highways was postponed until the next meeting. Instead, members had a robust discussion regarding the implications of taking on some of the services identified in the letter. Many were concerned that they did not have enough detail to make a decision at this stage and were also wary of the legalities of doing so. To assist with this, they were advised that there may be a highways steward who could help Parishes identify some of the things that needed to be done, such as potholes, overhanging branches.

There would also be training provided, details of which would be provided at the Parish Clarks meeting which was scheduled. Members were keen to ensure that residents were made aware of the request to Parishes to provide certain services. It was made clear that Parishes did not have to take on any service provision if they were unable to or did not wish to.

**Item 25: Actions and Next Steps**

The following was noted:

- Parishes to discuss what services they may be interested in providing and to inform the LCN team.
- The letter was sent to Parishes as some are working on their precepts. Not all Parishes may wish to take over any

services yet and could wait another year before taking them on.

- Members of the public and stakeholders should be encouraged to attend the LCN meetings to make them worthwhile.
- Information on insurance, training, the highways steward and learning from the LCN pilots should be distributed before the Christmas holiday.

Item 26: **Dates of Future Meetings**

Future dates were discussed and decided as Monday 29 January 2024 and Wednesday 27 March 2024. Various venues were discussed and will be advised nearer the time.

The meeting finished at approximately 9.00pm.

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