

Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Exmoor

Date: Thursday, 11 January 2024

Time: 7.12 pm - 9.10 pm

Location: The Moorland Hall - Cutcombe, Wheddon Cross TA24 7DL

Chaired by: Steven Pugsley (Chair)

LCN core membership attendance:

Name:	Representing
Mike Ellicott (Vice Chair)	Exford Parish Council
Cllr Frances Nicholson	Somerset Council
Andrew Sellick	Brompton Ralph PC
Sarah Buchanan (clerk)	Brompton Regis PC
Jan Aldridge (clerk)	Brushford PC
Sally Moran	Clatworthy PC
Jon Levenson	Cutcombe PC
Christine Dubery	Dulverton TC
Rebecca Tomalin (clerk)	Exmoor PC
Janette Sapsford	Exton PC
Stephen Kimsey	Huishchampflower PC
Duncan McCannlis	Porlock PC
Roger Webber	Selworthy & Minehead Without
Dan Barber	Skilgate PM
Katy Attwater	Timberscombe PC
Jennifer Yates (clerk)	Winsford PC
PCSO Supervisor Katherine Williams	Avon & Somerset Police
Nikki Bonner (Village Agent)	Community Council Somerset (CCS)
Rev David Weir	Exmoor Benefice

Officer attendance:

Name:

Jeff Brown – Interim LCN Lead Officer
Pip Hughes – Interim LCN Officer
Sam Murrell – Interim LCN Officer
Tom Parkinson – ICT Specialist
Kevin Bridgwater – Highways Manager
Kali Martin – Area Highways Office

Representing

Somerset Council
Somerset Council
Somerset Council
Somerset Council
Somerset Council
Somerset Council

Other attendees:

Name:

Mark Shelford, (PCC)
Patricia Bainbridge (clerk)
Norma Martin (clerk)
Roger Foxwell
Stephen Colson
Scilla Barney
Peter Bate
Lesley Webb (clerk)
PCSO Michelle Haines
Stephen Grice (Village agent)
Philip Beauvais

Representing

Avon and Somerset Police CC
Brompton Ralph PC
Clatworthy PC
Cutcombe PC
Porlock PC
Selworthy & Minehead Without
Holnicote Tenants / National Trust / MOP
Timberscombe PC
Avon and Somerset Police
Community Council Somerset (CCS)
Skilgate PM

Virtual attendees:

Name:

Nick Thwaites
Colin Wilkins
Julian Soltau
Will Lock
Peter Stenner
Charles O Connor
Beccy Brown – Employment & Skills

Representing

Dulverton TC
Winsford PC
Withypool & Hawkridge PC
Exmoor Young Voices
Member of the Public
Exmoor Parish Council
Somerset Council

Summary of discussion:

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

Item 40: **Introductions and opening comments**

The Chair advised that as the Police Crime Commissioner, Mark

Shelford was running late, he would take later items on the agenda first.

He also welcomed Peter Bate from Holincote Estate to the meeting. Peter was attending as a member of the public but representing the Holincote Estate (National Trust) tenants.

Item 41: **Apologies for Absence**

Julian Soltau (Withypool PC) who attended virtually, Andrew Bray (Wootton Courtenay PC), Margaret Rawle (Dulverton TC), Somerset Executive Member for Transformation and Resources – Cllr Theo Butt Philip, Colin McDonald (SC Rural Hsg Enabler), Sally Baker (Brompton Ralph PC), Ruth McArthur (ENPA).

Item 42: **Declarations of Interest**

None were declared.

Item 43: **Public Question Time**

There were no public questions or statements presented in advance of the meeting.

Item 44: **Notes from the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as a true record and unanimously agreed.

Item 45: **Update on Actions from the Previous Meeting**

Neither of the subgroups have had a chance to meet since the last meeting in November, but this was mainly due to the financial emergency and parishes having to concentrate their limited time and resource on setting their precepts.

Colin McDonald had spoken to the Chair and was collating the required data to enable the Housing sub-group to progress. Meetings would be diarised shortly.

Other items of concern such as the Roundwaters update would be discussed later in the meeting.

Item 46: **Somerset Council Financial Update**

This item was brought forward as the Police Crime Commissioner had been delayed.

Unfortunately the Lead Member for Resources and Transformation, Cllr Theo Butt Philip had tendered his apologies. In his absence, Cllr Pugsley provided a summary of concerns which were that the LCN members are worried about the impact of the financial challenges faced by Somerset Council on their local services and communities. They want to know what services will be withdrawn and how much they will cost to provide locally.

They were aware that the proposed cuts would affect highways, winter maintenance (including filling of grit bins), street cleaning, recycling centres, libraries and CCTV provision. If the parishes within the LCN decided to take on some of these services they wanted to have a fair formula for sharing the costs, which would be a reflection on their respective populations and geography.

It was considered frustrating that there was no financial information forthcoming from Somerset Council, which would assist the parishes in setting their precepts. Some of the parishes had decided not to wait any longer (Dulverton TC) and had already decided their precept that week. Others were making provision to increase their precept to cover service devolution if it was required.

Jon Levenson (Cutcombe PC) expressed bitter disappointment that the financial figures were not available to assist the parishes with the setting of the precept and stated that it was a sign of Somerset Council's financial collapse and poor fiscal management. It was no wonder that the Council found itself in such a financial crisis.

Comment was made that some of the services such as public conveniences, maintenance of play areas and grass cutting had already been devolved to the Exmoor parishes by the former West Somerset Council. There weren't many other services left to cut. Concern was also expressed about the lack of skills, time and resource at parish level which would be required to run

some of the services. Parish Councillors were volunteers and it was difficult enough to recruit to the roles, without the additional responsibility of managing staff!

Other areas of concern that were expressed:-

- The possible closure of the Dulverton recycling centre which would result in increased fly-tipping.
- The cost of the democratic process in Somerset Council and maintaining and paying for 110 councillors.
- The loss of the library, bus service and street cleaner in Porlock if the costs were too prohibitive to take on by the parish.
- The Somerset Council proposed council tax increase of 9.9% during a cost-of-living crisis.
- the lack of financial clarity due to “commercial sensitivity” and a perceived unwillingness to share information.
- Asset devolution – the burden of paying the legal fees would fall on the parish council.

Attendees were reminded that the budget consultation had been launched and would close on 22 January. [The survey and further information on how to participate can be found on this link.](#)

Cllr Pugsley highlighted that collectively as an LCN, most of the parishes were concerned with highways issues around:-

- the filling of grit bins/ supply of salt bags;
- clearing of drains/gullies; and
- verge maintenance (grass cutting etc).

He suggested that cuts in these services would most affect the Exmoor parishes, and it was important that the Exmoor LCN tried at least to mitigate this.

It was yet to be decided whether the Exmoor LCN wished to proceed with the revised Highway Steward model, and discussions were due to take place about possibly sharing the service with a neighbouring LCN area.

Cllr Pugsley agreed to take away these suggestions and follow up with the devolution team on the best way forward.

Item 47: **Annual Update from the Avon & Somerset Police Crime Commissioner, Mark Shelford**

The police and crime commissioner, Mark Shelford, reported on the achievements and challenges of the police force, such as the increase in charge rates for violence against women and girls, the cross-border operations to tackle rural crime, and the budget and precept survey.

A written report is attached.

Cllr Frances Nicholson welcomed bringing the Seahorse Centre in Minehead back into use, and the provision of a tri-partite hub. It would be used to house the neighbourhood policing team, NHS trainee nursing staff and some Somerset Council services.

Concern was expressed about the loss of CCTV provision across the county. Mark Shelford advised that in the main it was run by volunteers after an initial capital investment in the equipment by the Council. He had yet to have conversations with Somerset Council on the implications of standing down the service, and the proposed alternatives. He agreed that it played a massive part in crime prevention and community reassurance.

Unconfirmed reports had been circulating about drug use taking place in West Somerset College. Mark Shelford stated that sadly drug use was happening everywhere in the present day, but it should be reported to the local neighbourhood team as soon as possible. They would gather intelligence which would then inform how they responded to such crime.

PCSO Supervisor Katherine Williams stated that the local team had a very good relationship with the West Somerset College. They held weekly beat surgeries so that the students could drop in during break times and share any concerns or worries. They also organised presentations from visiting groups on such subjects as knife-crime, drug misuse and county lines. Year 10 at West Somerset College are about to have a talk on Child Exploitation which will also be rolled out to the two middle schools. This will raise awareness of the main issues, and the staff will also receive training. The team were not aware of any recent reports of drug misuse at the College, but they were

watchful and would treat any information sensitively.

The PCC reminded the Exmoor LCN that he did have the Police Community Trust Fund available to provide funding for community initiatives. This could include Speed Indicator Devices (SIDS). [The link to more information on these funding streams can be found here.](#)

Item 48: **Avon and Somerset Neighbourhood Policing Update**

PCSO Supervisor Katherine Williams and PCSO Michelle Haines were present at the meeting to provide an update on local neighbourhood matters.

Its been another busy quarter, with day to day work, finishing off the Mini Police project which was well received and attending our local Christmas events.

Crime update since November

There has been a marked increase in our crime figures due to an issue in Dulverton. This is currently under investigation so unable to discuss further – however there has been a marked improvement in the last 3 weeks.

Incidents of note: -

- 22/11 Theft of grabber from trailer, Timberscombe
- 22/11 Engine stolen from Dunster
- 8/12 Burglary Wheddon Cross – Property recovered out of force area (assisted by trackers fitted)
- 18/12 Att. Burglary Brushford – no entry gained
- 04/01 Burglary – non dwelling, Porlock – nothing stolen
- Theft of Quadbike Exebridge.

There has also been a report of deer remains found at Simonsbath and some incidents of quad and off road bikes being used at 2 places on the moor (Hopcott woods and Simonsbath). If registration numbers are taken, ASP will follow up. They will be having a meeting shortly with the Exmoor Rangers to discuss some joint action.

Going forward

Increase in Farm Visits -promoting farm watch and visiting existing members.

Funded SelectaDNA marker kits – Follow up visits to rural victims of crime giving advice and supplying marker kits – again promoting farm watch.

Monthly visits to continue to Cutcombe Market and hopefully another trailer marking session.

From March ASP will be visiting accommodation providers (hotels/camping) with information for visitors reminding them not to leave property in their vehicles when visiting the moors – repeating last year’s efforts which resulted in only one reported theft last season.

Pop up police posts in villages – hour sessions available for advice and cycle marking.

Organising attendance at country fairs.

In association with the Talking Café / Village Agents

The Police will be attending the Dulverton Talking café with the Village agents to raise awareness around mental health issues. These take place on Thursdays in Dulverton. Nikki Bonner (village agent) advised that on the 15 February, representatives from Somerset Mind service would be offering help and support at that particular Talking Café.

Cllr Frances Nicholson commended the collaborative work taking place and the multi-agency approach to raise awareness around mental health support.

The officers were thanked for their time and attendance at the meeting. The appreciation was marked with a round of applause.

Following their update, the PCC and the officers left the meeting.

Item 49: Exmoor LCN Highways Subgroup Update

Clarification was sought on a Government funding headline which stated that 8 billion pounds was earmarked for repairing potholes. Kali Martin advised that the figure was misleading, as

it was to be implemented over 11 years and was shared across the south of England including London. (This had been earmarked for 2.8 billion alone).The calculations on how the sum would be distributed would be determined on the length of the road networks in each county. It was very much a headline figure and the reality would be very different.

The Roundwaters scheme has started and will be monitored and updated regularly. Weekly updates were going to be circulated, and it was asked if they could be sent to the Link Officer for wider distribution. The first couple of weeks had seen the BT masts moved, vegetation clearance completed and Walters (the contractor) move their logistical equipment to the site. They had also carried out preparatory work at the base of the ravine. This would involve diverting the watercourse and carrying out water protection measures. There were some signage issues reported but these were picked up very quickly by Ross and dealt with accordingly.

Cllr Pugsley commented that he hoped another public meeting update would take place in February, but in the meantime the team would do their best to get out regular updates.

Cllr Ellicott said that he was aware there were some issues with the aggregates expected by the landowners (Tuckers), and this had not gone as smoothly as hoped for.

There had been some incidents with vehicles trying to access the smaller “no access” roads, and getting stuck, and the Highways team were keeping a close eye on it. They would review any closures or signage and tweak as necessary.

The **Winter Maintenance** situation is tricky due to ageing gritters and the high demand for pothole repairs. This reactive maintenance caused by the wet followed by freezing weather (creating potholes) has caused the planned maintenance programmes to fall behind schedule. Potholes have to be repaired as a matter of urgency but there are currently 1100 outstanding reports on the portal.

With the demand this creates, coupled with the need for the drivers to work within working time guidelines, it has impacted on other highway service areas.

The aging gritter fleet has caused problems due to breakdowns, and the team are doing their best to grit/salt the green routes within the capability of what machinery is available. They are also doing their best to source other gritters and equipment and approaches are being made to the rural community by the contractor (Milestone) to assist if possible. The situation was described as “tenuous” with the hope that really severe weather (snow) was not predicted at present. The team would be monitoring the weather forecasts very closely over the coming weeks, and if necessary gritting in anticipation of the cold temperatures.

Some other issues were mentioned specific to Skilgate and Timberscombe, but these were to be picked up outside of the meeting. Timberscombe, once again, requested an update from Highways regarding the remedial work which needs to be undertaken in Great House Street. Highways responded that they have yet to read the survey undertaken in September.

Salt bags were to be dropped in Timberscombe and Hawkridge as a remedial short-term fix for flooding/freezing on the Highway. Kali Martin agreed to follow this up outside of the meeting.

The Chair formally thanked Kevin and Kali for their frank and honest report about the winter maintenance service, and highlighting the challenges currently faced.

The **devolved funding jetting scheme** has been mostly completed and feedback was requested. (There are still a few parishes awaiting a visit, but this was due to the sub-contractor being pulled away on emergency response work). In the main, there had been mixed feedback from the respective parishes. They unanimously agreed that the work was of a satisfactory standard and well received. The main concern was ongoing maintenance and the fact that there was still a lot of work outstanding. It was unlikely this was all going to be completed as the budget was limited. Christine Dubery was formally thanked for all her hard work in getting this work delivered and liaising with the sub-contractor and highway wardens.

It was agreed that when the final jetting requests had been signed off, Sam Murrell and Christine Dubery would liaise on collating the various reports and feed them back to the Highways team. Any issues that were beyond the scope of the jetting operative could be picked up and assessed at a later date. Sam and Christine also agreed to assess the project and discuss what had worked well for the Exmoor LCN devolved funding. A report would be handed back to the Highways subgroup for comment, and then forwarded onto the LCN team. The Chair acknowledged that this had been a very useful collective exercise, and provided an example of what the LCN could administer when one parish council agreed to act as a collator of funds. (In this case Dulverton Town Council).

Item 50: **Exmoor National Park Authority**

The park did not send a representative to the meeting, which was criticised by some attendees. There were questions and concerns about the park's budget, the various grant projects and broadband provision.

The Parish Consultative Forum will continue to meet twice a year, which is a reduction in meetings. The Chair (Cllr Mike Ellicott) said it was important that members actively participated and brought forward items for the agenda so that the meetings could be properly managed and facilitated. The last meeting in November had been cancelled due to a perceived lack of business from the parishes.

It was requested that a representative from the ENPA attended the next meeting in March to provide an overview of recent projects.

Item 51: **Dates of Future Meetings**

The date of the next LCN meeting is the 7 March at the Moorland Hall, Cutcombe. A request was made to invite Matt Barrow (Connecting Devon and Somerset) and ensure a ENPA representative was present. Somerset Prepared are already scheduled on the agenda.

Exmoor LCN Date - The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe	Proposed Highways Sub-Group Date - Dulverton Sports Pavilion
Thursday 11 January 2024 at 7pm	Friday 23 February 2024, at 10am
Thursday 7 March 2024 at 7pm	Friday 19 April 2024, at 10am.
Thursday 9 May 2024 at 7pm *	

Dates of the Housing and Economic Development subgroups to be confirmed.

*The meeting of 9 May has now been reinstated and will be the final meeting before the Annual General Meeting.

Contact officer for meeting: Sam [Murrell sam.murrell@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:sam.murrell@somerset.gov.uk) or Exmoorlcn@somerset.gov.uk.