

## Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Crewkerne and Ilminster

Date: Thursday, 18 January 2024

Time: 6.35 pm - 8.40 pm

Location: Donyatt Village Hall, Donyatt, Ilminster TA19 0RG

Chaired by: Mike Best (Chair)

### LCN core membership attendance:

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Steve Ashton	Somerset Council
Mike Best (Chair)	Somerset Council
Sue Osborne	Somerset Council
Jo Roundell Greene	Somerset Council
Jason Crocker	Ashill Parish Council
Geraldine Wills	Chaffcombe Parish Council
Kathy Head	Crewkerne Town Council
Gemma Hughes (Deputy Clerk)	Crewkerne Town Council
David Light	Donyatt Parish Council
Nicky Handlay	Dowlish Wake Parish Council
Julie Chant (Clerk)	Hinton St George Parish Council
Pippa Reynolds	Hinton St George Parish Council
Ray Buckler	Horton Parish Council
Leanne Taylor (Vice Chair)	Ilminster Town Council
	Ilton Parish Council
Chris Baranowski	Kingstone Parish Meeting
	Merriott Parish Council
Jim Pendleton	Seavington Parish Council
Andrew Rowswell	Shepton Beauchamp Parish Council
	Wayford Parish Council
Bel Deering	Somerset Rivers Authority

## Officer attendance:

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Nathan Turnbull	Somerset Council / LCN
Tom Parkinson	Somerset Council / ICT
Becky Sanders	Somerset Council Democratic Services
Ally Laing	Somerset Council/ Communications

## Virtual attendees:

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Adam Dance	Somerset Council (Lead Member for Public Health, Equalities and Diversity)
Hannah Thurston	Community Council for Somerset
Martyn Hamlin (Clerk)	Chiselborough Parish Council
Roger Bulley	Chiselborough Parish Council
Hugh Williams	Haselbury Plucknett Parish Council
Nick Jones	Lopen Parish Council
Paul Bradly	Misterton Parish Council
Louise Brooks (Clerk)	Norton Sub Hamdon Parish Council
Fiona Day	Stocklinch Parish Council
Julia Borland	West Crewkerne Parish Council
Jonathan Naughton	Public
Matt Day	Public

## Summary of discussion:

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

#### Item 10: **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Steve Neate (Broadway Parish Council), Jane Knowles (Somerset Activity & Sports Partnership), Mark Tredwin (Clerk, Ilminster Town Council) and Steve Gray (Crewkerne Community Church).

#### Item 11: **Declarations of Interest**

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

Item 12: **Notes from the Previous Meeting**

The notes of the previous meeting held on 15 November 2023 were agreed as a correct record by those present.

Item 13: **Update and Discussion on Local Asset and Service Devolution**

The Chair explained that a copy of suggested savings options (dated 5 January 2024) as circulated to Clerks from Cllr Bill Revans (Leader of the Council) were on tables for discussion. The idea of the letter was to give parishes opportunities to look at where they wish to plug gaps in services at a local level or consider taking over some services in their communities.

Each parish present in the meeting was asked to provide a quick update on what options had or were being consider in their parish. Some of the points made included:

- still in the dark about what might have to fund – discussed what may get cut. Some confusion what the statutory services to be provided by Somerset Council are. Agreed would increase precept by normal amount but to not allocate to any specific at this stage. Mindful of possible increase to Council Tax. Lack of information makes it difficult to make a decision.
- Our parish has had a number of meetings. Like others still waiting to hear from Somerset Council about what won't be done by them in the future.
- Have agreed to raise parish precept as far as think can go. They had considered about what they may be able to take on but all guesswork.
- We've agreed no increase to precept and to manage our budget as it is as the situation with Somerset Council is unknown. Decided to rely on reserves for this coming year and what might happen. Our parish is small so even if raised precept by a high percentage it would only mean a small amount of money and not enough to make a lot of difference.
- We've increased our precept by a moderate amount for our parish.
- Our parish has agreed to increase its precept by 10%. Had been intending to take over cutting of verges and

had hoped to get the asset transferred but have now been told that won't happen.

- We are a very small parish council, our precept is being increased but we are being put in an impossible position. Small parishes cannot bail out the Council. Fear small parishes may fold.
- Our precept is increasing by 10%. Also looking to take on work regarding verges in the parish as makes a lot of impact in the village.
- We have set our precept by guesswork as costs are unknown. The precept has been increased.
- Our parish has increased its precept by 13% and have some reserves. Will be some reliance on local landowners and volunteers to undertake some work in the parish.
- We have taken the view to wait and see. Our parish is very small and get little assistance from the Council anyway.
- Again, we are a very small village. Have also taken option not to increase precept, and wait and see. We do a lot of footpath work ourselves anyway.
- As a Parish Meeting so don't have a precept. We will carry on doing what we can ourselves on goodwill,
- We began by looking at the list of services which might be cut and undertook some local consultation. From that we arrived at a list of items and put into a job description for a stewarding type role with some admin support, which has been costed and we will be increasing our precept to cover that – we will offer the stewarding role out to nearby parishes to see if they would like come on board and purchase some of the stewarding time if wished. Will be doing some local communications to explain to residents what we are doing and why.
- Our parish has increased its precept. No money going into reserves this year.
- Parishoners feel it's a double whammy – increases in costs but services reducing.
- Our parish has a very small precept. We have decided not to increase this year and to wait and see. A key service wanted in our parish is clearing the drains and hoping to get a quote for doing this. Interested in the stewarding role that Ilminster are offering and a local estate owner has also offered some help.
- We will be upping our precept by 5% which equates to

about £725. Worry about sub-contractors and if cause any damage there may be resulting legal issues.

Other points made during discussion included:

- At the previous LCN meeting parishes had asked for information about costs of services, am appalled that the has not been forthcoming as yet.
- Parishes are also still awaiting confirmation or further information of which Somerset Council services are statutory services.
- Highway maintenance is a concern in many parishes, particularly potholes and drain/gully clearing.
- Some parishes won't want to do anything as only have a few councillor and limited funding. Concerned that these parishes may be ignored. Most parishes don't have technical expertise, and there are concerns about liability and insurance.
- Cllr Steve Ashton referred to liability insurance and work on highways, he understood if persons were trained to the required standard then liability would be covered by Highways.
- Cllr Adam Dance referred to costings and enhanced services and noted if extra gully clearing was requested in addition to the scheduled programme of works it would likely be chargeable, unless required for statutory reasons.

The Chair noted the comments made and mentioned Somerset Council were also in a difficult position as there had been no confirmation to date about the additional increase in Council Tax or the capitalisation request. He clarified that the suggested savings options circulated were not cast in stone and no final decision would be made until the budget meeting at Full Council on 20 February. It was encouraging that parishes had been considering precepts and local services.

He fully acknowledged the frustrations of parishes still waiting for confirmation on costings and details about statutory services. The Chair clarified the process for the budget going through various committees to being set at Full Council on 20 February. It was hoped once the budget has been set that many things will become more clear regarding delivery of services.

The Chair commented he would take forward the concerns and frustrations of parishes regarding lack of information, especially about statutory services and functions.

Note – webpage with asset and service devolution useful links / contact:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/city-town-and-parish-councils/>

**ACTION:** The LCN Chair commented he would take forward the frustrations of parishes regarding lack of information about statutory services and functions.

Item 14: **Public Question Time**

The Chair took the opportunity to introduce Bel Deering, a Community Engagement Officer from Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA). Bel provided an overview of her role and noted she was happy for parishes to contact her direct - [bel.deering@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:bel.deering@somerset.gov.uk) .

Bel explained that she could help with developing emergency plans in parishes or as a group plan such as the LCN area, also how she could support landowners, and also support for resilience planning. She and colleagues were happy to provide training and support for parishes if required. There was also a small fund for emergency supplies such as sand/flood bags. She encouraged parishes to make contact for further information.

The Chair suggested that it might be a good idea to invite Bel and/or other representatives from the SRA to another meeting of the LCN together with possibly a representative from the Environment Agency, so that there could be a clear understanding of which organisation was responsible for what regarding water management.

During a short discussion someone asked whether the LCNs were achieving what they were set up to do. The situation had changed with Somerset Council now declaring a financial emergency. There are 18 LCNs which must be costing money which the authority now doesn't have.

In response, the Chair and Kate Hellard explained that when discussing Unitary before vesting day it was recognised that interaction and engagement with parishes might be lost, and hence the LCNs. LCNs were delivering actions in response to their priorities and some examples were provided. A wide range of priorities were coming out from the LCNs.

Item 15: **Updates from Highways**

Kate Hellard (Service Manager LCNs) provided a brief presentation to give an overview of the concept and work that could be undertaken by a Highway Steward any time from April if parishes were interested in buying into the scheme. The steward would be employed by the Highways contractor (Kier) – sick pay, risk assessments, equipment and insurance etc would be the responsibility of Kier. She advised the cost for a single full-time steward was approximately £50k per year – a parish doesn't have to have a whole steward and the steward could be split between a cluster of parishes but this would need to be a geographical cluster to reduce costs. Parishes could join the scheme at any point through the year but it would need to be for a full 12 months due to contracting staff.

If there was interest in a Highway Steward, Kate suggested the first step would be to form a Highway Steward Working Group of probably no more than 6 people, with each person on the group representing a small cluster of parishes, although for the initial meeting there could perhaps be more people. The Chair also noted that the working group would be an opportunity to meet with Highway Officers direct to discuss some issues and get any information required. Kate suggested any interested parishes join the initial conversations to see what could be discussed. It was understood the new contractor was also looking to provide a parish price list so that parishes would have costs if they wanted an enhanced service beyond routine maintenance.

During discussion, some points were made including:

- Some parishes had been unable to access the online meeting of the last Highways working group meeting.
- Parish Councillors are volunteers – need to be mindful of keeping asking them to attend multiple meetings.
- The LCN handbook version 1 – is that still the current

version?

- With the new Highways contractor were any reduction in service levels planned?

In response to some comments made, Kate Hellard, noted:

- there would be a need to engage other organisations and stakeholders to help deliver aspirations of the LCN – they may be able to help directly with delivery, or have access to funding and/or resources.
- Version 1 of the LCN handbook is the current version. Shortly to start a review and update the handbook – please contact officers if have any queries. There would at some point in the future also be a review of the LCNs to consider about making them more effective, but the scope of the review had yet to be determined. This LCN review would be fairly speedy and likely to go through relevant consultation and committees prior to the LCN Annual General Meetings in June.
- Highways would always have a safety responsibility and would always have to deliver the statutory minimum.

Note – the presentation slides for this meeting can be viewed at the end of the printed minutes pack or online at:

<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s24526/LCNPresentationJan2024.pdf>

**ACTIONS:** Representatives / Parishes interested about Highway Steward forming a Highway Steward Working Group – please contact team at [crewkerneandilminsterlcn@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:crewkerneandilminsterlcn@somerset.gov.uk)

A review will shortly commence on a review of the LCN handbook. Any queries or suggestions please contact the LCN team at [crewkerneandilminsterlcn@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:crewkerneandilminsterlcn@somerset.gov.uk)

Item 16: **Active Travel Workshop**

Nathan Turnbull (Locality Officer) provided a brief presentation about Active Travel and noted the subject had been raised at previous meetings. He commented that Active Travel could also tie in with the Highway Steward Scheme. A map was shown in the presentation to highlight footpaths specifically within the LCN. It was acknowledged from comments in the room that the map was difficult to read and the Public Rights of Way (PROW) network was easier to study online which also enabled users to



view reported path defects and status of paths etc. The link to the PROW map webpage is

<https://roam.somerset.gov.uk/roam/Map#>

Nathan suggested setting up a working group to discuss what might be done such as footpath maintenance and improvements. Any interested persons should contact the LCN team.

During a brief discussion a participant noted he was pleased to hear about Active Travel, however as a keen cyclist he expressed his disappointment with the poor maintenance and lack of funding for the one traffic free route through the LCN. He commented he would like to see some action on that before participating in a working group.

In response Kate Hellard suggested the situation would be appropriate to discuss with partners in a working group. Cllr Sue Osborne also noted that conversations were being had with Sustrans and others regarding the cycle route, and was hopeful progress would be made.

Note – the presentation slides for this meeting can be viewed at the end of the printed minutes pack or online at:

<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s24526/LCNPresentationJan2024.pdf>

**ACTION:** Any representatives / Parishes interested in forming an A Working Group please contact the LCN team at [crewkerneandilminsterlcn@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:crewkerneandilminsterlcn@somerset.gov.uk)

Item 17: **Action and Next Steps**

During a brief discussion a parish representative noted the current financial position of Somerset Council and queried if the LCNs were worth having as he wasn't convinced things were moving forwards. He suggested an item for discussion on the matter should be on the next agenda.

An update on actions discussed at the meeting was also requested for the next agenda.

**ACTION:** LCN team to consider the two suggested items for ti

Item 18: **Dates and Themes of Future Meetings**

The date of the next meeting of the Crewkerne & Ilminster LCN was noted for Thursday 21 March 2024.

A provisions date for the Annual General Meeting of the LCN was noted for Thursday 13 June.

The Chairman 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](mailto:crewkerneandilminsterlcn@somerset.gov.uk)