



Local Community Network

**Chard and Blackdowns LCN Meeting notes
2.30pm Tuesday 6th January 2026
Online only (due to weather warning)**

Chaired by Beth Poole, Somerset Council LCN Link Officer

Virtual Attendees:

Beth Poole	Somerset Council (LCN Link Officer)
Cllr Martin Wale	Somerset Council
Chris Booth	Somerset Council (LCN Link Officer)
Colin Fisher	Stoke St Mary Parish Council
John Harrison	Corfe Parish Council
Jon Nicholson	Somerset Council (Assistant Highway Service Manager)
Michelle Brooks	Somerset Council (LCN Link Officer)
Nick Ryder	Somerset Council (Enforcement Officer)

Apologies:

Cllr Sarah Wakefield	Somerset Council
Jon Richards	ARK at Egwood
Mike Canham	Otterford Parish Council

Summary of key points of discussion and outcomes:

Item 1: Welcome and apologies

LCN Link Officer Beth Poole, acting as Chairperson, welcomed attendees. It was noted that this LCN is trialling an alternative meeting time to improve engagement, and the session had moved online in response to the prevailing weather warning. Apologies received.

Items 2: LCN Officer Update

Beth provided an update on her work since the previous LCN meeting in early October. She explained that relationship-building across the Local Community Network continues, including participation in the Community Leaders' Breakfasts at Holyrood Academy and meetings linked to the Chard Community Plan, which has seen her promote Chard's new Key Information Network Directory (KIND) in development. Beth described her work with Public Health to connect healthcare assistants with local groups for blood pressure checks and other preventative health initiatives.

Additionally, she has been collaborating with SALC to identify suitable small parishes (under 1,000 households) for further health and wellbeing grant opportunities, as well as identifying groups who may be eligible for Community Conversations Thrive grants. She noted that, because she splits her time across both the Chard & Blackdowns and Yeovil LCNs, she effectively has around a day and a half each week for each area after accounting for administrative, training and travel requirements of the role.

Deprivation Data

Beth highlighted the recent publication of the updated Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), released in October. She explained that the IMD provides national deprivation rankings based on seven domains—income, employment, education/skills/training, health and disability, crime, barriers to housing and services, and the living environment—measured at Lower Layer Super Output Area level. Although these mapped areas do not align perfectly with LCN boundaries, analysts have aligned them as closely as possible. Beth noted that compared with 2019, some rural parishes, particularly those closer to the Taunton side of the LCN area, are showing increased deprivation. She will circulate a document detailing year-by-year changes, drawing on around 20–25 years of available data. The areas most affected appear to have increased deprivation linked to housing access, and education/skills/training. Attendees discussed these findings, with agreement that longstanding deprivation levels in Chard remain largely unchanged. They also proposed that it may be useful either to invite a speaker focused on barriers to housing or to receive a future update on the emerging Somerset Local Plan, which remains in development.

Colin Fisher asked when the call to sites will be published, and Councillor Martin Wale believed it had been delayed until March, but clarification is required.

Item 3: Parish Issues and Opportunities: Collaboration and Feedback

Colin raised ongoing difficulties securing highways-related actions, including delayed installation of a Speed Indicator Device (SID) post in Haydon and unresolved drainage and gully problems, noting that contractor scheduling appears problematic. Beth suggested that these matters might be explored further with the attending Highways representative later in the meeting, or via follow-up discussions. Councillor Wale raised similar frustrations, citing repeated reports of blocked drains on a major road in Chard without any resulting action or updates, despite acknowledged flooding risks. He noted that while some rural parishes have successfully implemented community-led drain-clearing schemes (notably Stoke St Mary), Chard town has not yet been able to adopt similar arrangements.

Beth closed this section by suggesting that some of these issues could be taken forward in conversations with Highways outside of the main meeting if they were not resolved in the scheduled Highways discussion, and noted that attempts to sustain a Highways Working Group in this area

Item 4: Enviro Crime (rescheduled from last meeting)

Beth introduced enforcement officer Nick Ryder, who had been unable to attend the previous meeting due to ill health. Nick provided an overview of his role within Somerset Council's Regulatory and Operational Services team, explaining that the small team of six covers the entire county and is responsible for investigating

environmental crime. Their work includes dealing with fly-tipping, pollution, antisocial behaviour, dog fouling, and abandoned vehicles. He described how reports should be submitted through the Council's online reporting portal, which allocates cases to the appropriate officer. Nick noted that historically, in parts of the former district areas, fly-tipping was cleared but not investigated, but this has now changed. He encouraged parishes to contact him directly if they encounter fly-tipping where evidence is present, as he can collect and investigate it.

Nick outlined the challenges caused by Somerset Council operating five legacy IT systems following unitary consolidation, which leads to inefficiencies and makes it difficult to trace some historical reports. This issue emerged when Colin raised concerns about a previous fly-tipping incident where substantial evidence had been provided but was later untraceable. Nick acknowledged the frustration, confirmed that records may have been lost due to fragmented systems, and invited Colin to send the materials again so he could review whether any action—even a written warning—might still be possible. He explained that evidence must meet a prosecutable threshold, but even where prosecution is unlikely, officers can still issue warnings or letters to those involved.

Nick went on to describe the wider enforcement powers available, including fixed penalty notices (which can reach up to £1,000), community protection warnings and notices for low-level antisocial behaviour, and joint operations with the police and Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) targeting unlawful waste carriers. He highlighted that some enforcement work—especially around unauthorised encampments—is highly confrontational, often requiring body armour and police support, and noted that resource limitations and large geographical coverage remain significant pressures on the team, particularly during summer months when reported encampment incidents increase. Attendees expressed concern that staffing levels were insufficient for the size of the county, but Nick confirmed there were currently no plans to expand the team beyond backfilling a departing officer.

The discussion concluded with confirmation that parishes can best assist the enforcement process by providing strong evidence when reporting incidents—such as names, addresses, vehicle registrations, and photographs—and by encouraging residents to use the reporting portal so cases are logged correctly. Nick shared his contact details, invited any follow-up queries, and remained available briefly for final questions before leaving the meeting.

Item 5: Highways

John Nicholson, Assistant Highway Service Manager, outlined how the highways service is structured following the move to a unitary authority. He explained that Somerset is now divided into East and West areas, with the East covering the former Mendip and South Somerset districts. Three Assistant Highway Service Managers operate within the South Somerset area, each supported by two superintendents who act as the service's primary "eyes and ears" on the ground. All reports submitted through the online reporting system are directed first to these superintendents, who visit sites, investigate issues, and act in line with the Highway Safety Inspection Manual. Where necessary, they escalate queries to their respective managers for decisions or further instruction. John emphasised that the highways maintenance team often becomes the first point of contact for a broad range of issues, including matters

such as fly-tipping, which sometimes reach highways staff before being redirected to the appropriate enforcement teams.

He went on to describe the limited budget available for small-scale “depot works,” such as short pipe repairs or installing individual gullies, and explained that allocation decisions are based on data and feedback from superintendents—particularly patterns in enquiries and recurrent problems. John also contributes to the county’s one-, two-, and three-year planned works programmes, which cover resurfacing, surface dressing, and drainage schemes. These programmes must be prioritised across Somerset, requiring managers to balance their own area’s needs with those of colleagues across the county. Prioritisation is largely data-driven, with repeated enquiries or recurring issues having significant weight.

Colin then raised several longstanding concerns from his parish. He highlighted drainage issues where volunteers had identified and cleared numerous drains, including several not recorded on council maps. Some blocked gullies requiring council action had remained unresolved for six months. Colin also referred to outstanding traffic flow changes in Shoreditch—agreed following a collision at a difficult junction—of which only some had been completed, with the remainder stalled for several months despite the parish offering to fund the work. A further issue concerned the installation of a SID post in Haydon, which had been awaiting action for at least three months, leaving Colin repeatedly reporting lack of progress to his parish council.

John explained that for work orders not requiring road closures, contractors legally have up to three months to complete tasks, after which financial penalties can be imposed. Penalties, however, do not ensure delivery, though John noted that his own area had seen improvements in contractor performance since May. He acknowledged Colin’s frustration with poor communication and agreed that parishes should be able to know when work orders were raised and by whom, enabling them to chase progress more effectively. He confirmed that the SID post request would have been issued through the traffic management team, but the same contractual rules apply.

Colin raised further concerns about difficulty contacting the right officers and receiving no acknowledgement when emailing the council. John acknowledged that clearer processes and better communication are needed. They also discussed the Enhanced Highways Maintenance Scheme, with Colin noting delayed guidance. John confirmed he had been involved in drafting the updates, which were close to completion, but he was unsure of the reason for the delay.

The discussion then turned to volunteer-led drain maintenance. Beth asked whether highways could work with parishes to avoid duplication—where volunteers clean drains only for the contractor to clean them again—and to ensure that unmanageable drains are prioritised for council action. John explained that newly identified gullies can be added to the council’s asset register, which determines scheduled cleaning. He described how he works with other parishes by sharing maps, establishing a consistent numbering system, and auditing cleans when parishes report missed gullies. However, he acknowledged that volunteer work is not currently recorded in the official asset system, leading to duplication because the council has no record that the work has been done.

Colin noted that his parish’s volunteer lead could provide detailed information but lacked clarity on where to send it. John recognised the value of the local data

volunteers were gathering and suggested that future improvements might come from a planned public portal, which would allow parishes to submit cleaning records directly alongside official asset references. Although that portal is still in development, John offered to help facilitate conversations with the relevant lead for Colin's parish. Beth proposed capturing details for the appropriate highways contact for Stoke St Mary, and the discussion concluded with general agreement that improved coordination between volunteers and the council would enhance efficiency and reduce repeated work.

Item 6: Working Groups and Future Agenda Items / Speakers

Beth reflected on the low engagement in the Highways Working Group, noting that the last sessions had been attended only by Graeme Watts of Stoke St Mary Parish Council and herself. Given the similarly low attendance at the current LCN meeting, she suggested an alternative approach: rather than continuing with a separate working group, the LCN could invite the Highways representative, John Nicholson, to attend future quarterly LCN meetings with time allowed within the main agenda for parishes to raise highways-related issues directly, without requiring an additional meeting that may not attract participation. Beth emphasised the need to use officer time efficiently and proposed giving John a defined slot to answer questions or provide updates, without obliging him to stay for an entire meeting.

Councillor Wale agreed, adding that smaller working groups often become overly focused on isolated issues—such as potholes or individual drainage problems—rather than considering the broader needs of the whole LCN area. He felt that highways matters should be discussed collectively within full LCN meetings, which are intended to focus on area-wide priorities rather than very localised problems. Colin also supported the proposal.

John confirmed he was willing to attend future LCN meetings in this way, noting that the LCN area is split between two Highway Service Managers, so he may sometimes need to liaise with his colleague regarding certain parishes. Beth proposed the possibility of alternating attendance between the two officers so that coverage is shared fairly. With general agreement from attendees, it was concluded that this arrangement would replace the previous Highways Working Group model, offering a more practical method for maintaining regular dialogue with Highways.

Beth thanked John for his time and contributions, and John departed the meeting.

Item 7: Any Other Business?

Amber Cold-Weather Health Alert:

Beth highlighted that an amber cold-weather health alert was in place until 9 January and encouraged attendees to be aware of groups most at risk. Guidance from national sources recommends practical preparation, such as planning ahead, keeping homes warm during prolonged cold spells, and supporting vulnerable residents.

Step Up Somerset Workshops:

Step Up Somerset is offering funded workshops and courses for eligible adults, focusing on physical and mental well-being. These include one-day workshops and

short courses starting in February. More information can be found on their website <https://www.stepupsomerset.org.uk/community-learning/>

Beth encouraged promotion of this resource, particularly given earlier discussions and relevance to deprivation indicators linked to education, skills and training.

Somerset Association of Local Council (SALC) grants:

Beth reminded attendees that SALC's health and wellbeing grants remain open to parishes with **fewer than 1,000 households** and encouraged applications for suitable small local projects. Colin shared his parish's experience applying for such a grant to support defibrillator training. Although well attended, the application had been declined. Beth encouraged continued engagement with SALC officers Fodo Higginson and Lily for guidance, noting that link officers are not part of the decision-making process but can assist in strengthening future applications.

Council Budget Consultation:

The Somerset Council budget consultation is open online and closes on 14th January 2026. Participation is encouraged: [Budget Consultation 2026/2027 - Somerset Council - Citizen Space](#)

Electoral Boundary Review:

The electoral boundary review has reopened until 14th January 2026: [Somerset | LGBCE](#) Colin sought clarification on whether parish boundary reviews were underway; Councillor Wale explained that the wider electoral review relates to the 2027 election, while parish boundary reviews are a separate, more complex process involving formal procedures and potential referendums. Beth encouraged any parish requiring support to get in touch.

Domestic Abuse Strategy 2026-2029:

A new domestic abuse strategy is being developed [Domestic Abuse Strategy Public Consultation - Somerset Council - Citizen Space](#) Beth stressed that domestic abuse is not solely an urban issue, as it often remains hidden in rural communities and that rural 'voice' is important in development of this strategy.

Wessex Water Drop-in Sessions:

Wessex Water will be holding community drop-in sessions on 17 February, 21 April and 9 June at Chard Library, offering residents the chance to discuss water bills, water and sewerage services, and ways to save water and prevent blockages. Sessions run from 10am–12pm and 1pm–2pm, with further details available at www.wessexwater.co.uk/community-drop-ins

Somerset Hypertension Campaign

Beth updated attendees on a local hypertension screening campaign targeting adults over 40, with a focus on men and other groups shown to have lower screening uptake. She invited parishes to identify relevant clubs or groups where blood pressure checks could be offered locally. Councillor Wale suggested the "Grumpy Old Men's Breakfast Club," which Beth welcomed as an excellent setting for community health engagement and requested contact details to pass on.

Parish Preparedness Survey:

Beth then addressed concerns circulated by one parish about the Parish Preparedness Survey, clarifying its purpose and responding to misunderstandings.

She explained that the survey is not designed to offload statutory duties from Somerset Council but to gather local knowledge that national and regional risk assessments often miss. Local insight helps strengthen emergency planning, improves community resilience, and ensures that vulnerable areas receive appropriate support. She acknowledged the volume of consultations parishes face and assured attendees that results from this survey would be shared—indeed, the emergency planning officer responsible has already been invited to the next LCN meeting to present findings. Colin raised points about survey design; Beth agreed this feedback was helpful and confirmed it will be passed to the relevant team. She emphasised the intention to be transparent and responsive, and noted that Somerset Prepared values such input for improving future processes.

Future LCN meeting dates:

- 2:30pm Tuesday 13th April 2026 – Churchinford and District Village Hall (hybrid)
- 7:00pm Thursday 7th July 2026 (AGM) – The Guildhall, Chard (in-person only)

Item 8: Close

Councillor Wale commented that despite the low attendance, the meeting had been productive and informative. Beth welcomed any suggestions for future agenda items and acknowledged the challenge of shaping agendas without a formal chair but expressed her commitment to balancing relevance and engagement. She also updated that the Community Working Review (including LCNs) is now in its final drafting stages. Michelle Brooks signposted further information online about the review [Agenda item - Community Working Review - Modern Council](#).

Issues such as whether certain rural parishes feel more aligned with neighbouring LCNs will be considered once findings from the Parish Boundary Review and Community Working Review are available. Colin shared historical examples of parish collaboration during previous consultations, which Beth welcomed and asked him to share.

Michelle also provided information about local “Friends of the Path” work relating to the Stop Line Way active travel route between Crewkerne and Chard.

Beth closed the meeting by thanking attendees for their time and confirming that meeting notes would be circulated within 21 days.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS:

1. Beth to circulate/publish deprivation data document; attendees to check deprivation levels for their own parish or neighbourhood using national postcode tools and Somerset Intelligence website and consider opportunities to address these for future discussion.
2. Beth to clarify timeline on when the Local Plan ‘call to sites’ will be published.
3. Nick to liaise with Stoke St Mary separately regarding outstanding fly tipping report.
4. Beth and John to follow-up on Highways issues raised, including drain/gully

schedule, SID post installation delays in Haydon, and traffic flow changes outstanding in Shoreditch.

5. Beth to capture and share correct Highways contact details with Stoke St Mary to coordinate volunteer drain-clearing with scheduling and update mapped records.
6. Future LCN meetings to include a dedicated Highways item on the agenda, and a Highways Officer to attend quarterly rather than have a separate working group.
7. LCN Partners to share information on Step-up wellbeing workshops starting in February.
8. Parishes with under 1,000 households to consider opportunities for SALC Health and Wellbeing grants and apply for grant with support from Beth, where applicable.
9. LCN Partners encouraged to participate in active consultations and promote among their networks.
10. Councillor Wale to forward details of 'Grumpy Old Men's Breakfast Club' as potential hypertension screening site.
11. Colin to share historical examples of parish groupings for potential review of this LCN's geographic grouping. All town/parish partners invited to contribute.

APPENDICES:

Presentation – LCN: [Click here to view](#)

Indices of Deprivation 2025 Initial Summary Report: [Click here to view](#)

Indices of Deprivation 2025 C&B LCN Overview: [Click here to view](#)

SALC Community Health & Wellbeing Newsletter: [Click here to view](#)