

Wells and Rural LCN

Attendees:

Becky Collins – Adult Social Care, Somerset Council
Charlotte Griffin – LCN Link Officer, Somerset Council
Nataliya Wills – LCN Link Officer, Somerset Council
Autumn Mason – Partnerships Officer, Somerset Council
Lee Dredge – Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue
Kathy Bissett – North Wootton PC
Simon Shimmin – North Wootton PC
Fodo Higginson – SALC
Jessica Lewin – Connect Somerset Champion
Claire Hutt – Young Somerset
Ros Wyke – Somerset Councillor (Vice-Chair)
Eve Whiltshire – Member of public
Paul Whiltshire – Member of public
Jacky Farley – Wedmore PC
Martin Cooke – St Cuthbert (Out) PC
Tessa Munt – MP
Victoria Welsh – St Cuthbert (Out) PC

Virtual attendees:

Heather Shearer - (Somerset Council)
Philip Blatchford - (Emborough PC)
Theo van Hensbergen - (Accessible Wells)
Sarah Powell - (Wells City Council)
Jon Abbott - (Binegar PC)
Syed Shah – Public Liaison Officer, Somerset Council

Apologies:

Tony Hathway – St Cuthbert (Out) PC
Phillip Welch – Wells City Council
Deborah Orrett - Wells City Council
Lilly Keeley Watts – SALC
Jim Reeves – St Cuthbert (Out) PC

**AI has been used for these notes – please check for accuracy*

1. Introductions (including any apologies for absence)

Denise Denis (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Agreement of notes from previous meeting

The minutes from the last LCN meeting held on January 13th 2026 were approved.

3. Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service Presentation

Presenter

- Lee, Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (Operational Manager, Community Fire Safety / Prevention).

Overview

- Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue Service outlined its community fire safety and prevention work, with a strong focus on preventing fires in the homes of vulnerable residents.
- Prevention work is carried out through Home Fire Safety Visits, often following referrals from partners such as social care, housing associations, care workers and community organisations.

Key Points Raised

- **Prevention teams**
 - Work alongside education (schools/colleges) and protection (business fire safety).
 - Focus on homes where risk is higher due to age, mobility, disability, sensory loss, living alone, hoarding, smoking, or electrical safety concerns.
- **Who is classed as vulnerable**
 - Older people
 - People with limited mobility
 - People with hearing or sight loss
 - People living alone
 - Bedbound individuals
 - Hoarders (due to increased fire load)
 - People who smoke inside the home
- **Home Fire Safety Visits**
 - Free and available by self-referral or partner referral
 - Include fire risk assessment and tailored advice
 - Installation of safety equipment where required

- **Equipment provided (free where appropriate)**
 - Smoke alarms (10-year battery)
 - Heat alarms (for kitchens)
 - Linked alarms for larger properties
 - Specialist alarms for people with hearing loss (including vibrating pillow pads and flashing units)
 - Fire-retardant bedding, chair throws and lap blankets
 - 30-minute timer plugs for appliances (e.g. irons)
 - Flat extension leads to replace unsafe block adapters
- **Key safety advice highlighted**
 - Test smoke alarms regularly (monthly recommended)
 - Close doors at night (especially kitchen and living room doors)
 - Avoid charging phones, laptops and devices on beds or overnight
 - Avoid running white goods (washing machines, tumble dryers, dishwashers) overnight
 - Switch appliances off fully rather than leaving on standby
 - Keep escape routes clear
 - Follow “Get up, get out, stay out” guidance
- **Young people and alarms**
 - Concerns raised that some young people may not wake to standard smoke alarm frequencies.
 - Fire Service acknowledged the issue and undertook to look into available evidence.
- **Data and local context**
 - Members asked for Somerset-specific data on fire incidents and causes.
 - Fire Service confirmed that most domestic incidents attended relate to electrical faults, smoking materials or candles, but could not provide figures during the meeting.
- **Community engagement**
 - Parishes encouraged to invite Fire Service into:

- Care homes
- Day centres
- Community groups
- Strong emphasis on parishes acting as “eyes and ears” and referring residents who may be at risk.
- **Referral route**
 - **Freephone number provided for advice and bookings: 0800 050 2999**
 - **Referrals can be made by individuals, councillors, parish councils, or partner organisations.**

4. Connect Somerset Presentation

Presenter

- Jessica Lewin, Connect Somerset Champion
(Also Community Team Leader, YMCA Brunel Group; covering West Mendip / Wells area)
- **Contact: jessicalewin@ymca.bq.org/07964368494**
- Mark Wilcox is the other Connect Somerset Champion for the area:
markwillcox@ymca.bq.org/07972852747

Purpose of Connect Somerset

- Connect Somerset is a partnership approach bringing together:
 - Somerset Council
 - NHS
 - Education services
 - Police and Fire
 - Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector
- Aim is to improve early help, coordination and access to services at a neighbourhood level.

Neighbourhood Model

- Somerset is divided into 6 localities and 12 neighbourhoods.
- Wells and much of the rural LCN fall within West Mendip neighbourhood, with some overlap into neighbouring areas.
- Different services operate at different levels:

- Some at neighbourhood level (e.g. primary care networks, children's services)
- Some at locality level (e.g. family intervention services)
- Some remain county-wide

Role of Connect Somerset Champions

- Act as connectors between services and communities.
- Help professionals understand:
 - What services exist locally
 - Where gaps or duplication occur
 - How services can work together more efficiently
- Champions are community-based and listed on the Connect Somerset website, with contact details.

Neighbourhood Team Meetings

- One larger neighbourhood meeting held in 2024/25.
- Going forward:
 - Three neighbourhood team meetings per year
 - Additional informal community breakfasts between meetings
 - Meetings to move around locations including Wells, Street and Glastonbury
- Membership includes:
 - Health services
 - Adult and children's services
 - Police
 - Local Community Networks
 - Parish councils
 - VCSE organisations

Focus of Neighbourhood Work

- Understanding strengths and needs within communities
- Identifying what is already working well
- Considering what could realistically be improved through better coordination
- Emphasis on early help for all ages

Youth Provision – Context and Update

- Youth provision has been raised repeatedly at LCN meetings (including September 2024).
- A youth provision audit commissioned by Wells City Council (delivered by YMCA) was referenced:
 - Basic provision in Wells
 - Much more limited provision in rural areas
 - Key barriers identified:
 - Transport costs and availability
 - Confidence of young people travelling
 - Awareness of existing opportunities

Key Findings and Ideas Discussed

- Approximately 1,500 young people in Wells City, with a wider young population across the LCN.
- Rural young people may not wish or be able to access activities in Wells.
- Importance of young people feeling belonging within their own villages, not only in the town.
- Suggestions raised in discussion:
 - Parish-level or cluster audits of youth needs and facilities
 - Use of parks, village halls, gaming areas and community assets
 - Taster events and outreach rather than weekly provision
 - Learning from pilots in other LCNs
 - Possibility of working groups or steering groups, if there is appetite
- Funding challenges acknowledged, with emphasis on small-scale pilots and partnership working.

Connect Somerset Website

- Highlighted as a key resource for:
 - Community information
 - Neighbourhood champions
 - Help for children, families and adults
- Encouraged for both professionals and communities.

5. Adult Social Care Presentation

Presenter

- Becky Collins, Service Manager – Adult Social Care (West Mendip & East Mendip)
Somerset Council
- **Contact: becky.collins@somerset.gov.uk/01749822956**

Purpose of Update

- To explain the role and scope of Adult Social Care.
- To encourage early contact and conversation, particularly via named contacts.
- To strengthen links between Adult Social Care and communities/parishes.

Key Points Raised

Approach and ethos

- Strong emphasis on prevention and early help, aiming to:
 - Keep people independent at home for longer
 - Reduce crisis-driven interventions
- Adult Social Care works best when relationships are in place early, rather than waiting for a crisis.

Contact and accessibility

- Becky Collins explicitly encouraged councillors and partners to:
 - Use her as a point of contact
 - Share her email address and phone number
- Message reinforced: *“If you’re not sure, contact me and I will help you find the right person.”*

Scope of Adult Social Care

- Covers:
 - Older people
 - Adults with learning disabilities
 - Working-age adults with physical or neurological conditions
 - Mental health needs
- Noted that around 40% of Adult Social Care work supports people below retirement age, which often surprises communities.

Local coverage

- Becky’s teams cover:
 - West Mendip (including Wells, Street and Glastonbury)

- East Mendip
- Team includes social workers and occupational therapists.

Referral and assessment

- Support usually begins with an assessment.
- Eligibility is based on needs, not assumptions.
- Even where individuals are over the financial threshold, Adult Social Care still encourages contact for advice and planning.

Financial thresholds and risks

- Concerns highlighted around people:
 - Selling homes to fund care
 - Becoming financially ineligible for support
 - Risking homelessness if assets are exhausted
- Clear message: speak to Adult Social Care before making major financial decisions.

Support for carers

- Carers assessments are available regardless of income.
- Encouraged councillors and parishes to:
 - Identify unpaid carers
 - Signpost them for assessment and support

Prevention tools and services

- Somerset Independent Living Centre (SILC) highlighted as a key resource:
 - Equipment
 - Assistive technology
 - Support to remain independent
- Technology and equipment evolving rapidly; invitations welcomed for demonstrations.

Partnership working

- Adult Social Care works closely with:
 - GPs and district nurses
 - Mental health teams
 - Fire and Rescue Service
 - Police

- Village Agents and Health Connectors
- Village agents highlighted as crucial links for rural communities.

Emergency planning

- Parishes encouraged to consider:
 - Vulnerable residents within parish emergency plans
 - Implications during flooding or access issues

Rapid Response and falls

- Discussion raised about responding to falls and avoiding unnecessary 999 calls.
- Becky confirmed:
 - Rapid Response services are active locally
 - Emergency planning is part of support planning where Adult Social Care is involved
- Emphasis on having plans in place *before* emergencies arise.

Information and materials

- Public information sheets and directories available for parishes.
- One-page summary materials for noticeboards are being developed by Somerset Council communications team.

6. Working Group Updates

Active Travel

Context

- Update provided during the Working Group Updates section of the Wells and Rural LCN meeting.
- Update reflected discussion from the most recent Active Travel Working Group meeting, attended by approximately 15–20 participants.

Key Topics Discussed

Burcott Lane / Green Lanes Pilot

- Update given on Somerset Council's work around green lanes and quieter road routes.
- Five pilot areas are being considered across the county.
- Key concerns raised by communities include:
 - Impact on landowners and farmers

- Use of lanes as rat-runs
- Balancing access for walkers, cyclists and vehicles
- Feedback from pilot areas has been strong and clearly communicated to Somerset Council.
- Consultation work is ongoing; no dates confirmed during the meeting.

Glastonbury – Wells Active Travel Links

- Recognition that while attractive routes exist, current links are not suitable for everyday commuting.
- Work is being explored from both ends:
 - From Glastonbury, where new developments are creating opportunities to extend active travel infrastructure northwards.
 - From Wells, where land previously purchased by the former Mendip District Council may enable a future walking/cycling route.
- Aim is to join routes incrementally, rather than deliver a single continuous route immediately.

Street Area Improvements

- Active travel elements have been incorporated into recent street and junction works, including:
 - Improved footpaths
 - Active travel routes alongside road improvements
- These works are intended to improve accessibility for a wide range of users, including:
 - Wheelchair users
 - People with pushchairs
 - Pedestrians and cyclists

Bus Stop Accessibility Audit

- Theo van Hensbergen outlined progress on auditing bus stop accessibility:
 - Excel spreadsheet mapping bus stops across Wells and surrounding rural area (approx. five-mile radius)
 - Next stage is site visits and audits using a structured template
- Audit considerations include:
 - Physical accessibility
 - Height and condition of timetables

- Accuracy and legibility of information
- A formal report will be produced once visits are completed.

Strawberry Line and Related Planning Issues

- Ongoing concerns raised about:
 - Impact of development proposals (including Wells Rugby Club planning application) on the Strawberry Line
- Comments have been submitted to Somerset Council as part of planning processes.
- Pedestrian crossing provision at the Strawberry Line crossing on the A371 was noted as still planned.

Future Funding and Planning

- It was highlighted that highways teams now have multi-year funding certainty, allowing longer-term planning of active travel routes.
- This is expected to improve coordination, continuity and delivery.

Next Meeting

- **2 June**, at **Portway Annex**

Highways

Context

- Update provided during the Working Group Updates section of the Wells and Rural LCN meeting.
- The Highways Working Group meets with Somerset Council highways officers to discuss parish-level highways issues and themes emerging across the LCN.

Format and Process

- Highways meetings operate on the basis that:
 - Questions are submitted in advance, allowing
 - The appropriate highways officers to attend, rather than a full highways team.
- This approach is intended to make meetings more targeted and manageable, given the number of highways specialisms involved.
- Concerns were raised by some parish representatives that:
 - The current format can be time-consuming
 - Meetings may involve issues from other parishes not relevant to all attendees

- Daytime meetings can be difficult for some parish representatives to attend

Recent Meeting and Key Themes

Road Safety and Traffic Management

- A recurring theme across parishes is road safety, including:
 - Speeding concerns
 - Traffic management
 - The role of police data in highways decision-making
- To address this:
 - Dan Cox (Police) and Nick Cowling (Somerset Council – Road Safety) are scheduled to attend an upcoming session for a focused Q&A.

Bus Routes and Highway Works

- Significant concern raised about planned roadworks at Burntwood Crossroads and the impact on bus services, particularly the 173 service.
- Issues highlighted:
 - Lack of clarity regarding bus diversions
 - Insufficient communication to affected parishes
 - Concerns over whether diverted services will return after works are completed
- School bus arrangements were reported as resolved, but public service buses were not.

Burntwood Crossroads Scheme

- Mixed experiences of consultation:
 - Some parishes reported constructive engagement with Somerset Council officers
 - Others felt consultation had been limited or unclear
- Ongoing concerns raised about:
 - Length of works
 - Disruption to rural communities
 - Impact on accessibility to Wells

Highways Contracting and Delivery

- Strong concerns expressed regarding:
 - Quality of workmanship

- Use of subcontractors
- Lack of site-specific understanding during design stages
- Specific issues raised included:
 - Drainage schemes that initially failed
 - Contractors allegedly identifying problems but being instructed to proceed regardless
 - Resulting re-work and perceived waste of public funds
- Members noted that similar issues are likely occurring across multiple parishes.
- County Councillors confirmed:
 - These concerns are being raised with senior officers and lead members
 - Contract management and supervision are under active discussion at county level.

Future Meetings

- A Highways Working Group meeting is planned for early June.
- This session will include:
 - Road safety specialists
 - Police representation
 - Pre-submitted parish questions

7. AOB

Charterhouse Telescope

- A query was raised regarding the telescope at Charterhouse, following approaches from members of the Mendip and Wells Astronomy Group.
- Concern expressed about what is happening with the telescope and whether it could be brought back into use.
- Officers confirmed the question had been raised previously with the relevant organisation but that no response had yet been received.
- Commitment made to follow this up again.

AGM and Governance

- The next meeting will be the AGM, provisionally scheduled for 13 July.

- At the AGM:
 - A new Chair and Vice-Chair will need to be elected.
- Members were encouraged to consider whether they might be willing to take on these roles.