



# Local Community Network

**Yeovil LCN Meeting notes**  
**7.00pm Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2025**  
**QEII Jubilee Pavilion, West Coker**

**Chaired by Beth Poole, Somerset Council LCN Link Officer**

This agenda reflects the themes of **Young People's Wellbeing (linked to poverty/deprivation)** and **Community Safety: 'One Team' model** identified in our June AGM.

## **Attendees:**

Andrea Blaney	Chilthorne Domer Parish Council
Anita Perry	West Coker Parish Council
Beth Poole	Somerset Council (LCN Link Officer)
David Neal	West Coker Parish Council
James Moore	Somerset Council (LCN Link Officer)
Kerenza Robinson-Barton	The Nelson Trust
Ian Timms	Somerset Council (Regeneration & Major Projects)
Karl Gill	Yeovil Town Council
Mike Still	Young Somerset
Niv Lonakutty	Somerset Council (ICT Support)
Natasha Rand	Somerset Connect / Yeovil Arts Space
Robin Carpenter	Hardington Mandeville Parish Council

## **Virtual Attendees:**

Autumn Mason	Somerset Council (Partnerships Admin Support)
Cllr Andy Kendall	Somerset Council
Cllr Andy Soughton	Somerset Council
Cllr Evie Potts-Jones	Somerset Council
Gemma Sheldrake	Somerset Council (Social Work: Service Improvement)
Karen Lavelle-Sullivan	
Linda Snell	Somerset (Yeovil) Bus Partnership
Sarah Kinnersly	Young Somerset

## **Apologies:**

Cllr Emily Pearlstone	Somerset Council
Cllr Faye Purbrick	Somerset Council
Cllr Graham Oakes	Somerset Council
Cllr Peter Seib	Somerset Council
Colin Rose	Yeovil Without Parish Council
Fodo Higginson	Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC)
Jon Richards	ARK
Lilly Keeley Watts	Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC)
Rob Stickland	Yeovil Without Parish Council
Shona Stone	Live West Homes

Sue Murrison  
Victoria Butcher

Closworth Parish Meeting  
Community Transport Southwest

## **Summary of key points of discussion and outcomes:**

### **Item 1: Welcome and apologies**

LCN Link Officer Beth Poole, acting as Chairperson, welcomed attendees to the meeting and thanked them for their patience whilst technical difficulties for online attendees were resolved. Apologies received and noted.

### **Items 2: LCN Officer Update and nominations for Chair / Vice-Chair**

Beth Poole (LCN Link Officer) reported on recent activities, highlighting collaboration with Natasha Rand and other community connectors involved in Yeovil's regeneration initiatives. Key actions included facilitating Community Conversations grants, supporting applications for SALC Small Parish Health and Wellbeing grants, strengthening partnerships with organisations such as The Birchfield Action Group, and working with public health teams to enhance the hypertension campaign's reach among target and marginalised groups. Upcoming collaborative work is anticipated with Abri (housing association) and its tenants in the Birchfield and Westfield areas to develop community projects and improvements.

Beth explained she covers both the Chard and Blackdowns LCN area and the Yeovil LCN area, working four days a week, with roughly one and a half days dedicated to each region after accounting for other work commitments. She highlighted the challenges encountered in managing both areas in the absence of a chairperson to guide agenda-setting and meetings. Karl Gill volunteered to act in this capacity for future meetings, and they will meet in January to discuss further.

### **Item 3: Parish Issues and Opportunities: Collaboration and Feedback**

Attendees were requested to outline the principal challenges faced by their respective parishes, as well as to identify common themes, support requirements, and opportunities for collaboration. The current issues highlighted included:

- Incidents of rural crime, particularly thefts in Chilthorne Domer impacting the farming and equestrian sectors and difficulties in recovering stolen property.
- Instances of anti-social behaviour in Yeovil Town Centre.
- Unresolved pothole repairs in Hardington Mandeville.
- Severely blocked drains in East Coker that exceed the capabilities of the Lengthsman, a concern also raised by Hardington Mandeville.

Beth encouraged attendees to reconsider establishing a Highways Working Group, noting its proven effectiveness elsewhere in addressing highways-related concerns. There was broad support for this initiative, and David Neal kindly agreed to serve as Chair, with a meeting to be scheduled in the New Year.

## **Item 4: Yeovil Masterplan Consultation Results & Overview**

Ian Timms, Yeovil Regeneration and Major Projects Consultant for Somerset Council, presented on the findings of the Yeovil Masterplan consultation:

### **Overview of Current Work:**

- The regeneration manager, responsible for the range of schemes in Yeovil Town Centre, introduced a strategic document called the Yeovil Town Centre Masterplan that will be adopted as part of the Local Plan, once finalised. This document is intended to provide a strategic framework and general guidance for future developments in the town centre, ensuring that planning decisions are informed and coordinated.
- The plan is currently under review and will be integrated into the next version of the Local Plan, which is currently being developed. Significant studies are underway, particularly regarding retail and leisure uses, to support effective planning decisions.

### **Consultation Process:**

- The consultation process included pre-engagement with key partners, technical work, and public consultation. The formal consultation lasted six weeks, from mid-September to early November, following the standard timeframe.
- Outreach included social media, council channels, local press, and in-person events. Approximately two hundred people were engaged directly, and the consultation received 575 online responses, including 112 free-text submissions. Additionally, a petition against the potential use of car parks for development sites gathered nearly 5,000 signatures.

### **Key Themes & Feedback:**

- **Parking Loss:** The most prominent concern was the potential loss of parking, particularly regarding sites already identified in the Local Plan. This issue generated significant feedback, with 184 comments specifically mentioning parking loss, and fifty-nine referencing the North Lane and Court Ash car parks.
- **Support for Regeneration:** There was widespread support for regeneration of specific sites, but many respondents expressed reservations about parking and the consultation process itself, suggesting a need for earlier and broader community involvement in future iterations.
- **Safety and Security:** Safety in the town centre was a major theme, with many respondents reporting concerns about feeling unsafe in the area.
- **Community Facilities:** Only 20% of respondents were satisfied with current community facilities. Suggestions for future development included more public toilets and maintaining car parks as community assets.
- **Job Opportunities:** Only 15% of respondents were happy with job opportunities in Yeovil, though some conflicting data was noted.
- **Business Types:** There was a strong preference for independent businesses, with 141 respondents expressing this view. There was also support for more hospitality and leisure businesses.
- **Other Suggestions:** fifty-three alternative site suggestions were made for development, though none are currently in council ownership. Comments also

highlighted the need for redevelopment of the Octagon and more facilities for children.

#### **Next Steps:**

- The feedback will inform amendments to the plan, which will be presented to the Planning Transportation sub-committee on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026. The revised plan will include a summary report, detailed appendices with all data, and a new document reflecting community feedback.

#### **Additional Discussion:**

- Issues such as anti-social parking on Westminster Street and Middle Street were raised, with enforcement and physical interventions being considered in collaboration with parking and police teams.
- The importance of supporting bus services and ensuring they meet community needs was also highlighted.

### **Item 5: Hidden Harms**

Gemma Sheldrake, Service Improvement Officer, Somerset Council presented on her research project, 'Hidden Harms to Children.'

#### **Project Overview:**

- Gemma introduced herself and her role supporting children's social care teams, fostering, family intervention, youth justice, SEND, and education teams, focusing on quality assurance and service improvement.
- She is currently undertaking a two-day-a-week placement with the Health Determinants Research Collaboration, leading a project on hidden harms to children – specifically those harms present in universal and early help settings, before families reach local authority services.

#### **Definition and Scope of Hidden Harms:**

- 'Hidden Harms' refers to the impact on children from parental substance misuse, mental health difficulties, and domestic violence or abuse. These impacts are often overlooked, as agencies tend to focus on visible issues (e.g., poor home conditions) rather than underlying risks.
- National data shows domestic abuse is present in 47% of incidents and substance misuse in 43%, with these factors frequently coexisting alongside mental health challenges.
- In Somerset, there has been a consistent rise in hidden harms over the past three years, with increasing numbers of children requiring child protection planning and entering care.

#### **Key Insights:**

- Hidden harms are often entrenched over prolonged periods and across generations, not just appearing when families engage with children's services. Early recognition and support are crucial to prevent lifelong and intergenerational harm.

- The project aims to evaluate pathways for earlier intervention, focusing on universal services such as health visiting, general practice, schools, and nurseries. The goal is to understand how practitioners identify and support families before issues become entrenched.
- The research seeks to strengthen evidence-based practice, inform multi-agency training and policy, and generate actionable recommendations for Somerset Partnership services, safeguarding partnerships, and domestic abuse services.

### **Research Approach:**

- The project is in its initial stages, currently in the literature review phase. Next steps include reviewing policies across agencies, understanding lived experiences of affected children and parents, and gathering practitioner insights.
- A particular challenge is understanding what "safety" means to younger children (ages 4–5), aiming to inform future interventions based on children's perspectives.

### **Discussion and Q&A Highlights:**

- The presentation prompted questions about trends in child protection numbers, especially post-COVID. Gemma noted a delayed reaction in data, possibly linked to the rollout of the family safeguarding model and recruitment challenges for adult workers.
- It was observed that during COVID, children were less visible to services due to home schooling and fewer face-to-face visits, making it easier for issues to go unnoticed.
- The discussion highlighted the intersection of hidden harms with poverty and the cost-of-living crisis, which are likely to have incremental impacts on families.
- Questions were raised about recruitment and workforce pressures in social care, with Gemma noting national difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff due to burnout and stress.
- The importance of multi-agency collaboration, including voluntary sector involvement, was emphasised. Offers of support and data sharing from the voluntary sector were welcomed to strengthen the research and intervention strategies.

### **Next Steps:**

- Gemma remains open to support, links, and suggestions from colleagues and the community. Contact details will be shared in the meeting minutes for those interested in contributing to the project.

Gemma's contact details are as follows:

**Gemma Sheldrake, Service Improvement Officer, Children and Families**

Email: [gemma.sheldrake@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:gemma.sheldrake@somerset.gov.uk)

Direct Dial: 01823 359694

## **Item 6: The Nelson Trust – Believe Change is Possible**

Kerenza Robinson-Barton spoke about the work of The Nelson Trust and its increasing importance locally.

### **Introduction & Background:**

- Kerenza introduced her role at The Nelson Trust, highlighting five years of experience supporting women at first point of contact with services in Somerset, and emphasising her familiarity with both available services and existing gaps.
- Kerenza previously worked on a programme supporting women, learning extensively about the challenges faced, and now serves as a whole systems approach worker, focusing on how systems function for women, identifying gaps, and fostering collaboration across Somerset.

### **The Nelson Trust's Services:**

- The Nelson Trust provides women's community services across the region, including the Somerset Women's Centre in Bridgewater. The organisation began in Gloucester as a mixed-sex rehab but found that women did not benefit equally, prompting a shift to women-only models.
- The Nelson Trust has expanded to Swindon, Bristol, and two centres in Wales. In the past year, nearly 5,000 women were supported, with 34,000 hours of key working delivered.

### **Approach & Philosophy:**

- Services are trauma-informed, focusing on evaluation, empowerment, and action. The Nelson Trust aims to remove barriers to access, such as childcare, and provide holistic support addressing all aspects of women's lives.
- Training exercises illustrate the complexity of women's lives, with multiple agencies and demands often leaving women feeling powerless and overwhelmed.

### **Key Insights:**

- Healing for women is relational, relying on trusted relationships with family, friends, and partners, in contrast to men who often suffer institutionally.
- Outreach is provided across Somerset, but challenges remain in Yeovil due to lack of facilities like crèches and group spaces. The Trust offers weekly emotional health and well-being groups, arts and crafts, and longer-term support groups, but aims to expand offerings in Yeovil.
- Data shows higher rates of deaths among supported women in Yeovil compared to other areas, underscoring the urgency of local support.

### **Risks & Pathways:**

- Yeovil has been identified as a high-risk area for violence against women and girls, as reported by BBC News. The Trust's "nine pathways" include homelessness, substance misuse, domestic and sexual violence, and relationships. Some specialised programmes are currently only available in Bridgewater.
- Facilities in Bridgewater include showers, washing machines, and a donation room. The Nelson Trust seeks to bring similar support to Yeovil.

### **Prevention & Advocacy:**

- The Nelson Trust focuses on preventing women's involvement in the justice system by providing timely support. Recent events such as the "16 Days of Activism" raised awareness of gender-based violence. Yeovil Town was noted as having the highest rate of sexual violence in Somerset between 2022 and 2025.
- The theme for the recent activism campaign was "digital harm," reflecting the increasing use of technology by abusers.

### **Statistics & Challenges:**

- Reports of sexual offences are rising, with nearly 8,000 cases in 2024–2025 compared to 5,245 in 2022–2023. Misogyny is increasingly prevalent among younger generations. Only a small fraction of reported rapes result in charges or convictions, highlighting systemic issues.
- The speaker shared a local case illustrating the difficulties faced by survivors, including ongoing safety concerns even after conviction of the perpetrator.

### **Reflections, Recommendations & Calls to Action:**

1. Beth, drawing on experience as former police staff, shared that domestic abuse and violence against women are not limited to young people, those in chaotic lifestyles, or low-income households. Such issues can also be hidden in more affluent or outwardly comfortable homes.
  2. A real-life case scenario was given involving a retired woman who reported abuse after decades in a coercive and controlling relationship, highlighting that these experiences occur across all demographics and communities, including rural parishes where abuse may be hidden and victims more isolated.
- Education and open conversations are vital to supporting survivors and preventing violence. Every 30 seconds a domestic abuse report is made to Police and every 5 days a woman is killed in the UK by a partner or ex-partner. We all know someone with an experience of domestic abuse.
  - There is a need for education on healthy relationships for young people, funding for women's spaces, and improved access to domestic abuse and rape crisis services. Current services are overstretched and underfunded.
  - Advocacy is needed from all community members, including men, to challenge misogyny and support women's rights, especially in the current political climate.

### **Deprivation Data**

Beth explained the rationale for choice of guest speakers, highlighting the relevance of presentations to current local issues in the context of the latest Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) released in October 2025. The IMD is the official measure of deprivation in England & Wales and is released every five years on average. It is measured at Lower Layer Super Output (LSOA) level – small areas of approx. 1,500 residents – and combines seven domains of deprivation:

- Income
- Employment
- Education, Skills, and Training
- Health and Disability

- Crime
- Barriers to Housing and Services, and
- Living Environment.

A deprivation score and rank is calculated for each area. LSOAs are grouped into deciles, where one is the most deprived 10% nationally (dark red), and ten is the least deprived 10% (light green). *This helps to identify areas that may need additional support or resources.*

#### **Overview of Deprivation Data:**

Yeovil LCN deprivation data was reviewed, using a handout Beth had produced for the meeting. The 2025 figures indicate an increase in deprivation compared to 2019, showing a general upward trend and greater deprivation among outlying parishes.

Deprivation is recognised as a contributory factor in hidden harms and violence against women and girls, where basic unmet needs create additional pressures on individuals and families.

#### **Implications & Next Steps:**

- The increase in deprivation in the Yeovil LCN area was described as deeply concerning.
- Beth encouraged collective action, suggesting that communities have opportunities to work together to address emerging issues.
- Attendees were encouraged to review the deprivation data online, use government websites to check their own area by postcode, and engage more deeply with the available information.

#### **Item 7: Working Groups and Future Agenda Items / Speakers**

There is an open invitation for interest in forming a working group to address the issues discussed, with the possibility of joining existing forums or creating new ones to improve local services and responses.

A Highways Working Group will be re-established, to meet before the next general LCN meeting and will be led by David Neal, with support from Beth.

#### **Item 8: Any Other Business?**

##### **Parish Preparedness Survey:**

Attendees were reminded that the Parish Preparedness survey is still open for completion until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025, and there may be some flexibility for any parish that needs additional support to complete it.

##### **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/>

##### **Council Budget Consultation:**

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

### **Electoral Boundary Review:**

The electoral boundary review has reopened until 14<sup>th</sup> January 2026: [Somerset | LGBCE](#)

### **Domestic Abuse Strategy 2026-2029:**

A new domestic abuse strategy is being developed [Domestic Abuse Strategy Public Consultation - Somerset Council - Citizen Space](#) The importance of this document was highlighted in the context of presentations received.

### **Community Support and Information Sharing:**

The voluntary sector highlighted the importance of sharing information about events and support available for families and communities. There is an ongoing effort to create a central space for sharing such information, covering both statutory and community.

### **LCN Attendance and Engagement:**

Suggestions were made to explore different meeting formats and times to increase opportunities for inclusion and participation, such as meeting during the day. The importance of flexibility and adapting to what works best for partners was emphasised.

The meeting content was commended; however, disappointment expressed at low attendance generally and at the notable absence of Somerset Council Members at LCN meetings. Initiative is being taken to promote broader representation and inclusion, and the outcome of the community engagement review (which includes LCNs) will shape these activities. Officers can not speak on behalf of members and suggested that concerned individuals speak to their Council member directly and their views will have been captured in the review, as well as in committee and full council meetings.

It was noted that UK legislation currently going through Parliament will require local government to engage with communities and neighbourhoods, which may impact how LCNs operate in the future, and the move towards unitary councils nationally is expected to influence local models of engagement.

### **Future LCN meeting dates:**

- 7:00pm Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2026 – Tintinhull Village Hall
- 7:00pm Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2026 (AGM) – The Manor Hotel, Yeovil

### **Item 9: Close, Networking and Mince Pies**

Attendees were thanked for their participation and patience, especially those joining online given technical issues. The meeting concluded with an invitation for any final questions or comments, and festive refreshments offered to those attending in-person.

## **SUMMARY OF ACTIONS:**

1. Progress the offer of Karl Gill to act as LCN Chairperson in the New Year.
2. Re-establish the Highways Working Group before the next LCN meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2026. David Neal to provisionally act as Chairperson.
3. Circulate the Yeovil Masterplan presentation slides to attendees with the meeting notes due to technical issues within the session.
4. Share contact details between Gemma Sheldrake and attendees via the meeting notes to support collaboration on the Hidden Harms project.
5. Circulate the Nelson Trust presentation slides to attendees with the meeting notes due to technical issues within the session.
6. 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.
7. Attendees to consider establishing a working group on Violence Against Women and Girls / Hidden Harms / community safety or identify an existing forum to link into before the next LCN meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2026. Contact Beth Poole with expressions of interest.
8. Attendees to share Step Up Somerset wellbeing workshops (starting Feb 2026) with their networks.
9. Attendees to review 'open' consultations, including the Council Budget Consultation and Electoral Boundary Review by 14 January 2026 and the Domestic Abuse Strategy, with a view to participating and encourage their networks to do the same.
10. Attendees invited to share community events and opportunities with Natasha Rand so they can be added to a local "What's On" webpage.
11. Parishes encouraged to complete the Somerset Parish Preparedness Survey before 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025, if they haven't already. Support is available, if required.

## **APPENDICES:**

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

Presentation – Yeovil Town Centre Masterplan: [Click here to view](#)

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

Presentation – The Nelson Trust: [Click here to view](#)

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

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

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