



**Somerset**  
Council

## Local Community Network

**Taunton LCN meeting notes – 10 November 2025, Quaker Meeting House, Bath Place, Taunton 5.30pm – 8pm**

### **Attendees:**

**Chair:** Cllr Kyle Gordon, Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council

Cllr Federica Smith- Roberts, Somerset Council  
Cllr John Hunt, Somerset Council  
Cllr Mike Rigby, Somerset Council / Bishop's Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council  
Cllr Nick O'Donnell Somerset Council / Taunton Town Council  
Cllr Glenn Gapper, Trull Parish Council  
Cllr Tony Taylor, Bishop's Hull Parish Council  
Cllr Graham Withnell, Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council  
Cllr Bridget Harrison, Cotford St Luke Parish Council  
Amanda Pearson  
PCSO Sam Bushen, Avon & Somerset Police  
Rachel Luke, Citizens Advice  
Marcus Prouse, Taunton Town Council  
Brenda Weston, Police Independent Advisory Group  
Andrew Pritchard, Mind in Somerset / Connect Somerset Champion  
Jennifer Mellows, UCS College Group  
Amber Packer-Hughes  
Mark Bell, Wessex Water  
Teri Underwood, Armed Forces Outreach  
Chrissie Brewer, Thrive  
Rachael Knight, Thrive  
Tessa Dean, Chair Taunton and Wellington CLP  
Syed Shah, J26 Public Relations Officer  
Roger & Jeanette Redman  
Anusha Chettakulathinkara Lalu, Community Safety  
Nicola Hale, Community Safety  
Alex Mountain, Displaced people services  
Sam Hayward  
Iona Taylor, Youth Representative, Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council  
Barry Childs, Bus Partnership  
Dee Childs, Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council  
Richard Austin, Taunton Minster  
10 local residents

### **Somerset Council:**

Michelle Brooks, LCN Link Officer  
Gill Keniston-Goble, LCN Link Officer

### **Apologies received:**

Cllr Lee Baker, Somerset Councillor  
Cllr Dawn Johnson, Somerset Councillor

Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey, Somerset Councillor  
Cllr Andy Sully  
Cllr Bev Fernandes, Taunton Town Council  
Fran Hicks, Citizens UK

## 1. Introductions

The Taunton LCN Chair, Kyle Gordon, introduced the meeting and welcomed attendees to the meeting.

Apologies noted above.

## 2. Elect the Vice Chair of the Local Community Network

The Link Officer advised the meeting was quorate.

**Nomination and Election Process:** John Hunt nominated Somerset Councillor, Federica Smith-Roberts for the position of LCN Vice Chair, the nomination was seconded, by the Chair of Taunton LCN, Kyle Gordon. Federica Smith-Roberts confirmed their willingness to stand as Taunton LCN Vice Chair. and Federica was elected without contest.

## 3. Agreement of notes from previous meeting – 28 August 2025

The meeting reviewed the notes from the previous meeting and reported that the actions from the previous meeting had been completed.

The notes from the previous meeting were agreed by all present.

Marcus Prouse, Deputy Chief Executive, Taunton Town Council provided an update on the Trull Road issue, including:

- **Trull Road Feasibility Study Progress:** summarised actions since the last meeting, including a meeting with Nick Cowling from highways, submission and approval of a study brief, and receipt of feasibility study options ranging from £4,000 to £25,000.
- **Funding Options for Study:** outlined potential funding sources for the feasibility study, such as Town Council grants, Community Infrastructure Levy funding, and the Ward Member Initiative Scheme, and noted positive discussions with Councillors Garside and Fernandes.

### Discussion

- **Community Involvement and Next Steps:** Participants discussed the possibility of community fundraising, particularly involving Parkfield School.

**Action:** Marcus Prouse to provide the detailed feasibility study documents, Link Officer to distribute for further review.

- **Drainage and Road Safety Concerns:** A participant raised concerns about ongoing drainage issues in the Trull Road area.

The Chair advised participants to report the problem via the Somerset Council report a problem on the road website:

Website provided: [Report a problem on the road](#)

**Action:** Link Officer

#### 4. Himalayan Balsam Awareness and Community Action

Amanda Pearson presented on the invasive Himalayan balsam plant, detailing its impact on riverbanks and native species, and led a discussion on best practices for removal, community coordination, and reporting to Somerset Council.

- **Impact of Himalayan Balsam:** Amanda explained the rapid spread of Himalayan Balsam along local rivers, its shallow root system weakening riverbanks, and the resulting erosion and property damage, with examples from Norton Fitzwarren.
- **Removal Techniques and Regulations:** Best practices for removal were discussed, including pulling up plants before flowering, hanging them in trees to prevent regrowth, and adhering to regulations prohibiting disposal in green bins or recycling centres.
- **Community Coordination and Awareness:** The Chair and Amanda encouraged forming local groups to tackle the issue, and highlighted the importance of raising awareness through parish magazines, and suggested reporting sightings to Somerset Council using their online portal.
- **Ownership and Responsibility:** The discussion clarified that landowners, including housing associations and private residents, are responsible for managing Himalayan Balsam on their property, and that Somerset Council is responsible for council-owned land.
- **Next Steps and Information Sharing:** Amanda agreed to share an information pack with the Link Officer for wider distribution, and participants were encouraged to support future efforts and stay updated on progress.

**Action:** Link Officer, share information pack

#### Discussion & Comments

- **Best Disposal Method:** An attendee asked what to do with Himalayan Balsam after pulling it up, with the recommendation to hang the plants in trees to prevent regrowth and suggested checking the RHS website for further guidance.

## [Himalayan balsam | RHS Advice](#)

**Impact on Native Species:** Himalayan Balsam affects native species. as it outcompetes native plants and can destabilise riverbanks.

- **Timing for Removal:** Attendees asked about the best time to remove Himalayan Balsam, Amanda clarified that February and March, when seeds germinate, is ideal, and that removal after flowering is less effective due to seed dispersal.
- **Riparian Ownership:** There was discussion about landowner responsibility for riverbank management, with Amanda explaining riparian ownership and the need for cooperation between private owners and housing associations.
- **Community Action:** Attendees discussed forming local groups to tackle Himalayan Balsam, with Amanda sharing her experience organising neighbours and allotment holders for removal efforts.

Attendees thanked Amanada for the information and presentation and expressed support for raising awareness and reporting Himalayan Balsam to Somerset Council, with the Chair encouraging everyone to submit reports online:

Somerset Council: [Harmful or poisonous weeds](#)

**Action:** Link Officer share links

### 5. Neighbourhood Policing Update and Community Safety Initiatives Police Crime Statistics and Policing Update

PCSO Sam Bushen from the Taunton Neighbour Policing Team presented crime statistics for the Taunton area from September – October 2025, discussed changes in policing boundaries and staffing, explained crime recording practices, and outlined community engagement, speed enforcement, and anti-social behaviour initiatives, with input from Somerset Council representatives.

- **Crime Statistics and Trends:** Sam reported a 7.5% increase in violence against the person, a decrease in theft, and a rise in criminal damage and commercial burglaries, clarifying that crime statistics include a broad range of incidents due to ethical recording requirements.
- **Policing Boundaries and Staffing:** Recent changes expanded Taunton's policing area, with Wellington's neighbourhood team temporarily supporting the new area; recruitment challenges and current staffing levels were detailed, including ongoing vacancies and the impact on service delivery.
- **Community Engagement and Reporting:** Sam emphasised the importance of public reporting for data-driven resource allocation, described engagement activities such as beat surgeries and school visits, and encouraged participation in Community Speed Watch schemes.

- **Speed Enforcement and Road Safety:** The team conducted speed enforcement operations, recruited a new Speed Enforcement Officer, and supported Community Speed Watch volunteers, who monitored thousands of vehicles and issued advisory letters for speeding.

### Discussion & Comments

- **Scams and Fraud:** An attendee asked if scams and theft by deception are included in the crime statistics. Sam clarified that fraud statistics were not included in the presented data but offered to provide them at a future meeting. He confirmed that most financial crime now occurs online.
- **Police Staffing and Area Changes:** An attendee asked if the expansion of the police area resulted in more officers. Sam explained that Wellington's team would continue to support the newly added area for now, with possible realignment of officers in the next 12 months.
- **Patrol and Neighbourhood Team Coordination:** An attendee asked about improved coordination between patrol and neighbourhood teams. Sam confirmed that a new model has improved communication and local focus.
- **Anti-Social Behaviour and Multi-Agency Work:** Cllr Federica Smith Roberts described the launch of an anti-social behaviour team to work alongside police, focusing on public space protection orders and multi-agency responses, replacing the previous 'one team' model.
- **Neighbourhood Watch:** An attendee asked if Neighbourhood Watch is still active. Sam confirmed it is, but noted that social media has become a more prominent tool for community alerts.

Attendees thanked Sam for his presentation and engagement, and the Chair congratulate thanked outgoing police sergeant, Charmaine Dyer on her promotion for her valuable work in the Taunton LCN area, especially contributions to the Young People Working Group.

## 6. Citizens Advice Somerset Services and Community Impact

Rachel Luke, Advice Service Manager, Citizens Advice Somerset, outlined the organisation's services, including general and specialist advice, project areas, access methods, and impact statistics, and addressed questions about local data, capacity, and referral processes.

- **Services Provided:** Citizens Advice Somerset covers a wide range of topics including benefits, employment, housing, homelessness, debt, and more. If they cannot directly help, they signpost to other organisations.
- **Impact & Reach:** In the last financial year, they assisted over 20,000 clients with more than 84,000 advice issues, resulting in £9.4 million income gained for clients. Their support is delivered through both volunteers and paid advisors.

- **Special Projects:** They run targeted projects such as open mental health support, litigants in person for domestic abuse survivors, Macmillan support for those affected by cancer, homelessness prevention, and specialist debt advice. Advisors receive specific training for these areas.
- **Access Channels:** Support is available via phone, email, web form, and in-person drop-in sessions (notably at their office by the church on Magdalene St, Mondays and Thursdays). Drop-ins are for initial advice, with follow-up appointments as needed.
- **Effectiveness & Outcomes:** Rachel shared that early engagement leads to better outcomes. Nearly half of clients improved their finances or physical health, two in five secured better housing, and three in five found it easier to manage daily activities.
- **Research & Campaigning:** Citizens Advice Somerset also identifies and campaigns on emerging issues, such as scams and policy gaps. Rachel cited a recent success where they helped get £45,000 of debt written off for a client due to a policy loophole. They also challenge issues like the impact of benefit migration on council tax.
- **Volunteering & Capacity:** Rachel encouraged volunteering, noting the service is mostly volunteer-run. She assured that no one is turned away and there are multiple ways to access support, including for those who are housebound.
- **Local Data & Collaboration:** Rachel agreed to provide locality-specific statistics (e.g., for Taunton or Bishop's Hull) upon request and highlighted the importance of sharing community trends to help drive change.

**Action:** Rachel Luke / Link Officer

Attendees expressed gratitude, likening Citizens Advice Somerset to an additional emergency service, and noted the value of being able to refer people in crisis. Rachel acknowledged the importance of early referrals and the dedication of their volunteers.

## 7. Role and Activities of the Local MP's Office

Amber Packer-Hughes, Chief of Staff to Gideon Amos MP, explained the MP's constituency and parliamentary roles, casework processes, policy advocacy, community engagement, and the limitations of MP powers, clarifying engagement protocols and referral practices.

- **Constituency Casework and Team Structure:** Described the MP's office as a bridge between Westminster and the community, handling nearly 10,000 cases in 18 months, with a team of 11 (mostly part-time) managing individual and campaign-related enquiries.
- **Types of Issues and Success Stories:** That the office addresses a wide range of issues, from benefits and housing to national campaigns, and collaborates with Citizens Advice Somerset on complex cases, such as resolving identity theft and preventing evictions.

- **Policy Advocacy and Legislative Work:** Gideon Amos MP participates in parliamentary debates, all-party groups, and policy advocacy on topics like NHS funding, rural transport, and climate, using constituency feedback to inform his contributions.
- **Community Engagement and Accessibility:** That the MP engages with constituents through surgeries, drop-in sessions, social media, newsletters, and event attendance, encouraging public input and maintaining accountability.
- **Limitations and Protocols:** Clarified that MPs cannot intervene in council operations, legal disputes, or prioritise individuals for housing, and explained strict parliamentary protocols regarding casework and cross-constituency requests.

### Discussion & Comments

- **MP's Powers and Limitations:** Amber clarified that MPs cannot directly intervene in local council decisions, fix potholes, or prioritise housing cases, and cannot influence court proceedings due to strict separation of powers. 7 8
- **Engaging with the MP's Office:** Amber encouraged attendees to contact the MP's office for support or to invite the MP to local events, but noted strict parliamentary protocol: only your own MP can act on your behalf for casework, while policy issues can be raised with any MP.

Attendees expressed interest in understanding the MP's role and how to engage, and thanked amber for the presentation.

### 8. Next steps for the Taunton LCN

- **Formation of Taunton LCN Transport Working Group:** The Chair proposed and invited interested participants to join a new working group focused on local public transport, with the aim of identifying and prioritising community needs through smaller group discussions.  
**Action:** Link Officer
- **Grant Resource Initiative / information sharing:** The Chair shared plans to create a grant hub for distributing information about available grants, encouraging attendees to share funding opportunities for wider community benefit.  
**Action:** Link Officer
- **Winter Support Funding and Community Assistance:** Chrissie Brewer from thrive, highlighted the availability of winter support funds, including the Household Support Fund, and encouraged attendees to refer residents in need for assistance with heating and essential needs.

thrive contacts:

Website: [Home - Thrive](#)

Email: [info@thrivesomerset.org.uk](mailto:info@thrivesomerset.org.uk)

Phone: 01823 331222

The Chair thanked speakers and attendees for their attendance and valuable contributions to meeting and the Taunton LCN, and encouraged all to contact him / the Link Officer with any feedback or comments and invited suggestions for the future items.

See Annex A for a summary of actions from the meeting.

Meeting closed 8.10pm

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