



Local Community Network

Taunton LCN meeting notes – 28 August 2025, Quaker Meeting House, Bath Place, Taunton 5pm – 7.30pm

Attendees:

Chair: Cllr Kyle Gordon, Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council

Cllr John Hunt, Somerset Councillor
Cllr Bev Fernandes, Taunton Town Council
Cllr Glenn Gapper, Trull Parish Council
Cllr Tony Taylor, Bishop's Hull Parish Chair
Cllr Graham Withnell, Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council
PCSO Sam Bushen, Avon & Somerset Police
Tessa Dean, Chair Taunton and Wellington CLP
Fran Hicks, Citizens UK
Fodo Higginson, Somerset Association of Local Councils
Ewan Jones (Chief Executive, Somerset Association of Local Councils)
Rosa Kell (Co-committee member, Somerset Bus Partnership)
Rachel Luke, Citizens Advice
David Northey, Somerset Bus Partnership
Nigel Pearce, Taunton Chamber of Commerce
Syed Shah, J26 Public Relations Officer
Craig Stone, Taunton Town Council
Brenda Weston (Police Independent Advisory Group)

Somerset Council:

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

Apologies received:

Cllr Lee Baker, Somerset Councillor
Cllr Dawn Johnson, Somerset Councillor
Cllr Fran Smith, Somerset Councillor
Sandra Lawson, Citizens UK
Cindy Furse, SPARK
Andrew Pritchard, Mind in somerset / Connect Somerset Champion

1. Introductions

The Taunton LCN Link Officer, Michelle Brooks, introduced the meeting and welcomed attendees to the meeting and invited attendees to introduce themselves, including their roles and areas of responsibility.

Apologies noted above.

2. Elect the Chair of the Local Community Network

The Link Officer advised the meeting was quorate.

Nomination and Election Process: John Hunt nominated Kyle Gordon for the position of LCN Chair, highlighting Kyle's enthusiasm and suitability for the role. The nomination was seconded, by Graham Withnell and Kyle confirmed their willingness to stand as Taunton LCN Chair. and Kyle was elected without contest.

Chair's Vision and Communication: Kyle Gordon outlined their vision for the LCN, stressing the importance of utilising the collective skills and knowledge of the group. Kyle encouraged open communication and committed to being accessible to all members for ongoing collaboration.

3. Police Crime Statistics and Policing Update

PCSO Sam Bushen from the Taunton Neighbour Policing team presented crime statistics for the area, and answered questions from meeting attendees regarding reporting, shoplifting, and police visibility.

- **Crime Statistics Overview:** detailed report on crime statistics from June to August 2025, noting a 2.2% increase in violence against the person, a decrease in theft (11.6%), shoplifting, public order offences, and burglary, but an increase in sexual offences (3.7%) and drug offences (53.8%).
- **Reasons for Crime Trends:** that changes in recording practices, especially for neighbour disputes and school-reported incidents, contributed to the rise in certain crime categories. The increase in drug offences was attributed to proactive policing and hotspot patrols under Operation Haven.
- **Community Policing and Resource Allocation:** the structure of the neighbourhood policing team, the impact of summer demand and abstractions for major incidents, and the challenges of maintaining visibility and long-term problem-solving when officers are redeployed to support other areas.
- **Reporting and Shoplifting Issues:** the meeting raised concerns about underreporting of shoplifting by retailers - Sam acknowledged that alternative reporting platforms like UK PAC and changes in reporting behaviour may affect official statistics. The group discussed the importance of intelligence sharing and direct communication with local officers.
- **Neighbourhood Engagement and Contact:** the members discussed ways to improve public awareness of local PCSOs, the use of online contact forms, and the potential for public forums or beat surgeries,

both in-person and online, to enhance engagement and information sharing.

Discussion

Operational Insights

Operation Haven: Ongoing hotspot policing initiative, funded until at least April 2026, focusing on visible patrols in high-crime areas. This has led to more drug offences being detected.

Neighbourhood vs. Response Policing: Neighbourhood teams focus on long-term community issues, but during busy periods (e.g., summer, protests, major incidents), officers are sometimes redeployed, impacting local visibility. Challenges: Staff abstraction for major incidents (e.g., protests, Cheddar Gorge car meets) and the impact on local policing capacity.

Community Questions and Concerns

Underreporting of Shoplifting: Some retailers no longer report incidents, possibly skewing statistics. Alternative reporting via the UK Partners Against Crime (UK PAC) platform was discussed. Craig Stone, Community and Place Manager, Taunton Town Council, discussed various community initiatives and the importance of collaboration.

Drug Offences vs. Burglaries: Query about the relationship between drug use and burglary rates; police noted that most burglaries now involve professional criminals targeting non-dwellings.

Door-to-Door Scams: Difficulty in reporting and classifying such incidents online; advice given to contact local PCSOs directly for intelligence sharing.

Visibility and Contact: PCSOs are still present but may be less visible due to abstractions. Contact details are available via the police website, and councillors can liaise directly with supervisors for community concerns.

Traffic and Parking Issues

Congestion and Enforcement: Problems with illegal parking on urban clearways and bus stops, causing congestion. Parking enforcement is now a Somerset Council Highways responsibility.

Reporting Non-Emergencies: Clarification on using “Safer Streets” for environmental concerns (e.g., poor lighting, graffiti) and direct police reporting for crimes.

Engagement and Communication

Beat Surgeries and Public Forums: Traditional in-person and online beat surgeries have had mixed success. The police are exploring ways to improve engagement, including newsletters and possibly reviving online forums.

Ewan Jones, CEO SALC, referenced the role of Town and Parish clerks in promoting police contact.

Future Actions and Suggestions for Improved Communication: Encouragement for all Councillors and Parish Councils to promote police contact details and facilitate community engagement.

Key Takeaways:

Crime in Taunton shows positive trends in several areas, with some increases explained by changes in reporting or proactive policing.

Community engagement and clear communication channels remain a priority, with ongoing efforts to improve visibility and responsiveness.

Traffic, parking, and road safety are persistent concerns, with collaborative solutions encouraged between police, Councils, and community groups.

The Chair requested Sam Bushen / member of the PCSO team to attend future LCN meetings and for Taunton LCN members and stakeholders to submit questions in advance would be helpful.

Action: MB

4. Agreement of notes from previous meeting – 10 April 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.

5. Elect the Vice Chair of the Local Community Network

There were no nominations Vice-Chair of the Taunton LCN.

This position is required to be filled by a Somerset Councillor.

If you are interested in being the Vice Chair of the LCN, or have a nomination for either, please do contact the Taunton LCN Officer to discuss:

Tauntonlcn@somerset.gov.uk

Action: MB

6. Bus Services and Transport Access in Taunton: David Northey and Rosa Kell from the Somerset Bus Partnership, supported by other members,

discussed challenges with bus access to Musgrove Park Hospital, fare structures, congestion, and the need for better coordination among bus operators, proposing a collaborative project for a unified timetable and improved information:

- **Access to Musgrove Park Hospital:** identified bus access to Musgrove Park Hospital as an issue, noting that current services do not connect well with county and train buses, causing difficulties for staff and visitors, especially with recent cuts to urban bus services.
- **Fare Structure and Operator Coordination:** the group discussed the complexity of fare structures due to multiple bus operators in Taunton, which leads to higher costs for passengers needing to use more than one operator. The lack of cross-operator fares was highlighted as a barrier to bus use.
- **Congestion and Bus Priority:** congestion in Taunton, particularly on key routes like East Reach, was identified as a significant issue affecting bus reliability. The group discussed the potential for bus priority lanes and the challenges of implementing infrastructure improvements.
- **Unified Timetable and Information Project:** members proposed developing a single, comprehensive timetable for all bus services in Taunton, including a physical booklet and digital resources, to improve public access to information and promote bus use. The Somerset Bus Partnership offered to manage the project, with support from Parish Councils and other stakeholders.

Action: MB/Chair/ DN/ FH

7. Grants and Funding Opportunities future priorities & funding

Fodo Higginson, SALC Community Health & Wellbeing Officer advised the Taunton LCN meeting that the SALC Health and Wellbeing Grant had relaunched on 30 June, highlighting:

- Largest grants now £10,000 – please make contact asap if you have proposals in the pipeline
- Up to £5,000 for production of Community Plans/Reviews
- Small grants of up to £1,000 for parishes with a population of under 500

Fodo provided information on available grants for community health and well-being projects and encouragement for parishes to apply for grants before the deadline.

Please follow the link for more information: <https://somerset-alc.org.uk/health-wellbeing/>

If you would more information, please contact Fodo on:

HWBSupport@somerset-alc.org.uk

8. Any Other Business

- **Road Safety and Upcoming Educational Events:** Sam Murrell , LCN Link Officer, announced upcoming road safety events led by Somerset Council's traffic management and road safety teams, aimed at Town and Parish Councils, to address issues such as speed indicator devices (SIDs), maintenance, and training requirements.

Action: MB

- **Engagement with Somerset Council:** The need for greater involvement from Somerset Council councillors and officers was emphasised to aid and support collaborative projects and inform decision making. Members discussed upcoming consultations and workshops as opportunities for input.
- **Trull Road Pedestrian and vehicle safety:** Taunton Town Council and Somerset Council Officers have met to discuss a potential feasibility study, look to receive an update at the next Taunton LCN meeting.

Action: MB

9. Meeting Structure and Future Planning

- **Proposed Meeting Format:** The group agreed to trial a format with an hour for informal networking followed by an hour for formal meeting business, aiming to encourage engagement and effective action planning.
- **Frequency and Location:** It was proposed to schedule four meetings per year as a baseline, with the option to add more if required, and to rotate meeting locations around the LCN area to increase community involvement.

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

Meeting closed 7.45pm