



Local Community Network

**Chard and Blackdown LCN meeting notes
7.00pm Tuesday 15th July 2025, Holyrood Academy**

Attendees:

Anne Shilton	Somerset Council
Beth Poole	Somerset Council
Cllr Sarah Wakefield	Somerset Council
Fodo Higginson	SALC
Ingrid Edington	Connect Champion & Holyrood Academy
Ken Pearson	Blackdown Hills Parish Network & Blackdown Practice Patient Group
Mark Palmer	Neroche Parish Council
Martin Middleton	West Hatch Parish Council

Apologies:

Cllr Martin Wale	Somerset Council
Colin Fisher	Stoke St Mary Parish Council
Keith Read	

Summary of key points of discussion and outcomes:

Item 1: Welcome and apologies

Cllr Sarah Wakefield welcomed attendees to the meeting and apologies received. Attendees introduced themselves.

An accompanying statement by former Chair Keith Read accompanies these notes, who has resigned through ill health. We extend our thanks and best wishes to Keith.

Item 2 and 3: Elect the Chair and Vice Chair of Chard and Blackdowns LCN

The election process for Chair and Vice Chair of Chard and Blackdowns LCN was conducted, in accordance with the terms of reference. Quora was not met, and no nominations were received for either position in any event. As such, an Acting Chair will be sought from attendees at future meetings for that meeting and/or a Somerset Council Officer will perform this role, until such time as a permanent Chair and Vice-Chair is nominated and endorsed.

Cllr Sarah Wakefield is willing to continue as Vice Chair, and Mark Palmer will consider acting as Chair (to be ratified at a future meeting).

Item 4: Consider the Annual Report on LCN work for the last 12 months

The Annual Report detailing the work and achievements of Somerset's LCNs over the past year was referenced, and remarks invited. Notably, attendance has declined in our LCN with some Council Members and parishes preferring not to participate.

Somerset Council has commissioned a review of LCNs and community engagement activities.

Item 5: Consider the priorities and areas of focus for the next 12 months

This LCN focused on 'Highways' and 'Environment', but progress has been limited. Opinions sought on why working groups hadn't taken off with the consensus being that, whilst people are interested in doing something, they don't offer what parishes are predominantly interested in, namely flooding, highways, and planning with the expectation that Somerset Council fulfils its duties.

The LCN can provide input to the Local Plan and some attendees have requested updates on major planning applications. However, LCNs lack statutory authority or a formal role in planning decisions. There was a request for a planning representative to discuss the Local Plan, Neighbourhood Plans, their impact, and parish involvement in major applications. Due to limited resources, planning officers may not be able to attend, but alternatives such as inviting the Lead Council member or holding daytime meetings to accommodate officer attendance will be considered.

Areas of focus for the next 12 months will be Flooding, Highways and Environment.

Item 6: Review core membership and make recommendations

Core membership was reviewed, with the observation that core members (besides town/parish councils) seldomly attend at LCN meetings across Somerset generally and ought to be regarded as key consultees instead. Barriers to attendance for core members and Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) organisations were discussed, including meeting accessibility outside of office hours. It was agreed to trial alternate day/evening quarterly meetings.

The geography of the LCN area was also cited as a continued barrier to engagement, with Chard Town Council identifying more with Crewkerne and Ilminster, and rural parishes not identifying with urban issues. This might be considered in the review.

The Primary Care Network, The Blackdown Practice, The Blackdown Hills Parish Network, and the Farmers Union were suggested as further stakeholders to engage.

Item 7: Agree the schedule of meetings for the next 12 months

The difficulty in scheduling meetings that don't coincide with existing town/parish council meetings was explained, limiting meetings to 1st or 2nd Monday or 1st, 3rd or 4th Tuesday each month. Friday evening meetings are considered unreasonable.

It was highlighted that the 3rd Tuesday of each month is no longer available. Rather than change affected dates, these dates are proposed for daytime meetings with a preference for afternoons.

Venues to be confirmed with suggestions welcome, particularly from our rural parishes. The agreed LCN meeting schedule is:

- Tuesday 7th October 2025

- Tuesday 6th January 2026 – daytime
- Tuesday 21st April 2026 – daytime (PM)
- Tuesday 7th July 2026 (AGM) – in-person only

Item 8: Neighbourhood Policing Team, Avon and Somerset: General Report

No police attendance, nor report or apologies received.

Item 9: Somerset Association of Councils: Grant Scheme Relaunch

Fodo Higginson spoke about Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) grant scheme:

- The grant scheme was relaunched on June 13th, with a top grant of £10,000 available. The parameters remain the same, requiring applications from parish or town councils, and collaborations with other organisations are encouraged.
- Over £435,000 has been awarded so far, and this is likely the final round of grants. The South Board is expected to decide on extending new grants until the end of September 2026, providing smaller parishes an opportunity to apply.
- The focus is on smaller projects, such as village events, community gardens, and allotments. Grants are not typically given for capital items like benches but are more activity-based.
- There is an emphasis on supporting smaller parishes and those with populations under 500, which have historically received fewer grants.
- The grant scheme also includes £5,000 grants for community plans, which outline the needs of the community, such as facilities for older residents or young people.
- The final deadline for applications is September 22nd, with assessment team meetings scheduled starting August 8th. Applicants are encouraged to discuss their ideas as early as possible and refer to the grant guidance available on the SALC website [Programme Resources & Grant Applications - The Somerset Association of Local Councils \(SALC\)](#).
- Fodo welcomes direct contact to discuss via HWBSupport@somerset-alc.org.uk or mobile 07932 265419.

Item 10:

Upcoming dates for Wessex Water drop-in sessions were shared.

If anyone would like to represent the Chard and Blackdowns LCN on the Somerset Active Travel Group, please express your interest via chardandblackdownslcn@somerset.gov.uk

ACTIONS / OUTCOMES

1. COMPLETE: Check whether drain/gully maps distributed and long-term plans for making the readily accessible.
Cllr SW reported that a new online mapping system will allow parishes to access this information via self-service. Parishes will be notified when it goes 'live'.

2. PENDING: Organise an Environmental Working Group meeting.
Meeting planned for early September, to be confirmed (venue dependent)
3. PENDING: Consider forming 'Blackdown Vale' specific working group via LCN.
Apologies received from action owner, Colin Fisher, therefore no update.
4. PENDING: Organise 'planning' themed LCN meeting during LCN Year 3 (2025/26);
person to talk about effectiveness of neighbourhood/local plans and role of
parishes (possibly Lead member and/or Lisa Turner).
Aspired for January or April LCN daytime date.
5. COMPLETE: Consider opportunities within the community for SSAL to develop
tailored learning.
No expressions of interest received. Open-ended opportunity.
6. NEW: Attempt to engage core members in future meetings and/or themes as guest
speakers or attendees through two daytime meetings (6th January and 21st April
2026) and direct liaison – LCN Link Officer by Year 3 AGM.