



Somerset
Council

Local Community Network

Taunton LCN Meeting Notes – 18 May 2026, Quaker Meeting House, Bath Place, Taunton, 5.30pm to 8.00pm

Attendees:

Chair: Cllr Kyle Gordon, Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council
Cllr Dee Childs, Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council
Cllr David Northey, Taunton Town Council / Somerset Bus Partnership
Cllr Martin Straus, Taunton Town Council
Cllr Iona Taylor, Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council
Cllr Tony Taylor, Bishop's Hull Parish Council
PCSO Sam Bushen, Avon & Somerset Police
PCSO Jason Routley, Avon & Somerset Police
Barrie Childs, Somerset Bus Partnership
Nigel Pearce, Taunton Town Business Chamber
Kiera Scott, UCS College Group
Tessa Dean, NHS
Mark Bell, Wessex Water
Rosie Hather, ARC
Alex Mountain, Displaced People Services
Fran Hicks, Citizens UK
Richard Austin, Taunton Minster
Krista Felek, Burnham & Weston Energy
Shane Hippisley
Syed Shah, Public Liaison Officer
Nick Harvey, In the Mix

Network session only:

Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, Somerset Council / Taunton Town Council
Cllr Fran Smith, Somerset Council
Cllr Nick O'Donnell, Somerset Council / Taunton Town Council

Somerset Council:

Michelle Brooks, LCN Link Officer
Gill Keniston-Goble, LCN Link Officer
Ashley Buttle, Health Check Practitioner
Charlotte Norman, Team Leader Healthier Lifestyles

Apologies received:

Cllr Nick O'Donnell, Somerset Council / Taunton Town Council
Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey, Somerset Council
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, Somerset Council / Taunton Town Council
Cllr Fran Smith, Somerset Council
Cllr Andy Sully, Somerset Council
Cllr Bev Fernandes, Taunton Town Council
Cllr Glenn Gapper, Trull Parish Council

Andrew Pritchard, Mind in Somerset / Connect Somerset Champion
Roger & Jeanette Redman
Anusha Chettakulathinkara Lalu, Community Safety Team
Sandra Lawson, Citizens UK

1. Introductions

The Chair of the Taunton LCN, Cllr Kyle Gordon, opened the meeting and welcomed those in attendance.

Ashley Buttle, Somerset Council Health Practitioner, provided the opportunity for health checks throughout the meeting duration. The NHS Health Check is a national programme designed to assess your cardiovascular health and determine if you may be at increased risk of developing serious conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease, or stroke.

For people aged over 65, the check also includes information on the early signs of dementia, as some risk factors overlap. With expert advice and clear next steps tailored to each individual, it is a valuable way to stay informed and in control of your health.

If you're aged 40 to 74, have no pre-diagnosed heart conditions, and have not had a check in the last 5 years, you can book your appointment

More information about the health check can be found by clicking on the links:

[NHS Health checks](#)

[Health Checks Outreach Booking Site:](#)

Apologies noted above.

2. Agreement of notes from previous meeting – 23 February 2026

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

The meeting reviewed the notes of the previous meeting and noted that the actions arising had been completed.

3. Neighbourhood Policing Update

PCSO Supervisor Sam Bushen gave a detailed presentation on policing in the Taunton LCN area. He explained that the police cover a very large geographical patch and outlined current staffing levels, including recent improvements in team numbers.

Hotspots and operational activity

PCSO Bushen showed local demand maps, indicating the town centre and surrounding streets as the main concentration of incidents, and explained that reductions in demand in previously problematic areas reflected police work to address persistent issues, providing updates on:

- Shoplifting and stolen goods investigations
- Closure of businesses linked to illicit tobacco sales and suspected organised crime
- Community engagement activity, including beat surgeries and use of a mobile police station
- Road policing, with drink-driving arrests, speed watch activity, and warning letters/prosecutions from dashcam and cyclist footage.

Key Crime trends: Comparison of the current period (February – April 2026) with the previous period (November 2025 – January 2026), including:

- Increased drug offences (which was explained partly as a sign of more proactive stop-search activity and successful detection rather than necessarily more drug use)
- A reduction in violence against the person
- Theft overall had fallen, but shoplifting had increased significantly. This was partly attributed to changes in crime recording categories
- Fraud had also risen, particularly romance fraud, with police describing repeated cases where victims were manipulated into transferring money.

Discussion

- **E-bikes, scooters and illegal use:** key messages:
 - Throttle-powered electric bikes and many e-scooters are illegal for road/public use
 - Police are not always able to pursue riders immediately, because the risk of serious injury is too high
 - Instead, they try to:
 - identify where riders live
 - gather intelligence
 - seize vehicles later where possible
 - educate, especially where parents may not realise the vehicles are illegal.
 - The meeting raised concerns about:
 - Dangerous riding on footpaths and underpasses
 - Repeated use of routes such as Wordsworth Way and other links between estates
 - Riders linked to delivery work or possible criminal activity.

- **Intelligence / crime reporting:** PCSO Bushen Police asked the public to report specific details, photos, routes, addresses, or patterns of use where possible, emphasising the importance of intelligence/reporting.
 - Police often hear people say an issue is “well known”, but it is not always being formally reported, better intelligence helps them prioritise patrols, plain-clothes activity and enforcement.

PCSO Bushen encouraged residents and businesses to use:

- online reporting
 - 101
 - Crimestoppers where anonymity is preferred
- **StreetSafe and similar reporting tools:** concern that town centre partnership working may not be reaching outer estates and the need for stronger communication links between police, shops and communities.

- **Cross-agency working**

PCSO Bushen advised that he attends a fortnightly priorities meeting with partners including Somerset Council teams, mental health services and housing providers.

- **Unauthorised encampments**

PCSO Bushen explained the Police cannot simply move encampments on immediately:

Legal thresholds are high and require evidence of significant disruption, any enforcement action must consider human rights, safeguarding, children’s welfare, large operational resource requirements.

4. **ARC Inspire - Presentation on Homelessness**

Rosie Hather, Head of Development, ARC Inspire gave a presentation on homelessness in Somerset and the organisation’s work, including:

- The scale of homelessness locally, noting high levels of rough sleeping in Somerset, significant pressures on temporary accommodation, and a shortage of one-bedroom homes which is preventing people from moving on from supported housing. Noted that Somerset has a high level of rough sleeping compared with many other local authority areas and encouraged people to read Somerset Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025 -2030:

[Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030](#)

- Homelessness is broader than rough sleeping and includes people who are sofa surfing, living in temporary or unsuitable accommodation, sleeping in vehicles or otherwise hidden from view
- Rough sleeping represents only a small proportion of homelessness overall
- Homelessness affects a wide range of people, including younger adults, older people, men and women
- The most common cause of homelessness is relationship breakdown, with other causes including domestic abuse, loss of rented accommodation, lack of affordable housing, mental ill-health and physical health issues
- Substance misuse is not always the cause of homelessness and may develop after homelessness begins, as a response to trauma and instability
- Taunton and Bridgwater were identified as the areas with the highest visible need, although homelessness is an issue across the county.
- A major challenge is the shortage of one-bedroom accommodation, which is preventing people from moving on from supported housing when they are ready.
- Temporary accommodation such as hotels and B&Bs continues to be used, but it is not viewed as a good long-term solution.
- Many people facing homelessness have multiple support needs, particularly relating to mental health, physical health and trauma.

About ARC Inspire

- ARC Inspire is a Somerset-based homelessness organisation supporting single homeless adults, mainly in Taunton, through accommodation and personalised support, see below:
 - operates 16 properties and can accommodate around 170 people on any one night, supporting more than 350 people each year.
 - runs a social enterprise to help people with lived experience of homelessness gain confidence, skills and a route back into employment.
 - also provides access to health and wellbeing support, including GP input, homelessness nursing, counselling and dental care.
 - Some ARC Inspire accommodation is pet-friendly, helping remove a barrier that can stop people accepting support.
 - Lindley House provides high-support accommodation for some of the most vulnerable people and plays an important role in preventing rough sleeping
 - ARC 50-year Anniversary events – follow link for all information and events: [Events | ARC](#)

Discussion

The meeting asked about the distribution of homelessness across Somerset and the potential for additional single-person accommodation, including modular or pod-style housing. Rosie responded that Taunton and Bridgwater had the highest visible levels of rough sleeping, although homelessness affected other parts of the county as well. She confirmed that the shortage of

one-bedroom accommodation remained one of the main barriers to move-on and welcomed exploration of practical housing solutions.

When asked how people could help, Rosie replied that raising awareness, challenging misconceptions about homelessness, sharing ARC Inspire's work more widely, and continuing to advocate for appropriate housing provision would all be valuable.

ARC Inspire website: [ARC](#)

5. Wessex Water information and overview

Mark Bell, Community Engagement Officer, Wessex Water, provided a broad update on the company's performance, local investment, customer support, and community outreach, including:

- **Company performance and investment:** explained that Wessex Water is one of the top-performing water companies in the country, with strong customer satisfaction and low complaint levels. He highlighted planned investment of £3.7 billion over five years, including:
 - reducing storm overflow discharges
 - improving wastewater treatment
 - removing nutrients from treated discharges
 - strengthening long-term water resilience
- **Water supply and resilience:** explained that Wessex Water benefits from a highly connected network and access to groundwater sources, which has helped avoid hosepipe bans for almost 50 years.
- **Stop the Block campaign:** a focus on preventing sewer blockages:
 - stressed that only the "three Ps" should go down toilets.
 - warned against flushing wet wipes and pouring fats, oils and grease down sinks, and distributed practical items such as fat disposal pots, shower timers and toilet leak test strips.
- **Support for customers:** outlined extensive financial and practical support available for customers, including:
 - payment plans
 - help for low-income households
 - discounts for people with medical needs or large families
 - priority services registration for vulnerable residents who may need bottled water in emergencies

- **Community drop-ins and local engagement:** promoted local drop-in sessions in libraries and community venues, where residents can receive face-to-face help with bills, meters, leaks and support schemes.

Discussion

Whether households with a water butt could receive a reduction in charges. Mark Bell advised that a reduction would only apply where all rainwater from the property was diverted away from drains and into soakaways, rain gardens or similar arrangements, and were advised that details could be submitted online for assessment.

How the group could help promote Wessex Water's support services and local drop-ins: Mark Bell responded that help with publicity through community centres, newsletters and word of mouth would be particularly valuable in reaching residents who were not online or were reluctant to make contact by phone.

Corporation Street sewer lining works concerns, particularly given the recent resurfacing of the road, the bus services impacts and access to Musgrove Park Hospital: Mark Bell advised that the works had been planned for some time and required formal permits. He confirmed that Wessex Water would undertake communications, hold a drop-in session, and seek to ensure that the road was reinstated appropriately following the works.
Action: Mark Bell agreed to follow up on bus stop communication and reassured the meeting that Wessex Water would undertake strong communications around the roadworks.

Wessex Water Website: [Wessex Water](#)

6. Working Group Updates

Highways Working Group

The Link Officer gave a short update on the Joint Taunton & Hestercombe LCNs Highways Working Group, noting that the group meets every two months with Council officers from traffic, street works and highways services attending, highlighting officer engagement has been positive and the group is proving useful. A fuller annual update will be given at the AGM.

Public Transport Working Group

Barrie Childs, Somerset Bus Partnership and David Northey, Co-Chair Somerset Bus Partnership provided an update on the newly established Public Transport Working Group, including:

- Meetings: January 2026 & March 2026, with the next meeting to take place 28 May 2026
- Priorities - better bus access to Musgrove Park Hospital, improving connectivity between buses, trains, park and ride, and other forms of transport, the poor condition of bus shelters and the wider image of the bus network – Barrie and David advised of the practical action that had been taken with a working group cleaning bus shelters and that Taunton Town Council had hired a contractor to clean bus shelters in the Taunton area.

Meeting participants noted ongoing concerns about the condition of bus shelters and the need for visible improvements to public transport infrastructure.

The meeting agreed the Public Transport Working Group Terms of Reference, with the addition of ‘meetings to be held online or in person’.

The meeting reviewed and agreed the Public Transport Working Group recommendations of priorities and work of the working group Taunton LCN Public Transport Working Group.

Discussion

- Concern was raised about winter gritting on key bus routes, particularly in Priorswood and Holway, and it was noted that this had been raised through the Highways Working Group.
- Members noted opportunities to promote greater bus use, including through Christmas and late-night shopping initiatives, and heard that the Working Group was engaging with partners on practical improvements.
- Syed Shah, Public Liaison Officer provided an update on the Taunton Transport Hub.
- Concern over consultation timing – Integrated Transport Strategy -

A major issue raised was Somerset Council’s consultation on integrated transport strategy and connected communities. Meeting participants were strongly critical of the very short consultation period, which did not allow LCNs time to discuss and respond properly. It was made clear that the LCN did not want to be treated as a token consultee. The Link Officer responded that a further consultation round in June should provide a better opportunity for engagement.

Action: Taunton LCN Chair to respond to the consultation that the LCN was unable to fully respond due to insufficient consultation time:

Main concerns:

- Strong perception of tokenistic engagement (“box-ticking exercise”).

- Consultation timelines were too short, preventing proper discussion at LCN meetings and working groups.
- Poor communication and coordination, including lack of early notice, resulted in missed opportunities to provide quality input / feedback.

Action: Link Officer

7. Items of Any other Business

- Fran Hicks provided a reminder that the Neighbourhood Plan consultation had just started and would run until 15 June, focusing on draft aims and objectives, with online and in-person engagement planned.

Action: Fran Hicks to send information to Link Officer to circulate

- **Public Health Outreach and Community Health Checks:** Charlotte Norman, Somerset Council Healthier Lifestyles Team, invited Councils and Community Groups to host NHS health checks and nutrition workshops in their community venues, offering outreach services for residents aged 40 to 74 and promoting food sustainability education.
 - **NHS Health Checks and Outreach:** Charlotte explained that the outreach team can deliver NHS health checks for cardiovascular, kidney, and liver disease in community venues, and encouraged Councils to offer suitable spaces for these services, with outreach clinics available across Somerset, including in Taunton Library.

Please follow the link for more information: [NHS Health checks](#)

The Chair thanked all speakers for their informative contributions and all attendees for their time and engagement, noting the strong attendance, the value of the discussion, and the importance of continued collaboration across the community.

The meeting closed at 8.00pm.