



Somerset
Council

Local Community Network

Taunton LCN meeting notes: 23 February 2026, Quaker Meeting House, Bath Place, Taunton 5.30pm – 8pm

Attendees:

Chair: Cllr Kyle Gordon, Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council

Vice Chair: Cllr Federica Smith- Roberts, Somerset Council / Taunton Town Council

Cllr John Hunt, Somerset Council

Cllr Nick O'Donnell, Somerset Council / Taunton Town Council

Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey, Somerset Council

Cllr Mike Rigby, Somerset Council / Bishops Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council

Cllr Fran Smith, Somerset Council

Cllr Jonathan Barter, Cotford St Luke Parish Council

Cllr Bev Fernandes, Taunton Town Council

Cllr Glenn Gapper, Trull Parish Council

Cllr Alison Roberts, Bishops Lydeard and Cothelstone Parish Council

Cllr Tony Taylor, Bishop's Hull Parish Council

Cllr Graham Withnell, Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council

PCSO Sam Bushen, Avon & Somerset Police

Denise Holway, Probation Services

John Bird, EVAG

Mike Webb, EVAG

Chrissie Brewer, Thrive

Sharon Coles, Thrive

Richard Austin, Taunton Minster

Barry Childs, Somerset Bus Partnership

Dee Childs, Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council

Charlie Daniels, Community Officer, Taunton Town Council

Nigel Pearce, Taunton Town Council

Lora Pearson, Assistant Principal UCS College Group

Andrew Pritchard, Mind in Somerset / Connect Somerset Champion

Iona Taylor, Youth Representative, Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council

Brenda Weston, Police Independent Advisory Group

Mark Bell, Wessex Water

Roger & Jeanette Redman

David Northey, Somerset Bus Partnership

Dave Mann, Charis

Sam Hayward

Anton Austin

Somerset Council:

Michelle Brooks, LCN Link Officer

Anusha Chettakulathinkara Lalu, Community Safety Team

Matt Cloke, Environmental Crime Manager

Kate Darlington, Engagement & Participation Officer

Gill Keniston-Goble, LCN Link Officer

Alex Mountain, Displaced People Services

Emma Plummer, Senior Parish & Community Development Officer
Syed Shah, Public Liaison Officer
Joanne Toogood, Environmental Health & Licensing Manager

Apologies received:

Cllr Andy Sully, Somerset Council
Cllr Amber Packer-Hughes, Taunton Town Council
Marcus Prouse, Taunton Town Council
Fodo Higginson, Somerset Association for Local Councils
Lilly Keeley-Watts, Somerset Association for Local Councils
Fran Hicks, Citizens UK
Shane Hipsley

1. Introductions

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

Apologies noted above.

2. Agreement of notes from previous meeting – 10 November 2025

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

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

Discussion & Comments

3. Neighbourhood Policing Update

PCSO Sam Bushen from the Taunton Neighbour Policing Team provided a comprehensive update on crime statistics in the Taunton area, discussed changes in crime recording, highlighted operational activities and addressed questions from attendees as below:

- **Crime Statistics Overview:** presented crime data for Taunton area from November to January, noting increases in violence against the person, sexual offences and criminal damage and a decrease in theft. The statistics reflect changes in crime recording practices.
- **Crime Recording Challenges:** explained that the rise in recorded crimes is partly due to the police's obligation to record all reported incidents, including minor school incidents and reports from persistent callers, which can inflate statistics. The team is working with schools and mental health services to manage these cases and ensure appropriate safeguarding.
- **Operational Activities:** reported that the police closed two businesses on Station Road, Taunton (linked to anti-social behaviour and criminality), conducted drink and drug driving operations stopping 144

vehicles, and implemented Operation Vigilant to address predatory behaviour in the night-time economy.

- **Community Engagement and Reporting:** the Neighbourhood Policing Team held 167 engagement events over three months, including beat surgeries, school sessions, and public meetings.

Discussion & Comments

Reporting Bad parking: PCSO Sam Bushen advised that persistent bad parking, especially where buses are blocked, must be reported *at the time it occurs* so officers can attend, witness the obstruction, and take action.

Police Visibility & Resource Use: PCSO Sam Bushen addressed public concerns about not seeing officers in certain neighbourhoods. He explained that visibility is closely tied to demand-led deployment - officers are sent where crime reports, incidents, and ongoing priorities indicate they are most urgently needed. He emphasised that if residents feel they never see police presence in their specific area, they should report this so the Neighbourhood Policing Team can review local patterns and adjust where possible.

School intervention: PCSO Sam Bushen explained they work with schools on a needs-led basis, focusing on targeted small-group engagement rather than assemblies, and maintain regular contact with safeguarding leads to support early intervention.

Reporting Crime Locations: PCSO Sam Bushen highlighted that using What3Words when reporting incidents would give far more accurate location information and improve response.

Dashcam collision reporting: PCSO Sam Bushen advised that dashcam and cyclist-cam footage of dangerous driving or collisions should be uploaded via the Avon & Somerset Police website, link below:

[Report a collision or incident on the road | Avon and Somerset Police](#)

Neighbourhood Watch: Residents were reminded that each area has a local coordinator who shares updates, and anyone not receiving information can use the Neighbourhood Watch website or give their email to the Link Officer, Michelle Brooks, to be connected or use the link below:

[Neighbourhood Watch Scheme | Avon and Somerset Police](#)

4. Flood Prevention and Emergency Volunteer Action Group (EVAG) Activities

John Bird and Mike Webb from EVAG, presented and described the group's history, flood response activities, available flood prevention products, and their collaboration with Somerset Council and Parish Councils to support at-risk residents.

- **EVAG Background and Role:** explained that EVAG was formed in response to the 2014 floods, initially focusing on warehousing and distribution of donated goods, and later supporting recovery efforts such as carpet laying and rebuilding. The group now works with Somerset Council to help residents prepare for and recover from flooding.
- **Flood Prevention Products:** EVAG demonstrated various flood prevention products, including self-inflating sandbags, air brick covers, and water-activated sacks. These products are designed to protect properties from low-level flooding and are available to residents.
- **Collaboration with Councils:** EVAG works with Parish Councils to identify at-risk properties, conduct site visits, and provide tailored recommendations. They avoid stockpiling products in sheds, preferring direct engagement with residents to ensure timely and effective distribution and installation.
- **Accessing Support:** Residents and Parish Councils can contact EVAG via email to request assessments and products. EVAG provides advice and products without profit and does not claim expenses for their work. They also coordinate with flood wardens and other local volunteers to reach those in need.

Contact: evag@evag.uk

Website: [EVAG – Emergency Volunteers Action Group](#)

Somerset Prepared Website: [Somerset Prepared – Helping Somerset prepare, respond and recover from emergencies](#)

5. Community Payback Scheme information and overview

Denise Holway, Community Payback Operations Manager, outlined the structure, benefits, and processes of the community payback scheme, answered participant questions, and clarified project nomination, eligibility, and operational details.

- **Scheme Structure and Purpose:** described community payback as a court-imposed punishment for offenders, involving unpaid work placements in the community. The scheme is managed by a small team covering Taunton and North Somerset, with projects coordinated through local councils, charities, and not-for-profit organisations.

- **Types of Work and Community Benefits:** community payback projects include litter picking, graffiti cleaning, parks maintenance, and painting in public spaces. The scheme benefits the community by providing visible restorative justice and supports rehabilitation by helping offenders develop skills and maintain stability.
- **Project Nomination and Criteria:** projects can be nominated by contacting Denise directly or via the government website. Eligible projects must be for non-profit organisations or public bodies, not private individuals or profit-making companies. Councils / organisations are responsible for providing materials, but there is no charge for labour.
- **Operational Details and Limitations:** the team operates seven days a week, with project scheduling dependent on available supervisors and offenders. There are restrictions on the types of work, such as proximity to roads and ownership of bus shelters. Offenders must comply with strict attendance and conduct rules.

Questions and Clarifications - team capacity, project prioritisation, and cost: Denise Holway clarified that prioritisation is based on community need, and there is no charge for labour, only for materials. She also explained the process for councils to engage with the scheme and the importance of risk assessment and insurance.

Contact: Denise.Holway@justice.gov.uk

Website: [Nominate a Community Payback project - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/nominate-a-community-payback-project)

6. Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) for Dog Control overview

Matt Cloke, Environmental Crime Manager, Somerset Council presented the proposed consolidation of dog control PSPOs, outlined the consultation process, and addressed regarding enforcement, coverage, and stakeholder responsibilities.

- **PSPO Consolidation and Rationale:** Somerset Council plans to consolidate multiple legacy dog control PSPOs into two comprehensive orders: one covering dog fouling and dogs on leads by direction, and another designating exclusion zones and mandatory leads in specific areas. This aims to streamline enforcement and reduce confusion.
- **Consultation Process and Stakeholder Actions:** a pre-consultation period is open until 20 March 2026 for parish clerks and elected members to review and suggest updates to existing PSPOs. The public consultation will follow in the summer, with all stakeholders encouraged to participate and promote engagement within their communities.
- **Enforcement and Evidence Requirements:** enforcement will be intelligence-led, focusing on hotspots identified through public reports. Witness statements and evidence are required for action, and the council's limited resources mean that proactive patrols are unlikely.

Signage will be placed at relevant locations, such as play areas and parks, but not on all footpaths.

- **Coverage and Legal Context:** the new PSPOs will cover all public spaces open to the air, including footpaths, bridleways, and cycleways. The orders replace previous reliance on the Dog Fouling of Land Act and local bylaws, aiming for consistency across Somerset.

Action: Parish Councils are advised to review their bylaws and ensure relevant areas are included.

7. Items of Any other Business

Rotary Christmas Hamper Initiative Inquiry: Richard Austin asked attendees to inform him or the LCN if they are aware of any ongoing Christmas hamper schemes in Taunton, particularly for children or families in need, to avoid duplicating efforts before considering restarting the Rotary's previous initiative.

Action: ALL

Trull Road Feasibility Study Update: The Link Officer, Michelle Brooks, provided a brief update that the Trull Road feasibility study will be presented to the Taunton Town Council Community and Place Committee, 24 February 2026 for funding consideration, encouraging interested parties to attend and support the proposal.

Public Transport Working Group: The Chair advised the meeting that the first public transport working group had taken place in January 2026, and anyone wishing to participate or contribute should contact the Link Officer, Michelle Brooks, to get involved.

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

Meeting closed 8.00pm