



Local Community Network

Yearly Report 2023/2024

Chard and Blackdowns



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Local Community Networks (LCNs)

Purpose

“To be the focus for community development, engagement and partnership working at local level; improving the outcomes for residents through establishing strong connections between Somerset Council, our communities and partners.”

Map

There are 18 LCNs in total.

They cover every city, town, and parish within the local authority area.

Full details of each LCN, including their demographics, characteristics, agendas, and meeting dates, can be found online.

Please visit the following webpage:

www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/



Chair and Vice Chair



Chair: Cllr Keith Read, CBE

The present Chair of this LCN is Cllr Keith Read.

Keith has been Chair of West Hatch Parish Council for the past five years.

A nuclear engineer, previous roles have included Chair of the UK Engineering Institutions Chief Executives Committee, and Vice Chair of the UK Science Council.

He is a Vice President of the RNLI locally.

Vice Chair: Cllr Sarah Wakefield

Sarah is a retired Commercial Property Solicitor.

She was a councillor at Somerset West and Taunton (SWT) between 2019-2023.

Sarah was elected to the new unitary authority – Somerset Council – when it was formed on 1 April 2023.

She has been a member of the Council's Planning Committee West, is involved with the management and sale of Somerset Council's property investments and sits on the Executive Committee as Lead Member for Adult Services.



Chair's Introduction

“The LCN’s initial progress has been steady, if a little slower than we could have wished for, in part occasioned by Somerset Council’s financial emergency announcement in November 2023, and also the lack of a permanent LCN Link Officer appointment.

Nevertheless, the degree of backing at our regular meetings has been very encouraging, genuinely positive and bodes well for the future.

The formation of the two working groups, which focus on *Roads and Transport* and the *Environment* have been well received and look set to produce some meaningful objectives and deliver some real, constructive outcomes across the network. A third *Health and Wellbeing* working group is at a formative stage.

The success of LCNs relies on the willingness of stakeholders and their constituents to commit time and effort to supporting and facilitating both the main meetings and the working groups.

Our thanks must go to our two working group Chairs, Andy Grant (Hatch Beauchamp) and Mark Palmer (Neroche) and to all who are fully engaged with the working groups. Thanks also go to Tim Cook (Somerset Council) who has almost singlehandedly kept the show on the road.

We anticipate more members joining the working groups in the next few months, enabling us to demonstrate the value that the LCN can bring to our communities.

Our Vice Chair, Sarah Wakefield, is standing down at the AGM due to her greatly increased commitments as a Somerset Councillor. We will very much miss her sage advice, wise words, and positive approach.

Communication is key to our future, and I look forward to a year of growing stakeholder engagement and upbeat outcomes that we can communicate to all our residents.”

Cllr Keith Read, CBE
Chair, Chard and Blackdowns LCN

Priorities and Ambitions

Data

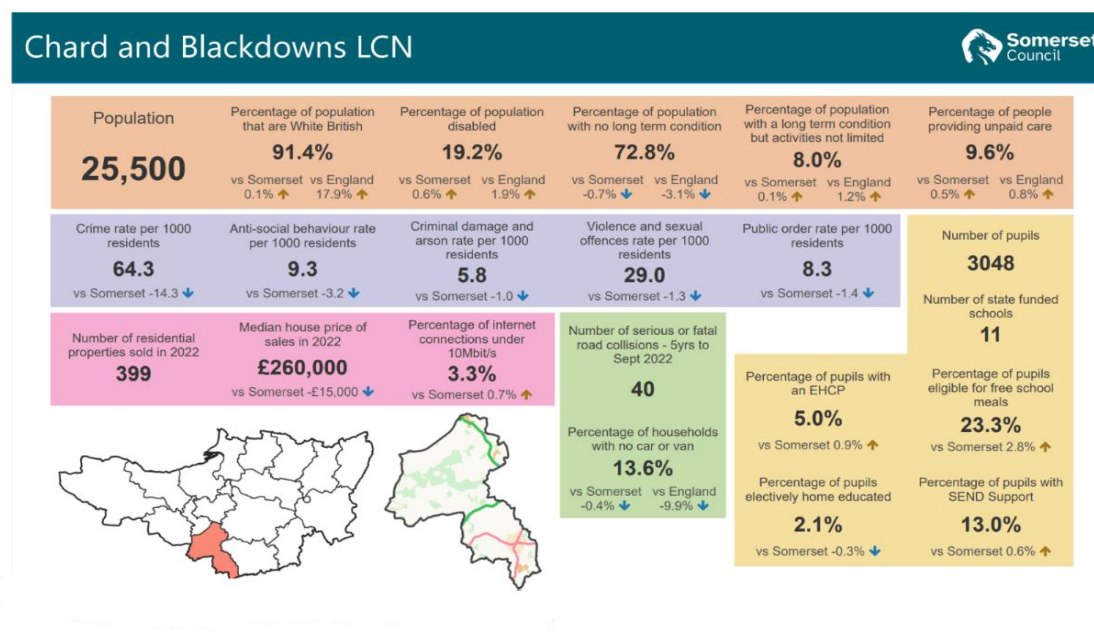
At the initial Chard and Blackdowns LCN meeting, attendees were shown a data set (see below). It provided useful statistical information aimed at generating initial thoughts and discussions, unique to the local area.

Those present at the LCN were asked to consider what this data meant to them in relation to their specific knowledge of their communities.

They were also asked what they felt was important to their residents, local businesses and visitors.

The answers from the data set discussions were grouped into themes.

You'll find a larger image of the data set at Appendix B of this report.



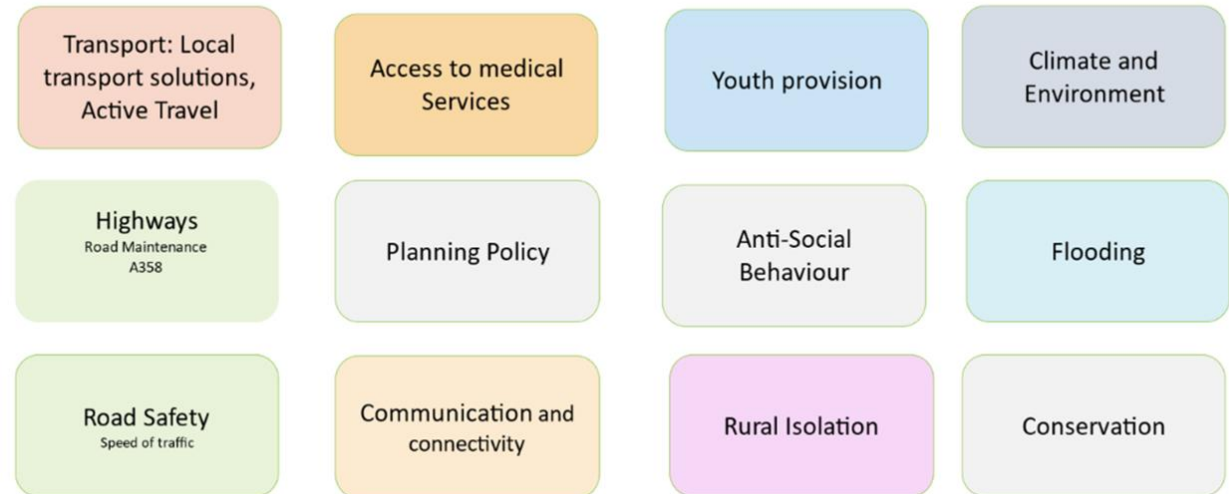
Priorities and Ambitions

Themes

At the initial Chard and Blackdowns LCN meeting, the focus has been on providing space for representatives to meet, get to know each other and begin to identify local priorities.

The process has taken time and has involved bringing people with different networks and existing relationships together within the newly defined LCN area.

This has started to draw out shared aims, objectives, and challenges in themes.



Financial Emergency

The Financial Emergency of Somerset Council was declared at a very early stage of LCN development. This has clearly impacted the nature of conversations which have had to take place within the context of identifying efficiencies and devolving services.

The LCN has proved to be a very effective vehicle for information sharing and for facilitating early consideration of the impact on service delivery and potential mitigation. This is an ongoing, complex, two-way process with details of service reductions and future service standards emerging over time.

The LCN has provided a space for representatives in particular Town and Parish representatives to share the approach that is taken to setting precepts etc.

Working Groups

Roads and Transport

Several topics related to roads and transport were raised alongside concerns about the highways network and ongoing challenges to maintain to a good standard and respond to local reports of potholes etc. Topics included access to transport, speeding, improvements to walking and cycling routes and management of HGV movements.

It was agreed that a working group should be established to consider the topics in more detail and develop some solutions.

The first meeting of the Roads and Transport Working Group was well attended with six LCN representatives and five members of the Highways team.

Cllr Andy Grant was elected as Chair of the group and facilitated a wide-ranging initial conversation. This has provided the basis of further work to define the purpose, scope, aims and objectives of the group.

The key areas have been identified as follows:

1. Public Transport
2. Road Maintenance
3. Cycle Paths
4. Speeding in rural areas
5. HGVs

The immediate priority for the group is to communicate the aims and objectives to the wider LCN and recruit volunteers to key areas and encourage more participation.

There is still some work to do to develop the information flow between the working group and the wider LCN membership.

The meeting was supported by Somerset Council Highways and Traffic officers, who provided an overview of their areas of work. Also in attendance were parish representatives, who raised concerns about highways issues and offered some ideas for potential solutions.

Further work is currently underway to structure the work of the group around agreed priorities.

Working Groups

Environment

The Environment Working Group, Chaired by Cllr Mark Palmer, has met once with support from members of the climate team at Somerset Council. The meeting was well attended. The initial discussion was very broad and identified potential priority topics.

At the last LCN meeting, members received a presentation about the Wild Neroche Project by Tristan Colaco.

The next step for this group is to define the scope, identify the gaps and areas where the working group can add value to the existing provision. This requires support from a dedicated LCN Link Worker and specialists, once work is defined.

Health and Wellbeing (proposed)

At the last meeting, the LCN considered needs around social and rural isolation and a need to investigate specific areas of deprivation in parts of the LCN area.

A presentation by Elizabeth McNabb about the work of the Blackdown Support Group prompted a good conversation about wider health and wellbeing needs across the LCN area.

There is potential for a third working group taking the theme of Health and Wellbeing. A call for interest has been sent to all and we will consider the level of interest and take this forward as a priority for year two.

Appendices

Appendix A – Core Membership

Parishes

Bickenhall
Buckland St. Mary
Chard Town
Churchstanton
Combe St. Nicholas
Corfe
Curland
Hatch Beauchamp
Orchard Portman
Otterford
Pitminster
Ruishton
Staple Fitzpaine
Stoke St. Mary
Tatworth and Forton
Thornfalcon
Wambrook
West Hatch
Whitestaunton

Electoral Divisions

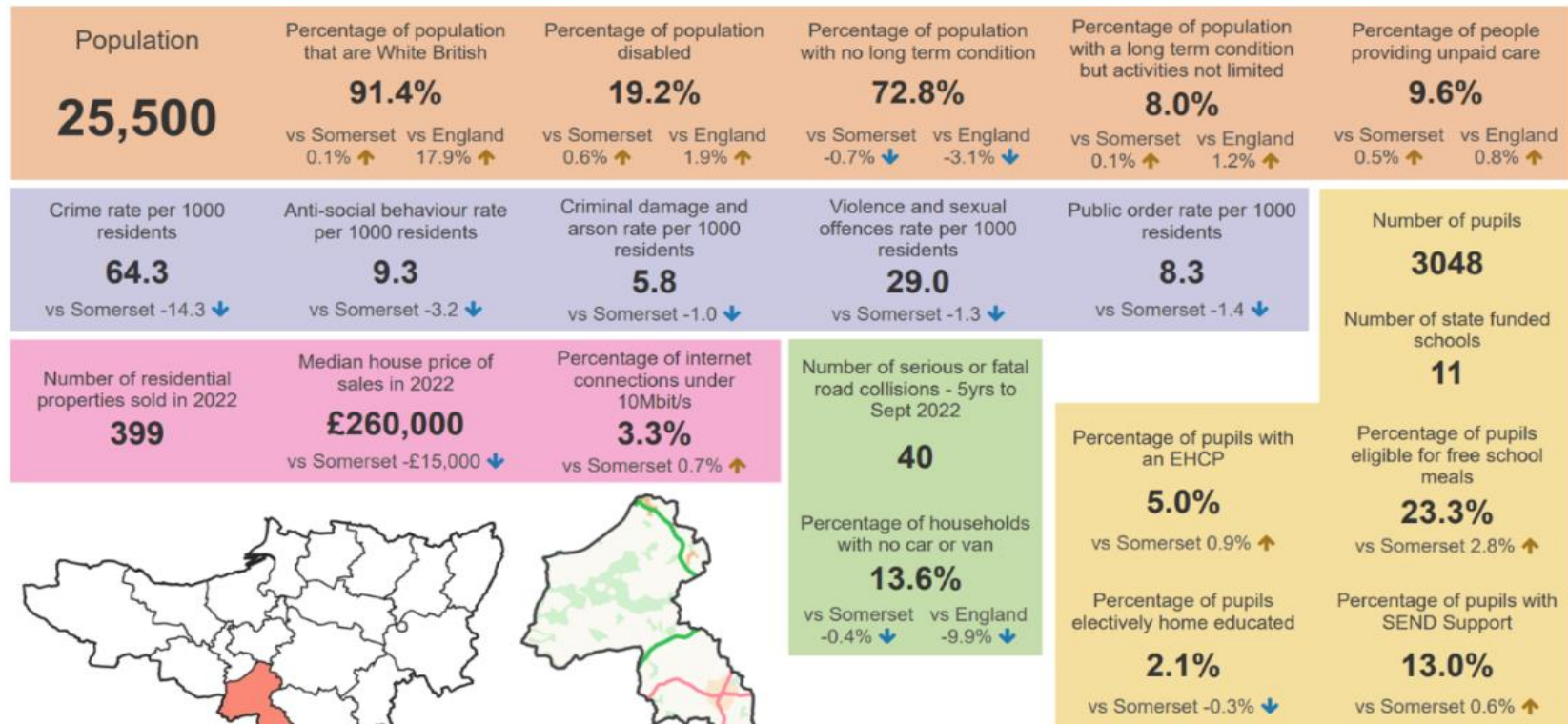
Blackdown and Neroche
Chard North
Chard South

Core Membership

Avon and Somerset Police
NHS
Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue
Education
Spark Somerset
Society Local Council Clerks (SLCC)
Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC)
Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership (SASP)
Community Council for Somerset (Village Agents)
Citizens Advice Somerset
Department of Work and Pensions
Somerset Rivers Authority
Somerset Local Nature Partnership
Business Chamber

Appendix B – Data

Chard and Blackdowns LCN



Appendix C – Meeting Dates and Agenda Items

For more information about Chard and Blackdowns LCN meetings please follow the link below:
<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeeld=899>

August 2023

- To elect the Chair of the LCN
- To appoint the Vice-Chair of the LCN
- To determine the priorities and areas of focus for the LCN for the next 12 months
 - What are LCNs and how will we work together?
 - Discussion – What is important to residents and businesses in our area?
- To agree the frequency of meetings
- The schedule of meetings for the next 12 months

October 2023

- Highlights of themes discussed at the last meeting.
- An introduction to data
- Discussion: To agree initial priorities and the formation of working groups.

January 2024

- Update on Somerset Council's current financial position - Q&A
- Actions from last meeting
- Discussion: What can we do / want to do locally regarding asset and service devolution?
 - What are the opportunities and risks?
 - What information do we have and what do we need?
 - How can we work together to achieve agreed actions?
 - Formation of working groups

March 2024

- Presentation by working group Chairs
 - Highways
 - Environment
- Discussion: Revisit original priorities and devolution potential
- Forward Plan – Topics or themes for future meetings

May 2024

- Brief update from working groups
- Presentation on the work of the Blackdown Support Group – Elizabeth McNabb
- Discussion: To agree priorities for the next Highways meeting 8th May. This WG meeting was postponed.
- Discussion: Explore the potential for a Health & Wellbeing Working Group