



Local Community Network

Yearly Report 2023/2024

Exmoor



Contents

Page

3	Local Community Networks (LCNs) Purpose Map
4	Exmoor LCN LCN Pilot Data
6	Chair and Vice Chair
7	Chair's Introduction Vision Statement
8	LCN Meetings
9	Working Groups Highways Economic Regeneration Housing
12	Achievements and Outcomes
14	Challenges and Goals
15	Reflections Contacts
16	Appendices

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/



Exmoor LCN

Exmoor is a place of starkly contrasting landscapes that provide variety and enjoyment to residents and visitors alike. There are large areas of open moorland to explore, wooded valleys, fast-flowing streams, high sea cliffs and spectacular coastal views.

The Exmoor LCN consists of one Somerset Council electoral division (Dulverton and Exmoor). It has one Town Council, 20 Parish Councils and one Parish Meeting. The main settlements are at Dulverton and Porlock.

The majority of the LCN sits within the Exmoor National Park boundary. Exmoor National Park is the principal planning authority and policy maker for the area.



© Crown copyright 2021 OS 100038382EUL. Use of this data is subject to terms and conditions

23/03/2023

LCN Pilot

The Exmoor LCN evolved from the legacy Exmoor Area Panel, which for 20 years convened every two months in a multi-agency partnership meeting to discuss and tackle local issues.

Input from various local councils, parishes, the police, Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) and the former Somerset County Council highways team, was already well-established in the area.

Because of this, the Exmoor Area Panel was selected as an LCN Pilot, with a particular focus on highways and traffic issues.

Exmoor LCN

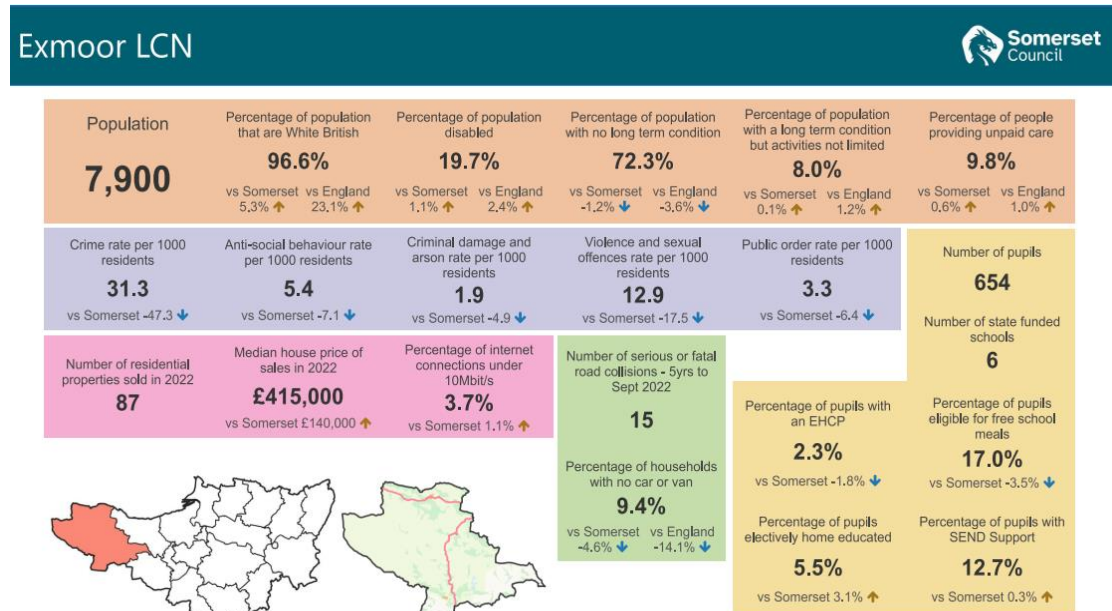
Data

The Exmoor LCN is one of the largest geographically – and yet it has the smallest population of just 7,900 residents.

The principal industries are agriculture and tourism which are traditionally low paid and can cause social and economic difficulties when contrasted against the average house price (around £415,000).

House prices are the highest in Somerset, with an increase in second home ownership and Airbnb serving to further reduce the local housing availability.

The Exmoor LCN agreed to prioritise and focus on these many challenges during its inaugural year.



See Appendix B for larger image

Chair and Vice Chair



Chair: Exmoor LCN

Cllr Steven Pugsley

Cllr Pugsley has represented parts of Exmoor since 1987. He has served as a District Councillor, County Councillor and also sits on the new unitary authority (Somerset Council) since it was formed on 1 April 2023.

He is currently Somerset Councillor for the Dulverton and Exmoor electoral division.

Cllr Pugsley was Chair of the Exmoor Area Panel, which became the Exmoor LCN.

Vice Chair: Exmoor LCN

Cllr Mike Ellicott

Cllr Ellicott is Chair of Exford Parish Council.

He also serves as Chair of the Exmoor Consultative and Parish Forum on the Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA).

In his role on the board of the ENPA, he represents local people across the wider area, not just those within the Exford parish.



Chair's Introduction

“Building on the foundation of the long-standing Exmoor Area Panel, the Exmoor LCN has had a successful year of consolidation, securing the enthusiasm and dedication of towns and parishes across its area, and incorporating important contributions from other stakeholders.

A great deal of consideration has been given to the particulars of the LCN Pilot, with its focus on highways matters, and which Exmoor pioneered on behalf of the rest of the county.

Our LCN has made huge strides in achieving closer working and improving communications between Somerset Council's highways team and local councils.

A key success has been the growing willingness of this LCN to act as a 'collective whole', and one which can - through its constituent councils - commission work for the benefit of all.

The Exmoor LCN has a clear vision, and a growing ambition to act as an effective advocate on behalf of its community. We're here to coordinate practical activities that will improve the wellbeing of all residents.”

Cllr Steven Pugsley
Chair, Exmoor LCN

Vision Statement

The Exmoor LCN will be working towards enabling Exmoor communities to flourish through the provision of affordable housing and support to families; making services more accessible, and ensuring our community prospers.



LCN venue: The Moorland Hall, Wheddon Cross

LCN Meetings

Traditionally, the Exmoor Area Panel held six meetings a year. This pattern was continued into the Exmoor LCN municipal calendar.

Due to connectivity, affordability and accessibility across Exmoor, the chosen venue for all meetings was The Moorland Hall at Wheddon Cross.

The Hall offers good facilities, plus adequate car parking and access. It is close to a main road and easy to locate, especially in the dark. This is important, not least because Exmoor was the first area in Europe to be designated a 'dark skies reserve', which means there are a dearth of streetlights right across the geography.

The former Exmoor Area Panel hosted several annual guest speakers who made appearances at specific meetings, in order to update communities on local issues. These standing items were carried forward to the Exmoor LCN.



Speakers at the Exmoor LCN in year one included Mark Shelford, (former) Avon and Somerset Police Crime Commissioner, Christine Boland from Magna Housing Association, Matt Barrow of Connecting Devon and Somerset, and Nicola Dawson from Somerset Council's Civil Contingency Unit.

Three of the Somerset Council Executive also visited to discuss items pertinent to their portfolios; Cllr Val Keitch, Associate Lead Member for Localities (LCNs) and Public Health, Cllr Dixie Darch, Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, and Cllr Richard Wilkins, Lead Member for Transport and Digital. The Exmoor LCN is most grateful for their input.

Full details of meeting dates and guest speakers can be found in Appendix C.

Working Groups

Highways Working Group

The Exmoor Area Pilot focus was on highways and traffic matters.

It highlighted how local communities can drive and contribute to highway service delivery to support the development of LCNs. At the same time, the Pilot was designed to strengthen service delivery pre and post the new unitary authority.

In September/October 2021, members of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Programme Team spent three days visiting parishes in the Exmoor electoral division to listen to each of the communities on highway and traffic matters.

Parish feedback concluded that they would like the following:

- Better two-way communication – to include an information and coordination role
- Programmes of planned and reactive works (highways and utilities)
- Local tasking of 'low tech, high value' minor maintenance works (delivered through the Highway Steward)
- A discretionary budget for local commissioning of works
- Asset information exchange

One of the first things established was a Highways Working Group, operating under terms of reference which determined how the Pilot would operate.

Members of the working group were selected from representatives from the parishes and supported by officers from the council's highways team.

Shortly after inception, it was decided that a 'broker' needed to administer the day-to-day running of the working group and this role has evolved into the LCN Link Officer role.

Working Groups

The Highways Working Group met six times this year, with meetings falling between the main LCN meetings.

Areas of business have been around winter service, updates on the B3224 Roundwaters scheme, planned and routine maintenance, StreetWorks diversion routes and overseeing the devolved funding budget.

The meetings have been held at the Dulverton Sports Pavilion courtesy of Dulverton Town Council (to whom we send our thanks).

The pilot concluded on the 31 March 2024 with the standing down of the Highway Steward and closing of the devolved funding budget.

It was decided to continue with the Highways Working Group meetings however, as these had proved invaluable as a communication tool between Somerset Council and parish representatives.

A special LCN meeting was convened to discuss the lessons learned and to celebrate the successes. These are outlined in the Reflections section of this report.



Highways Working Group model was successfully piloted at Exmoor LCN

Working Groups

Economic Regeneration Working Group

The inaugural meeting was held online via Teams on Thursday 26 October 2023. Recommendations included:

- **Rural Business Enabler role.** To look at funding opportunities which would enable the appointment of a Rural Business Enabler. (ENPA have evaluated this work and drawn up a business specification).
- **Business users and space.** Look at how current business units are marketed. Identify opportunities for existing businesses to expand. Promote the Dulverton hub as a hot-desking space.
- **Employment Opportunities.** Identify the gaps and or barriers to employment and training and evaluate how these can be overcome.
- **Connectivity.** Who has broadband/mobile connectivity and how is this delivered (satellite, fibre and/or mobile phone providers). Undertake a parish survey to determine who has access to wi-fi and identify any gaps.

Housing Working Group

The inaugural (hybrid) meeting was held at Exmoor House, Dulverton on Thursday 2 November 2023. Recommendations included:

- **Costs.** To gather evidence to support the arguments that local housing is beyond the scope of local incomes.
- **Investment.** Look for direct investment from Somerset Council to support housing initiatives in the Exmoor area. (Self-build sites to be included).
- **Aid and advise.** Information made available for self-builders, especially around the supply of utilities.
- **Empty dwelling survey.** Parishes to undertake a survey and identify empty dwellings in their boundary. (Empty House register). Take that information back to Somerset Council so action can be taken.

Please note: The Economic Regeneration Working Group and Housing Working Group did not gain traction during 2023 due to the impacts of Somerset Council's Financial Emergency declaration. However it is envisaged that these important themes will be taken forward following the LCN Annual General Meeting in June 2024.

Achievements and Outcomes

- **Highways Working Group.**

With good collaboration between Somerset Council staff, Members, and the parishes this group has helped influence the delivery of highways work at a local level.

- **Improved communication.**

Parishes, stakeholders, partners, and Somerset Council talk to each other. Key messages can disseminate quickly via LCN meetings and/or the LCN Link Officer. Demonstrated when Somerset Council declared a Financial Emergency in November 2023 and invited parishes to take on much-valued assets and services.

- **B3224 Roundwaters Scheme.**

The Highways Working Group has influenced the communications around this large capital scheme, including public meetings to update communities on the work schedule and minimise disruption on the diversion routes.

- **Utilities works in Dulverton.**

The StreetWorks team worked with Dulverton Town Council to ensure that local community events such as Dulverton by Starlight were not disrupted by road closures during the Christmas late-night shopping. Works were re-scheduled to take place at a more convenient time.

- **Exmoor Highways Pilot to launch countywide.**

The Highways Working Group model proved so successful it's being rolled-out across Somerset and other LCNs are developing their own such working groups. Exmoor TORs are being used as a framework for others.

Achievements and Outcomes

- **Better working relationships.**

Somerset Council highways staff and the parishes are building contacts and working well together.

- **Working with partners.**

There is an opportunity for partners and other public services to reach a wider audience. For example, Avon and Somerset Police are regular attendees and advise the LCN on crime prevention and local campaigns aimed at improving the safety of rural communities. Better use of time and resources.

- **Devolved funding.**

This scheme proved that there is merit in the LCN working collectively to deliver local projects/work using funding and grants.

- **Economic Regeneration Working Group.**

The first meeting was held online in the autumn. There is a willingness to develop this work further.

- **Housing Working Group.**

The inaugural meeting was held at Exmoor House, Dulverton and hosted by ENPA. There were a number of stakeholders present who were keen to develop this work further in 2024.

Challenges and Goals

- **Sparse populations.**

Parishes have a low precept base whilst covering a large geographical area. This presents challenges around funding, especially regarding sharing services.

There is a heavy reliance on a main town to cover the administration and manage the finances.

- **LCN staffing resource.**

The first year of Somerset Council did not have a dedicated LCN Link Officer.

The highways broker role was able to provide some support, but resource was stretched, and some working groups did not get the level of support they needed.

- **Expanding engagement.**

The Exmoor LCN meetings have had good attendance from the parishes and partner agencies but would benefit from developing better links with voluntary sector organisations.

Reflections

Progress through partnership

The Exmoor LCN achieved a great deal in its first year, not least as a pilot model for the Highways Working Group, and how this can shape and influence the delivery of Council services across Somerset. Credit must go to the volunteer parish councillors, who gave up a considerable amount of their time to oversee this work.

Dulverton Town Council should also be commended. Without their input and energy in taking responsibility for the devolved funding budget, it would not have been possible to deliver drainage schemes on Exmoor on behalf of the smaller parishes.

Financial Emergency impacts

Due to the devolution and precept-setting work required by our parishes directly resulting from the Financial Emergency declared by Somerset Council in November 2023, some priorities of the Exmoor LCN were placed on hold. In particular, we recognise that the inaugural autumn meetings of the Economic Regeneration Working Group and the Housing Working Group did not really gain traction, due to a lack of resource and officer time.

It is envisaged at our Annual General Meeting in June 2024 we will discuss how we move forward and build on the successes of the Exmoor LCN to date, and focus on taking forward the Housing and Economic Development work. With a dedicated LCN Link Officer now in post, there will be greater capacity and impetus to drive this critical work forward.

Samantha Murrell
LCN Link Officer, Exmoor

Contacts

Email: Exmoorlcn@somerset.gov.uk Website: www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/

Exmoor LCN: www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/lcn-areas/exmoor/

Appendices

Appendix A – Core Membership

Parishes

Brompton Ralph
Brompton Regis
Brushford
Clatworthy
Cutcombe
Dulverton
Exford
Exmoor
Exton
Huish Champflower
Luccombe
Luxborough
Minehead Without
Oare
Porlock
Selworthy
Skilgate

Timberscombe
Treborough Upton
Winsford
Withypool and
Hawkridge
Wootton Courtenay

Electoral Division

Dulverton and Exmoor

Organisations

Avon and Somerset Police
Exmoor National Park
Exmoor Young Voices
Exmoor Hill Farming Network
NHS
Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue
Education
Spark Somerset
Somerset Local Council Clerks
Somerset Association of Local
Councils
Somerset Activity Sports Partnership
Community Council for Somerset
(Village Agents)
Citizens Advice
Department of Work and Pensions
Somerset Rivers Authority
Somerset Local Nature Partnership

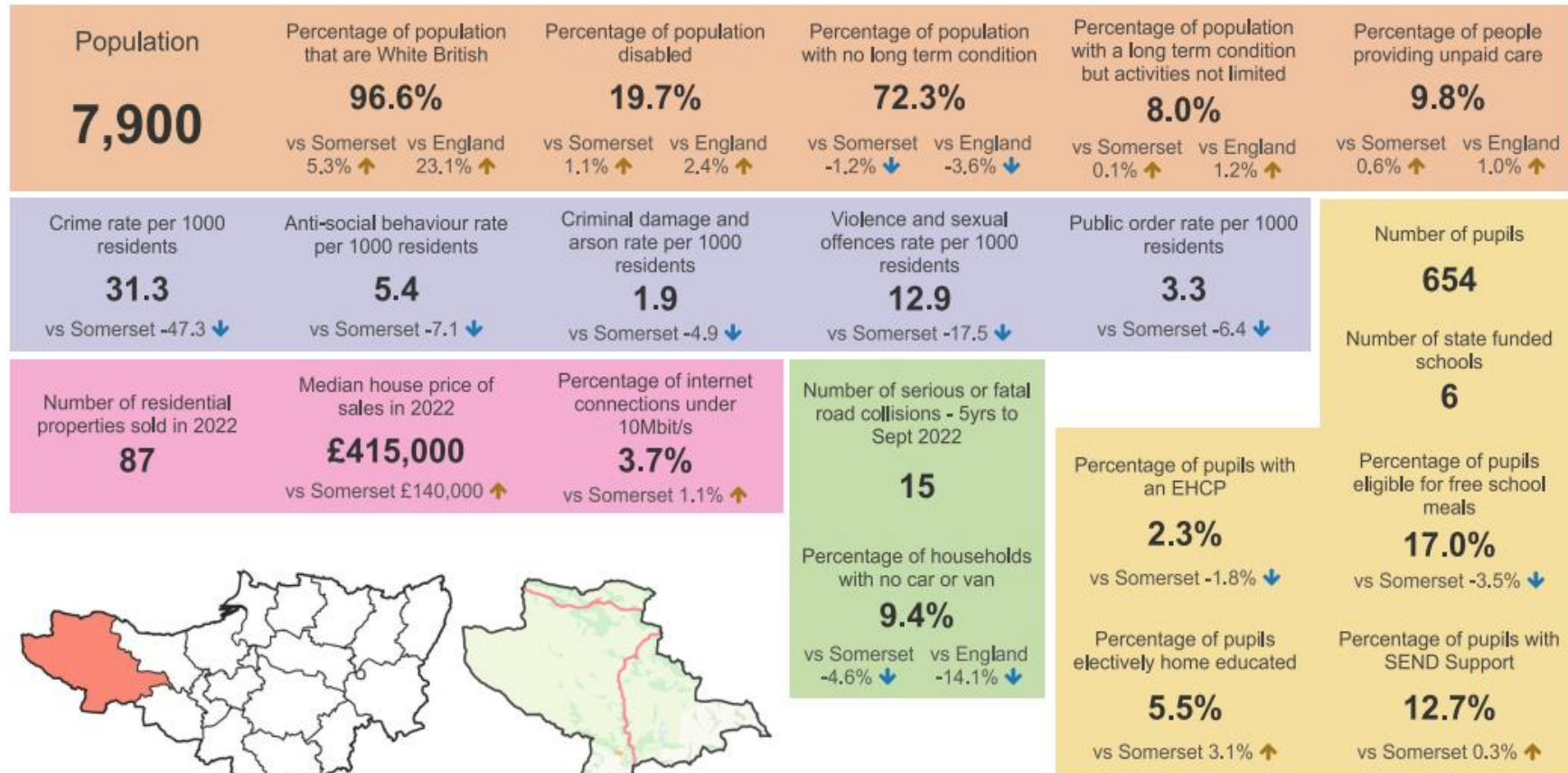
Appendix A - continued

Other Partners and Stakeholders

Connect Somerset / Minehead Eye
Exmoor Benefice
National Trust

Appendix B – Data

Exmoor LCN

Appendix C – Meeting Dates and Guests

To browse all Exmoor LCN minutes visit: <https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeeld=888>

25 April 2023 – Highways Pilot Meeting (post vesting day)

- Magna Housing Report – Christine Boland
- Connecting Devon and Somerset – Matt Barrow
- Highways Pilot and LCN – Somerset Council, Alyn Jones

8 June 2023 – Inaugural LCN Meeting

- Election of Chairperson – Cllr Steven Pugsley
- Election of Vice Chairperson – Cllr Mike Ellicott
- To determine the priorities and areas of focus for the LCN in the next 12 months.
 - **Highways Pilot** – to continue
 - **Housing – Affordability and Availability**
 - **Economic Regeneration – Employment, skills, and business development**
- To agree the frequency of meetings:
Six a year. Working groups to sit between these meetings.
The Highways Pilot – Andrew Turner, Kevin Bridgwater, Kali Martin.

7 September 2023

- Highways winter maintenance – parish wardens and Somerset Council team
- Highways Pilot update
- Establishment of Housing Working Group
- Establishment of Economic Regeneration Working Group
- Avon and Somerset Police – PCSO Supervisor Katherine Williams
- Exmoor National Park Authority – Dean Kinsella

9 November 2023

- Somerset Council Financial Emergency declared
- Avon and Somerset Police update (Statement)
- Somerset Connect / Minehead Eye – Paul Matcham
- Highways Pilot Update – Somerset Council highways team
- Economic Regeneration update – First meeting of working group – Beccy Brown (Somerset Council, Employment & Skills)
- Housing update – First meeting of working group – Colin McDonald (Somerset Council Rural Housing Enabler)

29 November 2023 – Special Public Meeting to inform on the B3224 Roundwaters Capital Scheme

A public meeting facilitated by the LCN to advise on the proposed road closure whilst delivery of the B3224 Capital Scheme was undertaken. A chance for local communities to meet the design team, Somerset Council (Bridges & Structures) and the contractor (Walters Group).

11 January 2024

- Annual update from the Police Crime Commissioner – Mark Shelford
- Avon and Somerset Police – PCSO Katherine Williams / Michelle Haines
- Village agent – Nikki Bonner
- Somerset Council devolution of assets and services – Kate Hellard
- Highways Working Group update
 - B3224 Roundwaters update
 - Devolved funding update (Jetting and Capital Schemes)

7 March 2024

- Avon and Somerset Police – PCSO Michelle Haines
- Dulverton Recycling Centre – Executive Member, Somerset Councillor Dixie Darch, plus Somerset Council's Kirsty Larkins
- Community Resilience / Places of Safety – Somerset Council, Nicola Dawson
- Highways Working Group
 - Letter to parishes on devolution
 - B3224 ravine update
- ENPA Farming in Protected Landscapes – Alex Farris (virtual)

9 May 2024 – Special LCN Meeting – (Highways Pilot)

This meeting sat outside the cycle of LCN meetings and was scheduled to share learning on the outcomes of the Exmoor Highways Pilot.

- Avon and Somerset Police update – PCSO Haines / Moden
- ENPA update – provided by parish members
- Highways Pilot update – Executive Member, Somerset Council's Richard Wilkins, plus Somerset Council staff Andrew Turner, Kevin Bridgwater, and Kali Martin
 - B3224 conclusions
 - Devolved funding
 - Area Office update
 - Recommendations from the working group