

Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Yeovil

Date: Thursday, 25 January 2024

Time: 7.00 pm - 8.40 pm

Location: Ilchester Town Hall, High Street, Ilchester, BA22 8NQ

Chaired by: Cllr Mike Hewitson

LCN core membership attendance:

Name:	Representing
Mike Hewitson	Somerset Council
Andy Kendall	Somerset Council
Tony Lock	Somerset Council
Graham Oakes	Somerset Council
Emily Pearlstone	Somerset Council
Faye Purbrick	Somerset Council
Peter Seib	Somerset Council
Andy Soughton	Somerset Council
Federica Smith-Roberts	Somerset Council
Paul Herbert	Brympton Parish Council
Karen Taylor	Chilthorne Domer Parish Council
Sue Murrison	Closworth Parish Meeting
Clive Wakely	East Coker Parish Council
Robin Carpenter	Hardington Mandeville Parish Council
Julie Stapleton	Ilchester Parish Council
Annette Davies	West Camel Parish Council
David Neal	West Coker Parish Council
Rob Stickland	Yeovil Without Parish Council
James Scott	Yeovilton & District Parish Council
Hannah Snowden	Spark Somerset
Bel Deering	Somerset Rivers Authority

Officer attendance:

Name:

Nathan Turnbull
Emily Window
Jo Morris

Representing

Somerset Council
Somerset Council
Somerset Council

Other attendees:

Name:

Clare Owen
Robert Halls
Carl Davies
Anita Perry
Linda Snelling
Pete McNaughton

Representing

Closworth Parish Meeting
Hardington Mandeville Parish Council
West Camel Parish Council
West Coker Parish Council

Virtual attendees:

Name:

Leona Drayton
Rachel Clark
Leanne Mountain
Fiona Elphick

Representing

Montacute Parish Council
Avon & Somerset Police
Avon & Somerset Police
The Phoenix Voices
Community Council for Somerset

Apologies:

Name:

Emma Jayne Hopkins
Jane Knowles

Representing

Yeovil Town Council
Somerset Activity Sports Partnership

Summary of discussion:

Agenda Summary of key points of discussion and outcome: Action by: item:

Item 18: Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from:
Emma Jayne Hopkins – Yeovil Town Council
Jane Knowles – SASP

Item 19: Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest from Somerset Council Councillors present at the meeting.

Item 20: Notes from the Previous Meeting

The notes of the previous meeting held on 1 November 2023 were approved as a correct record by those present.

Item 21: Update on Somerset Council's Financial Position

The Chairman introduced Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts (Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture) who provided an update on the financial position of Somerset Council. She noted that Somerset Council had declared a financial emergency back in November due to a £100million budget gap for the coming financial year driven by increasing costs particularly in adult services and children and family services. Somerset Council had looked at what services it could continue to provide in the future and there were some difficult decisions to be made. The budget proposals had been published and there was a timetable of meetings to discuss the proposed budgets and where things could be cut or reduced. The Government had announced additional funding of £5million for Somerset but this was not enough to fill the budget gap. The Council were looking for approval to increase Council Tax and to use capital funding. She explained that the Council would be asking for help to deliver some non-statutory services.

During a question and answer session, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts (Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture)

and Kate Hellard provided some responses to points of detail. A summary of some of the points and responses are provided below:

- *Yeovil Town Council were pursuing many options of looking to run many services including Yeovil Recreation Centre which would come at a cost. Clarification was sought regarding a request made by Yeovil Town Council to Somerset Council to obtain some of the previously earmarked reserves for Yeovil Recreation Centre.*

It was confirmed that the earmarked reserves from the four District Councils and Somerset County Council had been looked at by the Executive who agreed that they were not needed and therefore agreed to move those reserves to fund the overspend from the previous financial year, the overspend from the current year and to support the budget for the following year.

Cllr Graham Oakes, Leader of Yeovil Town Council said that he would welcome support from other parish councils to help fund Yeovil Recreation Centre as it was highlighted that it was not just residents that fall under Yeovil Town Council who use those facilities.

- *How did the Council become one when two Councils was the preferred option? Was there a referendum?*

The decision was taken by the Ex-Leader of Somerset County Council who asked the Home Secretary at the time in relation to making Somerset unitary. Along that journey, the four District Councils felt that two unitary councils would be the better option and Somerset County Council felt that one unitary council was the better option. Two business cases were put forward and a public consultation exercise was undertaken by the four district councils. The results stated that the people of Somerset would prefer the two Somerset model rather than one. The results were forwarded to the Secretary of State and it was decided that it was the One Somerset case that was going to be implemented.

- *What is the budget for LCNs?*

LCNs don't have a budget. There are marked reserves to pay for the venue space. There was currently a service restructure taking place and currently LCNs were being supported by interim staffing. A recruitment process was due to take place in the next few weeks. The pilot LCNs were all successful in drawing down grant funding from external funding providers to help deliver projects in their area and work with a range of partners which could be an option for the Yeovil LCN.

- *Is the proposed 10% Council Tax increase on all elements or just the Somerset Council element? Does it also include what was previously the district element as well?*

The increase was the Somerset County element of the total. The increase in the adult and children social care budget was driving the agenda but the Council must ensure that they are providing those statutory services. There was fundamentally an underfunding problem (due to the increase in costs by providers, inflation, and the demand on the service) and other services were suffering because of it.

With regard to devolution of services, there was a comment made around Parish Councils having to set their precept without knowing the likely costs that they may have to take on.

Kate Hellard (Service Manager LCNs) gave a presentation on a Highway Steward Scheme that was currently being trialled in Exmoor. The Highway Steward is a skilled highway operative, in a branded vehicle, who visits parishes and towns to a defined works programme but is also empowered to undertake ad hoc works when identified. The Highway Steward Scheme delivers minor works within the capability of a single operative. The scope of works could include low tech, high value works such as verge maintenance, highway surface water drainage maintenance, weed removal, sign cleaning and cutting back vegetation.

Options for delivery of the Highway Steward could be through a contract with Somerset Council's Highway Contractor from April.

The steward would be employed by the Highways Contractor therefore sick pay, risk assessments, equipment and insurance etc. would be their responsibility. She advised the cost for a single full-time steward was approximately £50k per year – a parish doesn't have to have a whole steward and the steward could be split between a cluster of parishes.

The presentation slides on the Highway Steward Scheme can be viewed at:

[PowerPoint Presentation \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/powerpoint-presentation)

Opportunities for exploring and the benefits of a Parish Ranger Scheme was also discussed. It was noted that the Parish Ranger Scheme currently operated in area south had been identified as a saving (£16,000). If enough Parish Councils were interested the cost of the Scheme could be split.

There were options for Parish Meetings who were unable to precept including adjoining with neighbouring parishes. The Governance Team at Somerset Council could provide further information.

It was requested that Town and Parish Councils express their interest in a Highway Steward Scheme or a Parish Ranger Scheme by emailing devolution@somerset.gov.uk.

Kate Hellard advised that Highway colleagues had offered to facilitate a Highways Working Group for each LCN which was a great opportunity to explore the Highway Steward Scheme and for local knowledge to be shared and to help inform works to be undertaken. If you are interested in joining the Highways Working Group please email: yeovillcn@somerset.gov.uk.

Item 22: **Public Question Time**

There were no public questions.

Item 23: **Discussion on What Can Be Achieved Together**

The LCN was asked to consider what future topics it wished to discuss and what was important. The following issues were highlighted:

- Buses and bus cuts
- CCTV cuts – it was suggested that this could be discussed at the Anti- Social Behaviour Working Group.
- Likely to be an increase in anti-social behaviour following the budget cuts.
- Octagon Theatre (also about economic regeneration) – there is a lot of support from outside of the town to help facilitate leisure facilities. Possibly look to organise friends of groups/groups of individuals/organisations to come together and offer support.
- Highways – concerns about the state of the roads particularly the issue of potholes.

With regard to the Octagon Theatre, it was noted that conversations were continuing with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in relation to the grant funding and business cases were being prepared.

It was noted that Somerset Council had approached Avon and Somerset Police Constabulary for additional funding to continue CCTV monitoring, but the request was declined. The Council would be looking for support from the towns to continue the service. It was suggested that the Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner be invited to attend a future meeting of the LCN.

Bel Deering, Community Engagement Officer at Somerset Rivers Authority explained about her role in supporting flood resilience in parishes and towns across the County. She explained about how the Somerset Rivers Authority may be able to help, which included: small grants scheme up to £5,000 to help with flood resilience equipment and sandbags, writing parish emergency plans, training on managing water courses and property level flood resilience. To get in touch with Somerset Rivers Authority please email: sra@somerset.gov.uk.

Item 24: Update from Connectivity and Transport Working Group

Nathan Turnbull, Locality Officer advised that there had been a low response received to joining the Connectivity and Transport Working Group, which had been identified as a key priority at the last meeting. A meeting of the Working Group had not yet been arranged. He was looking for at least six people to join the

group.

He asked anyone who was interested in being a member of the Connectivity and Transport Working Group to email: yeovillcn@somerset.gov.uk. A meeting would be held sometime in February.

Item 25: Update from Antisocial Behaviour Working Group

Nathan Turnbull, Locality Officer advised that there had also been a low response received to joining the Antisocial Behaviour Working Group, which had been identified as a key priority at the last meeting therefore a meeting had not yet taken place. He asked anyone who was interested in being a member of the Antisocial Behaviour Working Group to email: yeovillcn@somerset.gov.uk.

It was noted that a meeting of the Antisocial Behaviour Working Group would be held on 7 February 2024 at 2.00pm and would be an online meeting.

Rachel Clark, Neighbourhood Inspector for South Somerset said that she would be happy to get involved and could explain about the Police ASB tools and powers.

Item 26: Action and Next Steps

The LCN was about bringing people together to make some change and to make things better for everyone. Members of the LCN were encouraged to get involved and join one of the working groups.

It was agreed to invite the Police Crime Commissioner to a future meeting of the Yeovil LCN. Rachel Clark, Neighbourhood Inspector for South Somerset offered her team to attend and give a presentation on policing in the local area.

Item 27: Dates of Future Meetings

The date of the next meeting of the Yeovil LCN was scheduled to be held on Thursday 7 March 2024 at the Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

Provisional future date is:

- Wednesday 13 June 2024 (AGM) – venue to be confirmed.

Any suggestions for accessible, low cost public venues with wi-fi capability that could host future LCN meetings were always welcome.

Contact officer for meeting: LCN Team lcns@somerset.gov.uk