Somerset Council

Annual report 2025 - 2026

Somerset Local Community Networks & Parish Engagement

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Foreword from the Lead Member for Localities

Cllr Theo Butt Philip
Lead Member for Transformation, Human Resources and Localities

This report covers the work of our Localities Team, covering parish and community development, partnerships and Local Community Networks (LCNs).

Building, maintaining and strengthening the relationships between Somerset Council and our residents and communities is an essential part of how Somerset Council needs to work so that all of us who are lucky enough to live in Somerset can enjoy the benefits of strong, vibrant and supportive communities.

Over the past three years, our LCNs have been a key tool for bringing representatives of City, Town and Parish Council (and Parish Meetings), together with Somerset Councillors, officers and partners from the public and voluntary sectors. They have provided forums for sharing information, at all levels and bringing people together to seek to address common issues.

Somerset is a diverse county and each of Somerset's 18 LCN areas have their own unique character, strengths, challenge and opportunities. Our LCN areas range from highly urban areas to the incredibly rural and sparsely populated areas.

Over the past year, we've been working with external specialists to review how Somerset Council works with the communities it serves.

Over the coming months, I look forward to working with our partners to respond to that review and identify and implementing the key changes we need to make to improve the engagement between Somerset Council and communities across the county.

Meet the Localities Team

The Localities Team in Somerset Council sits within the Strategic Partnerships area of the Partnership, Localities and Culture Service.

Meet the Localities Team

Partnerships Officers: Partnerships Officers provide day to day support and management of many of the functions and processes of the team such as overseeing our generic email boxes, day to day management of the Assets of Community value process, updating and developing our website areas, organising and supporting meetings across the services, ensuring payments are made on time, that our meeting equipment works, and logging and following up actions and queries.

LCN Link Officers: Link Officers each work across a geographic area of Somerset. Their role is to support the development of LCNs, working with a range of partners to identify local issues and consider how these can be addressed.

Senior Parish and Community Development Officer: The Officer manages the development and improvement of communication and engagement with our City, Town and Parish Councils, including working with Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC). The role is also responsible for the management and assessment of the statutory policy and process relating to Assets of Community Value and the Community Right to Bid process.

Locality Development Manager: The Locality Development Manager manages the Localities Team and is responsible for the management and development of LCN, the strengthening and improvement of the relationships with City, Town and Parish Councils and other partners and the oversight of the Assets of Community Value process.

Somerset Council is committed to supporting the development of City, Town and Parish councils as key partners within our communities, recognising their role as the first point of contact within communities, their local knowledge and expertise and their position as representatives of residents.

Over this year, we have further developed our engagement and communication with Parishes, fostering greater collaboration to inform service development and delivery and key strategic plans, and supporting Parishes in their local governance role.

City, Town & Parish Engagement and Development

Monthly Clerks Meetings

We have continued to hold monthly meetings for clerks that provide a platform to discuss a wide range of topics. Subjects covered this year include the devolution of assets and services, the Somerset Nature Recovery Strategy, planning service updates including information on the Local Plan, playing pitch strategy and call for sites, planning for 2027 elections, transport and highways, and the development of a county-wide Public Space Protection Order focused on addressing dog fouling. These sessions provide an opportunity for knowledge-sharing, discussion, peer to peer support and networking, and a place for clerks to have an open dialogue with Somerset Council.

Enhanced Communication Framework

In Autumn 2025, the Localities team took steps to improve communication with Parishes by launching a dedicated inbox for Parish communications, introducing Parish briefing sheets, and sending regular up-date emails. These initiatives form part of a developing communications and engagement framework designed to facilitate improved information flow and promote active participation between Somerset Council and Parishes. Over the coming months we will be looking to improve the information and resources held on the Parish pages of Somerset Council's website through a participative project with Parish representatives.
Parishes@somerset.gov.uk

Parish Briefings and Workshops

Multiple briefing sessions have been organised for City, Town and Parish Council representatives. These sessions provide an opportunity for Parishes to learn more about policy development and service implementation and enable stakeholders to contribute valuable insight and feedback, ensuring that local priorities are reflected in broader decision making.

City, Town & Parish Engagement and Development

Somerset Parish Conference 2025 Purpose

This year, we supported Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) to run the Somerset Parishes Conference, which took place on Friday 3rd October 2025 at the Canalside conference centre in North Petherton, near Bridgwater. The event offered Parish Council Councillors and Officers the chance to meet, learn from each other, and engage directly with key partner organisations. The conference was well received, with a range of keynote speakers, interactive workshops and sector relevant marketplace, with 97% of survey respondents recognising the value of networking opportunities. The next Somerset Parish Conference will take place on the 8th October 2026.

Partnership Development

Work to build and strengthen the relationships with SALC and the SLCC is ongoing. This includes building capacity, skills and knowledge through training, sharing of good practice and identifying need. These partnerships are central to supporting and developing the sector, ensuring that local councils are well equipped to serve their communities.

Information and support for Parish sectors in other areas

The Parish Development and Locality Manager have visited and spoken to groups of Parishes, Local District and Principal councils and sector representatives who are in the early stages of local government reorganisation, to provide advice, support and reflection of the experience and learning in Somerset over the last four years. This has both informed their local development plans and our own practice.

Assets of Community Value (ACV)

Assets of Community Value

The ‘Community Right to Bid’ was introduced by the Localism Act and came into force on 20 September 2012. The Right to Bid gives voluntary and community groups, and City, Town and Parish Councils, the opportunity to nominate local land and buildings to be included on a list of ‘Assets of Community Value’. This is designed to give communities more opportunities to take control of the assets and facilities important to them.

Prior to the creation of Somerset Council, this was a statutory function carried out by District Councils. During this year, we have consolidated the former four district council processes for the management and assessment of nominations for ACVs. There is now a single website page featuring Registers of both Assets of Community Value and Unsuccessful Nominations.

From April 2025 to March 2026, we received 34 nominations (10 of these were renominations). 21 were listed on the register as successful, 6 as unsuccessful and we managed 6 relevant disposals of ACVs, triggering the statutory 6-week moratorium and associated actions. There has been one appeal where the decision to list the asset was upheld.

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 sets out significant changes to the current legal process for Assets of Community Value and shifts the emphasis to a Community Right to Buy. It also sets out a new category and a register for Sporting Assets of Community Value (SACV). The detailed guidance and associated timelines have not yet been published but we are working to prepare for its implementation, including working with a group of Councils across the country. Our policy, processes and website will need to be updated once the guidance has been published.

https://www.somerset.gov.uk/community-leisure-and-tourism/assets-of-community-value/

Local Community Networks

Purpose: LCNs are Somerset Council's forums for community engagement and development, based on an ethos of local partnership working. They function as a conduit for community voice and influence to enhance collaboration by bringing local groups and representatives together.

Aim: 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.

There are 18 LCNs across Somerset and over this year they have covered a wide range of topics and addressed priorities identified by residents and partners:

Local Community Networks

LCNs by their very nature have geographical boundaries but there are times when LCNs and Link Officers come together to work on topics and issues that cross these boundaries. We have shared some examples of the work that we have done together over the past year.

Engagement

A number of LCNs facilitated engagement events with their members at the request of the service team working with EDF at Hinkley Point. These sessions focused on discussing the potential challenges associated with a larger workforce in the area, as well as exploring ideas for how these issues could be managed or reduced. The engagement events were held alongside the community forums being run by EDF and prompted open and constructive discussion. The key points raised were later taken forward to a joint meeting involving EDF, Somerset Council and the Somerset Community Foundation.

Health Determinants Research Collaboration

The Health Determinants Research Collaboration Somerset is an active 5-year programme, funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), aimed at reducing health inequalities in Somerset. In some parts of Somerset, people are living more than 10 years less than others. The aim is to support work that will help to reduce the unfair differences in health and life expectancy that exist in the county. The HDRC team do this by building the Council's capacity to do research with communities and learn new ways to reduce inequalities together. The LCN Officers have been piloting the training that the HDRC team have offered and have already started putting it into practice in some LCN areas.

Emergency Response and Flood Recovery

Storm Chandra hit Somerset in January 2026, causing flooding across a lot of areas.

Somerset Council declared a major incident and the multi-agency response from multiple agencies including Somerset Council, Avon and Somerset Police and the Environment Agency supported residents in immediate need.

Link Officers and wider members of the Strategic Partnerships team were re-deployed to help support the response effort. They supported drop-ins, a Flood Café and gathered vital, on the ground information from partners, including Parish Councils, staffed information points set up to help keep local communities informed about local impacts and maintained close contact with parishes and other partners to support local efforts.

Adult Social Care

As part of refreshing the Somerset Adult Social Care strategy, which sets out the key priorities for the next three years (2026–2029), the LCN team helped facilitate broader community and partner engagement.

Two virtual cross-LCN meetings were initially held, with further engagement through local LCNs, for feedback on existing provision in order to inform recommendations moving forward.

"Working with the LCNs has enabled Adult Social Care to continue to listen, learn and work in partnership. We want to ensure that improvement activity remains grounded in lived experience, is responsive to emerging needs, and contributes to reducing barriers to accessing care and support while improving outcomes for people across Somerset. By taking the time to listen, learn, and co-produce, we can strengthen services in Somerset—building a system that supports independence, promotes wellbeing, and delivers consistently good experiences for everyone."

Vicky Chipchase. Head of Service, Quality, Performance and Assurance

Highways and Traffic Working Groups

There are 14 Highways and Traffic working groups across Somerset, facilitated by Link Officers. Some of these cover more than one LCN area.

The purpose is to provide a structured forum for collaboration between Somerset Council Highways and Traffic teams and local communities in order to improve communication and build effective working relationships which enable locally informed input into highways planning and delivery.

Membership of Highways and Traffic working groups typically includes City, Town and Parish Councils, business representatives across the LCN geography and Somerset Council officers (Traffic, Maintenance and Streetworks) and is supported and facilitated by the LCN Link Officer. They meet regularly (typically quarterly) between LCN meetings.

The scope of these groups includes:

- Highways maintenance (potholes, drainage, vegetation)
- Traffic management (speed limits, signage, parking)
- Street works and infrastructure schemes
- Road safety and data-informed prioritisation
- Community-led schemes and funding opportunities

The improved communication between Somerset Council Highways teams and City, Town and Parish Councils has led to improved local relationships, local influence over highways programmes and improved transparency and understanding of services and delivery pressures. This approach to partnership working has strengthened proactive and coordinated approaches to meeting local need and addressing local issues including surface maintenance, safety, parking and enforcement. They have informed planning and improved local communication regarding planned works and emergency repairs. Highways and Traffic working groups have also supported the monitoring of service delivery.

Drones for Environmental Monitoring

The use of “drones” for environmental monitoring is being trialled in across the Quantocks and Somerset Levels.

Uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs) or “drones” could help track the impacts of flooding, collect data on how land is being used, or monitor the condition of public assets such as footpaths in rural areas. Researchers from the University of Birmingham worked with Somerset Council to understand how local communities feel about this kind of drone use in their region by running a series of Online Community Consultation Meetings in January and February to gather people’s views. These took place in several LCN areas including Levels & Moors, Dowsborough, Taunton and Hestercombe.

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Cross LCN Active Travel Steering Group

The ambition of the Cross LCN Active Travel Steering Group is to support the Council, LCNs and the communities they represent, to promote and improve walking and wheeling in the area.

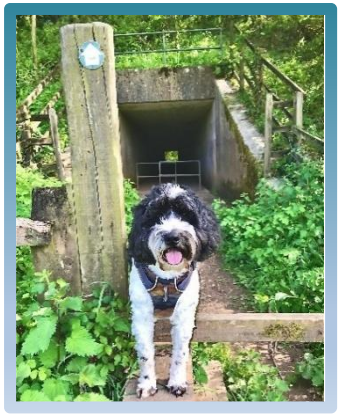
Recent meetings have addressed a broad range of subjects related to active travel and community initiatives. These discussions have been instrumental in fostering engagement and collaboration among participants.

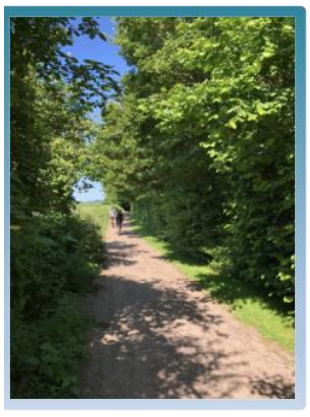
Main topics discussed:

- Exploration of the Rural Active Travel Toolkit and the Local Transport Plan - its implementation, and practical usage
- Funding opportunities available for community projects supporting active travel
- Mapping sessions designed to identify key areas and resources for active travel initiatives

Participant Contributions: Attendees shared their experiences, insights and examples from their own communities. These contributions facilitated a broader dialogue on possible collaboration and the development of future plans.

A big thank you to the Cross LCN Active Travel Steering Group for their time, enthusiasm, knowledge, experience and contributions in helping make walking and wheeling easier – and more enjoyable – for everyone in our communities and across the whole of Somerset.





Volunteering across the LCNs

Localities Team members have actively volunteered in their communities, contributing their time and skills to create wider social value, support inclusive participation and improve community wellbeing through local events, environmental initiatives, emergency response, sport and youth programmes. Through volunteering they have also built extended relationships in communities and a greater understanding of the priorities of local groups, organisations and communities.

"Myself and another Link Officer volunteered at RSPCA West Hatch Animal Centre in November 2025. Not only was the day rewarding, it was a great opportunity to meet other colleagues across the council and have some fun! We also had a tour of the site, saw many animals and the fantastic work that the RSPCA does in our communities."

Charlotte Griffin, LCN Link Officer

Volunteering across the LCNs

Volunteer Health Walk Leader Training

The Health Walk Leader Training at the Avalon Marshes formed part of a wider partnership project with Somerset Activity & Sports Partnership (SASP) to establish a sustainable programme of Health Walks. The training equipped local volunteers with the knowledge, confidence and practical skills to plan and lead safe, inclusive walks, including route planning, risk assessment and supporting participants' wellbeing.

This initiative has been key to enabling the launch of regular, accessible health walks at the Avalon Marshes, supporting green social prescribing, improving physical and mental wellbeing, and strengthening community connections with nature. It also contributes to the long-term legacy of the Step, Ride, Thrive project by building local capacity through trained volunteer leaders to sustain and expand walking opportunities in the area.

Living in such a beautiful county, it is always a joy to go for a walk, and I have been on a number of Health Walks organised by SASP. I am proud to have been part of the team working with SASP in starting Health Walks at the Avalon Marshes. I found the Health Walk Leader Training really rewarding, giving me the opportunity to learn more about the nature reserve while also building the practical skills needed to organise and lead a walk myself.

Nataliya Wills, LCN Link Officer

Relationship Building

During the year Link officers have had a focus on building relationships with City, Town and Parishes, the VCFSE and other stakeholders in order to better understand the networks that exist in communities, the issues residents face and build trust between partners and with Somerset Council.

Bridgwater LCN has developed its ways of working to reflect the breadth of partnership activity already taking place locally. Through detailed discussions with Bridgwater Town Council and local elected members we have built activity and discussion in areas to complement and build on existing priorities and activity. It has developed a distinctive approach centred on networking, coordination and signposting, reflecting the Town's already strong partnership landscape and positioning the LCN as a connector between organisations, services and local community groups.

Through ongoing engagement with partners and analysis of local data, several key priorities emerged. By bringing together voluntary organisations, community groups and statutory services, the LCN has created a space where partners can share knowledge, identify gaps and work more cohesively. This has included supporting discussions around innovative initiatives such as time banking, which encourages residents to exchange skills and support in ways that help strengthen community resilience and wellbeing.

This way of working has led to stronger relationships across the system, with improved communication between organisations and a clearer understanding of what support is available locally, raising awareness of local services and leading to improved access to these services for residents.

Launch of the National Year of Reading at Bridgwater Arts Centre by Somerset Libraries

Improved Road Safety

At the **Burnham LCN** meeting held in December 2025, an issue raised during routine discussion demonstrated the practical value of collaborative working between community representatives, elected members, and council officers.

A representative from Pawlett Parish Council highlighted concerns regarding significant surface water on the A38 between Clucky Moo and Richmond Cottages. The presence of standing water posed a clear risk to road users, particularly given the freezing winter conditions and the increased likelihood of ice formation.

During the discussion, and in response to a request from attendees, Councillor Theo Butt Philip provided the Emergency Highways contact number. This ensured that those present had immediate access to the appropriate reporting channel for urgent highways issues.

Following the meeting, the Parish representative used the contact provided to report the issue, outlining both the extent of surface water and the associated safety concerns. While there was a brief delay in establishing contact, the issue was acted upon promptly once it had been logged.

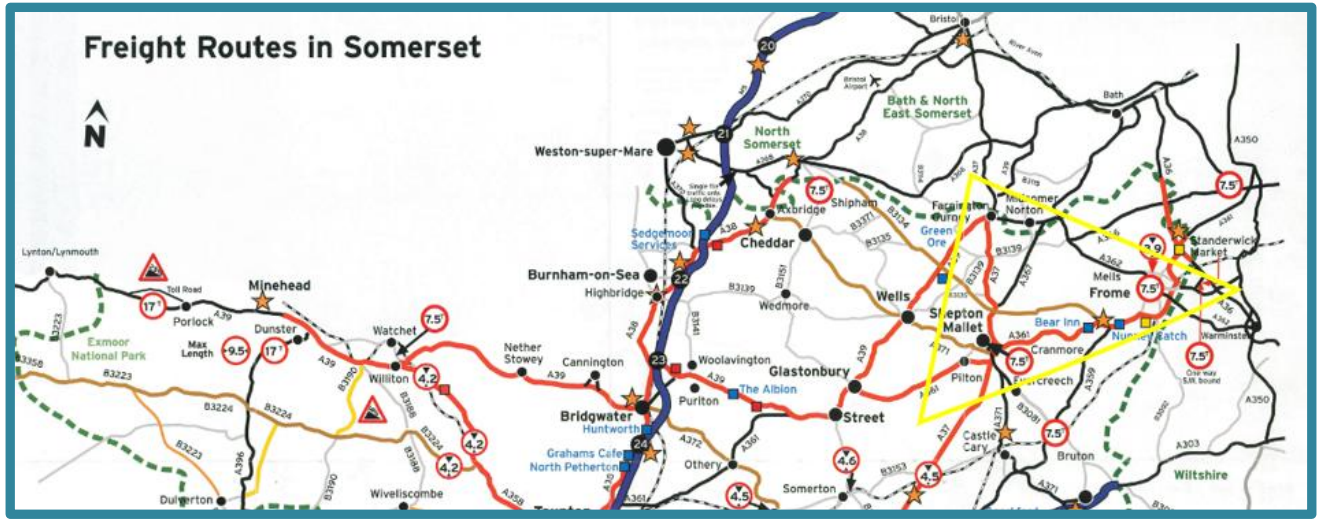
In just over an hour, Somerset Council's Highways team responded by installing both flood warning and ice warning signage along the affected stretch of the A38. This swift intervention mitigated the immediate risk to motorists and demonstrated the effectiveness of reporting issues through the correct channels.

Subsequent feedback from the Parish representative highlighted appreciation for both the accessibility of the correct contact information and the speed of the response. Thanks were also extended to Councillor Theo Butt Philip for facilitating timely action through the provision of the emergency contact details.

Safer Roads for HGVs

Safer Roads for HGVs, a partnership approach to rural road safety, emerged as a key priority for the **Shepton LCN** following ongoing concerns from Parish Councils about the impact of heavy goods vehicles on rural communities, including safety risks, unsuitable routing and deteriorating road conditions. In response, the LCN developed a dedicated workstream and convened a multi-agency forum in October 2025, bringing together Parish representatives, Somerset Council highways and traffic officers, and local businesses such as quarry and haulage companies. This partnership approach enabled stakeholders to map problem areas, explore freight routes, and identify both immediate and long-term solutions, moving from isolated local concerns to a coordinated, evidence-based approach.

The work highlighted the need for a network-wide approach to HGV routing, recognising that changes in one location can impact neighbouring communities, and that infrastructure issues such as drainage, signage and road condition play a significant role in safety outcomes. Through strong collaboration, the project has already delivered practical improvements, strengthened relationships across sectors and raised the profile of HGV safety within wider transport planning. It has also established a clear programme of ongoing work, focusing on strategic freight routing, alignment with the Somerset Local Transport Plan and continued engagement with businesses to deliver sustainable solutions that balance economic needs with community safety and wellbeing.



Shared Active Travel Links

During 2025/26, the Chard–Ilminster Shared Path remained a key focus for the **Crewkerne & Ilminster LCN** Active Travel Working Group. The path is an important active travel link for both leisure and everyday journeys, connecting communities across LCN boundaries and supporting walking, cycling, and inclusive access.

Progress over the year was driven by strong community involvement, with oversight coming through the LCN. Volunteers led by Matt Day formed the “Friends of the Path” network, delivering practical maintenance through organised work parties. These activities helped clear overgrown sections and restore visibility and usability along the route, while also building wider community ownership and engagement in the path’s future.

Alongside volunteer action, the LCN provided a forum to escalate longer-term maintenance challenges. Working group discussions highlighted the need for clearer coordination with Somerset Council Estates and more consistent planning for vegetation management, resurfacing, and future improvements. The group also raised the importance of securing and aligning developer contributions to support the path’s upkeep and resilience over time

Frome Missing Link

The **Vale of Frome LCN** has played a key role in backing projects that make a real difference to everyday life in the area, and the Frome Missing Link is a great example of that impact. Parishes within the Vale of Frome LCN recently received a £10,000 SALC grant to go towards the 'Frome Missing Link'. The initial discussion took place during a tour of Buckland Dinham between the LCN Link Officer, SALC and Buckland Dinham Parish Council before the bid was expanded to include Mells, Great Elm, Frome Town Council and the Frome Missing Link Action Group.

The 'Frome Missing Link' is section of traffic-free footpath stretching from Radstock to Frome Town. Remaining is the 1.3km Selwood Manor to Elliots Lane section where the Mells River, Coalash Lane and Jack's Lane need bridging, and a filled-in span under the A362 requires unblocking. This grant concerns work between Selwood Manor and Spring Gardens.

The project itself is ambitious and carefully planned. It builds on the wider Colliers Way route and focuses on overcoming some very real engineering challenges, including steep gradients, narrow lanes, heavy traffic on the A362, river crossings, bridge requirements and access constraints near the railway. Detailed work has already been developed on surfacing, fencing, embankments and access design, with proposals for a path around 2.5 to 3 metres wide so it can be used comfortably by a wide range of people. Specialist input has also helped shape the more technical elements, including slope studies, structural planning and options for bridge design that could reduce costs by using proven models already delivered elsewhere in Somerset.

Above: Initial meeting with the LCN, SALC and Buckland Dinham Parish Council

The project has attracted strong local backing, volunteers, fundraising and match funding, showing how the LCN can help turn shared local priorities into practical, visible change on the ground. For the Frome area, and particularly the parishes outside the town itself, the impact is clear: safer everyday journeys and reduced reliance on cars with a route that supports physical and mental wellbeing.

By bringing together parish councils, Frome Town Council, community groups and SALC, the LCN has helped support a project that will improve safe access into Frome for people walking, cycling and using wheelchairs or mobility scooters. It is a strong example of the LCN helping ideas move from conversation to delivery, with benefits that will be felt for years to come.

Community Health Checks for High Blood Pressure

The Link Officer for **Chard and Blackdowns LCN** supported the Healthy Somerset high blood pressure campaign by turning its targets into practical local action where it could have the greatest impact. Drawing on a combination of data and local knowledge to identify priority neighbourhoods, she worked with the Health Promotion Practitioner, Parishes and community groups across the LCN area to identify the best locations for pop-up health check clinics.

Alongside available data, they used feedback from community networks and partner organisations to focus outreach on communities and areas where people are less likely to come forward for routine checks, and where high blood pressure may be more likely to go undetected. This helped more residents get checked earlier and ensured they were signposted to the right support afterwards, demonstrating how the LCN approach can help public health work reach people who might otherwise be missed.

NHS Health Check appointments were offered at the May **Taunton LCN** meeting. The national programme assesses cardiovascular health and helps identify people who may be at higher risk of serious conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease and stroke. The appointments proved popular with attendees.

More information about the health check can be found by clicking on the links: NHS Health checks / Health Checks Outreach Booking Site

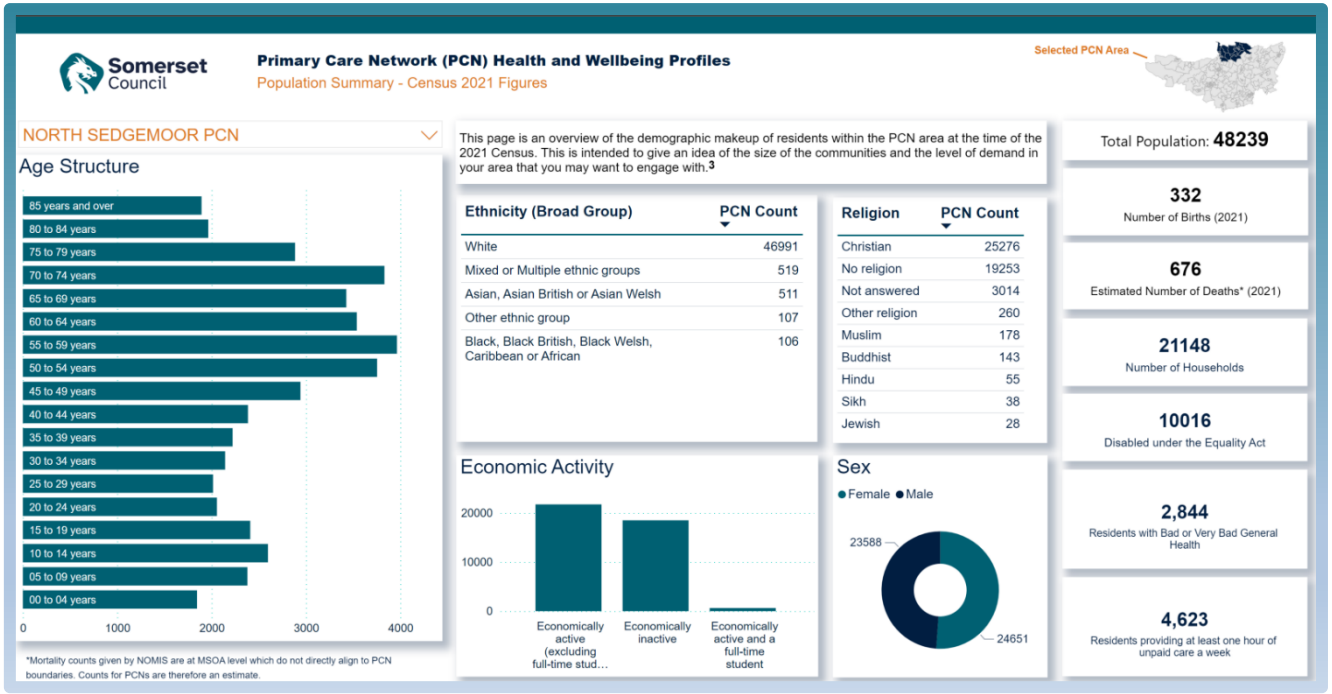
Above: Ashley Buttle, Health Check Practitioner, Somerset Council & David Northey, Somerset Bus Partnership and Taunton Town Councillor

The Importance of Data

In October 2025, **Cheddar & Axbridge LCN** brought together Parish Councils, partners and residents to explore how Public Health intelligence and local insight could be used to shape local priorities.

The session aimed to move beyond “data for data’s sake” by combining evidence with lived experience to better understand challenges such as housing affordability, access to services and health inequalities.

Using established datasets, including PCN Health & Wellbeing Profiles and LCN area data, discussions were structured around the “Wider Determinants of Health” framework. This enabled participants to interpret the data collaboratively, adding local context and testing whether perceived issues were supported by evidence.



The session identified key issues including housing affordability pressures, an ageing population, links between health outcomes and prevention opportunities, and low awareness of existing services. These insights directly informed LCN priorities, including improving access to information through a single directory, supporting ageing well and preventative health initiatives, promoting healthy lifestyles, and contributing to Local Plan discussions on housing and infrastructure. The approach has strengthened evidence-led, place-based decision making, equipping partners to focus efforts, influence strategic planning and develop collaborative solutions, and provides a replicable model for other LCNs.

Community Engagement Through Health Research

The **Yeovil LCN** Link Officer supported Yeovil Amateur Boxing Club to successfully apply for funding to host a *Community Conversation* with its members, who were considered a hard-to-reach and under-represented voice. The application secured a grant of £350 from the Somerset Research Engagement Network, working in association with Spark Somerset, and help was provided to facilitate the session.

The conversations explored members' understanding, feelings and attitudes towards health research in primary care settings. This approach enabled meaningful dialogue with a predominantly male audience who are not routinely involved in formal consultation or research activity.

As a result of this work, the LCN Link Officer was invited to present the learning and impact from the project at the Southwest Regional Research Engagement Network conference. This exposure led to an additional £165 being awarded to Yeovil Amateur Boxing Club, recognising the value of the engagement activity.

The relationship developed through the project led to further positive outcomes. The club was visited by Abri Housing's Community Investment Area Manager to explore partnership opportunities, and members are also participating in a charity abseil, raising funds for Yeovil Hospital. These activities helped broaden the club's network and strengthen its links with local organisations.

Community Solution Seekers - Resident engagement

In 2025, Thrive facilitated a series of 'Community Solution Seekers' sessions across four LCN areas: **Dowsborough LCN, Levels and Moors LCN, Shepton LCN and Yeovil LCN**.

The sessions in Dowsborough LCN, supported by the LCN Link Officer, were held in different locations to attract a wide range of participants. They were designed to encourage more residents to become involved with their local communities, to seek solutions to issues that were pertinent to them and explore how to start along the pathway of finding solutions together. These sessions facilitated cross LCN work, with colleagues from neighbouring **Minehead and Watchet LCN** and **Bridgwater LCN** joining as many issues are wider than the LCN boundaries. The sessions enabled stronger links with Thrive, Spark Somerset and local residents. A key concern raised repeatedly was the lack of reliable transport across this rural area.

Residents often shared how limited transport options were affecting daily life, particularly for young people accessing further education. One local parent described the challenges of getting their teenagers to colleges in Bridgwater or Taunton, with unreliable public transport routes making attendance difficult and, for some, unsustainable.

"*When my children turned 16, they were expected to continue education or training or take on an apprenticeship, for example, but getting them to their college on time in Bridgwater or Taunton became a nightmare. This wasn't just our family but others too, to the extent that the problem became insurmountable for some and they would drop out. We tried all sorts of methods and timings but it's not as straightforward as we'd hoped or as it should be. I welcome the opportunity to try to influence or have an impact on transport providers across our rural area, by joining others with similar concerns, especially as this hits just as hard for those without a car at any point in their lives.*"

The newly established "Transport across Dowsborough" group is beginning by holding an open meeting for residents to map existing provision, identify gaps and explore what an improved system could look like. The aim is to use this evidence to engage with transport providers and work towards practical, achievable improvements for the community. This might be further use of the Slinky service, perhaps, or for consideration of local volunteer car transport schemes.

Emergency Planning Workshops

Several LCNs, including **Exmoor** and **Avalon and Poldens LCNs,** have facilitated emergency planning workshops.

The sessions, run by colleagues from Somerset Rivers Authority and Somerset Councils, Emergency Response and Planning teams have been well received by participants, who include Somerset Councillors, the police, Parish representatives and partners.

The aim is to support communities to become more resilient and better prepared for emergencies such as severe weather, flooding and power outages.

The sessions are practical and interactive, guiding participants through the key elements of a Community Emergency Plan. Attendees shared local experiences, discussed common risks and explored realistic actions communities can take with the resources they already have.

A particular focus was placed on power cuts, with discussion around simple, low-tech solutions to help people stay warm, keep in touch and look after vulnerable residents when electricity is lost. Communities were encouraged to prioritise essential needs such as warmth, food and communication.

The workshops also provided an opportunity for Parishes at different stages of preparedness to learn from each other, share draft plans and swap ideas. This helped build confidence and reinforced that emergency planning does not have to be complicated to be effective.

Overall, the workshops have strengthened local links, increased understanding of community resilience and given participants the practical tools to take back to their communities.

Engaging with the Police and Crime Commissioner

At the January 2026 **Wells and Rural LCN** meeting, members welcomed Police and Crime Commissioner Clare Moody, who attended alongside colleagues to share her strategic priorities and engage directly with local partners.

During the session, Clare outlined her five key priorities for policing across Avon and Somerset:

- Strengthening neighbourhood policing
- Reducing violent crime, including serious youth violence and violence against women and girls
- Focusing on prevention, including road safety
- Improving support for victims
- Raising standards in policing, including robust vetting and officer support

The presentation provided valuable insight into the current direction of policing and highlighted areas of shared interest for partners working at a local level.
Following the presentation, Clare led an open and interactive question and answer session. Participants had the opportunity to raise topics in advance, alongside questions on the day. Key areas of discussion included:

- Drug driving and enforcement
- The Close Pass Campaign to improve road safety for cyclists
- Rural crime challenges
- Unlicensed music events and raves

This open dialogue enabled partners to explore local concerns in more detail and strengthen understanding between agencies.

Overall, the meeting was highly engaging and informative, offering a valuable opportunity for local stakeholders to connect directly with the Police and Crime Commissioner, share perspectives and explore how priorities can be aligned to support community safety.

Following the meeting with the Wells & Rural LCN, the Police and Crime Commissioner attended the **Bridgwater LCN**, **Hestercombe LCN** and **Avalon and Poldens LCN** meetings.

Regular Neighbourhood Policing Contact with LCNs

Stakeholders in many LCNs, have regularly raised concerns about local crime, in particular rural crime and a perception that crime rates are increasing across Somerset with local policing teams less visible on the streets.

The Link Officers have continued to build working relationships with Neighbourhood Policing teams, facilitating their engagement at main LCN meetings to provide statistical overviews and improve understanding of local policing priorities. In addition PCSOs now regularly attend these main meetings, often arriving prior to the start of the meeting for informal discussion with stakeholders.

Neighbourhood Policing teams now regularly attend Dowsborough, Exmoor, Minehead and Watchet, Taunton, Wellington & Wiveliscombe and Hestercombe LCNs

"Attendance and participation in the LCN enable local policing teams to engage and collaborate with partners and community groups, providing meaningful insight into local concerns and community issues, and ensuring policing priorities and demand are informed by lived experience."

***PCSO Supervisor Lora Bray**, based in Bridgwater*

People, Places and Things Project

The *People, Places and Things* project continued to develop through 2025/26 as a practical, community-led response to social isolation across the **Levels and Moors LCN**.

Building on earlier work, the project focused on maintaining and expanding a shared, free-to-use community activity list that brings together local activities, venues and support services in one place. The live community activity list was kept under review, with updates encouraged from Parish Councils, community groups and individual organisers to improve its accuracy and reach. The work was undertaken by Cllr Phil Sharratt, thanks to funding from SALC, applied for and held by Langport Town Council.

Throughout the year, the project was actively promoted through LCN channels, with Parish chairs and clerks encouraged to share the resource locally and contribute new information. The project remains focused on being accessible, adaptable and locally owned, with aspirations to move towards a searchable website when funding allows.

Young People's Health and Wellbeing Project

Several LCNs have considered how to better support Children and Young People. The **Minehead and Watchet LCN** have supported a partnership between Minehead Town Council (MTC), the Primary Care Network (PCN) and Minehead Eye.

Enhanced Youth Worker Project – Early Support That Makes a Big Difference

Through this partnership, a full-time Young People's Health Coach has been established: a unique role that blends youth work, health coaching and mental health support into one accessible, community-based service.

This project was already active in the area and has reached children who would otherwise have struggled to access support. Young people are now being supported in safe, familiar spaces, through youth clubs, referrals from youth workers and even through school-based support. These are children who might have slipped through the cracks but are now being given the tools to build resilience, confidence and emotional wellbeing.

In West Somerset, GPs and health professionals are seeing a high level of intervention required for young people's mental health. The pressure on services is growing and many young people are waiting far too long to access the help they need. This project is about early-stage intervention, supporting young people before issues escalate and helping them thrive in their communities.

Thanks to SALC's Community Health & Wellbeing Grant, and additional secured funding, this project is guaranteed to run until April 2027. However, to ensure its long-term sustainability and to expand its reach, the partners are encouraging community members, neighbouring Parishes and local organisations to consider supporting it further—whether through funding, partnership, or advocacy.

"The Young People's project is a brilliant example of what local councils can achieve when we work together with our communities. This reflects our commitment to supporting young people, promoting wellbeing, and building a stronger, more connected West Somerset."

Ben Parker, Clerk (Minehead Town Council)

Young People's Health and Wellbeing Project

A grant from SALC enabled the HYPE project to research the needs and requirements of young people across the **Hestercombe LCN** area and approach youth provision in a collaborative way for the benefit of all young people, based on their expressed needs. This has proven to be a model for other LCNs, of how councils within an LCN can work together to tackle common issues. For the young people of Hestercombe LCN, it has left a legacy of youth provision which is fully expected to continue into the future. There was support from all the parish and town councils, both financially and practically, encouraging confidence and trust in the project.

The activities delivered through three youth clubs have included art and crafts, dance, spoken word (Rap) and sports. In addition, sessions were arranged with *On Your Bike* and *Quantock National Landscape*. To fund the ongoing provision, all eight parishes continue to fund the activity at the same or increased levels for 2026/27. HYPE was also successful in attracting some funding from the Hinkley Point C Fund and from Awards for All, which will enable the sessions to continue into the future.

For the young people of the Hestercombe LCN, the project has:

- Drawn more young people into social situations
- Given young people the chance to express their views on their local environment and needs
- Provided the channel for those views to be escalated to their local councils
- Delivered greater diversity of activities at youth clubs
- Provided environments for the activities they requested to be tested in practice, to form an ongoing sustainable offering
- Contributed to improving facilities at Creech St Michael Pavilion for the Youth Club, based on members' wishes.
- Been inclusive of all young people across the LCN, including refugees.

Strengthening Parish and Town Engagement

Over the past year, the **South East LCN** has strengthened its role as a key connector between town and parish councils and Somerset Council services, ensuring that locally raised issues are actively progressed through consistent communication and follow-up.

Our Town councils have begun regularly using the LCN as a ‘way in’ to Somerset Council and this has led to some real results which work for both the community and Somerset Council. One example is a recently held meeting in Bruton with our larger towns and our Traffic Events Team, which has led to one joint Traffic Regulation Order for the LCN. This both saves money for our communities and makes the process more efficient for Somerset Council. The LCN has also consistently responded quickly to our Towns and helped our Clerks to achieve quick action on issues which require urgent attention – such as a damaged wall which was dangerously falling onto a well-used public footpath.

Many parish concerns require coordination across multiple organisations and the LCN has played a central role in bringing together the right partners to respond effectively. This has included:

- Organising multi-agency site visits to explore issues such as flooding and infrastructure challenges in detail
- Acting as a consistent point of contact to maintain communication between parishes and council services
- Establishing a crucial Highways Working Group

The LCN has focused on ensuring that parish correspondence leads to visible action, rather than sitting unresolved. Through responsive engagement with clerks, councillors, and community partners, the LCN has supported communities to navigate complex systems and secure timely responses. This has drastically improved confidence in the LCN and has led to it being an invaluable resource for our partners.

Using the LCN as a Pathway into Local Government

The **Taunton LCN** provides an open and accessible forum for residents to engage with local decision making, develop civic understanding and build confidence in participating in democratic processes. This case study highlights the journey of Iona Taylor, whose involvement with the LCN has supported her progression from youth representation into formal local government participation.

Iona first became involved in local government as Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council's Youth Representative. In this role, she developed an early interest in how decisions are made locally and how young people's voices can influence outcomes. However, like many young representatives, understanding the wider structures of local government beyond the Parish level was initially a challenge.

Through encouragement and support of the Taunton LCN Chair, Iona began attending Taunton LCN meetings, using them as an opportunity to observe and understand how issues are discussed across a wider geographical region and between multiple partners.

The LCN environment enabled her to:

- hear directly from elected members and officers
- understand how community priorities are raised and progressed
- gain confidence in formal meeting settings.

Alongside LCN meetings, Iona also attended Somerset Council Scrutiny meetings, further broadening her understanding of governance, accountability and decision-making processes at a county level.

Iona's successful attempt to join the Somerset Youth Parliament Advisory Group opened the door to another platform, which enabled her to access the views of more young people and continue to develop her own voice. Iona recently took part in a Welcome Event with Somerset Youth Parliament, where young representatives were formally welcomed to the Council by the Chair, Cllr Mike Best.

Using the LCN as a Pathway into Local Government

Building on her growing confidence and understanding, Iona progressed from youth representation to the role of a full Parish Councillor. This step represents a significant milestone in her journey, demonstrating how early engagement, supported by accessible forums like the LCN, can lead to sustained participation in local democracy.

Iona believes that her progression highlights how sustained engagement, visibility of decision-making and supportive officer involvement can enable young people not only to understand local government, but to actively shape it. Iona is also looking forward to helping other young people get involved in local democracy.

"The LCN has been one of the most supportive groups that I've come across so far on my journey into the world of local government. From pointing me in the right direction to encouraging me to keep going, the LCN has helped me to discover my own interests as well as to represent those held by others. Not only are the regular LCN meetings filled with fascinating presentations, they provide the opportunity to meet others who share your goals."

"I hope to be part of organising a collaborative, inclusive LCN group for young people, likely including some from Somerset Youth Parliament. Discussing ideas and sharing food for thought is what makes a healthy democracy, and facilitating other young people's involvement in doing this, in an LCN framework, is something I'm very keen to do. To me, nothing is more important than ensuring that the views of others are heard and considered.

Cllr Iona Taylor, Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council

Somerset YOUTH PARLIAMENT & advisory group

https://somersetyouthparliament.org.uk/

Together in Tone
Connecting people through music and creativity

At the **Wellington & Wiveliscombe LCN** Annual General Meeting in July 2025, arts and culture were identified as a local priority. This reflected a shared belief that creative activities help people feel connected, support health and wellbeing, and strengthen communities. Together in Tone followed directly from that conversation. The project explores how music and creativity can be used in welcoming, inclusive ways – particularly for people who may feel isolated or unsure about joining in.

Together in Tone is a partnership project, shaped and delivered locally by:

- Wellington & Wiveliscombe LCN Members/ Stakeholders
- Wellington Town Council
- Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC)
- Caz Besterman, Project Manager and Community Music Facilitator
- Local Music Groups

This partnership approach helped ensure the project was realistic, community-led and rooted in local strengths.

Rather than starting with a fixed programme, Together in Tone focused on listening. To date, the project has engaged with over 18 music groups and connected with more than 10 Parishes across the LCN area.

This included: talking directly with choirs, bands and music groups, connecting with Parish Councils, speaking with community hubs and organisations supporting older and isolated residents, and mapping what already exists locally. This helped build a clear picture of both opportunities and barriers.

Together in Tone has engaged with a wide range of local music groups and communities across the Wellington and Wiveliscombe LCN area. The next phase of the project will focus on improving accessibility and visibility, including low-pressure participation opportunities, development of a local music directory, and creation of content to support promotion and engagement, as well as exploring opportunities for collaborative music-making.

Together in Tone
Connecting people through music and creativity

“Together in Tone has shown the real value of creativity within community development. Music provides a gentle and welcoming way for people to connect across ages, backgrounds and Parishes, particularly for those who may not normally engage in traditional community activity. What has been most encouraging is seeing local groups, organisations and residents begin to build relationships through something positive, inclusive and shared. This project has never just been about performance — it has been about wellbeing, confidence, belonging and strengthening community connections across the Wellington & Wiveliscombe LCN.”

Laura Batcha - Community Development Officer, Wellington Town Council

“Together in Tone is dedicated to raising awareness about the wonderful world of music-making and the positive impact of music on health and wellbeing. There is a wide variety of groups, bands and choirs across the area. We are working hard to identify and reduce barriers, collaborate and promote musical opportunities, and get more people involved. Music has such a beneficial impact on people's lives.”

Caz Besterman, Project Manager - Together in Tone

Website: https://www.wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk/community-development/together-tone/

Community Working Review

Over the past year, we have undertaken a Community Working Review to help Somerset Council develop a clearer, more coherent and evidence-based approach to community engagement, community development and support for community resilience.

The review, commissioned in 2025, has been delivered by Citizen Network in three phases: research, co-design of options, and final report and recommendations. The review was informed by national legislation and best practice and responds to the need for a shared framework for community engagement and community development.

The review team worked with representatives from City, Town and Parish Councils, statutory partners, Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise stakeholders, alongside Somerset Council members and staff, to ensure all perspectives and aspirations were considered in the codesign of recommendations.

While the review highlights strong partnership working and a clear commitment to community working across the council, it also underlines the need for more consistent, coordinated, and community-led approaches to engagement and Neighbourhood Working.

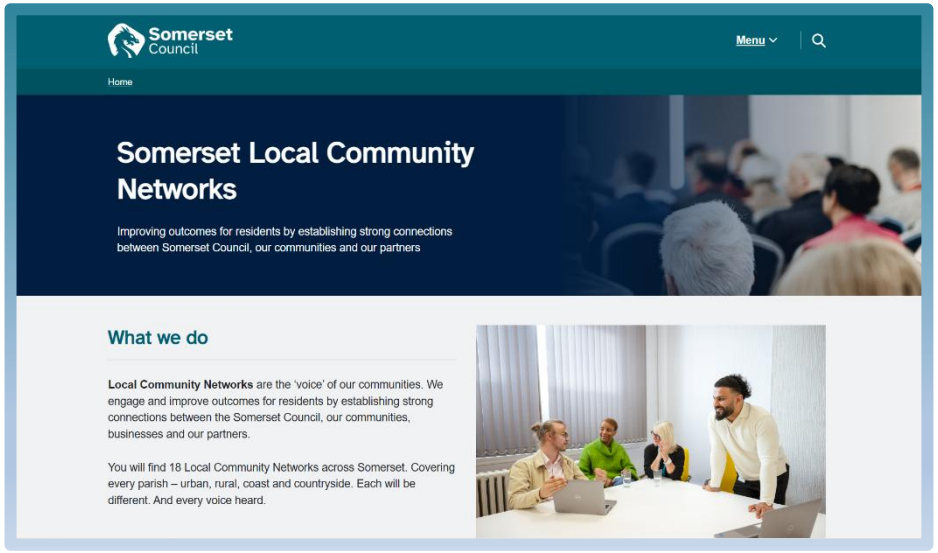
Somerset Council intended to use the recommendations from Citizen Network to strengthen relationships with communities, improve how local insight informs decision-making, and support more resilient, self-reliant communities as part of a wider prevention agenda in line with Somerset Councils new Council Vision and the requirements of the English Devolution and Community Engagement Act.

The full Citizen Network report can be found here Appendix 2 Citizen Network Community Working Review Report.pdf

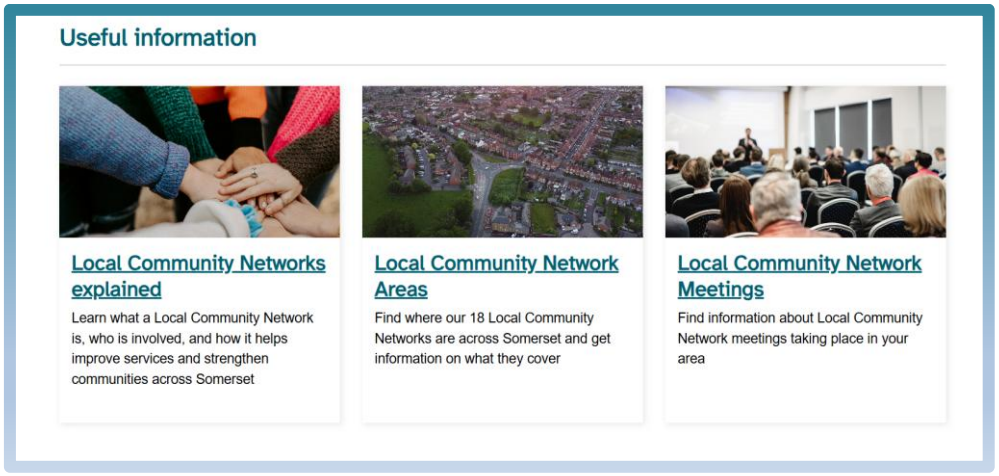
New Local Community Network Website Launched

In April 2026, we successfully launched the new **Somerset Local Community Network** website.

The website provides a clear and easy-to-navigate space for stakeholders to learn about the LCN offer. It includes information about the role of the Link Officer, details for each LCN area (including contact information), and up-to-date links to both past and upcoming meetings, all in one place. We will continue to develop the website to ensure it is a useful resource in understanding the role of an LCN and to access important updates and meeting information.



Somerset Local Community Networks
www.lcn.somerset.gov.uk



Looking Forward – The year ahead

In the year ahead, we will build on the learning from the Community Working Review to further strengthen the role and impact of LCNs. Our focus will be on shaping a more connected and cohesive network.

A strength-based approach will underpin this work, recognising and building on the existing assets, skills and resilience within communities, and valuing the vital role of VCFSE organisations and parish partners as key contributors to local development.

This will provide a coordinated approach to community working, supporting communities to play an active role in identifying and addressing the issues that matter most to them.

A key priority will be embedding our learning from the Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC), enabling more data-informed conversations at a local level.

Alongside this, we will continue to review and adapt our approach in response to national policy developments, including the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026. This will ensure that the Council remains flexible, responsive and well positioned to support evolving opportunities for community empowerment and local decision-making.

Thank You

Finally, a thank you.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all City Town and Parish councils, LCN members, partners and stakeholders who have contributed their time, insight and commitment over the past year.

LCNs rely on the active participation of City, Town and Parish Councils, voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise organisations, statutory partners, elected members, businesses and residents. Through your continued engagement, you have helped to identify local priorities, share knowledge and experience, and work collaboratively to develop practical solutions that respond to the needs of our communities.

Your willingness to contribute local expertise, support partnership working and engage in open and constructive dialogue has been central to the progress and impact of LCNs this year. Together, you have strengthened relationships across organisations, improved understanding of local challenges, and supported the delivery of more joined-up, community-led approaches.

We would also like to recognise the ongoing support of Somerset Council officers and members, whose involvement has helped to ensure that local insight informs wider service development and decision-making.

LCNs are built on collaboration, trust and shared purpose. Thank you for your continued commitment to working together to support strong, resilient and connected communities across Somerset.

Contact Us

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