

Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Dowsborough

Date: Wednesday, 22 November 2023

Time: 7.01 pm - 8.35 pm

Location: Wembdon Village Hall, Homberg Way, Wembdon TA6 7BY

Chaired by: Mike Caswell (Chair)

LCN core membership attendance:

Name:	Representing
Cllr Brian Bolt	Somerset Council
Hugh Davies	Somerset Council
Cllr Ian Dyer,	Cannington PC
Cllr Peter Felton	Chilton Trinity PC
Cllr John Vassalli	Durleigh PC
Cllr Derek Buller	Fiddington PC
Cllr Mike Coplestone	Holford PC
Cllr Steve Skinner,	Kilve PC
Cllr Kevin Ferriday,	Nether Stowey PC
Cllr Tina Gardener,	Otterhampton PC
Cllr Duncan Peaster,	Over Stowey PC
Cllr Simon Stretton, (Vice-Chair)	Spaxton PC
Cllr John McVerry	Stockland Bristol PM
Cllr Sue Goss,	Stogursey PC
Cllr Bridget Hedaux	Wembdon PC

Officer attendance:

Kate Hellard (LCN Development Lead), Emma Plummer (LCN Interim Lead Officer), Pippa Hughes (LCN Interim Link Officer), Ollie Lindsell (ICT Specialist), Sam Murrell (Clerk)

Other attendees:

Name:	Representing
Cllr Theo Butt Philip	Somerset Council Executive
Karen Scott (Clerk)	Holford / Kilve PC
Connie Sanders	Otterhampton PC
Amanda McMurrin (Clerk)	Over Stowey PC
Caro Slaymaker (Clerk)	Nether Stowey PC
Gillian Wintle	Spaxton PC
Bryony Carver	Stockland Bristol PM
Cllr Paul King, D Claydon, Lorna Edwards, Mark Phillips, Peter Major & Anne Reed	Wembdon PC
Sgt Kat Forrest	Avon & Somerset Police
Loretta Whetlor	SALC
John Roberts	Member of the Public

Virtual attendees:

Name:	Representing
Cllr Rosemary Woods	Somerset Council
David Mears (Clerk)	Bridgwater Town Council
David Gliddon	
Dawn Rogers	Somerset Council

Summary of discussion:

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

Item 18: **Apologies for Absence**

Cllr Lin Hook (Chilton Trinity PC) substituted by Cllr Peter Felton, Debbie McIlroy (Enmore PC), Cllr Chris Morgan (Stogursey PC) substituted by Cllr Sue Goss, Ian Porter (Quantock Landscapes), Luke Jackson (Connect Somerset), Anne Shilton (Spark).

Item 19: **Declarations of Interest**

None were declared.

Item 20: **Notes from the Previous Meeting**

Cllr Sue Goss queried a paragraph on Page 7 – Stogursey. It was asked that this was reworded as it implied that Cllr Chris Morgan had suggested that the parishes reinstate the Parish Lengthsman scheme and share the cost.

Stogursey PC already employed a Lengthsman and were very happy with the service. Cllr Morgan was suggesting that other parishes may wish to consider this as an option themselves.

Subject to this amendment, there were no other queries and the minutes were approved as a true record.

Item 21: **An update on Somerset Council's current financial position**

Councillor Theo Butt Philip, the Lead Member for Transformation and Resources took questions about the Council's current financial position. This followed a letter being sent to the parishes from the Leader Cllr Bill Revans, addressing the subject of asset and service devolution. Questions from the floor were raised as follows:-

Q. Cllr Paul King (Wembdon PC) – How is the process of devolution going to work? Does this mean that any staff will TUPE across with an asset and then the parish will take on the maintenance responsibility? Some of the parishes are very small and do not currently employ any staff beyond a clerk for a few hours a week. What happens if the parish decides NOT to take on the responsibility of assets and services?

A. *It will depend on demand for the asset/service and will be tailored to suit the work and parish needs. Services are provided in different ways across the County, so this will need to be taken on a case-by-case basis. In some cases, if the parish does not take on the work required, then this service is likely to be cut.*

Loretta Whetlor (SALC) asked what had happened to Finance following Function? The most valuable assets such as car parks will not be devolved as they provide income streams to Somerset Council. Unfortunately, it will mean that the parishes will be taking on assets without the wherewithal to finance them other than through the precept. There was a wide disparity between the size of parishes and thus the precept base, so some parishes would be at a huge financial disadvantage.

Q. Cllr Sue Goss (Stogursey PC) - Some of the services listed in the letter are Statutory. What happens to them if the parishes don't take them on? If the parish sets a precept to include these services, but Somerset Council also has a responsibility, aren't the Council Taxpayers paying twice?

A. *Somerset Council will have to change the method of delivery to accommodate the available budget. Some services may be cut and non-statutory assets such as public conveniences could be closed.*

Q. Is declaring a Section 114, (Bankruptcy) actually a bad thing? If this happens then surely central government has to act to put things right, especially if more and more Councils are in the same position. The current approach of asking parishes to take on more responsibility and bear the costs is not solving the problem but kicking it further down the road.

A. *If a Section 114 is issued then Government Inspectors will come in to assess how the Council can get to the position of a balanced budget. They will have to deliver the statutory services such as adult social care, children's services and waste collection but this will not be tailored to the needs of individual communities. It will also not solve the problem. The services still need to be delivered but instead of managing it ourselves, it will be in the hands of an independent assessor.*

Q. Kilve PC - How do we budget and set our precept when we don't know the costs of services and assets? We are precepting but we have no idea of the amount of money involved! Parish Councillors are volunteers and can't be expected to take on this additional level of responsibility especially around managing staff.

A. *If the parish(es) wish to take on a service or asset they should first write to the email devolution@somerset.gov.uk expressing an interest.*

There were other questions raised of a similar nature by the other parishes, especially around lack of time to make informed decisions, the disparity in precept base and level of service needed in different geographies. It was recognised that Adult Social care could be indirectly adversely impacted by the cuts due to the knock-on effect of rural isolation. It was also

concerning that early intervention and preventative work would reduce.

Item 22: **Public Question Time**

No questions or comments were received in advance of the meeting.

Item 23: **Update on Actions from the Previous Meeting**

These were picked up in later agenda items.

Item 24: **Highways - Working group**

Highways concerns were highlighted as the main topic for exploration at the inaugural LCN meeting. It was now envisioned that a working group would be set up to investigate how the Somerset Council Highway service could be improved and delivered.

Spaxton PC had demonstrated an area of good practice with their sign cleaning and signpost asset mapping in their parish. They were happy to share their learning with other parishes in the LCN area. This was one theme that could be explored through a Highways sub-group.

Concern was expressed about where the volunteers to serve on the working group would come from. Cllr Anne Reed (Wembdon PC) stated that it was difficult enough to recruit parish councillors, without adding to their existing workload.

Despite a long discussion about the amount of highways work that needed progressing, nobody came forward to volunteer. It was asked that some idea of the workload and time commitment were clarified, so that volunteers understood what they were signing up for. Some Councillors wanted to take the matter back to their respective parishes to see if this was something that they wanted to pursue.

The Chair expressed his disappointment that the subgroup was unable to proceed. He asked that when the LCN met in the New Year, this matter was revisited, and volunteers were found to take the work forward.

Cllr Simon Stretton also advised that Enmore PC had recently had the batteries stolen from their Speed Indicator Devices (SID)s in the village. These had to be replaced at a cost of £130 to the parish. He had been made aware that preventative locks could be fitted to the device to ensure that the batteries were not taken. (The locks could be purchased online and cost £65 each). He had the details if other parishes wished to follow up with him.

Item 25: **Environmental Concerns**

The Chair highlighted that the emptying of septic tanks did not fall under the nitrate planning restrictions, as they did not outfall into the main sewer.

Flooding Preparedness

Spaxton PC were currently mapping flooding incidents in their parish, so that they could identify mitigation and draw up a comprehensive flood plan. A request was made for officers to provide some examples of good practice and sign-post to existing flood plans which could be adapted and shared. It would be good if this work could be extended beyond the borders of Spaxton PC and encompass near neighbours who may be impacted by the work that Spaxton undertakes.

It was also stated that farmers and riparian owners would have to be held accountable for their use of land management techniques and stream/ditch maintenance.

Item 26: **Priorities for the forthcoming year**

It was considered difficult to set priorities for the coming year due to Somerset Council's financial situation. The Chair echoed the earlier comments and stated he found the position very disappointing.

Cllr Simon Stretton (Spaxton PC) asked for the following action point to be recorded:

“Could the Somerset Councillors present take back the concerns of the Dowsborough LCN, on the current budget uncertainties. Please feedback to us, the actions and timescales that Somerset

Council will commit to, in order to assist us (the parishes) with our precept setting in the coming months.”

The LCN Development Lead, Kate Hellard agreed to take this back and follow up with Cllr Theo Butt Philip.

It was also requested that Planning Officers were asked to attend to inform the LCN at a strategic level on the Local Plan, and planning enforcement. It was important that communities had a voice when it came to planning the infrastructure such as health centres, transport links and community hubs. (It was generally agreed that the LCN was not the place to talk about individual applications, where the responsibility lay with the respective parish as a recognised consultee).

Item 27: **Communications, developing methodologies and identifying good practice**

A new dedicated email address has been set up for the Dowsborough LCN. Queries can be sent to Dowsboroughlcn@somerset.gov.uk.

Loretta Whetlor advised that Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) would be holding their Annual General Meeting at the Edgar Hall, Somerton on the 2 December at 10am. Cllr Bill Revans would be in attendance. Any parishes wishing to attend were advised to contact Sam Winter at SALC. sam@somerset-alc.org.uk.

Item 28: **Suggested agenda items for the next meeting including start times**

A revised start time of 6.30pm was suggested, to allow more time for discussion. This was put to the vote and rejected. Most attendees said that 7pm was more realistic to allow commuting to the various venues around the Dowsborough LCN.

Cllr Peter Major (Wembdon PC) asked if planning development and enforcement could be considered as a future agenda item. This was echoed by Sue Goss (Stogursey PC).

Cllr John Vassalli (Durleigh PC) - There was a particular concern

around the large-scale development at Cokerhurst Farm, Wembdon which would involve a traffic regulation order for the A39 and a reduced speed limit of 20mph whilst the work was ongoing. There were concerns that there would be rat-running along Skimmerton Lane to avoid the main road, and perhaps it would be a good idea to enforce one-way traffic whilst the site works were happening? It was requested that an invitation was extended to Mike Smith (Cavanna Homes) so that he could provide an update on the development work. (To be extended to attend the Highways Subgroup once formed).

Item 29: **Dates for future meetings**

Wednesday 31 January, 2024 at 7pm. (Venue to be confirmed)

Monday 18 March, 2024 at 7pm. (Venue to be confirmed).

Contact officer for meeting: LCN Team lcn@somerset.gov.uk or
Dowsboroughlcn@somerset.gov.uk.