

Local Community Networks

Annual report 2024/25



Contents

Local Community Networks (LCNs).....	3
Foreword.....	4
Introduction	5
LCN Link Officer Team	6
Local Community Network Chairs 2024-25.....	7
Priorities.....	8
Climate and Environment.....	9
Food Resilience	10
Emergency Planning.....	11
Flooding Protection and Prevention.....	12
Highways and Road Safety.....	13
Children and Young People	14
Active Travel	15
Health and Wellbeing.....	16
Economic Prosperity	17
Housing, Infrastructure Needs and Planning	18
Housing and Planning.....	19
Connectivity and Transport	20
Connectivity and Transport.....	21
Community Safety and Policing	22
Looking Forward - The Year Ahead.....	23
Contact Us	24

Local Community Networks (LCNs)

Purpose

Local Community Networks 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.

"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 covering every city, town, and parish within the local authority area.

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



Foreword

It was always the case that the creation of a single unitary authority to cover Somerset would necessitate new ways of working, to enable Somerset Council to operate as close to the communities we serve. Local Community Networks (LCNs) provide an opportunity for a form of locally-based partnership working which has the potential to harness power of local communities, together with the public sector, the business community and the VCFSE, to understanding of local issues and bring both local and county-wide resources together to implement solutions.

In some areas LCNs are a brand new way of working, in others they represent just the latest in a series of evolving structures and approaches to community working which have been developed and embedded over time. Over the past year LCNs have really started to deliver the tangible benefits that was always their intended output. This report highlights some of the key areas where, working through LCNs, local communities are taking actions to help address their unique challenges.

Each of our 18 LCNs is different – from the most sparsely populated to the predominantly urban covering the coast and a huge range of villages, market towns and one cathedral city. And because they are so different, each has adopted different ways of working to reflect their different cultures, challenges and priorities. As each LCN develops differently, we will look for opportunities, through regular meetings of the LCN chairs and vice chairs, and through the work of our dedicated team of LCN Link Officers, to spread best practice between LCNs and find opportunities to share learning.

As we are now two years into the LCN programme, it is right that we take time this year to properly review what has worked well, what hasn't and where changes need to be made. Over the coming months I look forward to visiting more LCNs and finding what we need to be doing to help ensure Somerset Council truly is delivering for and empowering the communities we serve.

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

Introduction

The 2024/25 Local Community Network annual report provides an overview of the work of Somerset Council's 18 Local Community Network (LCN) areas. The report celebrates the work of our partners and highlights how we have facilitated local collaboration to deliver improved outcomes for residents and communities.

LCNs have been responsible for a wide range of activities, supporting projects, aiding networking opportunities, creating forums for influence, and being a conduit for enhanced communication between Somerset Council and its community partners.

This report focuses on our communities' key priorities. These have been identified across the county by gathering a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data to allow key issues to emerge alongside lived experience. This data has been collated at a local level, drawing on various partners to build a wider picture of an area's demography, including Citizens Advice, housing needs assessments, use of health and wellbeing services, and employment and education statistics. The variety of priorities identified and worked on by our LCNs demonstrates the importance of local voice and ensuring this is evidenced in wider decision-making.

To explore the collection of quantitative data across our LCN areas, follow this **LCN Profiles [Link](#)**

The reputation and influence LCNs, both amongst external partners such as the Parish and Voluntary sector and within Somerset Council, is growing. This facilitative role will continue to be central to how we work with our community representatives and residents.

In order to share ideas, themes and practice across the LCN network we have convened development days, enabling Chairs and Vice Chairs to come together, network, learn from each other and explore participative practices in more detail. The LCN team have shared examples of thematic work across LCNs and they have also convened cross-LCN working groups.

Whilst LCNs have geographic boundaries, there are many issues that cross those boundaries thus work across LCNs is also important, enabling parishes to come together around the topics and issues that matter to them.

LCN Link Officer Team

LCNs are supported by a team of Link Officers who are experienced in working in communities. In addition to bespoke support for the two LCN areas they each manage, where they convene and support the delivery of quarterly main LCN meetings and their associated working groups, Link Officers have:

- Taken an active, strategic and practical role in supporting recent **emergency responses** to flooding, particularly in the Ilminster, South Petherton and Somerton areas; bolstering capacity to have boots on the ground, staff rest centres and support recovery drop-in sessions for residents.
- Continued to work closely with the Emergency Planning and Response team to develop closer links with City, Towns and Parishes to **build and sustain more resilient communities** through a coordinated approach to emergency planning at a parish level, and consideration of longer-term mitigations for flooding and other emergency events.
- Supported the Planning team to deliver early engagement workshops for Somerset's new Local Plan.
- Worked with other Somerset Council services including the Contact Centre, Children's Services (Education and Early Help), Transport, Active Travel, Environment (Biodiversity and Nature Recovery), Economic Development and Highways (inc. Road Safety and Traffic), to engage communities across Somerset to identify place-based priorities, inform strategic planning and thinking and build local initiatives to meet local need.
- Developed their **Parish liaison role** to provide a point of contact for all parishes, answer queries, facilitate improved communication with colleagues and support the development of local projects and initiatives.
- Worked with colleagues across Somerset Council to **develop engagement** opportunities with communities to support the delivery of the Council Plan.
- Worked with Public Health colleagues to develop the **Building Blocks for Health Partnership Programme** in order to collaborate with communities to improve health outcomes for residents through identifying and considering the wider determinants of health and embedding research and evaluation techniques in their practice.
- Supported the delivery of the Parish Conference.
- Built stronger links with the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector, statutory service providers such as the Police, the NHS and parish partners.



Local Community Network Chairs 2024-25



Bryan Knickerbocker
Avalon & Poldens



Diogo Rodriguez
Bridgwater



Kevin Bray
Burnham



Keith Read
Chard & Blackdowns



Jacky Farley
Cheddar & Axbridge



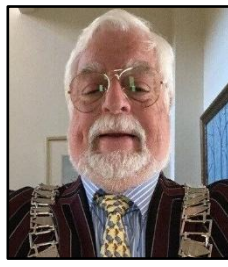
Mike Best
Crewkerne & Ilminster



Simon Stretton
Dowsborough



Steven Pugsley
Exmoor



Philip Spencer
Hestercombe



Sean Dromgoole
Levels & Moors



Mandy Chilcott
Minehead & Watchet



Phillip Ham
Shepton



Ewan Jones
South East Somerset



Dawn Johnson
Taunton



Max Wide
Vale of Frome



Ross Henley
Wellington &
Wiveliscombe



Tony Robbins
Wells & Rural



Mike Hewitson
Yeovil

Priorities

Through LCNs, a variety of evidence-based themes and priorities have been identified to drive activity at a local level. While there are similarities across the county, the distinctiveness demonstrated in each area of focus underscores the value of localised decision-making.

Flood Resilience

Flood prevention and mitigation

Children & Young People

Universal services

Active Travel

Influencing decision-making, route creation

Highways & Road Safety

Better communication

Planning needs

Planning policy and infrastructure needs

Economic Prosperity

Local business support and regeneration

Climate & Environment

Mitigation and adaptation

Health & Wellbeing

Access to services, signposting, collaboration

Connectivity & Transport

Improved broadband, travel routes and services

Climate and Environment

The **Cheddar and Axbridge LCN** Climate and Nature group was established after a meeting with the Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, which gave an insight into Somerset Council's climate-related strategies and how these will impact communities, as well as how they can contribute to them. The group was formed to facilitate communication across the areas, manage nature-oriented groups and act to support Parish Councils make more climate-conscious decisions. Since the first meeting the group has got to know the activities of local organisations, met with Somerset Council officers to understand their role in biodiversity net gain, and begun detailing how Parish Councils can act more climate-consciously. We look forward to seeing how this group grows and develops.

The **Chard and Blackdowns LCN** area is characterised by significant landscape value and areas designated for conservation, so a focus of one quarterly meeting was climate and the natural environment. Somerset Independence Plus spoke about opportunities to retro fit homes for energy efficiency, benefiting not only the environment but occupier health and wellbeing, and the option to use the 'Thermal Imaging Camera Loaning Scheme' to identify need was shared. The Woodland Creation Officer also presented on Somerset's Tree Strategy and the benefits of greater tree cover, including to flood mitigation. Its Environment working group aims to explore these opportunities further.

Due to the impacts of flooding and coastal land slippage (such as experienced at Cleeve Hill, Watchet), the **Minehead and Watchet LCN** took a particular interest in community resilience and emergency planning. There is a collective will to reinvigorate the Coastal Protection Working Group, which was facilitated through the former Somerset West and Taunton Council. This will be an area for development following the Annual General Meeting, where the LCN is welcoming input and presentations from the Environment Agency and senior officers at Somerset Council. It is hoped that this will feed into the ongoing work that is already taking place through the West Somerset Flood Group.



Food Resilience

Exmoor LCN - Moorland Food Bank

The Moorland Foodbank was placed at risk when its venue and volunteer support became uncertain. Since its establishment the foodbank had become a lifeline for residents across the moor experiencing deprivation and social isolation.

The **Exmoor LCN** recognised its value to residents and the role the LCN stakeholders could play in securing its future. Supported and coordinated by the LCN Link officer, a new charity was established, with funding being secured from Somerset Association of Local Council's (SALC's) Health and Wellbeing programme and Somerset Community Foundation's Help Through Winter fund. A new venue was identified, in partnership with Somerset Council and community representatives. The previously empty Riverside Centre was bought back to community use; increasing the capacity of the foodbank to support more residents in a wider geographic area.

The reliable funding source allowed recruitment of a temporary food resilience coordinator to get the organisation onto a constitutional footing, increasing its resilience and operational future. This means the trustees can move forward and begin expanding the reach of the foodbank by increasing access for volunteers and partners. This security led to longer term aspirations to tackle the causes of food deprivation, including debt and employment advice, social opportunities, and increasing access to services at the Riverside Centre.

The Exmoor LCN Link Officer continues to support the project and signposts to various grant opportunities as and when they become available. The **South East LCN** hopes to learn from Exmoor's experience in the relocation of Wincanton's food bank, demonstrating the value of partnership working across boundaries to produce better outcomes for local communities.



Emergency Planning

LCN response to serious flood events

LCN Link Officers directly supported communities experiencing flood events during 2024/25. The team had a role in the immediate emergency response working directly with individuals and local organisations to ensure evacuated residents were supported. We then worked with Emergency Planning colleagues to convene and support flood drop-in events in four communities, enabling us to go on to discuss potential mitigations and preparedness through LCNs.

The Crewkerne and Iminster LCN meeting in January provided a space for sharing and gathering data and local intelligence regarding homes affected by flooding, not previously reported to Somerset Council better informing the emergency response ensuring all residents were supported and enabling effective mapping of flooding areas to support potential, future mitigation measures.

Emergency preparedness

LCNs continue to host Emergency Planning workshops to enable parishes and other partners to work together to better support residents during an emergency. By working together, parishes can ensure that their plans join up with other local parishes and they are able to consider how best to share resources across their local area.

Through the **Wellington and Wiveliscombe LCN** Oake Parish Council and Somerset Council co-delivered a successful and engaging communities prepared workshop, supporting three LCN areas and resulting in a new handout titled "Ten Reasons to Have a Community Emergency Plan" to provide workshop participants with valuable information to share with their fellow councillors and community members.



Flooding Protection and Prevention

Building relationships with key agencies and understanding our places

Several LCN areas have identified flood mitigation and prevention as a key priority. Gaining an understanding of the role of key agencies involved in flood management has been a significant achievement of the **Avalon & Poldens, Levels & Moors, South East Somerset, Wells & Rural** and **Shepton** LCN areas.

Owing to their natural landscapes these areas regularly experience significant flooding. Difficulties communicating with relevant agencies or navigating their services have impacted residents' experience of flood events. LCN meetings have facilitated enhanced relationships between our community partners and key stakeholders including the Somerset Rivers Authority, Environment Agency, Natural England, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, and the Farming Community Network. They have created spaces for access to community grants, understanding the potential of natural flood mitigation and the role of local communities in project delivery, as well as greater links to form across catchment areas to begin better understanding of natural flows of water and their impact. This has resulted in organisations working directly with these key stakeholders to begin developing project plans and to access funds where necessary. The value of local flood groups has also been highlighted at these events, which have created support mechanisms for further groups to develop across the county.

The **South East LCN** area utilised the LCN network to promote the use of localised community flood warning systems such as the PegelAlarm, which was upgraded through grant funding and alerts users to water level activity at telltale sites equipped with monitoring gauges, enabling early flood preparedness and greater resilience to flooding. A Section 19 Flood Investigation report will be used by the LCN's flood working group to identify further opportunities for locally led change that mitigates risk to community members from potential flood events.



South East Somerset



Shepton

Highways and Road Safety

There are Highways, Traffic, and Road Safety Working Groups covering all of Somerset's LCNs. The aim of these working groups is to enhance communication and collaboration between City, Town and Parish councils and Highways and Traffic teams in Somerset Council. Facilitated and convened by the LCN team, the groups meet regularly to identify and discuss local priorities pertaining to Highways issues. Over the last year these have included streetlights and assets, highways and infrastructure planning, bridges and flooding, road safety, speeding, maintenance of the highway infrastructure and Parish Council powers. Meetings are attended by relevant officers from Highways and Traffic teams and, where appropriate, Avon and Somerset Police.

Engagement opportunities with the Road Safety Teams within Somerset Council and Avon and Somerset Police have enabled local partners to make evidenced based decisions regarding traffic management, promote road safety campaigns and use data and local knowledge to enhance road safety measures.

The groups have been a forum for regular communication with officers to support individual and group concerns, as well as an opportunity for community representatives to better understand the decision making and delivery processes of highways maintenance, enabling easier navigation of reporting, requesting, and tracking planned and reactive works. **The Taunton LCN** and **the Wellington and Wiveliscombe LCN** have led the way in supporting communities in navigating Council processes and facilitating self-help. **Taunton LCN** organised a county-wide training session on *one.network* and provided informative presentations. **Wellington and Wiveliscombe LCN** lobbied the Council for the requirement for a formal service agreement for the Enhanced Maintenance programme and use of other contractors for work on SC owned highways, reviewed and tested the digitisation of the LCN level map portal, and Milverton Parish volunteers piloted the highways volunteer training package.

Working Groups have also been a mechanism for the voice of communities to be heard in the work of our transport and infrastructure services. LCNs are beginning to see their voice evidenced in changes being made to how the service area interacts with its partners. The evolution of the pilot Highways Steward scheme into the Enhanced Highways Maintenance Scheme has been supported by LCNs, which have facilitated understanding and the pooling of resources across an area. Similarly, Highways Working Groups have worked together to share and inspire solutions-focused initiatives that address common concerns. Representatives from **Chard & Blackdowns LCN** working group attended at **South East LCN** to share information about volunteer-led activities in Stoke St Mary to clear and maintain local drains and gullies, inspiring parishes to lead and affect positive change.

Children and Young People

LCNs across the county have begun exploring the experiences of children and young people in their areas, considering how places can better meet their needs. This includes groups in the **Burnham LCN**, who are working alongside existing community partnerships to facilitate knowledge and information sharing, focusing on rural areas, and the **Taunton LCN** that have a thriving Young Peoples working group.

The **Hestercombe LCN** identified Children and Young People as a priority, forming a working group with local council and community representatives, as well as those from key organisations such as the Somerset Youth Work Alliance. They researched existing provisions and barriers to access, presenting their findings alongside a young person's experiences to the LCN, driving support and funding for continued service provisions across the parishes.

They have since secured the SALC Seed Grant to further explore the needs and aspirations of young people across the LCN area. This included holding focus groups and engaging with local schools. This extensive research further highlighted a need for more extensive access to extra-curricular opportunities for young people and led to the group securing £35,000 to support activities. This funding has allowed the delivery of activities in sports, music, art, and drama for young people in the Hestercombe LCN area.

Youth Provision Scoping

The **Wells and Rural LCN** facilitated discussions around the needs of young people across the rural areas of our LCN. This identified a lack of sufficient provision for children without easy access to Wells and led to Wells City Council, supported by the YMCA and Connect Somerset Champions, making a successful application to SALC's health and wellbeing programme to fund a full scoping exercise into the existing availability of youth activities and the needs of young people across the whole area.



Active Travel

Cross LCN Active Travel Steering Group

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

The meetings have covered a wide range of topics related to active travel, cycling infrastructure, and community initiatives, with participants sharing their experiences and discussing potential collaboration and future plans, with a view to look to work across LCNs to bring together a range of partners to coordinate and share ambitions across Somerset.

Levels and Moors LCN Route Progress

Driven by a desire to create safe and unbroken walking and cycling links across the area, the LCN established a working group to facilitate collaborative working across the parishes and progress their shared ambitions. A key part of the route is to connect Bridgwater to South Petherton across the Levels. The group has enabled parishes to work alongside key partners, such as the Landscape Recovery Programme, and place-based organisations such as the Langport Commoners and The King Alfred Pilgrimage.

The group has made significant progress and with the support of volunteers has begun work on creation of safe paths on the route. This means parishes are now connected in a way that can support the physical and emotional wellbeing of residents across the LCN area.

Works have been collectively funded through Parish Councils, who continue to explore grant funding opportunities and learn from projects across the county, such as The Strawberry Line.



Health and Wellbeing

LCNs such as **Chard and Blackdowns, South East and Yeovil**, have identified a desire to better support residents' health and well-being, and have started the process of better understanding the specific strengths and areas of improvement for residents, using surveys and wider community engagement. These activities have been directed by data and information available through Primary Care Networks across the county, enabling communities to build a detailed picture of the health and social care offers and statutory service delivery in their area, informing the direction of their health and well-being work. This has been enabled by wider access to funding for parish partners through the SALC health and wellbeing programme, providing an opportunity for parishes to consider their residents need and deliver targeted projects. LCNs have facilitated this information sharing across wide areas and been a place for collaboration across boundaries.

Yeovil LCN's deep dive into data about their LCN area prompted discussion around key data insights, including notable health disparities in mental wellbeing, diabetes and cardiovascular health, and in rates of crime and anti-social behaviour. These learnings present opportunities to engage with partner organisations to develop targeted interventions that reduce inequities and improve outcomes in hotspot areas, such as through initiatives to promote healthier lifestyles. Opportunities were also identified to build on Yeovil Town Council's existing work to install defibrillators, targeting areas of higher risk as well as considering bleed kit installation and delivery of First Aid training in these areas.

Yeovil, Dowsborough, Levels and Moors, and **Shepton Mallet LCNs** participation in the Community Solution Seekers Project (CSSP), led by The Community Council for Somerset (CCS), provides a welcoming space where local people can come together to further explore these opportunities and other ways to improve health and wellbeing in their communities, through the development of collaborative, solution-focused joint action plans and by equipping participants with skills and knowledge to drive positive change.

The Avalon and Poldens LCN Health and Wellbeing Working Group is made up of service providers, medical professionals, Parish Councillors, action groups, and voluntary organisations. They have come together to identify unifying concerns and issues relating to the health and wellbeing of residents. The makeup of health and wellbeing services across the area is complex, so a key priority of the group has been ensuring residents have a clear picture of what services and resources are available to them. This had led to the beginnings of a community mapping exercise and discussions around how to best reach isolated individuals. Access to nature, key services, and social opportunities was also identified as a priority, leading to a focus on active travel and connectivity.

In order to address loneliness and isolation The Shepton LCN are working with the Connect Somerset Champion to consider how access to community health and wellbeing services can be improved. They are considering what the barriers are and opportunities for community transport solutions, learning from neighbouring areas, engaging a range of partners, mapping existing provision and exploring funding options.

Economic Prosperity

Exmoor LCN Regeneration Working Group

A collection of stakeholders from across the Exmoor area have come together to explore topics such as connectivity, business space, employment and skills opportunities, access to childcare, transport links, all with a view to contributing to broader economic prosperity. The group has formed links with Connecting Devon and Somerset, Employment and Skills services, Exmoor National Park, and Exmoor Hill Farming Network. It has developed a set of key recommendations, which include attracting funding to enable the appointment of a Rural Business Enabler, explore the marketing of business units and opportunities for business expansion, identify specific gaps and or barriers to employment and training, and considering surveying current broadband and connectivity provision to identify gaps and enable expansion.

Bridgwater LCN Business Support Working Group

In collaboration with Sedgemoor Chamber, Bridgwater and Taunton College, and LCN members, a group focused on business support developed from wider discussions facilitated by the LCN. The group has been driven by an identified gap in employment and training opportunities, as well as insufficient business support and provisions. The group began by surveying businesses in the LCN area and gaining input from a wide range of partners. The Chamber of Commerce analysed the survey findings and the issues of highest concern were the difficulty in recruiting good quality candidates for vacancies and the long-term commitment of employees. There was an indication of apprenticeships being appreciated and working well. Training needs highlighted with a mix of being delivered both online and in person preferred but on the job training was felt to be most beneficial and appropriate for employers. The range of survey results and findings will now go on to influence the courses in consideration by Bridgwater and Taunton College and also to form up to date events and training offered by the Chamber of Commerce. It is hoped that the working group will continue into the future to further explore and influence activities within the town.

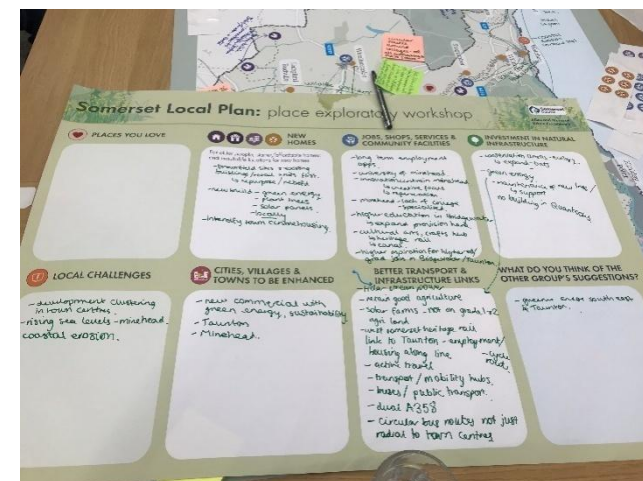
Housing, Infrastructure Needs and Planning

Early Local Plan Engagement

A Local Plan is a document that local authorities must produce to inform where and how growth happens in their area. It is a document that is used to determine planning applications in the future as well as promote investment for growth and development in the area. More than this, it will shape sustainable, healthy, resilient and economically productive places over the coming decades.

Working closely with the council's planning team, the LCN team supported early engagement workshops for stakeholders to help shape vision, objectives and policies from the start. LCN areas such as **South East and Shepton Mallet** facilitated additional 'mini' workshops to ensure every opportunity for participation in the non-statutory pre-consultation phase, reflecting the importance of LCNs as being the 'voice' for our communities.

The feedback will be used to inform the development of the new Somerset Local Plan, ensuring it reflects the community's input and addresses key issues and opportunities. In addition, the priorities explored and detailed in each community will help shape wider priorities for the LCNs in the coming year. The workshops highlighted existing strengths in communities as well as the pressures, particularly in the infrastructure needs of communities.



Housing and Infrastructure

Vale of Frome LCN - Understanding and informing decision making

The **Vale of Frome LCN** identified a potential mismatch between local need for services such as GPs, school places and transport links and, allocations being made through the planning process in S106 requirements of developers. They invited decision makers in Somerset Council's Highways and Transport team, Education and NHS colleagues to join the LCN partners to discuss the following questions: How are the infrastructure needs of the community assessed and what is the process for decision making? If all of the currently proposed development in the Vale of Frome LCN area is realised, what do you foresee the future needs of the area to be? How can we work with you locally to influence and support the decision making? The discussion was informed by data gathered locally and by the health and education data held by the NHS and Somerset Council. Through building greater understanding of the issues faced by the community and the decision making processes the discussion concluded with a commitment by all partners to work more closely together in the future to build locally led delivery plans.

Building Relationships with Housing Partners

The **Exmoor LCN** and **Minehead & Watchet LCN** have each identified challenges related to rising housing costs in West Somerset. This is compounded by a high proportion of low-paid employment opportunities dominated by agriculture and tourism. To begin exploring this issue, Exmoor LCN has built strong relationships with Exmoor National Park's housing enabler and local plan officer, as well as local housing associations and developers. Collectively they have begun gathering evidence on the gap between income and house prices, gaining knowledge on the challenges in delivering rural housing, exploring local housing initiatives, and identifying land and development opportunities to be fed back to Somerset Council. The LCNs have also promoted the use of Homefinder and raising awareness around local lettings and upcoming social housing developments.

Connectivity and Transport

For residents in the **Dowsborough LCN** area, both digital and physical connectivity have been identified as priorities. The lack of broadband provision and accessibility is an ongoing frustration for many residents. A presentation from Connecting Devon and Somerset was welcomed in March 2025, giving the most up to date situation across the area, which has a number of issues to tackle, due to the rurality of the areal. A previously awarded contract to connect thousands of homes had been unsuccessful and was being retendered at that time. Whilst the presentation might not have offered the positive outcome that was hoped for, it opened doors for an update in the coming year and gave individual parishes an opportunity to explore their own local options too, which for some has included representation to their MP. This topic will remain as one of interest until the whole area is adequately supplied with reliable broadband.

Physical connectivity across the area is limited by an identified lack of public transport. The LCN welcomed a presentation about the Slinky, on-demand bus service offered in the area. The Slinky service is currently developing digital booking capability (as well as by phone), so responding to demand more closely and efficiently. There is scope to supply a local Community Transport option which could be explored in more detail in the near future.

Avalon and Poldens LCN - Step, Ride, Thrive

Driven by the need to increase access to services, the Avalon and Poldens LCN received a SALC health and wellbeing grant to launch a pilot project to increase access to natural wellbeing spaces. The project has enabled increased public transport access to the Avalon Marshes Centre, which provides key wellbeing services. In partnership with On Your Bike CIC, the project includes the availability of bike maintenance in community settings. This initiative will promote healthy and safe active travel. The pilot project will be used to build evidence of the benefits of accessing well-being in nature and increase active travel across our communities.



Connectivity and Transport

Wellington and Wiveliscombe LCN- reinstating valuable connections

Public and community transport has been a key focus for the Wellington and Wiveliscombe LCN. Alongside a campaign by the Wivey-Welly Bus User Group advocating for better and more reliable bus services, and a petition to restore the bus route between Wiveliscombe and Wellington, the LCN working group considered practical steps that could be taken. This group, which includes representatives from Town and Parish Councils, local bus user groups, the Wiveliscombe Area Partnership, and Transition Town Wellington, submitted a set of recommendations and ideas to Somerset Council. These have largely been reflected in bus service change and Slinky Service improvements made this year.

Taunton LCN

The Taunton LCN received multiple presentations on the Taunton Transport Hub from Somerset Council. These presentations served as valuable opportunities for stakeholder engagement and feedback regarding this ambitious project, which aims to enhance travel experiences to and from the town. Feedback emphasised the importance of creating a transport hub that not only serves bus services but also incorporates active travel options and public realm improvements.



Community Safety and Policing

Building relationships between community representatives and policing partners

LCNs have been a forum for communication between Avon and Somerset Police and community partners, such as parish councils. This has enabled greater understanding of policing priorities across the county and how these align with lived experiences within communities. This includes the **Cheddar and Axbridge LCN** which was able to delve into the challenges around rural theft and the value of community groups and the quick communication between residents and the Police. The **Exmoor LCN** has welcomed the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner to give an overview of the development of the police and crime plan and the key priorities within it, enabling engagement and collaboration with neighbourhood teams and local councils. In order to maintain good relations and receive regular updates, **Minehead & Watchet LCN** has regular engagement opportunities at main meetings to provide updates, highlight crime prevention initiatives, and share intelligence.

Yeovil LCN continues to develop links between police, community safety and crime reduction partners, such as the Yeovil Crime Reduction Team, to address concerns around local crime and anti-social behaviour, whilst recognising that the experiences of rural parishes differ from town and urban parishes. The Yeovil Neighbourhood Police Team spoke about enforcement powers for specific types of anti-social behaviour affecting localised areas and highlighted issues with a decline in public reporting. The LCN was utilised to promote the launch of a QR code system that streamlines ASB and crime reporting, and an opportunity was identified to improve enforcement of Public Space Protection Orders through better partnership working, with work still in its infancy, whilst new partnerships are being explored by the Yeovil Crime Reduction Team to implement digital crime reduction solutions

Looking Forward - The Year Ahead

In the coming year we will be undertaking a review of how Somerset Council works with it's communities and ensuring that we are using our resources appropriately. While this takes place we will be:

- Continuing to build the membership of LCNs around topics that matter to our communities
- Developing more mechanisms to share good practice, ideas and work on common themes across LCN boundaries
- Ensuring we have a fully staffed Link Officer team providing dedicated capacity to all LCN areas and to provide a local touch point for City, Town and Parish Councils and other community partners
- Working with services across Somerset Council to increase and plan for engagement opportunities to inform policy and decision making
- Providing more opportunities to learn about Somerset Council's services and ways of working
- Engaging with our community stakeholders in LCN area to inform service development and practice
- Improving the communication about LCNs, the conversations and work going on in each area and further developing the LCN area of our website
- Having more conversations with residents, partners and LCN stakeholders about the things that matter to them; building locally led and delivered action plans to address opportunities and issues

Contact Us

For more information on any of the activities detailed in this report, please contact lcn@somerset.gov.uk or the individual area inboxes:

Avalonandpoldenslc@somerset.gov.uk

Bridgwaterlc@somerset.gov.uk

Burnhamlc@somerset.gov.uk

Chardandblackdown@somerset.gov.uk

Cheddarandaxbridgelc@somerset.gov.uk

Crewkerneandilminsterlc@somerset.gov.uk

Dowsboroughlc@somerset.gov.uk

Exmoorlc@somerset.gov.uk

Hestercombelslc@somerset.gov.uk

Levelsandmoorslc@somerset.gov.uk

Mineheadandwatchetlc@somerset.gov.uk

Sheptonlc@somerset.gov.uk

Southeastlc@somerset.gov.uk

Tauntonlc@somerset.gov.uk

Valeoffromelc@somerset.gov.uk

Wellingtonandwiveliscombelslc@somerset.gov.uk

Wellsandrurllc@somerset.gov.uk

Yeovilllc@somerset.gov.uk