



# **Local Community Network**

## Yearly Report 2023/2024

**Minehead and Watchet**



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# Local Community Networks (LCNs)

## Purpose

“To be the focus for community development, engagement and partnership working at local level; improving the outcomes for residents through establishing strong connections between Somerset Council, our communities and partners.”

## Map

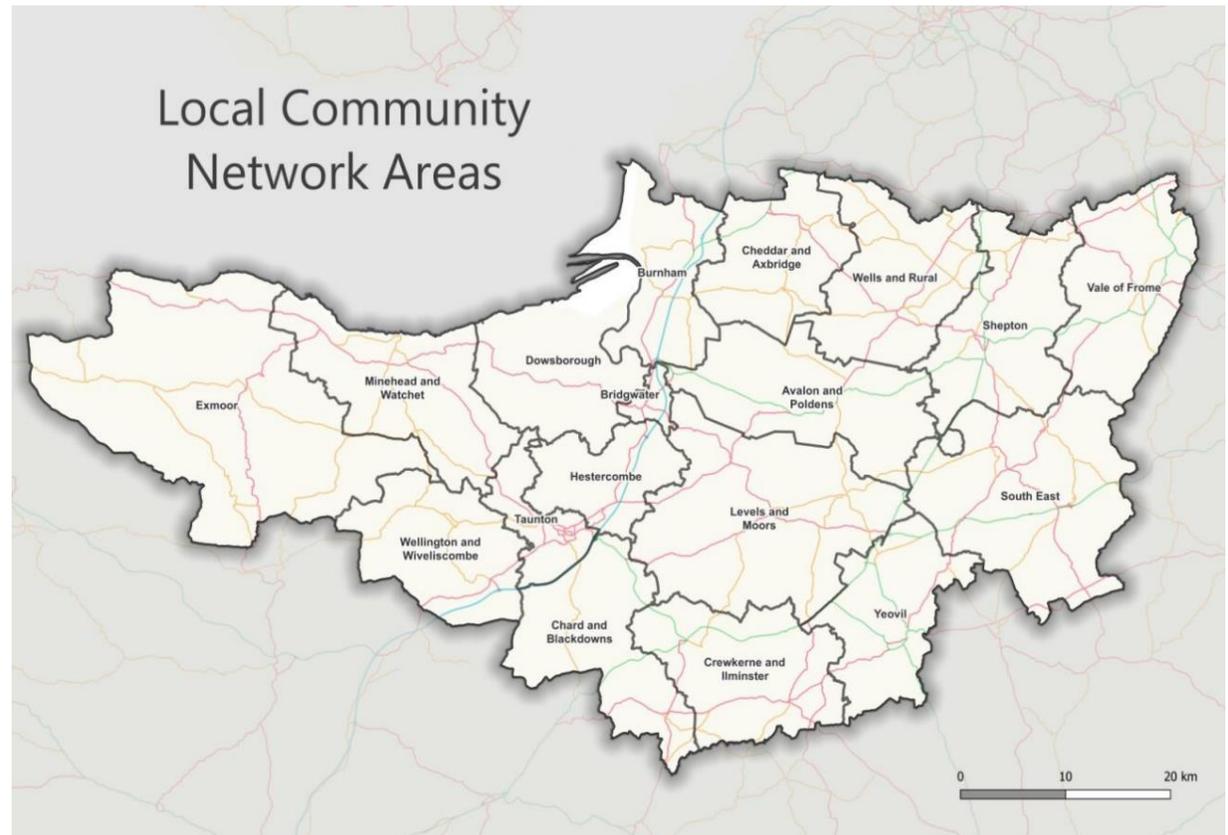
There are 18 LCNs in total.

They cover every city, town, and parish within the local authority area.

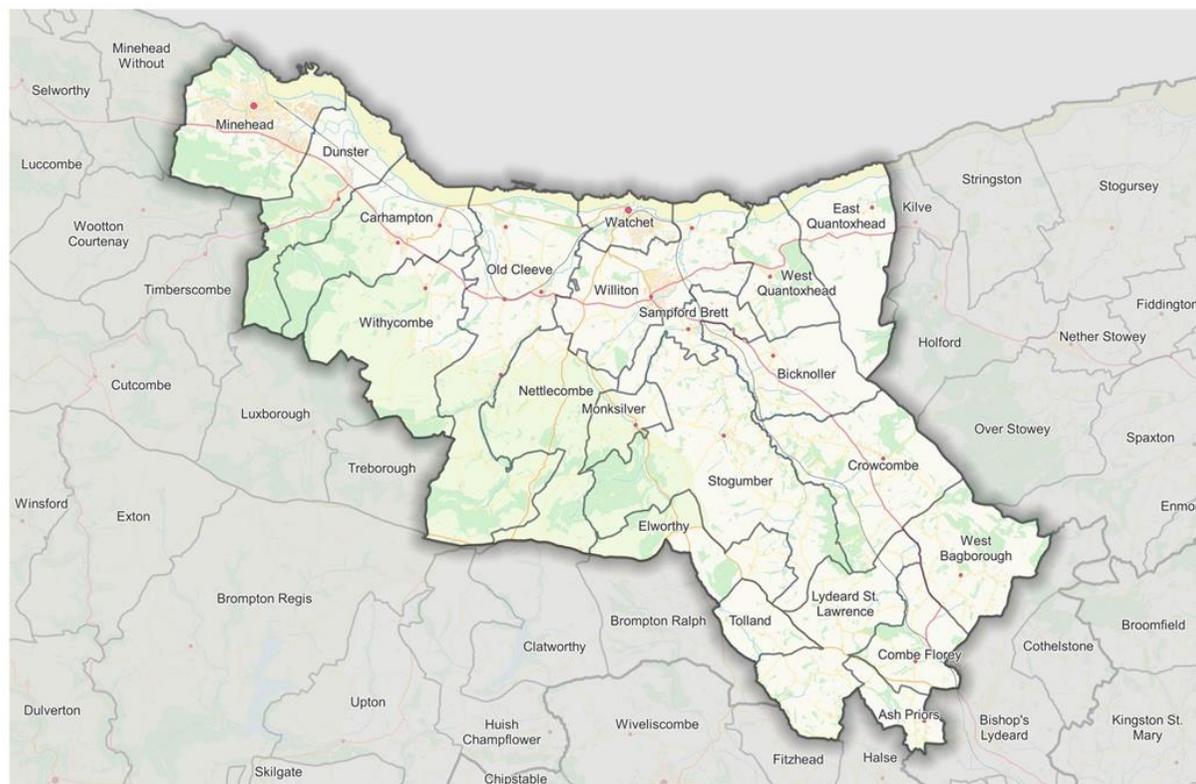
Full details of each LCN, including their demographics, characteristics, agendas, and meeting dates, can be found online.

Please visit the following webpage:

[www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/)



# Minehead and Watchet LCN



Situated within West Somerset and including some coastal parishes, this LCN has the Bristol Channel to the north, and is bordered by Exmoor National Park on one side, and The Quantock Protected Landscape (formerly known as Outstanding Area of Natural Beauty) to the east.

It has a population of 27,200. And there are approximately 11,900 households. The main settlement areas are the small towns of Minehead and Watchet.

There are 21 parishes consisting of the two principal towns, 16 parish councils and three parish meetings.

Four electoral divisions span this LCN. Dunster, Lydeard, Minehead, Watchet and Stogursey. It's served by eight Somerset Councillors.

The principal industries in the area are tourism and agriculture, although the Hinkley Point development site with over 10,000 workers sits just over the border in the Dowsborough LCN.

Transport links are provided by the A39 and A358 which pass through the LCN area and are essential for the delivery of services, supplies, visitors and commuters. The West Somerset Heritage Railway also serves several of the parishes starting in Minehead and terminating just over the border at Bishops Lydeard.

**Visit:** [www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/lcn-areas/minehead-watchet/](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/lcn-areas/minehead-watchet/)

# Chair and Vice Chair



## Chair: Cllr Andy Sully

Andy is a Somerset Councillor who represents the Lydeard Division, (which also includes some parishes within the Taunton LCN).

As well as being Chair of the Minehead and Watchet LCN, he also recently became Chair of the Harbour Management Advisory Board.

His other appointments include Vice Chair of Audit Committee, and he also serves on the Planning West Committee.

He represents Somerset Council on the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority and on the Taunton Heritage Trust.

## Vice Chair: Cllr Brenda Maitland-Walker

Brenda is Chair of Carhampton Parish Council and the West Somerset Flood Group.

She was formerly a Somerset County Councillor from 2009 to 2013. And also a West Somerset District Councillor between the years of 2015 to 2019.



# Chair's Introduction

"I would like to thank all the town, parish and community organisations who have attended and engaged in the Minehead & Watchet LCN during its inaugural year.

I would like to highlight the efforts of Cllr Brenda Maitland-Walker, our Vice Chair, for all her hard work and for the support she has given me and this LCN with her fantastic knowledge of the area.

Attendance has been extremely good, and the group has made huge strides in improving communications between Somerset Council.

After a serious flood event in our area on 17 September 2023, we held two drop-in meetings so people affected could meet with the flood risk authorities (the Environment Agency, Somerset Prepared, Somerset Rivers Authority and the Local Lead Flood Authority). These meetings were well attended by both businesses and residents.

The establishment of our Highways Working Group in March 2024 brought a number of us together with council staff to work on local issues and concerns. Our first meeting received positive feedback, Everyone who attended felt the group would prove a worthwhile mechanism to progress local actions.

There have been some lively discussions as well as a few challenges, including the possible closure of Williton Recycling Centre, but always throughout, attendees have shown a willingness to act as a collective voice for the whole community, and with a strong desire to improve the wellbeing of all our residents.

I would like to think this LCN will continue to flourish in the coming year as I hand over the role of Chair to someone new. Thanks to all for your support."

**Cllr Andy Sully**

Chair, Minehead and Watchet LCN

# Priorities and Ambitions

## Data

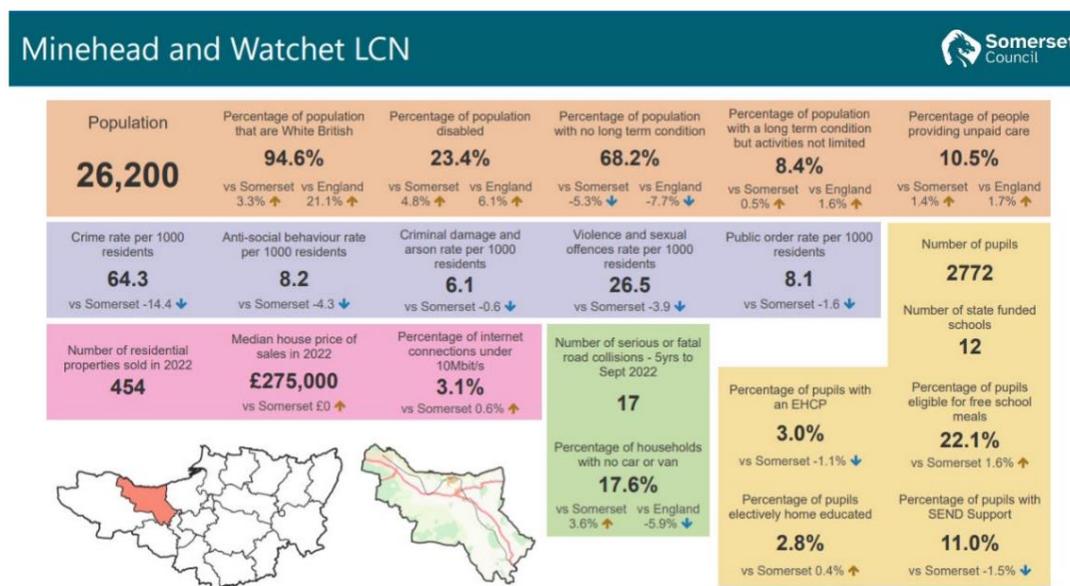
At the initial Minehead and Watchet LCN meeting, attendees were shown a data set (see below). It provided useful statistical information aimed at generating initial thoughts and discussions, unique to the local area.

Those present at the LCN were asked to consider what this data meant to them in relation to their specific knowledge of their communities.

They were asked to consider what they felt was important to their residents, local businesses and visitors.

The answers from the data set discussions were grouped into themes.

**You'll find a larger image of the data set at Appendix B of this report.**



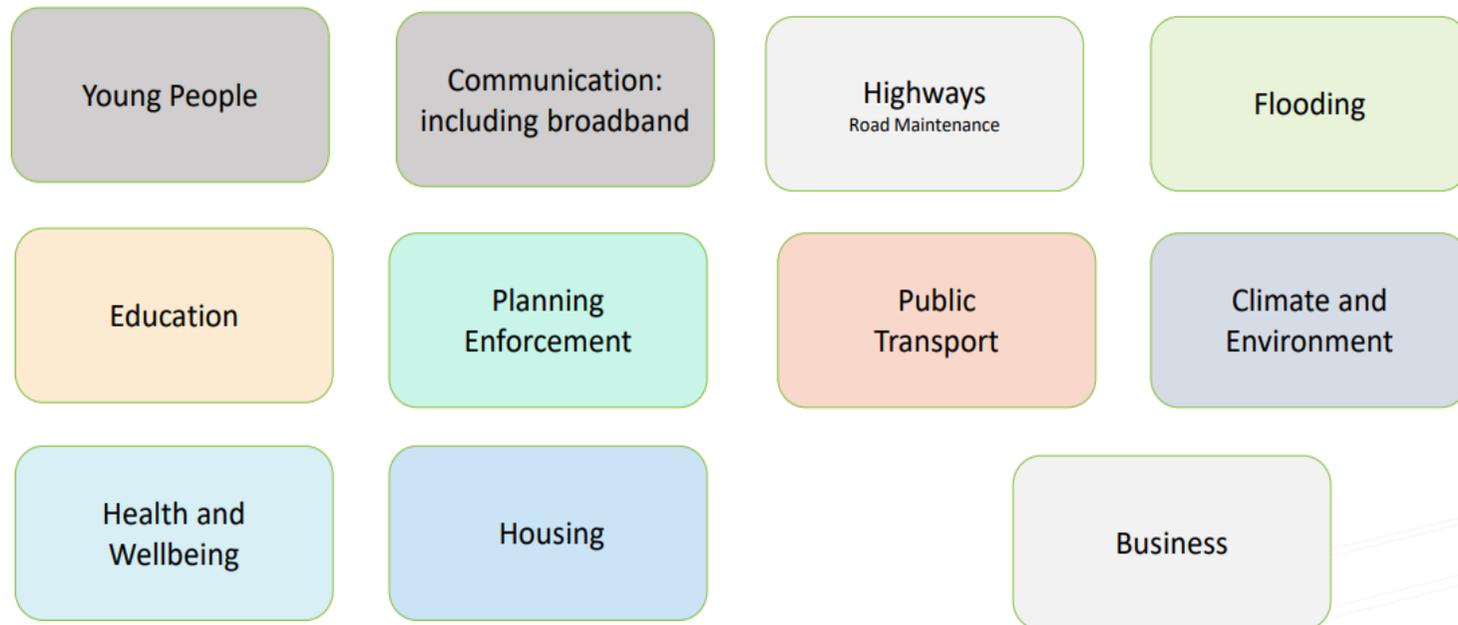
# Priorities and Ambitions

## Themes

The initial meetings of the LCN focused on providing space for representatives to meet, get to know each other and begin to identify local priorities.

The process has taken time and has involved bringing people with different networks and existing relationships together within the newly defined LCN area. This has started to draw out shared aims, objectives and challenges in themes.

At the July meeting the LCN discussed the issues they felt were pertinent to the area. They then were asked to take the top three and prioritise them in order of importance.



# Priorities and Ambitions

## Minehead and Williton LCN - Themes / Topics

1st choice            5pts  
 2nd choice            3pts  
 3rd choice            2pts  
 Others                 1pts

### Scoring preference from the night

Themes	Online	Table 1	Table 2	Table 3	Table 4	Table 5	Table 6	Total
Young People	1.5		1.5			2.5		5.5
Education	1.5		1.5			2.5		5.5
Health and Wellbeing	2	5	2					9
Communication including broadband						2		2
Planning Enforcement								0
Housing		2		2			2	6
Highways					2	3	5	10
Public Transport	5		5	5	3			18
Flooding				3	2		3	8
Climate Change / Environment								0
Business					1.5			1.5
Employment		3			1.5			4.5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>70</b>						

The themes have been colour coded where they are considered to overlap or interlink.

Thus Health & Wellbeing was strongly considered to be linked to Housing

Young People and Education were considered interlinked

Highways, Flooding and Climate Change/Environment all impacted on each other

Business, Employment and Connectivity were interlinked

# Priorities and Ambitions

As a result it was decided:

- to establish a Highways working group, to improve communication between Somerset Council and local residents, and explore the possibility of a Highway Steward Scheme.
- to promote Homefinder Somerset and provide a better understanding of the local lettings policy especially in relation to the new council housing development at Rainbow Way, Minehead.
- to provide updates on the No28 Bus Service, especially where proposed changes could adversely impact local communities.
- To gather data on recent flooding events, support and advise and improve resilience where possible.

## Financial Emergency

Due to the work resulting from the Financial Emergency being declared in November 2023, the other priorities of the Minehead & Watchet LCN were sidelined as the parishes concentrated on setting their precepts around the possible devolution of assets and services.

# LCN Meetings

The Inaugural meeting of the Minehead and Watchet LCN was hosted by Crowcombe Parish Council and was extremely well attended.

A request was made to base future LCN meetings at the former Council Chamber in West Somerset House, as this was seen as the historic hub and central gathering place for most of the district.

Due to connectivity, affordability and accessibility this was to become the preferred venue, as the Chamber can provide good facilities and adequate car parking.

The April meeting had to be re-located due to the Police Crime Commissioner Election, and was moved at short notice to the Elworthy, Monksilver & Nettlecombe (EMN) Hall.

Speakers at the Minehead & Watchet LCN in year one included Maureen Smith talking about the West Somerset Community Land Trust and Bel Deering from Somerset Rivers Authority.

Three of the Somerset Council Executive also visited to discuss items pertinent to their portfolios: Cllr Val Keitch (Associate Lead Member for Localities (LCNS) and Public Health, Cllr Dixie Darch, Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, and Cllr Theo Butt Philip, Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources.

The Minehead & Watchet LCN is most grateful for their input.

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



West Somerset House, Williton



EMN Community Hall, Monksilver

# Working Groups

## Housing/Homefinder workshop

An online presentation was held to update the parishes on the Rainbow Way, Minehead housing development. This is the first council housing to be provided to West Somerset in a generation.

Homefinder also provided information on their choice-based lettings scheme and how it would influence the allocation of housing to Rainbow Way.

## Flood Drop in Events / Resilience

At the April meeting, Bel Deering from Somerset Rivers Authority talked about offering support and information to parishes, in particular around flooding, community emergency and resilience planning.

After that meeting, a bespoke workshop was held on 19 June at Minehead Community Centre, to offer practical help and advice to residents.

Rotary Emergency Volunteer Action Group (EVAG) showcased various pieces of equipment that can be sourced to help in the event of flooding. Further support and materials have been offered by the “Somerset Prepared” team.

# Working Groups

## Highways and Traffic Working Group

The first meeting of the working group was held on Friday 22 March at West Somerset House. Attendance was good.

Somerset Council highways and traffic officers explained the history and background to the Highways scheme, which had been first piloted in the Exmoor area.

Local issues and priorities were discussed, and actions agreed. It was agreed that future meetings should be diarised.

Unfortunately due to elections and conflicting deadlines, this did not happen until the latter part of June 2024.

It is hoped that in the future invitations will be extended to include a representative from Street Sweeping, Active Travel and Bridges and Structures.

A recommendation will be made at the AGM to continue with the Highways subgroup and build on this foundation.

# Achievements and Outcomes

- **Highways Working Group**

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

- **Improved Communication**

Parishes, stakeholders, partners and Somerset Council talk to each other. Key messages can disseminate quickly via LCN meetings and/or the LCN Link Officer. Most notably demonstrated when Somerset Council declared a Financial Emergency in November 2023, and advised that the Williton Recycling Centre was under threat of closure.

- **Events / Workshops**

Following the Flooding in September 2023, a series of drop-in events were held in Carhampton and Minehead to capture data and provide information and assistance to residents. This also led to a well-attended resilience workshop being held in June 2024, to inform parishes on how to prepare, write and update their emergency plans.

- **Working with Partners**

There is an opportunity for partners and other public services to reach a wider audience. Avon & Somerset Police are in attendance and advise the LCN on crime prevention and local campaigns aimed at improving the safety of rural communities. This results in better use of time and resources.

# Challenges and Goals

- Sparse populations

Some of the rural parishes have a very low precept base whilst covering a large geographical area. This presents challenges around funding, especially regarding sharing services.

There is a heavy reliance on one of the main towns to cover the administration and manage the finances.

- LCN Staffing resource

The first year of Somerset Council did not have a dedicated LCN Link Officer but relied on an interim team. This meant that whilst some support was provided, resource was stretched and some of the working groups did not get the level of support they might have needed.

- Expanding engagement

The Minehead and Watchet LCN meetings have had good attendance from the parishes and some partner agencies but would benefit from developing better links with its voluntary sector and faith communities.

# Reflections

Minehead and Watchet LCN has worked hard to build strong relationships with parish councils and other partners, both in the public and voluntary sectors over the past 12 months.

It has discussed several topics and priorities and established a Highways Working Group following on from the success of the Exmoor Highways pilot project.

Other working groups will hopefully follow into the new municipal year, now that a dedicated LCN Link Officer is in post.

The LCN has also provided a regular opportunity for face-to-face dialogue with Somerset Council to update and discuss the Financial Emergency and its plans for sustainability with communities.

Attendance has been consistent and the enthusiasm for, and interest generated by the various topical discussions, provides a solid foundation to build collaboration to improve other local issues and outcomes for residents.

**Samantha Murrell**

LCN Link Officer, Minehead and Watchet

## Contacts

Email: [Mineheadandwatchetlcn@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:Mineheadandwatchetlcn@somerset.gov.uk)

Website: [www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/)

Minehead and Watchet LCN: [www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/lcn-areas/minehead-watchet](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/lcn-areas/minehead-watchet)

# Appendices

## Appendix A – Core Membership

### Parishes

Ash Priors  
Bicknoller  
Carhampton  
Combe Florey  
Crowcombe  
Dunster  
East Quantoxhead  
Elworthy  
Lydeard St. Lawrence  
Minehead  
Monksilver  
Nettlecombe  
Old Cleeve  
Sampford Brett  
Stogumber  
Tolland  
Watchet  
West Bagborough  
West Quantoxhead  
Williton  
Withycombe

### Electoral Divisions

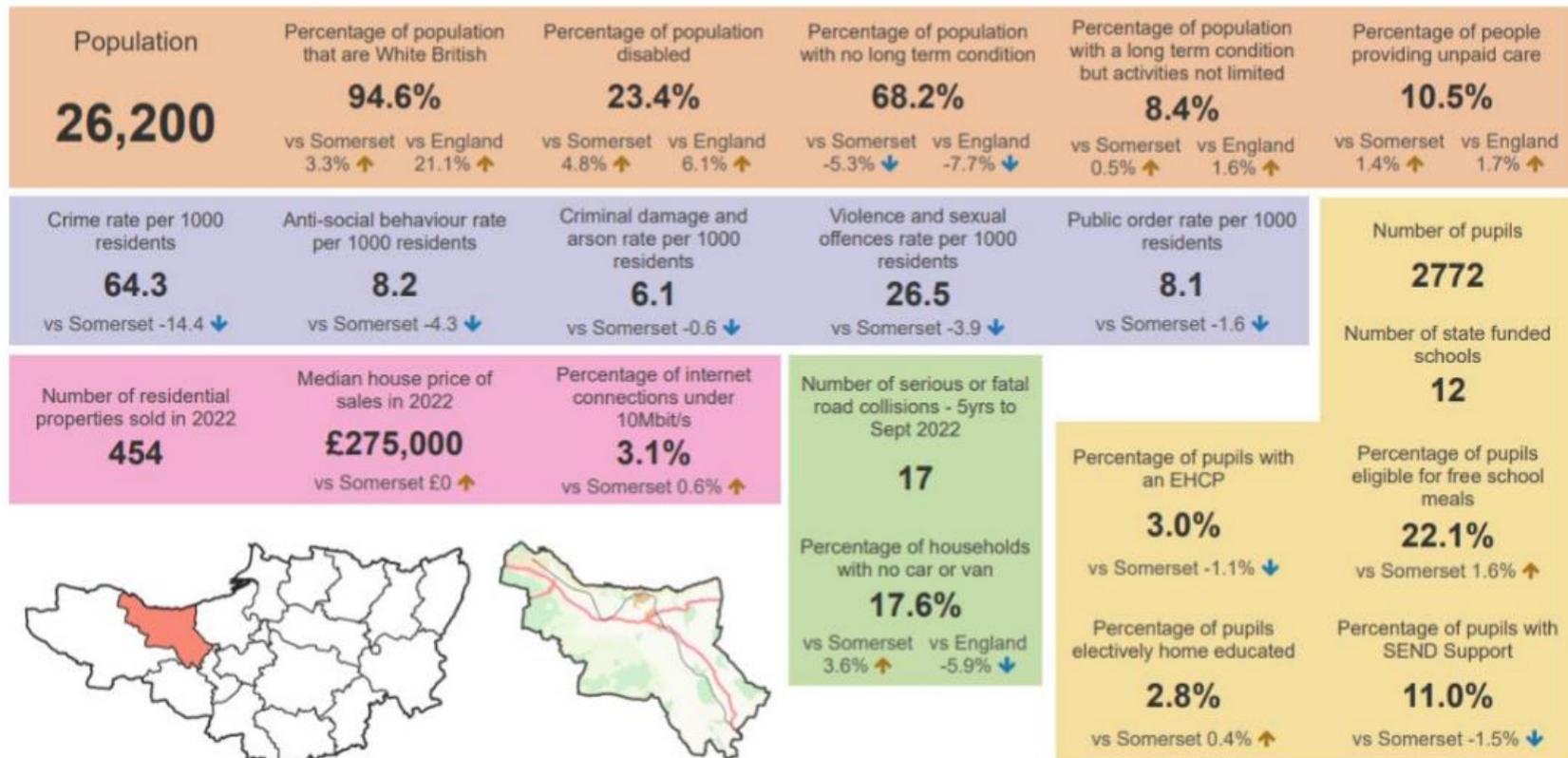
Dunster  
Lydeard  
Minehead  
Watchet and Stogursey

### Organisations

Avon and Somerset Police  
NHS  
Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue  
Education  
Spark Somerset  
Society Local Council Clerks (SLCC)  
Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC)  
Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership (SASP)  
Community Council for Somerset (Village Agents)  
Citizens Advice Somerset  
Department of Work and Pensions  
Somerset Rivers Authority  
Somerset Local Nature Partnership  
WACET (Business Chamber)  
The Onion Collective  
West Somerset Flood Group  
Home Start West Somerset  
Minehead and Coast Development Trust  
AONB  
Minehead Eye  
YMCA  
At West  
Watchet Coastal Community Team

## Appendix B – Data

### Minehead and Watchet LCN



## Appendix C – Meeting Dates and Agenda Items

For more information about Minehead and Watchet LCN meetings please follow the link below:

<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=898&Year=0>

### Thursday 13 July 2023 – Crowcombe Village Hall

- Elect the Chair
- Elect the Vice Chair
- To determine the priorities and areas of focus for the next 12 months
- What is important to residents and businesses in our area
- To agree the frequency of meetings
- To schedule the meetings for the next 12 months

### Thursday 19 October 2023 – West Somerset House

- Highlights of themes discussed at the last meeting
- An introduction to the data available
- Discussion and prioritisation exercise
- Next Steps

## **Tuesday 5 December 2023 – West Somerset House**

- An update on Somerset Council's Financial Position
- Feedback from Flooding Recovery Drop In Events
- Result of the Prioritisation Exercise from the previous meeting
- Feedback from Homefinder Somerset presentation
- Action and next steps

## **Wednesday 7 February 2024 – West Somerset House**

- Update on the No28 Bus Service changes
- Update on Somerset Council's Financial Position
- Closure of the Williton Recycling Centre
- Update on the Highway Steward Scheme and Highways Working Group
- Priorities for action in 2024 – Items for Future Meetings
- West Somerset Community Land Trust

## **Tuesday 30 April 2024 – EMN Hall, Monksilver**

- Update on the LCN Highways Subgroup meeting
- Flooding and Emergency Planning Workshop
- Proposed Topics for future meetings