

**EXMOOR PANEL
MINUTES
Thursday 10 March 2011
Moorland Hall, Wheddon Cross**

Those present:

Steven Pugsley, Chair	Alan Vigers, Exmoor PC
Chris Nelder & Mike Willison, Dulverton TC	Tessa Saunders, ENPA
PCSO Jo Dawson, Avon & Somerset Constabulary	John Bray, Winsford PC
John Davis & Eric Norman, Cutcombe PC	Mike Ellicott, Exford PC
Ann Piper, Selworthy & Minehead Without PC	Keith Ross, WSC
Karin Harwood, Dennis Quick & David Peake, SCC Highways	
Jon Freeman, WSC	Roger Webber, WSC
Corinne Matthews, WSC	Claire Richards, WSC

Member of the public:

Richard Webber, John Edwards and Jeremy Hickman

Community Concerns – Economic Development

Corinne Matthews, Economic Regeneration & Tourism Manager, WSC, stated that when she last reported to the Panel it was on work that was planned. The purpose of her report tonight was to update members on some of those actions, as follows –

- Much work had started on the West Somerset Employment, Skills and Enterprise plan funded from Working Neighbourhoods Funding and other successful funding bids.
- The Council had successfully supported SCC in placing some 18 young people into Future Jobs Fund vacancies in the District, and utilizing WNF had extended 4 of the six-month placements for a further 6 months.
- Supporting two Apprenticeship Programmes where both providers will be responsible for organizing the appropriate training for apprentices and it was hoped that, where possible, the training will be delivered locally within the West Somerset area. The two programmes were –
 - provided by Somerset Skills and Learning – up to 10 apprenticeship placements offered to businesses operating in the Western Somerset area who are involved with tourism (including hospitality), food and drink, environmental technologies, land management, creative industries and construction. Other areas of work may be considered. Employers are provided with a subsidy of £1,500.
 - provided by the South West Apprenticeship Company will host up to 10 apprentices who will be offered placements with Western Somerset Businesses. Those businesses hosting the placements will be provided with a subsidy of £1,500. The difference between (1) and (2) is that the South West Apprenticeship Company will management the contract of employment with the employee.

- The Council had successfully launched micro-business loan fund working in partnership with the Fredericks Foundation. The Council put in £30,000 into a £100,000 pot, SCC £20,000 and the Fredericks Foundation £50,000 and it was hoped this would go into perpetuity. So far, 3 West Somerset businesses have been supported, with the money from West Somerset Council being ringfenced for West Somerset businesses.
- The Making the Links Project aimed at micro-business support was being delivered on the Council's behalf by North Devon Plus with local project manager, Jenny Carey-Wood, taking the lead.
- A tourism event at the Minehead EYE for activity providers had been a hugely successful event.
- A business networking event for the launch of Making the Links project was planned for 30 March 2011 and was three-fold. The first session will provide an in-sight into the social media opportunities for small businesses to improve their marketing. The second session will be the official launch of the project and the final session is a consultation event being held on behalf of SCC who wish to consult businesses in relation to their Superfast Broadband application for funding to the Government's BDUK programme.
- The Economic Strategy was being reviewed/refreshed for two reasons, one to reflect the current economic conditions and, two, to make sure the Council have the correct policy framework/tool in place to maximize economic impacts and to help minimize diverse impacts arising from the proposed Hinkley Point C development. Key business sectors, including tourism, will be significantly reflected in the strategy.
- On the tourism side, a brochure has again been provided and the Council is working with the Exmoor Tourism Partnership to actively market/distribute that, as well as refreshing Visit Exmoor website and building capacity of the industry to enable them to continue to promote the area as public funding diminishes.

Finally, Corinne advised that the whole nuclear agenda and EDF were taking up a huge amount of her time at the moment.

Richard Webber, Shearwell, and Eric Norman, Rest & Be Thankful, both stated that the biggest problem to their respective businesses was lack of housing for staff. They were both prepared to invest in the area and employ local staff, but for staff employed from outside the district there was a need to house them short-term and this was very difficult. One other difficulty had been the decision of individuals and Housing Associations who would not let them attend meetings to discuss housing issues. Roger Webber advised that, although businesses were expanding, they did not have cash to buy properties to accommodate staff, but one alternative could be that the business proprietor lease a property, put their employees in as tenants and be responsible for the tenancy.

Corinne advised that economic development and housing were linked and there was some visioning around housing, but unfortunately it was not a quick win situation. All that could be done was to continue lobbying, but Housing Associations were being a bit prohibitive who they talk to and this was a concern. She agreed to take the comments back to the Council's Rural Housing Enabler.

It was noted that the Council and the Exmoor National Park were currently in the process of reviewing the LDF process at the moment and in the Park there was a huge demand for houses.

Tessa Saunders, ENPA, advised the Park were hoping to produce a draft plan in the autumn and it was obvious housing for key workers was very important. Consultation on the plan would take place and the Park would look at a range of options and the whole issue of providing housing on Exmoor.

Steven Pugsley stated that Europe works on a regional basis and now that tier was being dismantled there was a concern as to how money would reach areas such as Exmoor. He pointed out that it may be worth looking at if Europe giving money to a National Park area with similar circumstances she could make a case if they are giving to that National Park there is no reason it could not be given to Exmoor as well.

Corinne advised that it would be interesting to see how Local Enterprise Partnerships works and the Council were lobbying hard to ensure they get involved in the next stages.

Mike Ellicott stated that he thought there was a marked decline in the promotion of tourism for our region at a time when more should be done to promote the area more efficiently than at present. Tourism and farming is something the area relies on and more needs to be done to promote and preserve these. South West Tourism is being disbanded and that will not help the situation.

It was agreed that Corinne Matthews would give another update in 12 months time.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor Frances Nicholson; Margaret Rawle, Dulverton Town Council; Geoff Mason, Timberscombe Parish Council; Loretta Whetlor, WSSP; Sergeant Andy Whysall, Avon & Somerset Constabulary; Penny Webber, Selworthy & Minehead Without PC; Mike Gammon, WSC.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 January 2011 and Matters Arising

The minutes were agreed as a true record of the meeting with no matters arising.

3. Highways

Karin Harwood, Performance & Efficiencies Manager, Highways, Traffic Management & Transporting Somerset, Somerset County Council, gave a presentation on performance management. She stated that her primary role at the moment was looking after the highway works contract.

She confirmed that Atkins were awarded the contract in April 2010 for a five-year term to deliver the highway service in partnership with Somerset County Council. The contract value was £28 million per year and the objectives of the contract were to ensure that the service is delivered having due regard to the employer's corporate priorities, strategies and objectives as defined by various documents and plans issued by the employer from time to time. The services procured

include but are not limited to the repair, maintenance, enhancement and improvement works on or adjacent to the highways within Somerset. The objectives of the contract were to achieve continuous improvement in the delivery of the service and the condition of the highway, to measure changes in the performance of the contractor and to link performance rebate and reward payments to actual performance of the contractor.

The required outcome was to ensure performance is monitored and managed in accordance with the Performance Management Regime and the SCC Manager specifies the performance indicators and their targets. Some performance indicators are used for performance rewards as defined in the price list and some services damages.

The contract makes provision for the Council to recover their losses where the contractor is found to be providing low levels of service. In addition, the contract provides an opportunity for the contractor to be awarded a performance bonus if exceptionally good levels of service delivery are received. The Council operate a robust audit regime having the ability to audit the contractor's work in both technical and financial terms. A system approach to audits is taken and "ad hoc" audits are also carried out as and when required.

In summary, the existing highway works contract is completely different than the previous contracts, e.g. in terms of the management, reporting and value for money, and the contractor now has to seek approval for payment on a monthly basis. The County Council has taken back many management roles in order to ensure that the services are delivered efficiently to provide a quality, value for money service for the residents of Somerset.

Following questions raised by those present relating to lack of action with regard to reporting of potholes, Karin advised that, although the area offices/superintendents knew the area well, problems should be reported on the roads and transport number 0845 3459155 in order that the calls could be registered and tracked on the system. She also stressed that, under no circumstances, should members of the public interfere with anyone working on the highway if they were not happy with the work being undertaken; problems should be reported on the 0845 number.

Concerns were raised about the lack of communication between highways and the Police over road closures, night time resurfacing work and the poor quality of resurfacing work undertaken on the road between Wheddon Cross and Luckwell Bridge. In reply, Karin advised that a review of road surfacing works, particularly in Exmoor, would be undertaken in partnership with Atkins and that would also involve looking at the possibility of moving these works to day time works.

Steven Pugsley gave an update following a meeting between highways, Veolia, representatives of the District Council and members of Parish Councils to discuss roadsweeping issues. The outcome of this was that Veolia, who undertake roadsweeping on behalf of the District Council, will in future advise Parishes in advance so streets/roads can be kept free of traffic on the day(s) they will be swept. For most of the moorland villages, this will be on an 8-week cycle. In addition, it had been agreed that highways and Veolia would share information

with each other as far in advance as possible and that highways would submit their list of planned highways works to parishes so they could assist in the monitoring process and remedial action taken where necessary. One further point was that it appeared there were a number of Environment Agency rules relating to the disposal of roadsweepings and Steve Watts from the District Council was in the process of investigating whether these were as stringent as thought and, if so, whether some pressure could be brought at Parliamentary level.

One other issue was that of mud on roads by farmers/landowners not taking their responsibilities seriously and it was highlighted there was a need to talk to the NFU/CLA who represent those with landowning responsibilities to make sure they do keep roadways as tidy as possible.

Finally, it was accepted that a lot of the above points were matters of communication and making sure everyone knows what is happening and when. Peter Radford, County Bridges and Structures Manager, SCC, was quoted as a very good example of how communications and time could be saved by keeping up a good flow of communication between various organisations and everyone involved was very appreciative of that.

Highways Issues

Following discussion at the last meeting about the issue of more signage being erected near historic bridges to prevent over-sized lorries taking these routes, Richard Newby had advised that this was being discussed more fully and hopefully there would be more action on this than in the past.

David Peake reported that works had been completed for the financial year. Surface dressing would begin again in May/June and one phase would be in July/August. He would be writing to all Parish/Town Clerks nearer the time and he asked everyone to let Highways know of any surface dressing requirements for 2012.

Steven Pugsley drew attention to the drainage works undertaken on the road from Coomers Cross to Withypool and reported that the drains appeared to have collapsed again.

Dennis Quick confirmed that the banks in Muddicombe Lane would be dealt with in conjunction with the landowner; Highways would provide the JCB and the landowner would take the debris away.

Alan Vigars raised concerns about what Highways were going to do on the other side of Simonsbath to try and keep people out and in reply, Karin Harwood advised they were looking at a scheme. The landowner had offered some land to widen the area for a turnaround back to the telegraph post. She agreed to speak to Peter Owen to ask him to put an update in the next newsletter. It was noted that the Exmoor National Park were the landowner and Karin Harwood was advised to speak to Matt Harley at the Park.

Meeting Administrator's Note: It was subsequently agreed between David Peake and West Somerset that a link to the list of planned highway works on the SCC website would be placed in the Community Matters Newsletter issued weekly to all parish/town councils by the Council.

However, at the time of the draft notes being circulated, the link on the SCC website was being checked as the one originally given only gave access to the SCC home page.

4. Chairman's Remarks

The Chairman had no remarks.

5. Police Issues

PCSO Jo Dawson advised that since the last meeting there had been –

- 1 dwelling burglaries
- 5 thefts
- 1 public order offence
- 4 criminal damage offences
- 5 other minor offences

this equated to 2 more offences than for the same period last year.

She reported that -

They were still trying to wrap-up Rural Watch and have had a few more responses, but she asked everyone to let her know if they knew of anyone else who might be interested.

To her knowledge, there were no plans to reduce the number of PCSO's.

The Exmoor Team would in future be based at the Dulverton Police Station, although they would initially start their rota at Minehead, they would drive to and work from Dulverton.

The best way of contacting Officers was via the 0845 contact centre number, who would then email the Officer(s) responsible.

6. Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service Issues

No member of the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service could be present, therefore Panel members did not receive an update.

7. Local Authority Budget Updates

Steven Pugsley confirmed that West Somerset Council had agreed to support the topping up of business rate relief for another year, which was very important. He stated that the Panel should be making sure this additional support was made available to every parish throughout the moor.

8. LSP Update

No report.

9. Parish Lengthsman Scheme & Update

Steven Pugsley advised that, other than an acknowledgement from the Chief Executive at Somerset County Council, he had still not received an appropriate response and Chris Nelder confirmed he had not received anything either.

Chris Nelder stated that the scheme was going to continue in a much reduced format. Parishes had agreed to increase their contributions. He had received a 95% response, but had not yet received all monies and had not yet received any response from Exmoor Parish Council. The increased contributions had brought in an additional £3,700 which had brought the sum up to £11,800 assuming there was 100% support.

The Parish Lengthsman had agreed to reduce his hours and this meant that every Parish would pay the same amount of money but get half the amount of time. It did seem rather a poor arrangement, but it was an arrangement which allowed the scheme to continue. In the meanwhile, the committee will see how they can increase contributions/funding for 2010. It was known that West Somerset Council were not likely to fund the scheme in 2010.

Keith Ross highlighted an article in the West Somerset Council Community Matters Newsletter in which Steve Atkinson from the Somerset County Council had stated that the Parish Lengthsman could help.

It was agreed that a follow-up letter should be written to the Chief Executive at Somerset County Council seeking financial support for the scheme.

Mention was made that perhaps EDF could contribute to the scheme. In reply, Corinne advised negotiations were taking place surrounding Section 106 monies for the preliminary works and the Council were trying to negotiate a wider area than the initial one. However, she stressed there was a need to avoid making individual requests to EDF.

10. Items to be brought forward by Parishes

Chris Nelder advised that the Clerk to the Dulverton Town Council had raised a query about what other parishes were doing to encourage people to stand for parish/town council elections. Dulverton Town Council would be holding a meeting on 23 March to encourage people and try and get some additional councillors. The general feeling from town and parish councils at the meeting was that they were all finding it hard to find enough people to stand for election.

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm.