

## Dunster Panel

### Notes of Meeting held on 14 October 2013

#### at the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Williton

#### Present

Marilyn Crothers (Chairman); M Andersen (Bicknoller Parish Council); Christine Oliver (Dunster Parish Council); Ron Buckingham (Elworthy Parish Council); Patricia Lyle, Margaret Smith, Phil Gannon (Old Cleeve Parish Council); John Fulwell (Withycombe Parish Council); PCSO Bryan Stevens, PCSO Dave Rowe, APS Tom Lomas and APS Tim Richards (Avon & Somerset Constabulary); Tony Murray (Magna Housing Association); David Peake (SCC Highways); Jim Kent (West Somerset Seniors Forum); Keith Turner (Brompton Ralph PC and WSC), Cllr M Dewdney, Cllr T Taylor, Cllr A Trollope-Bellew, Cllr E May, Bruce Lang (WSC); Penny James (WSC/TDBC)

#### **1. “Have Your Say” – Community Issues**

No issues were raised that were not to be covered elsewhere in the meeting.

#### **2. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Faye Barringer-Capp (Carhampton PC); Ian Liddell-Grainger MP; Chris Jones (Devon and Somerset Fire Service) and Somerset County Councillor Christine Lawrence.

#### **3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 July 2013 and Matters Arising**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 July 2013 were agreed as a correct record.

Councillor M Dewdney requested that an invitation be issued for a speaker to attend a future meeting to discuss an update on the provision of broadband in rural areas in West Somerset.

In respect of Item 1(b), representatives from Old Cleeve Parish reiterated their concern regarding road safety and the A39 in Washford particularly in the vicinity of Walnut Tree Corner.

It was agreed that representatives from Old Cleeve Parish should meet with officers from Somerset County Council Highways to discuss the whole issue in more detail.

#### **4. Magna West Somerset Housing Association**

Tony Murray, the Director of Magna West Somerset Housing Association, presented an annual report to the Panel – a copy of which had been circulated with the agenda – reiterating the role of the Housing Association and its activities over the previous twelve months. Questions were then raised by members of the Panel including relating to the issue of insulation of properties, future funding for affordable housing, the policy of selling homes to build new houses and the help provided by Magna in regard to elderly and vulnerable people.

The Leader of West Somerset Council thanked Tony Murray and his colleagues for all their good work.

Tony concluded the item by encouraging anyone to contact him if they had any further issues or queries; his email address is [tony.murray@magna.org.uk](mailto:tony.murray@magna.org.uk)

## 5. Police Report

PCSO B Stevens and D Rowe outlined the crime figures in the Dunster Panel area since the last meeting. Figures did indicate a general rise in criminal activity over the previous period but this was primarily as a result of issues relating to the badger cull and mainly confined to an area between Williton, Carhampton and Luxborough.

On a specific matter that was referred to in Item 1(d) of the notes of the previous meeting, it was reported that the individual concerned had been served with an ASBO.

Tom Lomas and Tim Richards then explained their roles as Police Force Liaison Officers in regard to the badger cull which had just been extended by a further three weeks. Their respective telephone numbers if anybody had any issues/concerns were 07900 703909 and 07824 085594.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that non-dwelling burglaries appear to have been on the decrease although everyone should remain vigilant with the long winter nights approaching.

Tim Richards confirmed that he would contact colleagues in the Police Accident Reduction Unit to see if they could assist with the issues of road safety on the A39 through Washford.

## 6. Highways Report

David Peake reported on the current and proposed works in the Dunster Panel area – as set out in the attached Appendix A.

He made particular reference to flooding alleviation works that were to be undertaken on the A39 at Dragon's Cross, Bilbrook. These were essential and much needed works and would necessitate temporary road closures between 9am and 3.30pm, Monday to Friday for three weeks commencing on 4 November 2013.

Members of the Panel did express concern at the disruption that these road closures would cause and enquired whether consideration had been given to undertaking the works at night time.

In response David confirmed that all issues had been taken into consideration and given the additional cost, noise nuisance to residents and difficulty of undertaking the particular works in question without daylight, on balance it had been decided to proceed with day time temporary closures.

An issue was raised regarding examples of stones and rubble that needed clearing from rural roads in the Panel area. David acknowledged that this was a problem but due to the shortage of revenue funding it would not be possible to keep the roads clear of such debris to the extent that the highways authority had been able to if more funding had been available.

**Note:** Subsequent to the meeting the following information was provided by David Peake in order to clarify the sequence of temporary road closures at the most important, upcoming scheme at A39 Dragon Cross, Bilbrook:

Phase 1

Monday to Friday, 09.00 to 15.30, 4th November to 22nd November

The A39 will be closed during these times. In addition the side roads at Dragon Cross (Old Cleeve to Blue Anchor and Lodge Rocks Lane) will also be closed. The reason for this is that, with the section of A39 between Dragon Cross and Washford Station being

used as a stacking area for waiting HGVs, it would be unsafe to allow light traffic accessing/exiting these lanes to mix in with these parked vehicles.

#### Phase 2

This will follow on immediately from Phase 1. The A39 will be opened under temporary traffic signals. However, Old Cleeve to Blue Anchor and Lodge Rocks Lane turns off the A39 at Dragon Cross will remain closed as drainage work will now be carried out in these narrow lanes themselves.

In both Phases, access to Old Cleeve will be via Watchet and the Blue Anchor Inn turn whilst access to Lodge Rocks Lane will be via Abbey Road, Washford and Batallers Lane, Lower Roadwater.

### **7. Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service**

Although Chris Jones had submitted his apologies due to being unwell, he had forwarded a report on the activities of the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service which was circulated at the meeting.

The report stated that crews had attended fewer calls than normal for the time of year and were only alerted to 30 operational calls since the beginning of August. There had been no cases of deliberately ignited fires during the last quarter in the Dunster Panel area.

Notice was also given of a second national strike date of Saturday 19 October between 6.30pm and 11.30pm and made the point that the fire service still had a legal duty to maintain a level of service to local communities and therefore contingency plans would be put in place ahead of this date for industrial action.

### **8. Items of Interest Raised by Parish Councils – Code of Conduct/Declarations of Interest**

In response to a request to parishes to raise any items for discussion, Carhampton Parish Council had responded to say that they had experienced examples of individuals being put off from putting themselves forward to be a parish councillor due to the requirements of complying with the Councillor Code of Conduct and felt that there should be a better balance between protection and restriction, common sense and legislation.

Bruce Lang, as Monitoring Officer in West Somerset, recognised the concerns expressed and reassured the Panel that the requirement to have a code of conduct was introduced by central government to increase public confidence in local government. By complying with the code and declaring appropriate interests to demonstrate transparency, this would also protect individual councillors from allegations of impropriety.

Bruce circulated copies of an advice note regarding details of the current codes of conduct (recognising that there were at least two versions of the code being used in West Somerset), together with a copy of slides that he had used for parish councillor training.

Bruce confirmed that if anyone had any queries on the matter they were welcome to contact him – his email address being [bdlang@westsomerset.gov.uk](mailto:bdlang@westsomerset.gov.uk)

In response to a question, Bruce confirmed that the code of conduct applied to elected councillors and not members of staff. Council employees were required to abide by an employee code of conduct as well as contracts of employment. This included the necessity to avoid any obvious conflicts of interest. An issue was raised regarding staff

undertaking private work and it was confirmed that this matter was currently being addressed.

## **9. West Somerset Council Report**

Bruce Lang introduced Penny James to the meeting who would be taking up the post of Joint Chief Executive of West Somerset Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council with effect from 24 October 2013.

Bruce confirmed that the business case for joint management and shared services between West Somerset Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council was to be initially considered at the Scrutiny Committees of the two authorities on 24 October 2013 and then by special meetings of the respective Full Councils on 12 November 2013. Should the business case be agreed by both authorities, a joint management team would be put in place with effect from 1 January 2014 with a view to having a shared work force in place by 1 April 2015.

Bruce reported that indications were that an announcement on the government agreeing a strike price for the cost of generating electricity from the proposed Hinkley Point nuclear power development undertaken by EDF Energy was imminent.

Bruce concluded by encouraging everyone to complete and return their electoral registration forms.

The Leader of the Council reported that he had been contacted by the media in regard to local authorities in Wales that were beginning to experience severe funding cuts and were looking to learn from West Somerset Council's experience in handling such a challenge!

## **10. Dates of Future Meetings**

27 January 2014 at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Williton  
7 April 2014 at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Williton

## **11. Chairman of the Panel**

In recognition of this being the last meeting which Councillor Marilyn Crothers would Chair, all the Panel members expressed their sincere appreciation for her efforts over the previous three years in this role.

The meeting closed at 8.35 pm.