

**EXMOOR PANEL
MINUTES
Thursday 20 January 2011
Moorland Hall, Wheddon Cross**

Those present:

Steven Pugsley, Chair	Frances Nicholson, SCC
Chris Nelder & Mike Willison, Dulverton TC	Alan Vigars, Exmoor PC
Ruth McArthur, ENPA	Hazel Bedward, Exton PC
Sergeant Andy Whysall, Avon & Somerset Constabulary	Bob Churchill, Luccombe PC
John Bray, Winsford PC	Keith Ross, WSC
Geoff Mason, Timberscombe PC	Bruce Lang, WSC
Simon Corrick, NHS Somerset	Claire Richards, WSC
Dennis Quick & Richard Newby, SCC Highways	
Linda Atkins, Eric Clarbull and John Davis, Cutcombe PC	

Member of the public:

John Edwards, Jeremy Hickman and Gay Brook

1. Community Concerns

Simon Corrick, Project Director, Capital Development for NHS Somerset, gave a presentation on the new Minehead Community Hospital. He confirmed –

- the hospital would contain 19 in-patient beds, all ensuite; out-patient department, minor injury unit (open 24 hours a day), day surgery unit, radiology department, therapy department and provision for mental health services.
- the new build would allow for a 74% increase in in-patient activity, 68% in out-patient activity and 81% increase in day surgery facilities.
- they had been very mindful of flood levels on site and emergency arrangements had been made for the hospital to evacuate to the West Somerset Community College in the unlikely event of this being necessary.
- in the region of a quarter of a million pounds had been spent on a new x-ray machine, which would enable consultants at Taunton to see the results immediately.
- all rooms would have natural light, there would be piped oxygen rather than via cylinders, overhead hoists, telephones in each of the inpatient rooms funded by the League of Friends and there was the potential to put telephones by the side of beds.
- the mental health services at Barnfield and Stone Cross would be transferring/integrating into the new hospital. This was a big step forward and would allow dual diagnosis.
- there would be over 100 public car parking spaces at the front of the building with 30 spaces for staff at the rear; there were no plans to charge for parking.
- the vast majority of equipment had already been delivered, with the exception of the x-ray equipment, which was due to be delivered in the last week of January 2011.

- as at the end of the day on 16 February 2011, everything would be in the new hospital.
- there had been great benefit in being involved with the League of Friends, which had allowed the NHS to increase the standard of beds, etc.
- there would be a bus stop right at the front of the new building.
- there would be an open day for members of the public on 29 January 2011.

Steven Pugsley thanked Simon for his very informative presentation.

2. Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman

It was proposed and seconded that Steven Pugsley remain as Chair and Chris Nelder as Vice Chair and on being put to the vote this was carried.

Steven thanked the Panel for re-electing him, for their involvement over the past 12 months and stressed that the coming year would be a difficult time bearing in mind the financial constraints facing all areas.

3. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Margaret Rawle, Dulverton Town Council; Bernard Foster, Selworthy & Minehead Without Parish Council; Nik Harwood, Somerset County Council; Tess Saunders, Exmoor National Park; Angela Palmer and Mike Gammon, West Somerset Council.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2010 and matters arising:

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

5. Chairman's Remarks

The Chairman had no remarks.

6. Police Issues

Sergeant Whysall advised that since the last meeting there had been 33 reported incidents across the Panel's area. These could be broken down as follows –

- 9 non-dwelling burglaries
- 7 counts of criminal damage
- 7 thefts
- 5 malicious communications
- 1 theft of a motor vehicle
- 2 thefts from motor vehicles
- 2 other public order offences

Compared to the same period as last year, there were 7 less crimes. Over the Christmas period, there were only 3 reported crimes in 3 weeks, which was no doubt due to the weather.

The office at the Dulverton Police Station was closing and would not re-open, but the building would remain as a base for the Exmoor Team. A telephone would be available outside the Police Station where members of the public could make a call and be transferred to a call centre. Email addresses were available on the Avon & Somerset website and all Parish Clerks had access to those.

Rural Watch was now up to 150 farmers, which was very good.

They would shortly be running PitStop again in Dulverton alongside Exbridge Motors.

7. Highways Issues

Dennis Quick advised that highway works had been affected both due to the weather and budgets.

However, the following works had been completed – drainage by Simonsbath; areas of re-surfacing on the A396 between Wheddon Cross and Timberscombe and on the B3224 between Wheddon Cross and Raleghs Cross. They had also managed to undertake some small scale works, such as collapsed pipes, etc, and completed the footway outside the Moorland Hall working in conjunction with both the Parish Council & Village Hall Committee.

With regard to works at the Simonsbath Bridge, he hoped these would take 6-8 weeks; they had now received permission from the Environment Agency and English Heritage and were hoping to erect scaffolding in the river next week. Posts would be erected in the road that would prevent vehicular access, but allow pedestrians, horse riders, etc, to cross. Comment was made that part of the reason for the damage to the bridge was lack of maintenance to the drainage system over the last few years. With regard to road closure signs, Richard Newby confirmed that these had been erected very quickly, but he was unaware of how many remained in situ or whether any further signs were required. In reply to a comment on the road closure signs at Kinsford Gate, he advised he would look into this issue.

Members of the Panel pointed out that there was a lot of highway damage in terms of potholes, etc, as a result of the extreme frost/snow and highlighted the following areas -

- the road surface on the Sandyway to North Molton road, especially now bearing in mind the diverted route from Simonsbath.
- White Post at Exford, just over the brow.
- at the top of Amory Road in Jury Road, Dulverton.
- near Croft Farm on the Brushford side.
- B3224 between Wheddon Cross and Raleghs Cross.
- Badly damaged wooden sides to the bridge at Luccombe.

- Lifting/cracking road surface on the Wheddon Cross to Slade Corner road.
- Water running down the side of the road and washing out the edges from the top of Coland Cross to Slade Bridge.

A query was raised as to whether a sign could be erected at Chibbet Post to deter HGV's from using Landacre Bridge and Richard Newby stated that if it was a proposal of the Panel it could be taken forward under the Road Traffic Order.

Steven Pugsley requested that if any members of the public had noted any particular potholes they notify their Parish Clerk who would email these to the Highways Department.

Jeremy Hickman advised that in April 2010 he had notified the Highways Department of 5-6 separate locations of potholes/drains that were blocked, but nothing had been done. He had again reported these approximately 10 days ago and the work had now been undertaken. He questioned the internal procedures within the Highways Department and asked why there had been a delay. In reply, Dennis Quick confirmed he would have to speak to Gerald Matravers and come back to Mr Hickman with a copy to Steven Pugsley. Comment was made that it would be better use of money to undertake maintenance works on drains rather than retrospective emergency works.

Jeremy Hickman also questioned who was responsible for cleaning roads of leaves, etc, and how often this was undertaken. Comments were also made about whether the County and District Councils liaised to co-ordinate street cleaning with highway works, etc. It was confirmed this was a District Council function and Bruce Lang agreed to provide further details.

Note: Road sweeping is undertaken every eight weeks and street cleaning is undertaken on certain streets in Dulverton and Porlock on a daily basis.

Members questioned whether the same mortar would still be used for repairs to bridges and Frances Nicholson confirmed that there had clearly been problems with the mortar currently used. When it had been analysed it had been found that it was not the type specified. However, she hoped this situation had now been rectified.

8. Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Services

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

9. Local Authority Budget Updates

West Somerset Council

Bruce Lang advised that the budget was the main issue for concern at West Somerset. He reported that –

- in the Government settlement in December, West Somerset was hit with the equal highest % reduction, even though several visits to London had been made to raise awareness of West Somerset's unique situation.
- the actual cut in West Somerset's grant was proposed to be 13.9% meaning that, over the next four years a saving of £1.6 million would be needed. The Council were waiting for confirmation of the grant settlement at the end of January 2011.
- next year the authority would need to save £600k and a list of savings had been drawn up for consideration at Cabinet on 2 February and Council on 23 February. Those organisations affected by the proposed cuts have been written to.
- discretionary grants have been affected severely.
- the Council were hoping that a higher element of business rates could be kept locally at some stage in the future, but this was only a proposal at present.

Somerset County Council

Frances Nicholson advised that it was a difficult time in terms of services for local authorities. Somerset County Council were having to make very difficult decisions and had a number of plans on which there had been considerable consultation. She stated that, in her opinion, the weight of cuts bears too heavily on rural areas at every point, but the standard response of the County Council was that under the equality legislation they had to ensure that the service(s) supply the greatest number of people. However, she confirmed that following consultation exercises undertaken, a number of proposals were being re-worked and a final decision on proposals would be made on 16 February 2011.

Exmoor National Park (ENP)

Ruth McArthur advised that the whole range of expenditure would be reduced for the ENP and, in due course, there could be a reduction in the number of staff. DEFRA had cut their grant by 5% in the current year and from April 2011 there would be a further reduction of 5.4%.

The ENP had been anticipating reductions and had not been filling vacant posts. It was hoped that in the next year there would not be any forced redundancies, but the situation would be reviewed from April 2012.

She confirmed that, as a result of the above they were already looking at being as cost effective as possible. Some projects would continue, but they were looking at prioritizing and were re-focussing other work.

10. LSP Update

There was nothing to update.

11. Parishlengthsman Scheme & Update

Chris Nelder advised the scheme started 2 years ago this April by the SCC and originally 13 parishes were involved; this was now down to 11. However, the scheme was now facing a financial crisis as the SCC had withdrawn all their funding and West Somerset Council were proposing to pay £3,000 in 2011/12 and cease funding in 2012/13.

General discussion took place regarding sources of funding and how the scheme could continue in its current format. During the discussion a suggestion of commercial sponsorship was made and a question raised as to what percentage of the County Councils and District Council's work the Parishlengthsman undertook.

It was agreed that the Chairman of the Panel should write a letter to the Chief Executive of the Somerset County Council asking her to explore the possibility of the Somerset County Council maintaining a 75% funding level for at least one further year to give the scheme the opportunity to survive and look for alternative funding streams over a more realistic timetable. Chris Nelder would also write to all parishes within the scheme to ask whether they would consider increasing their funding and would look into the issue of commercial sponsorship.

12. Items brought forward by Parishes

Chris Nelder advised that Dulverton were holding a public meeting on 25th January 2011 at the Town Hall to provide information on the possible loss of the youth and library services and the household waste recycling centre. He confirmed that, following a meeting on 20 January 2011 the Dulverton Town Council were still in negotiation with the West Somerset Council over the management of the Dulverton car parks.

13. Dates and Venues for 2011

10 March 2011	Moorland Hall, Wheddon Cross
23 June 2011 (P)	Moorland Hall, Wheddon Cross (tbc)
6 September 2011	Winsford Village Hall (tbc)
1 November 2011	Winsford Village Hall (tbc)

Steven Pugsley advised the March meeting was a scheduled one, but the other dates listed were provisional pending the May 2011 elections.

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm

Next meeting 7.00pm on 10 March 2011 at the Moorland Hall Wheddon Cross.