

**EXMOOR PANEL  
MINUTES  
Thursday 21 June 2012  
Moorland Hall, Wheddon Cross**

**Those present:**

Steven Pugsley (Chair)	
John Davis, Cutcombe PC	Nick Thwaites, Dulverton TC
Rod Coyne, Dulverton TC	B Foster, Selworthy PC
A Palmer, Porlock PC	Philip Griffin, Wootton Courtenay PC
Geoff Mason, Timberscombe PC	John Edwards
Tessa Saunders, ENPA	David Peake, SCC Highways
Karen Mills, Cllr WSC	Keith Ross, Cllr WSC
Keith Turner, Cllr WSC	Bruce Lang, WSC
Frances Nicholson, SCC	
Lisa Simpson and Bryan Stevens, Avon & Somerset Constabulary	
Loretta Whetlor, SOCA/West Somerset Seniors Network	

**1 Apologies for Absence**

- 1.1 Christine Dubery, Chris Nelder and Margaret Rawle of Dulverton Town Council.

**2 Have Your Say / Police Issues**

- 2.1 Whilst there were no members of the public present wishing to raise any specific issues regarding crime prevention and communication with the police, the Chairman encouraged an open discussion on this issue given that Inspector Lisa Simpson and PC Bryan Stevens were present.
- 2.2 The police representatives reported that there had been a worrying 20% increase in outbuilding theft for the period from March to the end of May 2012. The good news was that two arrests had been made for Porlock burglaries and the intelligence gathering process was making progress with a rural crime theft team currently focussing on this issue across the south west.
- 2.3 The police encouraged parish representatives to remind the members of the public to report anything suspicious and to invigorate a neighbourhood watch as most of the best leads into these crimes had come from members of the public.
- 2.4 Cutcombe Parish Council thanked the police for their assistance in helping to manage the traffic in connection with the Jubilee beacon.

**3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 March 2012**

- 3.1 Agreed that the minutes be accepted as a true record of the meeting.

## 4 SCC Highways Report

4.1 David Peake reported on the works in the Exmoor Panel area – see attached Appendix A.

4.2 Other issues referred to included:

- Some highway works had been disrupted by the unusually wet weather over recent months.
- The procession of the Olympic Torch through West Somerset had been extremely successful.
- Civil Parking Enforcement or on-street parking had been introduced in West Somerset with effect from 11 June 2012.
- The highways authority was undertaking a traffic survey at Wheddon Cross and Beulah Chapel.
- Various points were then raised by members of the Panel including two specific concerns:

- a) Negative impact of diversions where many people got confused over the directions and these diversions did sometimes appear to be in place for longer than necessary; and
- b) An ongoing problem of high hedges/overhanging trees restricting visibility and causing a danger to drivers and in some cases blocking the roads in inclement weather. It was felt important that the highways authority should put some pressure on landowners to meet with their responsibilities in these instances and both the Somerset County Councillor and David Peake agreed refer this matter back to County Hall.

A specific observation was also made that some of the traffic signs were becoming hidden behind plant growth with a request that clearing these obstructions should be a priority of the County Council.

4.3 The County Councillor made a request for the public to report any perpetrators who damaged bridges as the taxpayer was having to fund considerable number of expensive repairs.

4.4 David Peake then explained the impact of budget cuts on the highways service. Essentially capital funding from the Department of Transport had not been significantly cut but the money can only be spent on certain items such as resurfacing and drainage. The County had benefited from one-off funding over the last three years to help repair damage caused by the winter weather although this was only one-off and was unlikely to continue in the future.

4.5 The most severe cuts related to revenue funding which overall had been cut by 26% over two years. In terms of the impact of these cuts this could be broken down as follows:

- 1) No cuts at all – snow clearing/responding to winter weather conditions, dealing with the emergencies and addressing safety defects (although in some cases the quality of the work may be affected).
- 2) Reduced funding – grass cutting, cutting of rural roads, gully emptying, drainage clearance, signage and line maintenance.

- 3) Cut completely – kerb weed killing in urban areas (except meeting the statutory requirements when dealing with obnoxious weeds).

## **5 Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service**

- 5.1 No representative from the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service present at the meeting.

## **6 Exmoor National Park Authority Issues**

- 6.1 Tessa Sanders reported that the ENP draft local plan would be ready for consultation in December for an eight week period. Officers from the ENP were supporting Lynton and Lynmouth with the development of a neighbourhood plan and liaising with West Somerset Council planning officers to explore closer working including the duty to cooperate on strategic issues and how to work together in those parishes which were part in and outside the National Park.
- 6.2 In response to a question on the impact of funding cuts in the ENP, it was recognised that standards may need to drop in terms of public footpath clearance as the current standard of service had been maintained at a higher than statutory minimum.
- 6.3 It was also reported that the ENP had recently agreed to relax their approach in relation to a Mortgagee in Possession Clause which would enable registered social landlords to more easily borrow and thereby provide more affordable housing in the Park. This move was warmly welcomed by Councillor Keith Turner, the West Somerset Council portfolio holder for housing.

## **7 Parish Lengthsman Scheme and Update**

- 7.1 The Chairman read out an update provided by Chris Nelder which confirmed that the scheme was continuing in 2012/13 on minimum funds. It was noted that Dulverton Town Council were not taking any administration fee to enable the scheme to survive.
- 7.2 He thanked the parishes who had paid up their contributions promptly and reminded those that had not to please pay as soon as they could. He also reminded parishes that were still not getting their returns back after the Parish Lengthsman had undertaken his work to do so as this evidence was important to justify funding.
- 7.3 He explained that despite expressing an interest to join the scheme, it had not been possible to include the Clatworthy and Dunster parishes due to uncertainties about the funding of the scheme in general, and that he would get back to the two parishes concerned should the position change.
- 7.4 Councillor Karen Mills reported the good news that the £3,000 from West Somerset Council had been secured for the current financial year and that agreement had been negotiated with Veolia for £2,000 of their work relating to the Dulverton mill leat to be transferred to the Lengthsman.

## **8 Localism Act 2011 – Preparing for the implementation of the new Ethical Standards Regime**

8.1 Bruce Lang in his role as Monitoring Officer provided an update on the new ethical standards regime that was emerging from one of the implications following from the Localism Act 2011.

8.2 The key elements explained included:

- 1) With effect from 1 July 2012 each town, parish, district and county council (plus the Exmoor National Park Authority) must adopt a code dealing with conduct expected of members.
- 2) There was no model code although the District Council would be circulating a draft to town and parish councils recommending that they adopt and the National Association Local Councils may also be circulating a suggested model code.
- 3) The District Council will continue to be responsible for dealing with the complaints against town/parish council members and details of this process would be circulated once approved by the West Somerset Council.
- 4) The District Council were going to establish a Standards Advisory Committee to oversee the complaints process and operation of the code generally and the Committee would continue to include independent and parish/town council representatives as well as district councillors.
- 5) There would be no statutory sanctions such as suspension or disqualification in respect of alleged breaches of the code but it would become a criminal offence to fail to disclose disclosable pecuniary interest as defined by regulations.
- 6) The District Council will only be able to recommend sanctions (rather than impose them) upon town and parish councils.
- 7) The Monitoring Officer will be required to establish and maintain a register of interests for district, town and parish councils which must be available for inspection at West Somerset Council's offices and on its website and if the parish/town council has a website the register must also be available on this.
- 8) The Monitoring Officer will only deal with dispensation applications in relation to interests from District Council members and so town/parish councils must have procedures in place to deal with dispensation applications from their own members and it might be sensible to consider delegating some of these decisions to the town/parish clerk.
- 9) Given the timescales, parish/town councils may wish to consider holding special meetings relatively quickly after 1 July to approve a new code of conduct and it was confirmed that the District Council would be providing further details and guidance after the matter had been considered at the full Council meeting on 27 June 2012. The Monitoring Officer will also be working with the Somerset Association of Local Councils in regard to offering further training for town/parish councillors and clerks, and encouraged anyone with questions or concerns to make contact with him.

## **9 Format of Future Exmoor Area Panels**

9.1 The Chairman facilitated a discussion on the possible format of future Exmoor Area Panels with a view to trying to encourage a greater attendance, ideally from members of the public but especially from parish councils.

9.2 A few points emerged from the debate, as follows:

- 1) Going forwards, especially with a proposed larger County Council Division for Exmoor, the Panel should be a useful vehicle of communication between the County Councillor (and District Councillors) and the parishes in the Panel area.
- 2) The agenda for the Panel should reflect what the parishes want but for this to happen parishes must come forward with suggestions and then attend the meetings.
- 3) The Panel needs to add value and should be able to do this as it is one way of three levels of local government meeting together.
- 4) It may be worth considering holding the meetings on a set day of the week – at present it varies between Tuesday and Thursday.
- 5) Parishes may take for granted that their County/District Councillors will attend their own meetings but if this was not the case so regularly then Panel meetings may become a way of facilitating discussions between parish, district and county.
- 6) A suggestion that at least part of the meeting could be run on a “parent’s evening” approach whereby the various agencies would sit round the room and parish councillors would have the opportunity to talk specifics with those agencies depending what was important to them at the time.
- 7) Perhaps having an agenda with less items on it allowing more time for detailed debate and having different items at different meetings rather than the same agenda for every meeting.
- 8) The possibility of once again having a regular attendance from a senior corporate officer of Somerset County Council, and the County Councillor agreed to explore this option.

## **10 Items brought forward by Parishes – Somerset County Council Exmoor Community Bus**

10.1 The County Councillor drew the Panel’s attention to a meeting to be held on Tuesday 10 July 2012 at the Dulverton Congregational Church Hall at 7pm to discuss the future of the Exmoor community bus. She stressed that it was very important for people to attend to demonstrate support for retaining this facility and come up with ideas for making the best use of the bus to secure its future.

## **11 Dates and Venues for 2012**

- 4 September 2012 at 7.30 pm at Winsford Village Hall (noting that at 6.30pm there would be a meeting of the Highways Wardens)
- 6 November 2012 at 7.00 pm at Winsford Village Hall (Note: it would be explored as to whether it would be possible to move the venue to Moorland Hall, Wheddon Cross for this meeting.)