

Dunster Panel

Notes of Meeting held on 23 July 2012

at the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Williton

Present

Marilyn Crothers (Chairman); Faye Barringer-Capp (Carhampton Parish Council); Chris Oliver, Doug Challoner (Dunster Parish Council); Ron Buckingham (Elworthy Parish Council); Anne Sparling (Luxborough Parish Council); Dave Walker (Skilgate Parish Meeting); John Fulwell (Withycombe Parish Council); Ian Liddell-Grainger, MP; PC Bruce Strachan; PCSO S Hurley (Avon & Somerset Constabulary); Doug Hayhoe (Devon & Somerset Fire Service); David Peake (SCC Highways); Jim Kent (West Somerset Seniors Forum); Martin Dewdney, Tim Taylor, Bruce Lang (WSC)

1. “Have Your Say” – Community Issues

A letter was read received from the Clerk to the Old Cleeve Parish Council making reference to the rescue of a woman from waist deep mud in Blue Anchor Bay on 16 July 2012.

The letter acknowledged that whilst it was not sensible to walk out so far on the beach, visitors were not always familiar with the dangers and requested that consideration be made to ensure that adequate signage warning people of the dangers of falling rocks and deep mud were provided at Blue Anchor.

Bruce Lang of West Somerset Council said that he had discussed this issue with his colleagues earlier in the day and a replacement sign for the current faded one had been ordered. He also indicated that consideration would need to be given to the wording on signage as currently there was reference to the display of a red flag should conditions be dangerous and it was important to ensure that such a process was in place or, if not, such reference should be removed from the sign.

PC Bruce Strachan mentioned that there were at least three access points down onto the beach along the seafront at Blue Anchor and suggested that it would be ideal if a sign could be provided at each entrance. Bruce said that he would raise this issue with his colleagues.

There was also a discussion around why there was such an accumulation of mud in Blue Anchor Bay and one theory was that the dredging from Watchet Marina could possibly be deposited near to Blue Anchor Bay and Bruce agreed to make some enquiries in this regard.

2. Election of Chairman

Agreed that Councillor Marilyn Crothers be elected as Chairman of the Dunster Panel for the ensuing municipal year.

3. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Phil Gannon, Margaret Smith and Pamela Scragg (Old Cleeve Parish Council); Alan Chick and Keith Turner (West Somerset Council); Christine Lawrence (Somerset County Council); Stephanie Oliver (ENPA) and Graham Lamacraft (Dunster Parish Council).

4. Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 April 2012 and Matters Arising

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 April 2012 were agreed.

There were no matters arising.

5. Local MP

The Chairman welcomed Ian Liddell-Grainger, Local MP, to the meeting and invited him to make any comments he wished.

Ian made reference to the fact that public sector funding was going to continue to be very constrained and expenditure in the public sector was still exceeding income and expected the situation to continue for a few more years.

He recognised how difficult it was for County Council, District Council and Town/Parish Council colleagues to continue to provide services under such difficult circumstances and paid tribute to them.

He also made reference to the likelihood that West Somerset Council would be organising a referendum in 2013 to elicit public support to increase council tax to enable the Council's funding gap to be met. He wished everyone to support the Council in its endeavours to get a positive result from the referendum as it was important, in his view, that the sovereignty of West Somerset remained intact.

Aligned to this, Ian stressed that many of the current government policies underpinned a belief in localism, with local people having more opportunity to control their own destiny.

In response to a question as to whether government funding would be more rural proofed, Ian confirmed that he was aware that this was an important issue and hoped that it would be addressed but acknowledged that it would be difficult.

6. Police Report

The main issue of concern in the Panel area was of non-dwelling burglaries. There have been 20 such burglaries since the last meeting and the police needed the public's help in being vigilant and reporting anything suspicious or unusual. Apart from this, generally the crime rate in the area was low with the detection rate at 44% being at an all time record high.

In response to a question it was confirmed that marker pens were available from the police or could be acquired via the internet.

7. Highways Report

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

David then explained the impact of budget cuts on the highways service at the County Council. 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.

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).

Councillor Dewdney did express his concern at the dropping of kerb weed killing and asked what savings figure had been achieved by stopping such activity in West Somerset. David agreed to find out this information. Councillor Taylor enquired about the maintenance of the footpath running between Dunster and Carhampton which was causing concern and David Peake confirmed that he would be having discussions at the end of the Panel meeting with representatives from Dunster and Carhampton Parish Councils.

Councillor Taylor also raised the issue that in some instances it appeared that road closure signs were being left up longer than necessary and David confirmed that he would ask his supervisors to keep an eye on this issue.

Representatives of Dunster Parish Council asked if there was yet a date scheduled to do improvement work to the Watchet/Blue Anchor road and David confirmed that whilst this was still on the long list of works there was no specific date yet known.

Finally, a question was asked about the significance of different coloured road markings and David promised to bring a full answer to a future meeting.

Following the meeting, David provided information in regard to the above issues as follows:

Cllr Dewdney - What is the reduction in SCC weed killing budget?

The figures are somewhat approximate as we still carry out reactive treatment of noxious (eg Ragwort) and invasive (eg Japanese Knotweed) weeds but the pro-active spraying of kerbed road edges has ceased. However, to give an idea of the scale of the budget reduction:

In 2010/2011 the weed killing budget was £220,000 county-wide and £16,000 in West Somerset.

In 2012/2013 the weed killing budget is £40,000 county-wide and £5,800 in West Somerset.

Dave Walker, Skilgate Parish Meeting - Is there any significance in the different colours of paint sprayed on the road to denote roadworks?

Yes, the standard colours agreed between the Highway Authority and the Statutory Undertakers are:

Blue	Water
Yellow	Gas
Grey	BT
Red	Electricity
White	Highways (Planned Inspection Team)
Orange	Highways (Area Highways Office)
Yellow	Highways (Resurfacing and Surface Dressing Team)

Dave Walker, Skilgate Parish Meeting - Why have we written "Do not do leave to 11 May" on road surface?

It actually says "Do not do leave till later"! (It is actually part of our planned patching programme for the remainder of this financial year).

8. Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service

Doug Hayhoe reported that apart from the Blue Anchor beach rescue incident that had already been referred to, activity in the Panel area had been quite quiet over recent months.

The service was suffering from funding cuts and it had been confirmed that £15 million was to be cut from the Devon and Somerset Fire Brigade over the next three years. He was hoping that people would not notice a drop in service although the service was likely to be using smaller appliances with a smaller number of crew on each appliance.

In response to a question Doug confirmed that Chinese lanterns should not be used and as far as he was aware were not available for sale. If anyone spotted such lanterns then he suggested that this be reported to the fire service.

9. Localism Act 2011 – Preparing for the implementation of the new Ethical Standards Regime

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 the Localism Act 2011. 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 had circulated a draft to town and parish councils they could use and the National Association of Local Councils had also circulated a suggested model code.
3. The District Council would continue to be responsible for dealing with the complaints against town/parish council members.
4. The District Council had established 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. There was currently a vacancy for a parish/town council representative and Bruce invited any nominations to be submitted to him.
5. There would be no statutory sanctions such as suspension or disqualification in respect of alleged breaches of the code but it had become a criminal offence to fail to disclose disclosable pecuniary interests 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 would 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 offices and on its website (although there was currently a dispute over the legality of this) and if the parish/town council has a website the register must also be available on this as well.
8. The Monitoring Officer will only deal with dispensation applications in relation to interests from District Council members 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. The Monitoring Officer will be working with the Somerset Association of Local Councils in regard to offering further training/guidance for town/parish councillors and clerks, and Bruce encouraged anyone with questions or concerns to make contact with him. He also mentioned that Peter Lacey of the Somerset Association of Local Councils is running a training session at the Moorland Hall, Wheddon Cross on Monday 6 August 2012 at 7pm, and encouraged parish/town councils to attend.

10. West Somerset Council Report

Councillor Tim Taylor made reference to the Olympic Torch passing through West Somerset on 21 May 2012 and thanked everyone for making the event such a success.

Bruce Lang confirmed that the major issue for the Council was still how to meet the financial challenges to make the organisation sustainable going forward. Over the next few months members and officers would continue to consider the options in advance of setting a budget for 2013/14 and it was still expected to hold a referendum in May 2013. If this was the case then it would be necessary for the Council to set a preferred budget (which would be implemented in the event of a 'yes' vote) and an alternative budget (which would be implemented in the event of a 'no' vote).

11. Dates of Future Meetings

15 October 2012 at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Williton
28 January 2013 at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Williton
15 April 2013 at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Williton

The meeting closed at 8.10 pm.