

Environment Overview Committee

Minutes of a meeting held at County Hall,
Colliton Park, Dorchester on 27 March 2014.

Present:

Robin Cook (Chairman)
Margaret Phipps (Vice-Chairman)
Richard Biggs, Andy Canning, Ronald Coatsworth, Paul Kimber, Mike Lovell, Mark
Tewkesbury and John Wilson.

Hilary Cox, Cabinet Member for Environment, Robert Gould, Cabinet Member for Corporate Resources and Toni Coombs, Cabinet Member for Education and Communications all attended under Standing Order 54(1).

Janet Dover, County Council Member for Colehill and Stapehill, attended the meeting for minutes 74 to 76.

Ros Kayes, County Council Member for Bridport, attended the meeting for minutes 77 to 79.

Bill Trite, County Council Member for Swanage, attending the meeting for minutes 84 to 86 and 93 to 95.

Officers attending:

Mike Harries (Interim Director for Environment), Steve Hedges (Group Finance Manager), and David Northover (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

For certain items, as appropriate:

Dave Ayre (Head of Countryside and Business Development), Don Gobbett (Head of Planning), Andrew Martin (Head of Dorset Highways Operations), John Alexander (Policy and Performance Manager), Mike Harden (Chief Engineer) and Jan Stevenson (Group Manager).

Public Speakers

Attending for minutes 65 to 67

Eve Bishop, local resident

Attending for minutes 68 to 70

Brian Shears, local resident

Attending for minutes 71 to 73

David Marsh, local resident

Attending for minutes 74 to 76

David Bird, Co-ordinator of Blandford and District Bus Users Group

Attending for minutes 77 to 79

Andy Pennington, local resident

Apologies for Absence

52. Apologies for absence were received from Peter Hall, Mervyn Jeffery and Peter Richardson.

Code of Conduct

53. There were no declarations by members of disclosable pecuniary interests under the Code of Conduct.

Minutes

54. The minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2014 were confirmed and signed.

Public ParticipationPublic Speaking

55.1 The Committee were informed that no requests for public speaking had been received.

55.2 The Committee were informed that no public statements or questions had been received.

Petitions

55.3 The Committee were informed that eight petitions had been submitted for consideration.

Petition for an Alteration to the Street Lighting in the Springfield area of Broadway, Weymouth

56.1 The Committee considered a report by the Interim Director for Environment on the receipt of a petition containing 101 signatories for an alteration to the street lighting arrangements in the Springfield area of Broadway, Weymouth. The petitioners were requesting that street lighting be reinstated so that every other street light remained illuminated so as to not compromise the security and safety of the area. In initiating this petition, the County Council Member for Broadway asked that this request be acceded to as a means of going some way to addressing the concerns of local residents over their safety and accessibility to properties in that area at night. He offered to meet with officers on site during the hours the policy was in place to emphasise his case.

56.2 Officers reiterated the principles behind the part night street lighting policy in contributing towards the efficiency savings which were required, as well as the part this played in reducing energy consumption. They considered that the policy had been correctly applied in this case. In response to a member's question, officers confirmed that as each column was independently controlled there was scope for them to be adjusted to suit particular needs but this would reduce the capacity to make the necessary savings. Furthermore, it was considered that those who needed to access the area after the lights were turned off could arrange for their own means of illumination.

56.3 Officers confirmed that £256,000 worth of savings had already been achieved from the application of this policy. The Committee considered that this area had similarities with many other residential areas throughout the County and there was no reason for this to be made a special case. Accordingly, there appeared to be no particular safety concerns identified by the Police that would justify a divergence from the policy in this instance and that to do so would set a precedent. On being put to the vote, the Committee decided that this policy should be maintained in this case and that the petitioners should be informed of the reasons for this.

Resolved

57. That the petition be noted and the petitioners be informed that the part night street lighting arrangements operating in the Springfield area of Broadway met the criteria in the policy and should continue to be maintained.

Reason for decision

58. To provide innovative and value for money services.

Petition for an alteration to the street lighting placement in Back Lane, Broadwindsor

59.1 The Committee considered a report by the Interim Director for Environment on the receipt of a petition containing 50 signatures requesting an alteration to a street

lighting column placement to provide for more footway capacity for pedestrians on Back Lane, Broadwindsor. The petitioners claimed that the placement of the column inhibited access on the footway, which necessitated the dangerous practice of pedestrians having to step onto the carriageway. Officers confirmed that even with the column sited where it was, the minimum width of 1 metre of footway was still provided, and other footways in Broadwindsor were less than this.

59.2 Officers reported that given the configuration of the footway along that road there was no other option other than to site the column in that position. Altering its position or removing it would compromise the illumination along that rural road. Officers also reported that discussions had taken place with the County Council's street lighting contractors, SSE, over the possibility of alternative solutions but these were impractical. Accordingly the Committee considered that there was no prospect of the column being resited and that the petitioners should be notified of the Committee's decision.

Resolved

60. That the petition be noted and the petitioners be informed that there was no alternative other than the street light column to remain situated in its current location.

Reason for Decision

61. In the interests of road safety.

Petition for the alteration to the street lighting in St James' Street, Shaftesbury

62.1 The Committee considered a report by the Interim Director for Environment on the receipt of a petition from Robert Walter MP containing 129 signatures for an alteration to the aesthetics of the lamp columns being installed in St James's Street, Shaftesbury and requesting consideration of the erection of heritage columns which were more in keeping with the historic setting of that part of the town. Officers reported that since the petition had been received, discussions between the County Council's street lighting contractors, SSE, Shaftesbury Town Council, the County Council local member and officers had been held to seek a compromise to the situation. As a result, SSE had agreed providing, at their own expense, heritage lighting in the specific area of concern, including Gold Hill, so that the environmental setting of the area might be maintained.

62.2 The Committee were informed that the lighting column replacement contract generally provided for only a standard design being used to meet its street lighting obligations and that any upgrade of this type would be at the local town or parish council's expense. Officers reported that heritage columns generally costed in the region of £400 more than a standard unit so their provision was financially prohibitive. The Committee agreed that confirmation of these developments should be formally conveyed to the petitioners and the Committee's decision to endorse this.

Resolved

63. That the petition be noted and the petitioners be notified of the developments which had taken place in acceding to their request.

Reason for Decision

64. To safeguard and enhance Dorset's unique environment and support our local economy.

Petition for the provision of a bus service between Morn Gate Holiday Park and Dorchester

65.1 The Committee considered a report by the Interim Director for Environment on the receipt of a petition containing 25 signatures for the provision of a bus service between Morn Gate Holiday Park and Dorchester to serve those residents, guests and visitors of that park.

65.2 Officers explained that an hourly service, Service 31, was operated by First along the A35 linking Weymouth with Axminster, via Martinstown and was run on a commercial basis. The petitioners had suggested that, on occasion, this service could be diverted past Morn Gate to serve that community. Officers reported that First were unwilling to divert that service or Service X53 for that purpose. Officers reported that even if this was the case, there were impracticalities in doing this, particularly arrangements for buses manoeuvring in order to pick up passengers safely on a main road where visibility was limited or within the confines of the Morn Gate Holiday Park.

65.3 However officers reported that an alternative arrangement was available by way of the Dorchester 'Dial a Bus' Scheme which operated at a nominal cost and subject to booking arrangements. Officers explained how this Scheme operated and how it might be accessed.

65.4 In addressing the Committee, Eve Bishop considered that that, in her understanding, the County Council's rules required a medical/disability reason to be able to access the Dial a Bus Scheme, there was a need for a bus service to serve that community, there was the capability for the bus to manoeuvre within the curtilage of the site and there were prohibitive cost of accessing Dorchester by other means.

65.5 However, officers' and members' understanding of how the Dial a Bus Scheme operated was contrary to that of Ms Bishop and they could see no reason why she was unable to access it. Their understanding was that access to the Scheme was readily available, subject to the terms and conditions of use.

65.6 Officers agreed to investigate this point further, although they were confident that the Scheme operated without such prescriptive measures. However, they acknowledged that there were a number of individual schemes which operated, all of which had their own distinct terms and conditions. As such, there was need for clarification of how the various schemes operated and for them to be rationalised, if practicable. Members asked that information as to how these operated be publicised extensively. Officers agreed to clarify and publicise the schemes and make this available both on the website and as leaflets.

65.7 The County Council Member for Dorchester (Richard Biggs) suggested that the owner of the holiday park might wish to consider playing some part in providing access to the Scheme as it would benefit their residents. The County Council Member for Linden Lea supported this and considered the Dial a Bus Scheme to be the obvious solution but also asked if the rerouting, on occasion, of the Number 61 weekly service could be taken into consideration, given that Martinstown was still served by the X51 service.

65.8 Whilst the Committee acknowledged that commercial operators ran their services on economic grounds and had the right to deregister services as appropriate, they agreed that, in principle, the possible use of the Dial a Bus Scheme should be explored. Members asked for a report to be provided for their next meeting on community transport availability and the possible setting up of a Policy Development Panel.

65.10 The Committee agreed that the petitioner should be notified of this but that, in principle, the Dial a Bus Scheme seemed to be a reasonable and acceptable solution in the circumstances.

Resolved

66.1 That the petition be noted and the petitioner informed of the how the Dial a Bus Scheme might be accessed.

66.2 That further research be undertaken into accessibility of the Dial a Bus Scheme and that the range of schemes in operation be clarified and, if practicable, these be rationalised and their accessibility publicised.

66.3 That a report on community transport availability be provided for the next meeting of the Committee.

Reason for Decision

67. To safeguard and enhance Dorset's unique environment and support our local economy.

Petition for the Retention of Bus Service 316 on Thursdays between Winterborne Kingston and Blandford Forum

68.1 The Committee considered a report by the Interim Director for Environment on the receipt of a petition containing 68 signatures requesting the retention of Bus Service 316 on Thursdays between Winterborne Kingston and Blandford Forum.

68.2 Members were reminded that as part of the proposals designed to achieve the necessary £850,000 reduction in the local bus subsidies budget, the Cabinet had agreed to withdraw bus subsidies for rural bus services costing over £5 per passenger and where the number of passengers was less than seven per journey. From evidence gathered in the process of determining which services met these criteria and which were eligible to be withdrawn, Service 316 was assessed as meeting both thresholds. Accordingly, the decision made by Cabinet in those circumstances was correctly based. Officers emphasised that there was still a community transport provision available via the Nordcat service.

68.3 The Committee were provided with a series of options to consider regarding how they might respond to the petitioner's request.

68.4 The Committee were addressed by Brian Shears who asked that the Cabinet's decision be reconsidered as he considered that there was a need for this service to be retained for accessibility. He was of the opinion that the figures used to calculate the economics of the service were not a true reflection of the actual passenger numbers. He had gathered evidence and number, in his experience, were considerably higher. Additionally he considered that the alternative arrangements with the Nordcat service did not provide sufficient time when visiting Blandford.

68.5 Officers explained that any discrepancy in numbers was undoubtedly attributed to the way in which the figures had been calculated, the County Council's calculation being based on an average over the whole route rather than numbers on a particular length of journey over a full 12 month period. This method of assessing the service had been applied consistently and uniformly across the whole exercise. It was emphasised that if such a request was acceded to, additional funding would need to be found from elsewhere in the budget, or further savings would have to be made.

68.6 The Cabinet Member for Environment reminded the Committee that in making the necessary savings, the Cabinet had ensured that alternative community transport arrangements were available to serve communities. In response to one member's concern

that if the current arrangements were withdrawn, the community would be isolated, she acknowledged that whilst there was no absolute guarantee that this would not happen, there was no reason to believe that it would. She considered that the flexibility provided by community transport schemes might well allow community led schemes to flourish by arranging their own community transport needs and by the possible use of alternative county council owned vehicles when these were not being used. This approach was in line with the County Council's commitment to supporting independent living via initiatives such as Dorset's Partnership for Older People Programme (POPP) and Pathways to Independence.

68.7 The Committee recognised that this particular community still had access to community transport and considered that this, together with the suggestion made by the Portfolio Holder, was a positive way of ensuring that services, whilst limited, might be maintained and tailored to meet local community needs. Members asked that they be provided with information at their next meeting on Community Transport options and detailed proposals for its application. The Committee agreed that the petitioner should be informed of this decision

Resolved

69. That the petition be noted and the petitioner informed that the decision made by Cabinet for the withdrawal of bus subsidies for Service 316 was correctly based and that alternative community transport arrangements were available.

Reason for Decision

70. To provide innovative and value for money services.

Petition for the Retention of Bus Service 14 to Chard

71.1 The Committee considered a report by the Interim Director for Environment on the receipt of a petition containing 39 signatures for the retention of the Bus Service 14 serving Chard from Thorncombe.

71.2 Members were informed that, in accordance with the County Council's criteria used when determining which bus services should have their subsidies withdrawn as part of the savings exercise, from the evidence which had been gathered in the process of determining which services were eligible, Service 14 had been assessed as qualifying for withdrawal. Accordingly, the decision made by Cabinet had been correctly based. However officers reported that this particular service would be retained for a one day a week service on a Tuesday, which had been assessed to be the most popular day of the week to travel. A series of options was provided for the Committees consideration. Officers emphasised that any alternative to the current arrangements would incur the need for additional funding to be found from elsewhere in the budget or further savings having to be made.

71.3 David Marsh asked that the Service should be retained for at least three mornings per week on the grounds of social mobility and in order to access vital medical services and retail facilities given the lack of available alternatives. Furthermore he considered that there was evidence to suggest that the school bus which accessed Marshwood Primary School returned empty from that journey and there might be scope for this to be utilised as a passenger service. He also asked what part Somerset County Council played in the arrangements given that the economy of Chard was benefiting from those visiting the town.

71.4 Officers explained that to achieve what the petitioners were requesting would incur additional costs as the bus company had already made alternative arrangements for delivering the service it now provided. Officers also confirmed that Somerset had declined making a contribution towards the cost of subsidising this service. Officers were not

necessarily aware of the situation regarding the arrangements for the Marshwood Primary School bus but agreed to explore what opportunities the bus operator could provide. The Committee agreed that the petitioner should be informed of the Committee's decision.

Resolved

72. That the petition be noted and the petitioner be informed that the decision taken by Cabinet to withdraw funding for Service 14 be endorsed but that officers explore any opportunities to utilise the Marshwood Primary School bus with its operators.

Reason for decision

73. To safeguard and enhance Dorset's unique environment and support our local economy.

Petition for the Retention of Bus Services 13, 83 and 89 from Wimborne

74.1 The Committee received a report by the Interim Director for Environment on the receipt of a petition containing 1,375 signatures requesting the retention of the following bus services:-

- Service 13 - Wimborne to Bournemouth on Monday to Saturday evenings,
- Service 89 - Wimborne to Castlepoint Shopping Centre (via Ferndown) on Saturdays only and;
- Service 83 - between Wimborne, Blandford and Shaftesbury.

74.2 Members were informed that, in accordance with the County Council's criteria used when determining which bus services should have their subsidies withdrawn as part of the savings exercise, from the evidence which had been gathered in the process of determining which services were eligible, Services 13, 83 and 89 had been assessed to qualify. Accordingly, the decision made by Cabinet had been correctly based. A series of options on how to proceed was provided for the Committees consideration. Officers emphasised that any alternative to the current arrangements would incur the need for additional funding to be found from elsewhere in the budget, or further savings would have to be made.

74.3 The Committee were informed that funding would be withdrawn with effect from 6 April 2014 for both Service 13 and Service 89, whilst the current Service 83 would cease to operate but would be replaced in parts by two other routes. However officers reported that there had been a material change in circumstances since that decision taken by Cabinet regarding the provision of Service 13. Given that this was largely operated on a commercial basis, the bus company had decided to continue operating the full timetable beyond 6 April 2014 without financial support. Accordingly, it was considered that this issue had been resolved to the satisfaction of those petitioners.

74.4 Officers reported that regarding Service 89, it was possible to travel to those destinations on other services by changing buses, which passengers ordinarily had to do during weekdays when that service did not run. As such, it was considered that as alternative public transport provision was available, the Cabinet's decision taken on this route should be maintained.

74.5 Officers reported that the Service 83 route would still be served in part between Blandford and Shaftesbury with a new two hourly Monday to Saturday service X9, whilst a Wednesday only shoppers service - X315- remained available to link communities

on the southern half of the current route. Additionally the amendments to the route of Service X88 now provided for a service between Sturminster Marshall and Wimborne.

74.6 Comments relating to Service 83 were predominately concerned about the loss of access to shops, banks and health facilities and rural isolation/social inclusion issues.

74.7 Given that the Chairman, Robin Cook, was one of the local members for this item and wished to express his views on the matter, he handed over the Chairmanship of the meeting for this item to the Vice-Chairman, Margaret Phipps.

74.8 The Committee heard from David Bird on his concerns for the withdrawal of Service 83 and the inconvenience that this would cause in accessing amenities and the inadequacies of the alternatives which had been provided. He also expressed concern at the way in which the subsidised bus service process had taken place, how the County Council had calculated their figures to justify which subsidies should be withdrawn and how the service could be classified as urban.

74.9 The County Council Member for Colehill and Stapehill, in commenting that the size of the petition should have ordinarily been considered by full County Council, expressed her concern at the loss of the all three services, but particularly Services 83 and 89 which would severely compromise the ability of those wishing to access amenities and facilities which those routes served. Moreover she had reason to believe that Service 13 was only guaranteed to run until May 2014, when its provision would be reviewed by the bus company again and an assessment made of how well used it had been.

74.10 She was concerned that the subsidised bus service process had not taken enough account of the implications of the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) undertaken and on which any decision taken should be based. Accordingly, she considered that as a direct result of the withdrawal of these services, the basis of the EIA would be compromised and which, she regarded, should have been made readily available.

74.11 She also expressed concern at the way in which the subsidised bus service process had taken place and how costs and numbers had been calculated. Given the concerns raised in the petition and the uncertainties which remained over the continued provision of Service 13, she considered that an officer/member group should be set up to review the petition, as provided for as an option in paragraph 3.16 of the report.

74.12 The Interim Director took the opportunity to assure the Committee that he was confident that the provisions of the EIA had been taken fully into account in both the assessment process and the decision making process and, whilst there was a summary of the assessment contained in the Cabinet report, the complete document was publicly available for inspection if so required. He suggested that members might wish to review how this arrangement was applied, if they saw fit.

74.13 He also explained the means by which the Cabinet had made their assessments and how the available funding was applied. He recognised that bus companies had the right to de-register services which they considered to be uneconomic, but that there was no reason to believe that this would be the case with Service 13 given its patronage. Officers further explained how costs were assessed and the part that the Government withdrawal of the Fuel Duty Rebate had played in the increase in prices.

74.14 The attention of the Committee was drawn to the receipt of comments from the County Council Member for Ferndown (Ian Smith) expressing concern at the loss of the services, whilst appreciating the reasons why this was necessary. He asked that every effort

be made to ameliorate the situation and that all alternative arrangements should be considered.

74.15 The Committee Chairman and County Council member for Wimborne Minster then took the opportunity to address the Committee, expressing his appreciation at Morebus for continuing to deliver the Service 13. He considered that despite the withdrawal of Service 89, there were other options for accessing the Hospital but, for him, concerns remained about how the decision had been taken to withdraw Service 83 and the process associated with this. Of particular concern was that employment opportunities were being compromised as a result of this withdrawal and that the alternative arrangements in place did not necessarily satisfy the accessibility needs of those using the service. He asked that consideration might be given to changing the timing of Service 88 to provide for this.

74.16 The other County Council Member for Ferndown (John Wilson) was pleased to see that the Service 13 was being retained and looked like it was being used and Morebus should be commended for this. He recognised the constructive relationship that the County Council had with bus operators in working towards maintaining services wherever possible and acknowledged the work of individuals in playing their part in achieving routes that existed, namely the Service 89. He asked that consideration be given to discussion with Guard Bus over their Service 132 and any part this might play in finding a solution. He considered that given the situation, there might be opportunities for more flexible arrangements with smaller bus companies in resolving the issue.

74.17 The Committee considered that despite the reservations still held by some members, by and large, Services 13 and 89 had found a solution, at least in part. However, members considered that there was a need for further discussion and research into finding a solution for Service 83 and, in taking up the suggestion made by the local member for Colehill and Stapehill, agreed that an officer/local member group be set up in order that this might be achieved. Additionally, discussion should also include how Service 89 was operating. The Committee were informed that any conclusion arising from this would need to be first reported to the Committee and then, depending on any financial implication, if necessary, a recommendation made to the Cabinet.

Resolved

75. That the petition be noted and the petitioners be informed that an officer/local member group be set up in order that a solution might be found over what alternative public transport arrangements could be put in place over the Service 83 route.

Reason for Decision

76. To safeguard and enhance Dorset's unique environment and support our local economy.

Petition for the retention of Bus Service 47 from Bridport to Yeovil

77.1 The Committee considered a report by the Interim Director for Environment on the receipt of a petition containing 2,225 signatories requesting the retention of Bus Service 47 between Bridport and Yeovil to recognise the strategic importance of this route to students, families and workers and to the local economy, as well as recognising that it was the only public transport connection to the wider train network in that area.

77.2 Members were informed that, in accordance with the County Council's criteria used when determining which bus services should have their subsidies withdrawn as part of the savings exercise, from the evidence which had been gathered in the process of determining which services were eligible, Service 47 had been assessed to qualify. Accordingly, the decision made by Cabinet had been correctly based. A series of options for

how to proceed was provided for the Committees consideration. Officers emphasised that any alternative to the current arrangements would incur the need for additional funding to be found from elsewhere in the budget, or from further savings having to be made.

77.3 However the Committee were informed that following the Cabinet's decision further information had been received in that the bus operators, First, had de-registered the commercial route Service 47 and the service had ended in January 2014. Officers reported that the commercial element of the route was a vital service for Dorset students to get to Yeovil College and was also well used by villagers on the route to access shops in Yeovil. Given that the de-registration would affect students during the middle of the academic year, in a joint effort between the Dorset and Somerset County Councils, Yeovil College and First, it was decided to maintain the existing route as previously operated on a commercial basis, by providing a subsidy until the 28 June 2014. Subsequently, First had also agreed to register the college holiday peak time journeys until 28 June without additional subsidy.

77.4 The financial arrangements were explained and the Committee were informed that Somerset had, as yet, not committed any funding towards a solution and it was understood that their response would be dependent on the decision taken by Dorset. Yeovil College had also refused to contribute towards the cost transport of students to their establishment.

77.5 Officers drew to the attention of the Committee that, as the route had been de-registered, another operator had indicated that they might provide a commercial service, with pre-contractual discussions on this having taken place between bus companies and the two county councils. However it now appeared that any solution provided would require a subsidy and that negotiations over this continued.

77.6 The opportunity was then provided for the County Council Member for Bridport address the Committee. She considered that there was a need for the Service to be retained for social inclusion, accessibility, employment and educational purposes. She was of the opinion that the figures used to calculate the economics of the service were not a true reflection of the actual passenger numbers. It was her view that, from figures independently gathered, numbers were considerably higher. She was also critical of the timing of the surveys undertaken, these having taken place over the summer holidays and during December. She considered that further research should be undertaken with a view to reinstating the service in full or in part and with all parties playing their part in finding a solution.

77.7 In response to Ms Kayes, officers explained that any discrepancy in numbers was undoubtedly attributed to the way in which the figures had been calculated, with the County Council's calculation being based on an average over the whole route rather than numbers on a particular length of journey over a full 12 month period. This method of assessing services had been applied consistently and uniformly across the whole exercise.

77.8 Andy Pennington then addressed the Committee and spoke of the importance of this route to students, families and workers and to the local economy and his concerns was that the loss of this vital service would compromise social inclusion and employment and education opportunities, all of which should be being supported by the County Council. He considered that Dorset had an obligation to promote the role that public transport played and their actions seemed to contradict this. He considered that the EIA should have been more readily taken into consideration when Cabinet made its decision, given the social and economic implications that the Service's withdrawal could have.

77.9 The attention of the Committee was then drawn to the receipt of an email from the County Council Member for Beaminster who considered this route to be a vital link for employment and education and asked that opportunities for alternative community transport arrangements be taken into consideration if at all practicable.

77.10 The County Council Member for Bride Valley considered that there was definitely a need for this route to be retained and officers and members should determine how best this might be achieved. He considered that Somerset County Council should play their part in finding a solution as the route ran a considerable way through that county and benefited it both economically and socially. Other members agreed that this course of action should be pursued and that establishing a member/officer group, to include local members, as well as Somerset County Council and Yeovil College if they wished to participate, to try to find a solution was the best way of achieving this.

77.10 Officers agreed that, in taking the comments made into account, the whole operation required a reassessment to see how the re-distribution of busses throughout the day and the adjustment of sequencing might deliver a service which met the needs of the petitioners. A member/officer group could help in delivering this. The outcomes would once again be reported back to Committee and, if there were financial implications of doing this, then a recommendation would need to be made to Cabinet.

Resolved

78. That the petition be noted and the petitioners be informed that an officer/local member group, to include the relevant bus operators and lead petitioners and Somerset County Council and Yeovil College if they so wished, be set up in order that a solution might be found over what alternative public transport arrangements could be put in place over the Service 47 route.

Reason for Decision

76. To safeguard and enhance Dorset's unique environment and support our local economy.

Forward Together - The Way Ahead

80. The Committee considered a report by the Interim Director for Environment which provided an update on workstreams for the Environment Directorate's Transformation Programme, particularly with regard to its restructuring; the holistic transport services review and the Highway Service Delivery Model. The Committee were pleased to see the progress being made in this regard; the way in which community engagement was to be carried out and the role that members should have in how this was applied.

Noted

Dorset Highways Capital Programme 2014/15

81.1 The Committee considered a report by the Interim Director for Environment which provided detail of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) Capital Programme for 2014/15, this being set out in the Appendix to the report in the form of the Dorset Highways Capital Programme April 2014 to March 2015. The Programme detailed all the schemes which were planned for construction during the forthcoming financial year, explained how the highway improvement schemes were prioritised and the funding arrangements associated with these.

81.2 Officers reported that in addition to the planned programme of works, the toll that the recent damaging inclement weather had taken on the road network had attracted £5.8 million funding from Government towards the cost of the estimated £12.5 million repair work required. Furthermore, the County Council would be submitting a bid for a share of the

£200 million available for the “pot hole challenge”, this being funding made available by Government as a contribution towards the cost of repair work.

81.3 Members recognised that as a consequence of the urgency to complete these two significant additional pieces of work, the timescales for the programmed work would undoubtedly be delayed so as to ensure that this essential work was completed as soon as possible.

81.4 Whilst officers took the opportunity to respond to a series of generic questions raised by members on the detail of the programme, the Chairman requested that any technical information on individual schemes affecting a member’s particular electoral division should be taken up direct with officers outside of the meeting.

Resolved

82. That the LTP Capital Programme for the 2014/15 financial year be endorsed.

Reason for Decision

83. In order to progress the County Council’s corporate aims of supporting economic growth and health and well-being.

Country Parks Performance

84.1 The Committee considered a report by the Interim Director for Environment which set out the performance of the County Council owned country parks at Avon Heath and Durlston respectively. The report covered the parks’ strategic importance to the delivery of the County Council’s corporate aims, including the economic and health and wellbeing benefits, together with the financial performance of both. In particular it was anticipated that both parks would generate a financial surplus during 2014/15, taking into account the additional operating costs of the newly refurbished Durlston Castle. The funding arrangements for both parks were explained in detail and members were pleased to learn that both had attracted a broad range of national and environmental designations and awards.

84.2 The significant part that volunteers played at the parks was widely recognised and their commitment went a considerable way to achieving the success which both had received. Of particular note was the customer satisfaction survey associated with the visitor experience at Durlston, with the renowned ‘Trip Advisor’ website deeming it to be excellent.

84.3 The County Council member for Swanage was pleased to see how successful Durlston was and supported another member’s suggestion that there should be improved signage to the venue. If appropriate, consideration should also be given to the provision of sympathetic, low level lighting to illuminate footways to the car parks.

84.4 In echoing the sentiments of the Cabinet Member for Environment, the Committee were pleased to learn of the excellent progress being made with this much valued asset and the direction in which both country parks’ finances were moving. They hoped that this would not only be maintained, but improved upon, in the coming years.

Resolved

85. That the progress being made at both Avon Heath and Durlston country parks be commended.

Reason for decision.

86. To safeguard and enhance Dorset’s unique environment and support our local economy.

Economic Growth and the County Council

87.1 The Committee considered a report by the Interim Director for Environment setting out the current and potential activities which the County Council could pursue in maintaining and enhancing its community leadership role in light of the corporate priority of enabling economic growth and what opportunities there were for this.

87.2 The report set out what arrangements were already in place to facilitate economic growth, together with the scope for increased collaboration with partners to enable further growth. Members were invited to comment on how they considered this could be expanded and what else it should encompass.

87.3 The role which the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) played in economic growth was acknowledged and the Vice-Chairman considered that the Dorset Nature Partnership also had a significant part to play. Officers confirmed that considerable collaborative work was ongoing with district and borough councils through the provisions of their local plans in order to encourage local economic development. Updates on progress would be provided via the Members' Gateway.

87.4 The Committee recognised that it was necessary that the County Council was seen to be proactive about economic activity and suggested the following categories for inclusion in any future considerations:-

- services, transport and utilities infrastructure,
- the role which town and parish councils played,
- youth councils,
- bio energy - including anaerobic digestion, agricultural waste, solar power, wind farms, other renewable energy,
- transport links to business parks and facilities
- the ability to support independent providers of broadband if the opportunity arose in those rural areas which BT were unable to serve as a means of supporting small and local businesses..

87.5 On this final point officers explained that given the contractual arrangements with BT over the roll out of rural broadband, there was little opportunity for negotiations to take place with independent telecom providers in the way suggested. Furthermore, resources were being committed to delivering the BT broadband contract and, whilst understanding the sentiments behind the use of independent broadband providers, it was not considered efficient to divert those resources for such a purpose. However, officers considered that there was a need to keep an open mind for receipt of such approaches, which should be considered on their merit.

87.6 The Committee's attention was drawn to the receipt of an email from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care asking that there be greater engagement with other authorities, especially district councils and where appropriate synergy of the approach taken to the delivery of services and, where possible, less bureaucracy.

87.7 Whilst some members considered that Dorset should have one economic focus or speciality with which it could be identified, other members considered that it was the diversity which Dorset offered that gave it its attraction. Officers considered that the very fact that Dorset was so diverse in what it offered its residents and visitors alike, meant that it was better equipped to cope with the vagaries of the economy, rather than having to rely solely on one theme.

87.8 The Committee welcomed the opportunity to contribute towards the future direction of how economic growth opportunities might be managed and delivered in Dorset and would continue to make their views known to officers on this.

Resolved

88. That the views of the Committee, as set out in minute 87.4 above, be taken into consideration in providing a steer as to how the County Council could enhance its role in enabling economic growth in Dorset.

Reason for Decision

89. To contribute towards the development and delivery of the emerging Corporate Plan for the County Council, which identified enabling economic growth as a priority.

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2013/14, including Forward Together (Residual Meeting Future Challenges (MFC) Update)

90.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Corporate Resources which showed budget monitoring information as at the end of January 2014, showing a forecast overspend against all service budgets for the County Council of £4,462,000, compared with the overspend of £5,665,000 as at the end of November 2013.

90.2 For the Environment Directorate this represented a forecasted overspend of £346,000 or 0.9% of the budget for the year this being attributable to:-

- Countryside Services - £311,000 over spent,
- Dorset Highways - £249,000 over spent,
- Planning - £42,000 under spent,
- Dorset Property - £200,000 surplus,
- County Buildings - £24,000 over spent,
- County Farms - £2,000 over spent
- Dorset Passenger Transport - £42,000 under spent, and
- Business Support Unit - £43,000 overspent.

90.3 The Committee were also reminded of the toll that the recent damaging inclement weather had taken on the road network, which had attracted £5.8 million funding from Government towards the cost of the estimated £12.5 million repair work required. Furthermore, an interim claim of £669,931 has been submitted for costs incurred to the end of February 2014, against the DCLG Bellwin Scheme. The Bellwin Scheme reimburses councils for costs incurred from the immediate actions they take in connection with a disaster or emergency, over and above a determined threshold. A further claim will be submitted during April. Officers were awaiting a response to these.

Noted

Corporate Performance Monitoring Report: Third Quarter 2013-14 (1 October - 31 December 2013) and Draft Corporate Plan 2014-15

91.1 The Committee considered a joint report by the Chief Executive and the Interim Director for Environment which presented the results of the monitoring of the County Council's Budget and Corporate Plan for the third quarter of 2013/14, with a specific focus on those elements of the plan which were managed by the Environment Directorate. The report also contained analysis of the Council's progress against all five of its corporate aims and presented the Corporate Balanced Scorecard. Members' attention was drawn to the

work and budget of the Environment Directorate, which was largely encapsulated in Aim 4 of the plan.

91.2 Members were informed that at the end of the third quarter, the performance indicators in the Budget and Corporate Plan had an average “amber” rating. The percentage of indicators that were meeting or exceeding their targets was 62%. Furthermore, 67% of actions were on course or complete. At the end of Quarter 3, the forecasted year end underspend for the whole authority was £60,000 which, by the end of January 2014, had increased to £998,000 – 0.4% of the total budget.

91.3 Regarding performance indicators for the Directorate, Aim 4 had an average “amber” rating, with 50% of indicators on target and 43% more than 5% off target. The projected overspend for the Directorate was £846,880, which was less than 1.3% of the total budget, with 69% of actions on course.

91.4 The Committee’s attention was drawn to where Dorset sat in relation to benchmarking with other authorities on the percentage of the road network where maintenance should be considered in 2011-12. Whilst acknowledging the situation in which the county found itself, Dorset fared reasonably favourably by comparison to other shire counties, some of whom had roads in a considerably worse condition.

91.5 The Committee’s attention was drawn to the draft Corporate Plan for 2014-15 in which focus was placed on the two themes of ‘Enabling Economic Growth’ and ‘Health, Wellbeing and Safeguarding’, with emphasis for the Environment Directorate on roads, broadband and the natural and built environment.

91.6 Members were informed that the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership provided a considerable amount of information on Dorset’s economy and this could be found on its data dashboard. The Committee asked that, under “Enabling Economic Growth’, the reference made to the benefits of a ‘green, low carbon economy’ should be strengthened to emphasise the importance of this to Dorset and that reference ‘Energy Efficiency’ would achieve this.

Noted

Policy Development Panels

Establishment of Future Policy Development Panels

92. The Committee decided that there was no need to establish any further Policy Development Panels at this time but that consideration of one relating to “Assessing Community Transport Needs” should be borne in mind.

Policy Development Panel on On Street Pay and Display Parking and Enforcement

93.1 The Committee were notified of progress being made with regard to the Policy Development Panel on On Street Pay and Display Parking and Enforcement and the proposals to be considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 9 April 2014 as to how the criteria recommended by the Panel in support of the policy should be applied. The Committee were provided with a summary of the work of the Panel and the progress it had made.

93.2 The Chairman of the Panel took the opportunity to thank those involved on the Panel for the positive contribution they had made towards establishing a set of criteria which, he believed, would ably assist in the delivery of the policy and was happy to endorse the approach to be taken. He asked however that the word ‘endorsed’ in the third paragraph in the summary be replaced with ‘recognised’ to provide a more apt reflection of the situation.

- 93.3 The Committee also accepted the recommendations made by the Panel for:-
- an amendment of the Panel's title, so that it was more encompassing,
 - an amendment to its Terms of Reference, to do likewise.

93.4 The Committee were pleased to see the progress being made on this and endorsed the work of the Panel.

Resolved

94. That the Panel's title and Terms of Reference be amended.

Reason for Recommendation

95. To safeguard and enhance Dorset's unique environment and support our local economy.

Policy Development Panel on Roundabout and Other Asset Sponsorship

96. The Chairman reported on the work of the Policy Development Panel on Roundabout and Other Asset Sponsorship and the progress it was making. Members were informed that there had been certain agency issues resulting in a slight delay to the assessment process from the consultants, which in turn had delayed the next meeting of the Panel until May 2014. However, from preliminary assessments made, it was envisaged that potentially between £300,000 and £600,000 could be realised by the County Council from income generated from the sponsorship of roundabouts and other County Council assets. The Committee welcomed this information and hoped that the expectations could be put into practice.

Policy Development Panel on Verge Cutting/Highway Vegetation Management

97.1 The Committee considered a report by the Interim Director for Environment on progress in respect of highway vegetation management arrangements and, in particular, those for the coming growing season.

97.2 Members were reminded that at their meeting on 23 January 2014, they had agreed to recommend to the Cabinet a Road Map for Future Arrangements. Whilst the Cabinet were generally supportive of the principles outlined in the Road Map and the need for the management of Dorset's verges to change over time, they were concerned that the Panel were not recommending any changes for the 2014 season due to financial constraints. The Cabinet, therefore, had referred this issue back to the Committee for further consideration and accepted that any change to this position might well incur additional resources in the short term.

97.3 Whilst a reinstatement of a full, twelve urban cuts in accordance with the previous County Council policy would incur a significant additional cost of up to £250,000, the Committee were informed that the Cabinet were minded to agree to a relatively modest contingency fund so that it would be possible to carry out additional cuts on an 'as and when' basis.

97.4 It was therefore recommended that the Cabinet set aside an additional £50,000 as a contingency fund for any additional cuts that were likely to be needed in the forthcoming growing season. Consequently, the first bullet point under 1.2 of the Road Map for Future Arrangements had been amended to represent that change.

97.5 The committee agreed that in the "Living Verges - Road Map for Arrangements" document, reference should be made throughout to "Districts, Boroughs,

Parish and Town Council's", for continuity purposes. The Chairman of the Panel emphasised the need to support the "Plantlife" campaign too.

97.6 Members asked how the arrangements for this would be applied and what processes were in place for bids to be considered. Officers reported that more detail on this was being developed and would be disseminated in time for district, town and parish councils to assist them in applying for this. The Committee also considered that it would be necessary for the Panel to meet in the near future to determine what criteria should be applied to this bidding process.

Recommended

98. That the Cabinet be asked to:-
- (i) Establish a fund of £50,000 for the 2014 growing season to help finance additional cuts to highway verges, where necessary, to be funded from contingencies.
 - (ii) approve the amended Road Map for Future Arrangements which incorporated this change.

Reason for Recommendation

99. To respond to a request from the Cabinet to improve arrangements for highway vegetation management during the 2014 growing season.

Member Briefings

46. The Committee were provided with the opportunity to identify topics for future member briefings. They were advised that whilst a comprehensive presentation of the Highway's Asset Management Plan would be considered by Committee at their June meeting, there was the prospect of a seminar on this following the County Council meeting on 24 July. A briefing on gypsies and traveller sites would be held at an opportune time.

Noted

Schedule of Members' Seminars and Events 2014

47. The Committee's attention was drawn to the Schedule of Members' Seminars and Events for 2014. The Chairman drew attention to the addition of a proposed Community Engagement seminar on Thursday 24 April 2014.

Noted

Environment Overview Committee Work Programme

48. The Committee considered and agreed its work programme for the remainder of 2014.

Noted

Outside Bodies

49. On this occasion there was no receipt of submissions from members on outside bodies. However officers agreed to take into consideration the inclusion of the Portland Minerals Liaison Group on the list of outside bodies.

Questions

50. No questions were asked by members under Standing Order 20(2).

