

Environment Overview Committee

Minutes of a meeting held at County Hall,
Colliton Park, Dorchester on 19 January 2015.

Present:

Robin Cook (Chairman)

Richard Biggs, Ronald Coatsworth, Hilary Cox, Mervyn Jeffery, Paul Kimber, Mike Lovell
and John Wilson.

Peter Finney (Cabinet Councillor for Environment) and Toni Coombs (Cabinet Councillor for Education and Communications), both attended under Standing Order 54 (1).

Janet Dover, County Councillor for Colehill and Stapehill, attended the meeting for minutes 8 to 10.

Trevor Jones, County Councillor for Dorchester, attended the meeting for minutes 12 to 14.

Ros Kayes, County Councillor for Bridport, attending the meeting for minutes 19 to 21.

David Mannings, County Councillor for Lodmoor attended the meeting for minute 40.

Officers attending:

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

For certain items, as appropriate:

Andrew Martin (Head of Dorset Highways), Peter Moore (Head of Environment), Matthew Piles (Head of Economy), John Alexander (Policy and Performance Manager), Mark Fortune (Strategy Officer), Chris Hook (Workplace Travel Coordinator), Anthony Littlechild (Corporate Sustainability Officer), Sue McGowan (Management Engineer (LTP)), Gordon Sneddon (Group Manager), Jan Stevenson (Passenger Transport Services Manager) and Carmel Wilkinson (Area Manager).

Public Speakers

Attending for minutes 5 to 7

Lester Cowling, West Bexington local resident

Ian Jackson, West Bexington, local resident

Attending for minutes 19 to 21

John Collingwood, Bridport local resident

Rebecca Hilton, Bridport local resident

Nick Meyers, Bridport local resident

David Neylan, Bridport local resident

Andy Pennington, Bridport local resident

Herbie Treehead, Bridport local resident

Apologies for Absence

1. Apologies for absence were received from Andy Canning, Margaret Phipps, Peter Richardson and Mark Tewkesbury.

Code of Conduct

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

Minutes

3. The minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2014 were confirmed and signed.

Public ParticipationPublic Speaking

4.1 There were no public questions received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21 (1).

4.2 There were no public statements received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21 (1).

Petitions

4.3 The Committee were informed that two petitions had been submitted for consideration.

Petition regarding the condition of the South West Coast Path at West Bexington

5.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment and the Economy on the receipt of a petition containing 104 signatories regarding the condition of the south west coast path at West Bexington and how local villagers had offered to work with Dorset County Council to restore that part of the South West Coast Path which had been damaged during the 2013/14 winter storms. The Head of Environment took the opportunity to clarify how the petition had arisen, the basis on which the evidence in response to the petition had been provided and how the assessment of the breakdown of signatories had been determined.

5.2 The Committee were informed that part of the South West Coast Path on Chesil Beach at West Bexington was covered in shingle in the winter storms of 2013-14. Officers considered that the route had always been reasonably challenging but remained useable, albeit with increased difficulty. Whilst the desire to restore the path to its former condition was understandable, it was considered that the dynamic natural processes at work in the area would, in reality, make this very difficult to achieve and even harder to sustain in the long-term.

5.3 The reasoning for this was because, firstly, the recently deposited shingle, if removed, would not necessarily reveal the former hard surface, because the vegetation that bound it together would have died. Additionally, future storms were likely to deposit shingle back on top of any cleared area, and if a precedent was to be set now by removing it, the costs of repeating the operation would escalate over time. Finally, the site enjoyed a high level of statutory environmental protection, partly to enable the natural processes which created it to continue, and there were complex regulatory issues which required further exploration before any works could be undertaken. As part of this, a non statutory, shoreline management plan limited what mitigating measures should be considered as it effectively prescribed that no active intervention should be taken and that nature should be allowed to take its course.

5.4 The report set out, amongst other things, details of the petition, the arrangements in place for responsibility of the maintenance of the path and a summary of issues and options which had previously been considered.

5.5 Officers acknowledged that the dialogue which had previously taken place with the petitioners had been constructive and generally positive, albeit in the absence of an agreed solution.

5.6 Ian Jackson, local resident, considered that the state of the path currently had an adverse affect on tourism, either by those visiting West Bexington, or just passing through it. He was concerned that the visitor experience was being severely compromised and would affect the future viability of the village. He was convinced that given the willingness of villagers to help the County Council, the restoration of the path could be achieved to some degree and wanted to be given the opportunity to do this.

5.7 Lester Cowling, local resident, echoed the sentiments of the previous speaker in allowing the villagers the opportunity to help towards the restoration of the path. He had witnessed previous storm damage which had been rectified and could see no reason why the same could not be applied on this occasion. He considered that it was unsustainable for that stretch of path to be retained in its current state, as those wishing to use it would simply avoid West Bexington altogether, effectively bypassing the village. Once again he had concerns for the long term sustainability of the viability of the village's facilities and considered that the path's restoration was imperative. He also took the opportunity to refer to a similar petition which had been sent to the Rt Hon. Oliver Letwin on the matter.

5.8 Officers recognised the undoubted value of the South West Coast Path and the benefits it brought to Dorset. They recognised the concerns which were being expressed and commended the offer which had been made by local residents in an attempt to help the County Council resolve the issue.

5.9 The County Councillor for Bride Valley was of the view that whilst there might be some scope for limited remedial work, he agreed with officers that whatever might be achievable in the short term was unsustainable in the face of future weather events similar to that which had been experienced during the winter of 2014.

5.10 Whilst reference had been made in the report to the costs associated with remedial works, he considered that it was difficult to be able to make a meaningful judgement on how these might be applied in the absence of any proper costings. However, in his opinion, it was likely that any costs associated with this would undoubtedly be prohibitive and could not be justified in light of the other funding commitments the County Council had. He considered local residents' offer to be highly commendable but, given the practicalities of any limited achievements being sustained, he felt that this stretch of path should be left to the forces of nature.

5.11 Officers emphasised that the magnitude of any remedial works should not be underestimated. They explained that detailed costings had unfortunately been unable to be achieved within the committee cycle timescale, but realistically costs would be considerable, given the length over which any remedial work would be needed. Even if this was not a consideration, there were limited engineered options available, with a possible solution of a boardwalk costing in the region of £100,000. Accordingly in recognising the economic impact the situation was having on West Bexington, they suggested that greater emphasis might be placed on seeing the village as a destination for tourists, rather than being a transitory stop on their continuing journeys.

5.12 Despite the engineering limitations of providing a solution and taking into account the seeming futility of carrying out any remedial works and being presented with the options on how to respond to the receipt of the petition, the Committee considered that the County Council should continue to work in partnership with local residents, together with Natural England to make improvements to that stretch of the South West Coast Path which were affordable, reasonable and practicable. This response accorded essentially with the option in paragraph 2.3 of the Director's report.

5.13 In the meantime, officers would make an assessment of appropriate costings and attempt to identify any appropriate engineering solutions which were practicable.

Resolved

6. That the petition be noted and the petitioners be notified that the County Council would continue to work in partnership with the local residents/petitioners,

together with Natural England, to make improvements to the condition on that stretch of the South West Coast Path which were affordable, reasonable and practicable.

Reason for decision

7. To meet the corporate aims of economic growth and health, wellbeing and safeguarding.

Procedure for Petitions - Petition entitled “The provision of an hourly bus service along Leigh Road and Wimborne Road West , Wimborne”

8.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment and the Economy on the receipt of a petition containing 338 signatories requesting the provision of an hourly bus service along Leigh Road and Wimborne Road West, Wimborne.

8.2 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 stood aside for its consideration. In the absence of the Vice-Chairman, John Wilson was elected as Chairman for this item.

8.3 The report put into context the arrangements currently in place for public transport provision in that area and, particularly, what services Yellow Bus and Gardbus operated. Whilst this route had previously been served by both operators, owing to changes being made on a commercial basis to their service provision, the Yellow Bus service had recently ceased and the Gardbus service was now more limited.

8.4 The current basis for public bus service provision was described in the report, including the criteria used when determining which services should be supplemented by subsidies from the County Council in light of the loss of any commercial bus services and the consequences of this happening. The report provided a series of options on how the Committee might consider proceeding in response to the petitioners’ request.

8.5 The petitioners considered that the reduced service they now received severely compromised their ability of accessing necessary amenities and facilities which routes had served previously and this had caused considerable inconvenience. The inadequacies of the alternatives provided were also expressed.

8.6 The County Councillor for Colehill and Stapehill addressed the Committee. In speaking on behalf of not only herself, but the petition organiser, Jane Rawlinson, she requested that the services be reintroduced as a matter of urgency as they had provided a lifeline for those who had limited capacity to access alternative transport options. This was particularly relevant as there was a significant number of vulnerable residents in that area of her division whose ability to access vital amenities was being compromised and who often had no access to alternative provision. She asked for consideration to be given to the provision of an hourly service in line with that which had been previously provided.

8.7 In her own right, she reiterated the views of the petitioners, being of the view that the arrangements now in place were inadequate and did not meet the needs of the community, leaving many isolated and unable to gain access to vital amenities or visit family and friends. She also asked if the Wimborne Business Improvement District (BID) could play a part in finding a solution, as she considered that there would undoubtedly be an adverse effect on the town’s economy. She asked that more consideration should be given to looking at ways of improving the service.

8.8 The Committee Chairman and the County Councillor for Minster then expressed his views in response to the petition. He appreciated that whilst there had been a considerable amount of change with service provision, this particular decision had been taken purely on a commercial basis and had no bearing on how routes were subsidised by

the County Council. He acknowledged that the sudden reduction in service had led to the concern now being raised. However he reminded the Committee that on 9 October 2014 they had agreed that the current arrangements for managing public bus services should be maintained in order that their merits might be given the opportunity to be fulfilled and in view of what the holistic transport review might reveal. Accordingly he felt that there was little room for any manoeuvre in this case. He also considered that the Wimborne BID had little part to play in these circumstances given that the economic vibrancy of the town appeared to be thriving.

8.9 In debating the issue, some councillors considered the issues raised by the petitioner, and supported by the local member, to make improvements to the regularity of the service, might be pursued. Whilst appreciating that the County Council did not have a direct responsibility in this instance, they considered that they might act as a conduit in facilitating a means of addressing this.

8.10 Given the lowering in the cost of fuel over recent months, councillors considered this might have a bearing on whether bus companies might wish to reconsider the decisions they had made in limiting their services and in assessing their viability.

8.11 Officers explained that this particular situation essentially had arisen as two bus services had been sharing the same routes and its passengers and, consequently, neither had sufficient patronage to make them commercially viable. With only one company now operating a limited service, there might be more scope for a solution to be reached.

8.12 Whilst emphasising that the County Council were limited in what part they could play in how commercial services operated, particularly as there was no funding to subsidise the services, officers confirmed that the County Council could facilitate a meeting between the bus operators, the petitioners and the relevant local members to see what progress might be made in addressing the issue.

8.13 The Committee considered that this course of action should be progressed and agreed that the petitioner should be informed accordingly.

Resolved

9. That the petition be noted and the petitioner informed that arrangements be made for a meeting between the relevant bus operators, local county councillors, the petitioner and officers to see what progress might be made in addressing the issues raised in the petition.

Reason for Decision

10. To enable local people to connect with locally elected decision makers and to enable economic growth.

Forward Together for Environment and the Economy

11.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment and the Economy which provided an update on progress being made on The Way Ahead workstreams for the Directorate's Transformation Programme, the three elements of which were; the Directorate's restructuring, Holistic Transport Services Review and Highways Service Delivery Model.

11.2 Members were informed that each workstream continued to progress well and was co-ordinated with the Forward Together Programme and governance arrangements. Heads of Service were provided with the opportunity to provide a summary of their proposals for the future delivery of their service and what actions were being taken to achieve this.

11.3 Councillors were pleased to hear of the progress being made with the rationalisation of services and resources and how those services were designed to be delivered more efficiently in future. Officers agreed to provide members with a chart showing the Directorate's new organisational structure and it was suggested that the Member's Gateway would provide a means of access to this.

11.4 Some councillors were concerned at the apparent greater use of fixed term contracts for employees and the perceived implications of these in terms of job security, terms and conditions. Mention was also made of the experience which was being lost as a result of redundancies being made. The Director confirmed that the management of these changes would ensure that the right skills were in the right place to deliver what was necessary across the Directorate.

11.5 The Committee acknowledged the progress being made regarding the need to change the way in which the Directorate worked, both operationally and in how its resources were used, and recognised that the Forward Together Programme was essential in facilitating this.

Noted

Park and Ride – Weymouth and Dorchester

12.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment and the Economy on how the park and ride schemes for Weymouth and Dorchester were operating and the progress being made in improving how they were delivered.

12.2 Councillors were reminded that, at their meeting on 19 June 2014, they considered a report outlining the current situation with Weymouth and Dorchester Park and Ride (P and R) sites. The Committee agreed that further investigation should be undertaken on the future of the sites, which included the specific actions set out in detail in the Director's report.

12.3 Since that time, a pan-Dorset parking regime had been proposed, comprising the single delivery parking model, incorporating on and off street parking provision and Park and Ride. The investigation into P and R would contribute to that process, in particular the key actions identified in points a-d, set out in the Executive Summary to the report.

12.4 The Committee were informed that investigations to date had shown that for many authorities, subsidy of Park and Ride services was justified by significant contributions to high-level transport objectives, including improved local air quality and reduced town centre congestion, as well as to parking objectives such as increased town centre "churn" and meeting seasonal capacity shortages.

12.5 The outcomes of the investigations and the next steps, including the part the Weymouth Town Centre Masterplan Project could contribute to this were set out in the report. Weymouth P and R was considered to be an essential tool in helping to remove vehicles from the town centre and was therefore integral to the exercise. The Committee were informed of the relationship between the various initiatives designed to manage traffic, how strategic priorities for parking services and master planning were being managed and recognition of the need for there to be some incentive for use of the R and R service. The operational costs associated with both sites were described, along with the capacity and limitations of each site.

12.6 Officers hoped that the developments underway, including the provision of the single partnership parking service, would include consideration of park and ride services as an integral part if they were to deliver the full range of benefits.

12.7 The County Councillor for Dorchester (Trevor Jones) considered that what was being proposed was appropriate and would allow the opportunity for those initiatives being delivered to come to fruition. However, he asked that the Dorchester Transport and Environment Plan (DTEP) member led working group play their part in monitoring the progress being made with the Dorchester scheme. Officers agreed that this would be a sensible approach.

12.8 The other County Councillor for Dorchester (Richard Biggs) supported the proposal too and the inclusion of DTEP in the process and suggested that consideration might be given to the provision of an electric bike scheme at the P and R sites as an alternative to using the bus. The County Councillor for Portland Tophill also supported this suggestion too.

12.9 The Chairman then drew attention to the information provided on Real Time Passenger Information (RTPi), which complemented both P and R operations and the Holistic Transport Review, in how passenger transport was designed to be delivered in the future. Councillors assessed this in conjunction with the P and R issue. The County Council's Audit and Scrutiny Committee had previously scrutinised RTPi and had asked what progress was being made. Whilst the Committee were not being asked to take any decision on this, the information provided was helpful in their understanding of the relationship between various initiatives and how it was designed to contribute to the more efficient management of traffic and travel opportunities. It was agreed that progress on the RTPi should be shared with all councillors.

Resolved

13.1 That continuation of the operation of the Park and Ride sites under the current arrangements for a further period of 28 months be confirmed, during which time the Weymouth Masterplanning work would develop, large employment engagement would have increased and the single delivery parking model was implemented.

13.2 That the DTEP working group play its part in monitoring the Dorchester aspect of the initiative, with the Weymouth elements being incorporated into the Masterplan and Western Growth Hub Steering Group.

Reason for decisions

14. Park and Ride was an essential method of managing town centre parking. The nature of Dorset and the reliance on motorised transport meant that parking would be essential for the medium to long term needs of the towns. Maintaining these sites and increasing the usage, greatly assists in reducing peak town centre congestion, freeing up space for short-term shoppers to park and helped with economic growth.

Heritage Partnership Agreement for Dorset Bridges

15.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment and the Economy on the development of an Heritage Partnership Agreement between the County Council, Bournemouth Borough Council, the Borough of Poole and English Heritage to establish a management framework for the repair, maintenance and alteration of all bridges, or part of bridges, which were classed as heritage assets. This was designed to ensure the preservation of their historic interest, whilst reducing cost and potential delay associated with the current consenting process, by agreeing in advance a range of detailed specifications set within a formal agreement.

15.2 Councillors were pleased to learn that this innovative approach was being promoted by English Heritage as a national first and positioned Dorset at the forefront of a new and more efficient approach to heritage conservation.

15.3 Officers drew Councillors' attention to the draft Heritage Partnership Agreement set out in Appendix 2 to the report, which was designed to provide some basis upon which a more comprehensive legal document could be developed.

15.4 The Committee considered that the agreement provided for a basis to secure the long term protection of heritage assets for undertaking such remedial works within a consistent process framework.

Recommended

16. That subject to any further detailed revisions being approved by the Head of Environment, after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and the Economy, the Heritage Partnership agreement be approved.

Reason for Recommendation

17. To ensure the effective and efficient maintenance of historic bridges in Dorset as an important part of our highway infrastructure and heritage, and to deliver corporate plan commitments to:

- Ensure the good management of our historic assets and heritage
- Provide efficient, customer-focussed regulatory services
- Manage and maintain the highway infrastructure

Notice of Motion – Great Western Rail Services and the introduction of the new IEP trains

18.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment and the Economy which had been prepared in direct response to the receipt of a motion by Councillor Kate Wheller. This raised concerns about the proposals for the Great Western Rail Services to introduce the new Inter City Express Programme (IEP) trains and the implications of this on staffing and service cuts. The motion urged the Government and the franchise operators to protect the interests of passengers and the communities who relied on these rail services by ensuring that all contracts were set up to deliver properly funded, properly staffed and affordable railways. Councilor Paul Kimber, as seconder to the motion, presented it to committee on Councilor Wheller's behalf.

18.2 In response, officers explained that, whilst the Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset Local Transport Plan 2011-2026 contained policies that promoted sustainable travel modes, including public transport, as an alternative to the car and that Policy LTP H-5 of that document provided for enhancing the role of rail travel, the County Council had very little scope to influence operational decisions made by the Train Operating Companies as this remit lay outside the jurisdiction of the Authority.

Noted

Motion to Council in respect of Public Bus Services

19.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment and the Economy which had been prepared in direct response to a notice of motion to the County Council on 22 October 2014 from Councillor Ros Kayes which called on Dorset County Council to:-

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- reconsider its level of reimbursement for concessionary bus passes, recognising the impact of low reimbursement on the sustainability of services, and to alter this upwards in line with the national average;
- recognise its duty under section 63 of the Transport Act 1985 to “ secure the provision of such public passenger transport services as the council consider is appropriate to meet any public transport requirements within the county which would not in their view be met apart from any action taken by them for that purpose “ and to recognise this specifically in relation to economically significant routes upon which both jobs and the livelihood of town centres depend , and,
- recognise its duty under section 108(1)(b) of the Local Transport Act 2000(b) for the Local Authority to carry out its functions so as to implement the policies of section 2.4.1 of its Local Transport Plan to :
 - a) Maintain and improve levels of access to key services and reduce dependence on the car and
 - b) Support and promote a culture of community led rural access solutions creating easier longer distance trips to urban areas by public transport".

19.2 The report set out in detail the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) and how its provisions were applied to the County Council transport services, the relationship of those provisions to the Local Transport Plan priorities, the part that the Holistic Transport Review would play in determining future passenger transport provision and governance arrangements associated with this. The governance arrangements were set out in Appendix A to the report.

19.3 Officers explained that calculating concessionary travel reimbursement was predicated on determining what would have happened in the absence of the concessionary scheme and required Travel Concession Authorities, i.e. the County Council, to estimate a series of components of reimbursement, which were set out in the report. The way in which the concessionary travel reimbursement was calculated was set out in the report and, as it was applied universally and consistently, officers recommended that this should be maintained.

19.4 The Committee’s attention was drawn to the reports summary, explaining that work to develop a sustainable transport service which supported the Local Transport Plan was ongoing and that there were two options for the level of re-imburement paid to bus operators for the ENCTS: either to maintain the existing re-imburement level using the guidance provided by DfT, or to ignore it.

19.5 Officers emphasised that any increase in the re-imburement rate to bus operators for the ENCTS would require a source of additional funding to be identified or savings to be made from elsewhere in the budget.

19.6 Ros Kayes, County Councillor for Bridport, reiterated the provisions of the motion, explaining the reasoning behind them and what they were designed to achieve. She considered that the County Council had a responsibility to provide adequate passenger transport provision and this was not currently being fulfilled. She referred to the number of services which had been lost as a consequence of applying the new public transport arrangements.

19.7 She considered that the way in which the concessionary fares reimbursement scheme was being applied was unsatisfactory and was not meeting its needs. Consequently she asked that more flexible consideration of quality contracts and subsidies be applied to

meet the needs of bus companies, so that they might be able to maintain services which they otherwise would have to reduce. Accordingly she asked that a cross party, working group, drawn from members of the Committee, be established to look into what might be achieved to satisfactorily address the issue.

19.8 The Committee then heard from David Neylan, local resident, who expressed concern at the limited bus services now being provided, particularly regarding the Service 753 bus route from Bridport as he considered that this would have an adverse impact on education and employment opportunities, as well as exacerbating congestion. Having previously attended Weymouth College as a mature student, he had found this service to be invaluable.

19.9 Herbie Treehead, local resident, expressed his concern at the lack of provision now being available via Bridport as a result of the recent changes to service provision. He considered that this would adversely affect his employment opportunities and would leave Bridport inaccessible in the evenings to those who had no other means of transport.

19.10 Nick Meyers, local resident, took the opportunity to ask for quality contracts between the County Council and bus operators to be given greater prominence and that consideration should be given to determining an agreed standard of service to be provided. He was of the view that this would benefit both sides and provide some assurance for what was expected from the service and of those drivers involved.

19.11 Rebecca Hilton, local resident, similarly expressed concern that the service on which she had relied to visit her dependants had now been reduced severely and this would consequently restrict her ability to maintain those visits on a regular basis and restrict the opportunities she had to visit. Indeed the reasoning for her selection of those particular care facilities was that it was served by the Service X53 route.

19.12 John Collingwood, local resident, explained that the limitations of the Service X31 had adverse consequences for what amenities could be accessed from Bridport. This had severely compromised his ability to visit dependents on a regular basis. He asked that reconsideration be given to the issue of passenger transport as a whole.

19.13 Finally the Committee heard from Andy Pennington, local resident, who considered that passenger service provision was critical in accessing education and employment opportunities and was severely compromised without a sustainable solution. As it stood, diminishing routes had led to social isolation and a loss of economic prosperity and he encouraged councillors to engage directly with service users to better understand the issues they were having. He considered that the current system was not fit for purpose and supported the establishment of a working group to consider how improvements for service provision might be made.

19.14 In response to the final point Mr Pennington made, the Head of Economy drew the Committee's attention to the context of Appendix 1. This set out the membership of the Holistic Transport Board, on which four Cabinet members served and which would oversee the Holistic Transport Review. As such, he considered that those arrangements would be sufficient in achieving all that was necessary.

19.15 Whilst appreciating the comments made by the speakers, the Chairman drew councillors' attention to the report's recommendation asking if they considered that the Government's means of calculating concessionary fare reimbursements should be maintained and asked that they focus on this.

19.16 The Committee were informed that regular meetings had taken place with bus operators to ensure that economic growth was not compromised and education and employment opportunities were maintained.

19.17 Whilst recognising that the means by which concessionary fare reimbursement was calculated was complex, officers considered that, in the circumstances, this was essentially the only option available to the County Council to establish what this should be. The process, being independent, had served both the County Council and bus operators well in the past, in ensuring that companies were adequately recompensed for what they had incurred in providing this service. Officers confirmed that the calculator used took account of inflationary consideration in its calculations.

19.18 Officers confirmed that whilst bus operators had the opportunity annually to state their case for receiving an increase in the concessionary recompense they got, this had never been forthcoming. Officers explained in detail the process used for making calculations and the consideration being given to the use of quality contracts and how these might be applied. Officers clarified the distinction between services which had been withdrawn and those which had been merely reduced.

19.19 The Committee discussed the merits of the motion in detail, but agreed that the concessionary payment made to operators accurately reflected the fares which they would have otherwise received had the concessionary scheme not been operating. Given this, and in light of the independent assessment made into what reimbursement should be paid, they considered that the arrangements currently in place should be maintained.

19.20 In terms of the establishment of a working group to supplement what arrangements were already in place, some Councillors considered that this was already covered by the work being undertaken by the Holistic Transport Board and that therefore, there was little need for any further group to be established. However other Councillors expressed concerns that more evidence was needed as to the implications of any increased rate to bus operators or the services they would be able to provide. As such they felt that a working group, with cross party representation, could play a significant part in determining how best to address this issue and could form part of any renegotiations of what services might be able to be provided.

19.21 On being put to the vote, the recommendation contained in the Director's report was agreed. However, the proposal to establish a cross party working group to complement the work of the Holistic Transport Board was not supported.

Resolved

20. That the reimbursement to bus operators in respect of concessionary bus fares should continue to be calculated using the Department for Transport guidance be endorsed.

Reason for Decision

21. This action would maintain the existing network and not incur additional costs for the County Council.

Dorset Highways Performance 2014/15 (Quarter 1 and 2)

22.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment and the Economy which provided an overview of the performance of a range of services in Dorset Highways for the first two quarters of the 2014/15 financial year. The report comprised a summary of Dorset's highways performance and a table of performance indicators for a range of key highway services, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

22.2 The report provided an update on funding allocation, particularly in respect of two substantial, successful funding bids to central government to assist with highway maintenance. The securing of this funding had assisted considerably in Dorset Highways achieving a significant proportion of remedial works resulting from the severe weather events of 2013/14, including carriageway resurfacing and improved drainage. This funding and other investment had contributed significantly to a marked improvement in the overall condition of the highway network, which had been reflected in improvements in customer satisfaction.

22.3 The performance summary overview also covered the part the Service had played in a forthcoming television documentary on the work highway authorities carried out, on Service Redesign and how the realignment of functions would be applied and the 'Top 12' key performance indicators from across the Service. The Service's partnership working arrangements were also described.

22.4 The Committee, in being invited to comment on the new format of the performance information provided, considered that whilst this was somewhat basic, the information remained meaningful and relevant. However, they asked that consideration be given to further use of graphics where appropriate so that Councillors might have a better understanding of how performance was being monitored. Officers envisaged that 'infographics' would play a more prominent part in delivering this information in the future.

22.5 The Committee could see that improvements were generally being made in the Dorset Highway's performance and hoped that this progress would be sustained.

Resolved

23.1 That the Dorset Highways' Performance 2014/15 (Quarter 1 and Quarter 2) be noted.

23.2 That, whilst the new format remained meaningful and readily understandable, consideration be given to the greater use of graphics, where appropriate.

Reasons for Decisions

24.1 To ensure Councillors were aware of the performance of Dorset Highways and to draw attention to any specific performance issues or highlights.

24.2 To provide data to assist in making evidence based decisions.

24.3 Feedback was sought to ensure that Dorset Highways continued to provide a simple, comprehensive and meaningful way of presenting service performance information.

Renewable Energy Business Rate Retention

25.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment and the Economy on the proposed arrangements to benefit from the Government's introduction of new provisions to allow local planning authorities to retain business rates in full for new commercial scale renewable energy installations and the Government's subsequent encouragement, through its Community Energy Strategy, to invest these revenues to support further community energy development in their area.

25.2 The report set out the case for allocating this additional income to help maintain the staff capacity to support community energy development within the framework of the adopted Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Strategies, and in doing so, to maximise the potential economic and social benefits to Dorset from renewable energy development.

25.3 The report also set out the opportunities for Dorset's economy and the County Council to benefit from the growth and investment in green renewable energy, with the

economic benefit to the local economy and communities in Dorset from the community energy sector being significant. The Strategy was designed to put communities in control of the energy they used, which in turn was considered to have wider benefits including building stronger communities, creating local jobs, improving health and supporting local economic growth. In order to facilitate this, the Strategy placed emphasis on the Government's encouragement of all local authorities to reinvest revenues in information, advice and support services for community energy projects.

25.4 Officers explained that an opportunity was also being taken to seek a mandate to approach Dorset's district and borough councils to seek a share of the additional renewable energy business rates received by them to support strategy delivery. The Committee considered that town councils should also be included in any approach made.

25.5 The report also described the part the County Council's Sustainability Team played in securing a large proportion of European and national funding associated with this sector.

25.6 In the absence any dedicated funds to deliver the Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Strategies projects, either in terms of staff resources or projects, the report described how the funding from this source would enable the Sustainability Team to continue to support this growing and influential sector.

25.7 As such, in line with Government Guidance, there was now the opportunity to allocate a proportion of the additional business rates secured from renewable energy to maintain services in this area and capture these benefits in future.

25.8 The Committee considered that Community Energy development should be supported and that good progress had been made in what had already been achieved. They considered that it was important that appropriate funding was made available to support it and to continue to facilitate its growth. However, Councillors were mindful that the County Council's general principle was that funding could not necessarily be ring fenced solely for a particular project and therefore there was a need to amend the wording of the recommendation to reflect this.

25.9 To this end, the Committee considered that the principles behind the allocation of the funding should benefit those who had responsibility to promote and facilitate sustainability, taking into consideration the emphasis the Government placed on encouraging this, without necessarily being prescriptive to how funding was allocated.

Recommended

26.1 That revenue resulting from the renewable energy business rates retention scheme for developments where the County Council was the planning authority should be allocated to support the County Council's work on community energy, currently led by the Sustainability Team, in accordance with the emphasis Government placed on encouraging this.

26.2 That officers being given a mandate, after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and the Economy, to approach Dorset's district, borough and town councils with a view to allocating a proportion of the renewable energy business rates accruing to them to deliver the shared commitment to community energy within the framework of the adopted Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Strategies.

Reason for Recommendations

27. Allocation of business rates from renewable energy installations would put the work on community energy led by the County Council on behalf of the local

authorities in Dorset on a sustainable financial footing. This would enable the County Council to promote the development of community energy in Dorset, maximising the significant economic and social benefits in line with the County Council's corporate aims, specifically to:

- enable economic growth by promoting an energy efficient, low carbon economy,
- generate economic growth through the use of green technology and local energy.

Dorset Highways Capital Programme 2015/16

28.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Environment and the Economy which provided details of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) Capital Programme for the 2015/16 financial year, which was presented in the form of the Dorset Highways Capital Programme April 2015 - March 2016, as set out in Appendix A to the report and which sought Committee approval of the Programme.

28.2 The report detailed all of the schemes planned for construction in the forthcoming financial year, explained how the highway improvement schemes were prioritised and the funding arrangements associated with them. It also set out how bridges and structures and structural maintenance schemes were prioritised. The detail of the schemes was set within the context of the Local Transport Settlement 2015/16 and the other funding streams which provided the means for additional funding to be secured.

28.3 Councillors noted that the Programme was divided into four categories so as to be readily meaningful and explanatory, these being safety schemes; construction only schemes; design and construction schemes and; design only schemes which provided the Committee with some context of the means by which schemes would be delivered.

28.4 The Committee was pleased to see what was being achieved in delivering the highways improvements for 2015/16 and hoped that these would be progressed as envisaged. The Chairman invited Councillors to discuss direct with officers the progress being made with schemes in their particular electoral divisions outside of the meeting.

Resolved

29. That the LTP Capital Programme for 2015/16 financial year be approved.

Reason for Decision

30. To progress the County Council's Corporate Aim of supporting economic growth.

Revenue Budget 2015/16

31.1 The Committee considered a joint report by the Chief Financial Officer and the Director for Environment and the Economy which set out a summary of the key issues within the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement and the impact of the settlement on the budget strategy for the County Council.

31.2 The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement was received on 17 December 2014 and saw a reduction in government grant funding for Dorset County Council of around 14% in 2015/16. This was anticipated in the Medium Term Financial Planning. Allowance had been made in the budget strategy through the Resource Allocation Model for pay, price and demographic changes totalling £5.3m and central commitments totalling £1.8m. The overall budget shortfall for the three year period 2015/16 to 2017/18 was now estimated to be £45m and would need to be delivered through the Forward Together.

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31.3 Councillors were informed that for 2015/16, the savings required were £15.3m. Proposals to address the majority of the gap had been developed by the Cabinet and it had agreed that these should now form the basis for consultation and further development.

31.4 The report outlined the implications of the budget strategy on the Environment and Economy Directorate. Officers explained that the Directorate's adjusted base budget for 2014/15 was £35.999m, with the budget for 2015/16 being £34.837m. Analysis of the movement in the budget was shown at Appendix 1 to the report and included base budget adjustments, cost pressures recognised through the Resource Allocation Model (RAM) and the Forward Together savings proposals and targets. Officers confirmed that the Directorate was undergoing a transformational programme comprising three elements to delivering the relevant savings: a new Directorate Operational Model (£1.5m); Highways Service Delivery Model (£1.0m); and the Holistic Transport Review (£1.5m). The report included commentary on how the proposed savings would be achieved.

31.5 The Committee were provided with an opportunity to suggest alternative savings if they considered these to be appropriate and were asked to consider any additional measures that could be taken to generate savings to reduce the remaining budget gap.

Resolved

32. That the savings proposals relating to services within the Environment and Economy Directorate for 2014/15, as outlined within section 4 of the joint report, in line with the agreed Forward Together Transformation Programme be noted and accepted.

Reason for Decision

33. The County Council must set a budget within the resources available, and agree a precept for 2015/16 by the end of February 2015. To do this, Directors were required to draw up detailed budgets and develop and consult upon savings proposals within them.

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2014/15, including Forward Together Update

34.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Financial Officer setting out budget monitoring information as at the end of November 2014, which showed a forecast overspend against all service budgets for the County Council of £5,765,000.

34.2 For the Environment and the Economy Directorate, this represented a projected underspend of £350,000, or 0.96% of the budget for the year, with the details attributable to each cost centre being set out in the report. This compared to a forecast overspend of £376k at the end of August 2014. The main reasons for the improvement were the applications of one-off monies from central balances and highways reserves to cover base budget deficits in Parking Services and Highways and a forecast underspend within the former Dorset Property budget.

34.3 The Committee noted the forecast budget position for the Directorate and the actions which had been to reduce the overspend position.

Noted

Corporate Performance Monitoring Report: Second Quarter 2014/15 (1 July – 30 September 2014)

35.1 The Committee considered a joint report by the Chief Executive and the Director for Environment and the Economy which contained analysis of the Council's progress against both of its corporate aims and presented the results of the monitoring of the

County Council's Corporate Balanced Scorecard for the second quarter of 2014/15. Members were reminded that as well as the Corporate Plan, the Balanced Scorecard was the principal means by which the County Council could monitor high priority performance measures on budget management, customer service and staff development and wellbeing. Whilst the Scorecard summarised performance monitoring analysis across the whole Authority, there was a specific focus on those elements of the plan which were managed by the Environment and the Economy Directorate.

35.2 Officers reported that the Corporate Plan now contained 37 performance measures of which twelve were associated with the Enabling Economic Growth corporate aim and 25 related to the Health, Wellbeing and Safeguarding theme. Five of the Enabling Economic Growth measures were the responsibility of the Environment and the Economy Directorate, in the areas of economic development, waste management, superfast broadband delivery and highways management with three of the Health, Wellbeing and Safeguarding measures being their responsibility too, in the areas of access and countryside management, rights of way access and reducing traffic accidents. Detailed performance information for all of these measures was provided in the Appendix to the report.

35.3 The Committee was also informed of a development arising from an Audit and Scrutiny Committee decision taken on 16 December 2014, whereby the Committee was now provided with a more meaningful understanding of the performance indicators for which it was responsible, with this information being set out in Appendix 2.

35.4 Councillors noted that at the end of November 2014 there was a green forecast corporate overspend of £4.3m or 1.7% on the net budget for the year. The headline issues for the Directorate in Quarter 2 were as follows: -

- Enabling Economic Growth – Whilst housing affordability slightly improved, as did the percentage of employees in high skill occupations and, overall, unemployment fell slightly, youth unemployment remained high, and the percentage of young people in jobs without training had increased.
- Budget - The Dorset Waste Partnership was forecast to have a significant overspend at year-end of £1.6m (8.4%). However, Environment and Economy budgets were now forecasting an overall underspend of £350k.

35.5 As part of the performance commentary for the Directorate, emphasis was placed on the issue of youth unemployment and the implications for this. Officers agreed that there would be more stringent monitoring of this in the future, on a more regular basis so that the information provided was more meaningful.

35.6 The issue of the marginal decrease in the percentage of employees working in creative industries was also highlighted. Officers explained that improvements were being made to the submission of this data by way of a census table which had been commissioned which would better take into account self employed people and very small businesses, which the current arrangements did not. This should provide for a clearer insight into what was happening in that field.

Noted

Policy Development Panels

36.1 The Committee were provided with the opportunity to consider establishing any new Policy Development Panels, but decided that there was no need for any to be established at this time.

36.2 The Chairman took the opportunity to provide the Committee with an update on progress with the Policy Development Panel on Roundabouts and Other Asset Sponsorship. He explained that suggestions by the consultants looking into how sponsorship might best suit Dorset would not necessarily meet Dorset's needs. However some parts could be modified to suit Dorset's needs, if appropriate.

Noted**Schedule of Councillors' Seminars and Events 2015**

37. The Committee's attention was drawn to the Schedule of Councillors' Seminars and Events for the early months of 2015.

Noted**Councillor Briefings**

38. The Committee were provided with the opportunity to identify topics for future councillor briefings but decided that there was no need for any to be held at the present time.

Noted**Environment Overview Committee Work Programme**

39. The Committee considered and agreed its work programme for the early months of 2015.

Noted**Outside Bodies**

40. The Committee noted the oral submission provided by David Mannings in respect of the Dorset Local Access Forum; by Hilary Cox in respect of the County Farms Liaison Panel, Dorset AONB Partnership Board, Dorset Local Nature Partnership Board and the Jurassic Coast Trust; and by Ronald Coatsworth in respect of the Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority. The Committee thanked them all for their informative updates. Clarification was also provided that the Safewise Board of Trustees and the Streetwise Partnership Trust Limited had now amalgamated under the auspices of the Safewise body and, for the time being, Toni Coombs would assume the councillor representative role serving on this.

Noted**Questions from County Councillors**

41. No questions were asked by councillors under Standing Order 20(2).

Meeting duration:
10:00am – 1.00 pm and 1.30 pm – 2.40 pm

