

WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

Minutes of General Meeting No.88 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 26th November 2015

Present: Peter Body (Beaminster Town Council); John Collingwood (Bridport); Bob Driscoll (Symondsburry Parish Council); Debbie Fiddik (DCC); Alan Glenn (Askerswell); Ignacio Gomez (BAG-WD); Ian Gray (DCT); Freda Hennessy (Corscombe PC); Julian Jones (Green Party); Dominic Knorpel (POPP); David Marsh (Thorncombe PC); Gavin Maxwell (Bridport); Debbie Morris (E-zec Medical); Tom Murphy (Churches Together); Mike Nicks (West Bay Community Forum); Erica Pretty (POPP); Peter Ridler (Walditch Lane); Philip Sankey (Lyme Forward); Peter Smith (Chair WATAG); David Shurden (First); Hannah Smith (E-zec Medical); John Snow (Yarn Barton); Wayne Spedding (E-zec Medical); Tony Taylor (Puncknowle&Swyre GPC); Daryl Turner (DCC); Richard Webster (Bridport); Lottie Welch (View From); Alan Williams (WATAG).

Apologies: Tim Christian, Bryony Chetwode, Ron Coatsworth, Mike Farmer, John G Green, Sue Herman, Trevor Jones, Ros Kayes, Anna Lovell, Geoff Parr.

1. Minutes: The minutes of the previous (87th) meeting were agreed.

2. Matters arising not covered later: none.

3. E-zec: Presentation by hospital transport provider

Business manager, Wayne Spedding, explained that E-zec is a family-owned business dedicated to patient care. The company has delivered over 5 million journeys since 2013. He had met the Dorset CCG (Clinical Commissioning Group) the previous day and stressed that the company had to meet tight key performance indicators. Eligibility criteria are set by NHS England, whereas E-zec's role is as a "gate-keeper". Mr Spedding maintained that "it is not in E-zec's interest, morally or financially, to refuse transport". The appeals process is "not a perfect mechanism" and transport is not a NHS priority. Peter Body reported that on one occasion, the E-zec call centre had declined his request for transport to Shepton Mallet hospital and merely suggested he take (and pay for) a taxi; on a different occasion, his request was accepted and he travelled alone in a fully equipped ambulance. Mr Spedding stressed that the paramedics and vehicles supplied are for non-emergency cases. E-zec has no access to medical records. Gavin Maxwell (who is on the board of NICE) recalled that the referring GP or hospital consultant used to be the person responsible for applying for transport, and wondered if there should be a review of clinical information. Tom Murphy stated that there are 60 voluntary transport schemes in Dorset, with 20 journeys a week from Bridport alone. The 40 volunteer drivers are struggling to keep up with this "social need." E-zec confirms that they pass on information on voluntary groups at the CCG's request. The meeting was unsure as to whether hospital visits for radio- or chemo-therapy qualify. E-zec and Erica Pretty said yes, Tom Murphy said no and Dominic Knorpel said "not automatically". Daryl Turner was told that calls are recorded and monitored. Wayne Spedding thanked all present for hearing E-zec's position and suggested that it may be useful for WATAG to invite the CCG to the next meeting. He will mention the points raised at the next E-zec/CCG meeting.

4. Re-routing issues on route 44

Bob Driscoll gave a summary of the background to the continued failure to resolve this problem which has led to the prolonged isolation of a number of elderly Wanderwell estate/Valley Road residents. WATAG has written to the Traffic Commissioner (copied to relevant County Councillors and DCC's Adult and Community Services Director, Catherine Driscoll). A copy was also sent to Oliver Letwin MP who has asked to be kept advised. Bob has also contacted the Local Government Ombudsman who has registered WATAG's complaint and may intervene if other avenues are exhausted.

5. Bus Operators' news, including:

(i) First bus

David Shurden introduced himself as First Wessex's "interim" general manager, explaining that Mark Williams is working on RTPI systems and Simon Newport is now based elsewhere.

Mr Shurden stated that he had not inherited “Simon’s in-tray” and welcomed comments on current issues. These included the “near misses” experienced due to the obstruction of the bus stop outside the Lyme Regis Co-op by large delivery trucks. Philip Sankey asked when First would need input from WATAG before next “summer’s timetables are set in stone.”

(ii) Damory

There was no representative from Damory to answer concerns raised by Freda Hennessey on behalf of the residents of Corscombe and surrounding villages about Christmas timetables, particularly on the 204 which may not run for three weeks, as Christmas falls on Friday. Debbie Fiddik undertook to see whether a driver and bus are available on another day. The public needs this information as well as bus-stop timetables (there is no 44 timetable at the Nationwide stop in Bridport).

(iii) Dorset Community Transport

Ian Gray had good news on the opening of a new door-to-door service from Marshwood and Thorncombe to Bridport on Wednesdays. The service has had a good start and is expected to attract further passengers as news of its introduction spreads. Debbie Fiddik undertook to ensure that the service is mentioned on the DCC website.

6. Information from DCC including “Holistic Transport Review”, future of timetables and real-time information

The meeting was told that the damaged Lyme bus shelter will be replaced on 26th January. Debbie Fiddik confirmed that timetable booklets will not be issued in November and will probably not appear in May 2016 either. Less and less funding is available and the “Holistic Transport Review” (led by Gerald Rose) aims to pull all strands together to give the best value for money. Council vehicles are to be used more. The question was raised as to whether WATAG – as a ‘stakeholder’ – would be consulted. Bob Driscoll felt that it is time to drop RTI in West Dorset and suggested that it is time to think about reviewing free concessionary bus passes as well. Ms Fiddik confirmed that Dorset concessionary pass holders may travel free on the 08.30 Bridport/Poole X53 (from Roundham Gardens), the 06.25 Bridport/Exeter (from Charmouth to the Devon border) and the 08.00 X51 Bridport/Winterbourne Steepleton or Martinstown. A lively discussion ensued and Dominic Knorpel suggested that WATAG write to Oliver Letwin as bus passes are a national matter.

7. Hospital Transport – reimbursement rate for those qualifying for refund.

WATAG has written to Financial Services at Dorset County Hospital to ask them to re-examine the current transport reimbursement rates. No reply had been received at the time of the meeting.

8. Railway news including disabled access at Dorchester West station

Bob Driscoll confirmed that Cranbrook station is due to open on Sunday 13th December and that work on disabled access at Dorchester West station will start “soon”.

9. Website news

There was a spike in the number of hits on the WATAG website when the X51/53 bus timetables changed.

10. Democratic moment & AOB

Alan Williams presented the new timetables prepared by WATAG. The initial print run will be 5,000. Several speakers commented on anomalies in the real-time information and on-board bus systems.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 8.45 pm.

The next meeting (including the AGM) is to be held in the WI Hall North St Bridport at 6.30pm on Thursday 28th January 2016.

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