

Full Council – 30 July 2019

Motion to oppose the closure of Porlock Fire Station

Motion proposed by Councillor Andy Milne, seconded by Councillor Terry Venner

Preamble:-

This Council notes that:

1. Devon and Somerset Fire Authority (D&S FA) need to make significant financial savings. To do so, they have proposed seven options for change that contain six elements: *'Station Closures; 'Third Fire Engine' removal; 'Second Fire Engine' removal; Change of status to day crewing; Change of status of second fire engine to on-call at night only; Introduction of six day crewed roving fire engines.'* Details of the proposed options can be read in D&S Service Delivery Operating Model Consultation document. See Appendix A para 1. Specific details relating to Porlock Station can be seen at Appendix 1 para 2.
2. All options build on the closure of 8 stations - seven in Devon and the Porlock Station.
3. The principal points of objection to the closure of the Porlock Station are as follows:
 - a. The community pay their rates and expect the service to be the same or better each year.
 - b. The station was confirmed as the best in the D&S FA last year, a remarkable achievement for retained fire fighters who average 85% availability. The closure of such an effective station seems to be an unbelievable action to the local population.
 - c. It is disputed that Minehead Fire Station can reach a fire in Porlock inside 15 minutes; 20 minutes is a more likely time frame and very much greater than the 10 minutes D&S FA expect to reach 80% of the population. Travel time will increase markedly reaching the remoter locations.
 - d. Removal of the Porlock Station opens up a 'hole' between Minehead, Lynton and Dulverton of some 30 miles. Poor quality of moorland roads, bad weather and increased holiday traffic makes significantly slower travel than computer models predict. At a house fire in Porlock (May 2014) the Minehead engine took 40 minutes to reach the burning building.
 - e. Properties are as vulnerable to fire today as they were yesterday and will be tomorrow, the risk has not changed. There are 84 thatch properties in Porlock District alone. Chimney fires are common place, increased prevention

teaching that is proposed is not going to reduce this risk. Since Porlock Station was built, 300 additional houses have been built.

- f. There is an increasingly elderly population in rural areas. In Porlock District alone, at least 784 people are over 60. That is 27% of the population in comparison to 11% in Somerset. The elderly community is increasing not diminishing as Porlock continues to attract a retired population.
- g. The Station is a base for the Porlock Co-Responder service. There is great concern at the loss of this important community service provided by the fire fighters.
- h. The permanent population of Porlock District is 2000 permanent residents. A popular tourist attraction, this figure increases markedly in the tourist season. 25% of the houses are second homes and these are filled to capacity in the summer months. The increased risk has not been included in the modelling used by the D&S FA but clearly a factor that should be included.
- i. Increased tourism means increased traffic on the narrow and precipitous roads over Exmoor these require greater Fire and Rescue cover not less.
- j. Exmoor National Park regularly has moorland fires that need quenching in the summer months. Global warming is an accepted reality where increased dry periods will be commonplace. The Porlock Station has specialise moorland fire vehicles and the skills to respond swiftly to upland fires. Thick woods border the moors in which small communities, many with vulnerable houses (84 thatch properties this district alone) are at risk of a fire threat. To reduce fire cover can be considered as reckless at best.
- k. Flash flooding is more likely. Models predict a large area of houses in Porlock District will be affected in such a situation. The loss of trained emergency personal have very serious implications to the local population should such an event occur.
- l. The loss of the Porlock Station greatly increases the demand on Minehead Fire Station. There is a large population, which greatly increases in the holiday period, Butlins alone has 7000 visitors. The loss of Minehead vehicles to service a fire in the Porlock District will greatly increases the risk to residents of Minehead.
- m. At the SWT Full Council Meeting 19 June rural poverty was rightly identified. The proposed reduction in rural fire cover is another example of how the all services are being reduced to the rural community and this proposed cut which should be opposed at all costs. Rural lives matter, this service need to be improved not diminished.
- n. The seven 'options' offered in the Consultative paper cannot be considered to be options for the Fire Authority members to choose from. Six of the seven options are conflated versions all building on the previous proposal. This does not provide relevant alternatives to choose from.

This Council considers that:

Devon and Somerset Fire Authority should remove Porlock Fire Station from its closure plans and as a consequence re assess the full impact of any changes/closures on the surrounding rural communities using practically “proven” data instead of computer generated information that does not apply in the real world.

Recommendations:-

This Council therefore resolves that:-

1. A letter is written to the Chair of the Devon and Somerset Fire Authority expressing this Council’s opposition to the closure of Porlock Fire Station and the impact it will have on the surrounding rural areas.