

Questions from County Councillors

Question from Paul Kimber to the Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills and the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Highways in relation to school sites on Portland

Question

Portlanders are naturally very concerned about the proposed developments on school sites on Portland and retaining some of the open spaces that the community have enjoyed for years.

With the intention to build on all the school sites could I have assurance that open space will be left so Portlanders can and will enjoy the open space, as part of the design?

Answer

Thank you for raising this concern. We are currently in discussion with Portland Town Council over the future of the main detached playing field and Multi Use Games area at the Royal Manor Campus, with a view that they will be retained for continued community use.

The remainder of the Royal Manor and Southwell Primary sites will be disposed of, as they will no longer be required for Educational purposes. It will be for the purchaser of any of the redundant school sites to seek planning approval from the Borough Council as to how they are re-developed and what if any open space will be retained for community use.

Question from Paul Kimber to the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing and Children's Safeguarding in relation to Hate Crimes

Question

The report in the Dorset Echo 14/7/16 reports Hate Crimes in the county has increased by 22 percent. Can I be assured we are doing everything, including working with the police and all agencies, to bring about effective action to combat Hate Crimes?

Answer

The County Council commitment to making sure that people in Dorset are safe from discrimination is well known. We are committed to playing our role in making sure that all people are treated with the respect and dignity and that we exercise our equality and diversity duty effectively. This means that we **have** to work with our partners to ensure that where hate crimes occur we make sure that those who perpetuate such crimes are dealt with appropriately. The County Council, through the Community Safety Partnership, makes sure that a focus on hate crimes is an important part of the partnerships remit and that wherever we can we make education and prevention of hate crimes part of the councils wider work.

Question from Spencer Flower to the Cabinet Member for Organisational Development and Transformation in relation to Queen Elizabeth's School, Wimborne

Question

Can the Leader reassure members that every effort is being made to prepare for and pursue a claim against Mouchel or any successor company, for the design shortcomings that caused this council so much difficulty during the construction of the QE School and subsequent cost escalation? Further that this matter will be concluded at the earliest opportunity and that no settlement nor decision regarding any claim will be agreed without the consent of the members of this council in accordance with the provisions of the constitution. That if necessary Chairman this meeting go into exempt business so that a proper debate take place. This matter has gone on for far too long. We must surely stop 'kicking the can down the street' and reach a considered position without further delay.

Answer

Yes, I can assure members that every effort is being made to pursue Mouchel to recover as much as we can of the additional cost caused by Mouchel's failings.

Throughout the investigation of the potential to recover from Mouchel and throughout our preparations to do so the Council has obtained specialist legal and technical advice. Court rules require parties to follow a particular set process before resorting to issuing formal legal proceedings. Accordingly, ahead of action through the courts our external legal advisers have exchanged information, including detailed letters before claim, with Mouchel.

In addition, the courts also advocate meetings and mediation in an effort to settle disputes without resorting to the courts. Mediation took place in London on Thursday 23 June and for the County Council was attended by the Chief Finance Officer, the Principal Solicitor, our experts and external legal advisers. The mediation did not result in any settlement.

The Monitoring Officer has a standing delegation to institute, defend or settle all legal proceedings or disputes in contemplation of legal proceedings on behalf of the County Council. In view of the significance of the mediation the Cabinet received a detailed briefing from the external legal adviser. This briefing reinforced the Cabinet's intent to seek to recover as much of the loss suffered as possible.

In the absence of a satisfactory offer from Mouchel preparations for a full hearing of the Council's case will continue. Formal proceedings have already been issued and the external legal adviser will shortly issue particulars of the claim.

The Cabinet will continue to receive updates about the claim and preparations for it to be heard. Under the constitution it is for the Cabinet to decide what the Council's strategy should be and whether any offer of settlement is acceptable. Those discussions have to take place in confidential session with our advisers present but I extend an open invitation to Councillor Flower or any other member with a particular interest in QE School and the claim against Mouchel to attend and contribute to the discussion.

Note: The responses to all questions will be provided verbally at the meeting. The responses will then be emailed to the relevant member following the meeting and included in the minutes of the meeting.

Question from Spencer Flower to the Cabinet Member for Organisational Development and Transformation in relation to the Forward Together 2020 change programme

Question

Members will be aware that the Forward Together Board and the Cabinet are committed to continue to be assertive in their approach to the budget challenges. Can the Leader reassure members in this chamber that this council will not revert to the discredited practice of top slicing budgets in the old fashioned way. That fundamental redesign of services and council management structures, which have been the cornerstone of policy in recent years, will continue and not be abandoned as the principle means of living within our available and reducing financial resources. That this approach be strengthened and widened, rather than pursuing policy, which would have an immediate impact on front line services, for example, the withdrawal of funding from services such as rural bus subsidies among a number of other key service areas.

Answer

Forward Together remains the overarching programme to make sure that the council is able to balance the budget over the coming years. Far from reverting to practises of the past, we are transforming services more radically than ever before.

The council is investing in our change programme to make sure that we have the resources to deliver on a range of projects across all service areas. These projects are about ensuring that the maximum is available for front line services. We are focusing on delivering differently wherever we can, so that we don't continue work that does not add value for our residents. And by engaging with our partners in the towns and parishes we are making a real difference to people's lives.

On the specific issue of bus services, our approach is much more integrated than our last review, making sure all our resources are utilised. This is illustrated in our recently published Community Transport Toolkit which I commend to members. The old model of subsidised bus services did not work and we are working with bus companies and national government for a better solution.

To make the search for transformative savings more open and accessible to all members we created the Budget Strategy Task and Finish Group and I urge members to engage in its work.

Alongside the Forward Together programme, this council is at the forefront of important work examining how we can be more effective and efficient through Local Government Reorganisation and devolution.

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