

Public Participation

The following question has been raised by Mr J Graham for consideration by the DWP Joint Committee on 23 March 2017:-

How does the Council intend to address the problem of litter on the county's main and minor roads? And how does the Council intend to do this within the context of the Government's imminent national litter strategy?

I drive a lot in the course of my work across Dorset and am often amazed at the amount of litter which has been dropped and has accumulated at the side of the road. Some of it clearly falls off goods vehicles but a great deal is dropped by car and van drivers. It has become a real eyesore in many places, and near where I live, especially the A35 and Weymouth Relief Road. But the problem is widespread across the county. It really detracts from what is an incredibly beautiful part of the country and I feel that if it continues, will act as a real deterrent to tourism and inward investment into the area. It is also very damaging to wildlife and water courses.

I realise that funds are tight but I do think that a more concerted effort needs to be made to keep the county's roads cleaner. Quite often the litter ends up being chopped up and spread around when the grass is cut on verges and a lot of it (I'm thinking of the wooded area of the A35 going towards Poole) has been there for a very long time. Perhaps also, the council might consider how to harness volunteer support in tackling this litter problem. I realise that there is a problem with road safety using volunteers to clear main roads. But, volunteering works very well, as long as it is coordinated by a central organisation. It tends not to happen if left solely to communities.

I look forward to the committee's response.

Response from Dorset Waste Partnership:-

The Dorset Waste Partnership (DWP) is responsible for the removal of litter from highway verges in Dorset, apart from the A35 Bere Regis westbound to the edge of the county which is the responsibility of Highways England. Whilst the DWP waits for the release of the National Litter Strategy, which is expected later this year, we continue to work with our partner councils and Highways England to remove the litter which is left on the roads across the county, either by being blown off vehicles or being thrown out of vehicle windows. Close working with Highways England has led to a recent overnight works on the A31 in the Ferndown area and additional works around the Ashley Heath roundabout are taking place w/c 20 March 2017.

Over the past two years a number of DWP staff have been trained to work on high speed roads across the county so that the removal of litter can be carried out safely and in accordance with safety guidelines. We are currently reviewing this year's training requirements to ensure as staff leave we have sufficient cover, this is for the physical litter picking, the risk assessments, and supervision on site. We work closely with the verge cutting crews to co-ordinate cutting and cleansing where practicable and we use approved contractors to supplement our own cleansing crews as and when required. Measures are being put in place along some stretches of road where the grass and the litter will be collected at the same time thereby removing the need to litter pick these areas. We share dates, times and contacts to try to provide advance notice to each other of verge cutting and litter picking dates.

Sometimes when external contractors are involved communication has not been effective and despite the efforts of senior officers the litter picking and verge cutting has not always been able to be co-ordinated, and this is frustrating to us all. As a result, the tender specification for rural verge cutting 2017/18 means the successful contractor will either liaise with DWP to coordinate the timings of grass cutting and litter picking; or liaise with DWP to discuss the potential for undertaking litter picking by the successful contractor, under separate contract to DWP - or a combination of both. We are also investigating jointly with our partners new verge cutting equipment that would cut-and-collect everything along the highway verges including litter, and would enable mechanical 'litter picking' safely on roads where currently the risk is too high for staff to be deployed on foot without complete road closure.

There is of course also a strategy to reduce littering in Dorset – Litter Free Dorset (LFD). The DWP, in its commitment to reduce litter, has just funded a 14 month trial of a part time community Litter Free Dorset post. The post holder will now be able to implement the Litter Free Dorset Strategy, developed from community groups across the county. The vision of Litter Free Dorset is to work together as an independent partnership effecting positive change to reduce litter across Dorset's towns, villages and open spaces. We know there are large numbers in our communities who share your and our concerns and levels of littering along highways and elsewhere and, through education and communications we can all try to improve the situation through the LFD project