

Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Annual Report 2017-18

A thriving local economy provides us all with more opportunities.

But... there are areas where there aren't as many jobs available or chances for young people to train at work and gain the valuable skills that employers need. Many people also struggle to find good quality, affordable housing.

We want to help new businesses to thrive and existing businesses become more productive and efficient, taking advantage of the superfast fibre broadband that is now available in most of Dorset. To support that productivity, we want to plan communities well, reducing the need to travel while "keeping Dorset moving", enabling people and goods to move about the county safely and efficiently.

Dorset County Council Corporate Plan 2017-19

**Working Together
for a Strong and Successful Dorset**



Dorset County Council

Foreword

As Chairman I am pleased to report how well the Economic Growth Overview & Scrutiny Committee has performed, scrutinising so many different areas affecting economic growth. This year has been a challenging year. Growth in the local economy is essential to the success of our local area of Dorset. As we are all aware, budgets are being reduced but the local infrastructure must be continually monitored and improved as we move forward.

Many people refer to infrastructure as being the local roads and highways but it is so much more. For Dorset to grow we need better mobile communications by both phone and broadband. To encourage a growth in both existing business and new business it is essential that we get the best basic communications available. People are no longer happy with low speed broadband; the modern way of living requires high speed and reliable communications in this rural economy. Children do their homework using technology, businesses are run using technology, the farming community use technology. These are the reasons we need to continually monitor our levels of communication. What is acceptable today, becomes unacceptable next month.

With the growth in New Business also comes the need for more housing, houses that people can afford - especially our key workers. Wage growth will come as we encourage more technological companies to grow their business in Dorset. House prices are reliant on us providing better communications. Roads, internet speed and sustainable telecoms are some of the areas that the younger generation are insisting upon.

Our team is looking at all of the ways in which we can keep ahead of the competition for new business from all areas of the UK. As we move forward to the new Council we will combine the knowledge at District and Borough Councils with the knowledge available at County Council into a strong powerhouse for the South of England.

I am proud to have played my part, leading a great team that looks laterally rather than being blinkered, and reacts positively to the needs of residents. Happy residents become happy workers and that leads to better business and a growing economy.



Ray Bryan

Chairman, Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Committee Membership 2017-18

Ray Bryan (Chairman)

Cherry Brooks

Jon Andrews

Andy Canning

Jean Dunseith

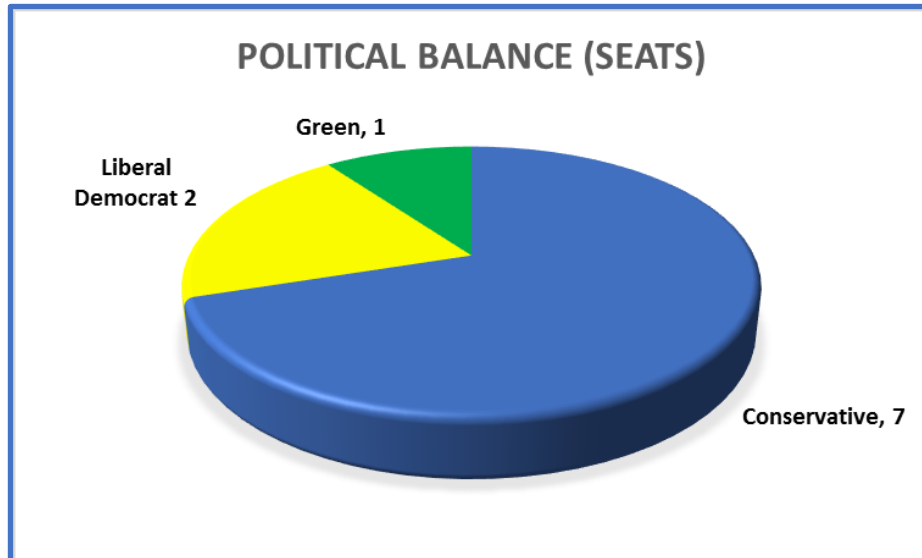
Spencer Flower

Peter Hall

John Orrell

Margaret Phipps

David Shortell



Background: Outcomes Focused Scrutiny

Dorset County Council's Corporate Plan is based on the outcomes that we are seeking for Dorset's people – that they are **safe, healthy and independent**, and that they benefit from a **prosperous** economy. Underpinning this is the firm commitment to work as One Council, alongside our partners and communities, to ensure the best possible outcomes for Dorset's people, even as the available resources diminish.

Historically, scrutiny at the County Council reflected directorate structures and was based around children's services, adult services and environment services. While this worked to an extent, its focus on services rather than outcomes meant no committee had oversight of thematic, cross-cutting issues, like independence. Senior leaders – both councillors and officers – were keen to break out of this model and focus on strategic outcomes, with greater involvement from local residents and partners.

To take this forward, in February 2016 the council agreed that the future committee structure should be based on the new outcome focused Corporate Plan. Instead of focusing on a single directorate, as the old Overview Committees had done, three new Overview and Scrutiny Committees would each champion one or two corporate outcomes.

Three new committees were formed:

- **Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee:** *To oversee what the council does to keep people in Dorset **safe***
- **People and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:** *To oversee what the council does to help people in Dorset be as **healthy and independent** as possible*
- **Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee:** *To oversee what the council does to make Dorset's economy more **prosperous**.*

Our councillors also separated the 'audit' and 'scrutiny' functions, so the former Audit and Scrutiny Committee became the Audit and Governance Committee. This committee's primary purpose is to assess the governance, financial, performance, internal control and risk information from right across the authority. An Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, comprising the Chairmen of the four new committees, was created to bring oversight and coordination to the whole process.

The rationale for our overview and scrutiny arrangements is that councillors want to ensure that our committee system reinforces the corporate plan and uses the outcomes framework to ensure we work as one organisation to improve the lives of residents and communities (and also that they have a say in assessing how well this is done). Changing the focus of each committee has meant meetings, debates, recommendations and decisions are aligned with the corporate plan, helping councillors and officers alike focus on what makes a real difference.

The changes also place councillors in the position of proactively leading investigations on the issues they want to consider, instead of our more traditional approach of officers taking the lead and deciding which reports are required.

This Annual Report summarises the work of the Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee during its second year – the committee's purpose, the work in which it has been directly involved, and the contributions it has made towards improving outcomes.

Purpose of committee

Delivering good outcomes for the residents and communities we serve through a constructive, proactive and objective approach to the consideration, scrutiny and review of policies, strategies, financial and performance issues.

Overview

- To review and develop policy at the Committee's own initiative or at the request of the Cabinet or the Public Health Joint Board and make recommendations to the Cabinet, Joint Committee or the Full Council.
- To oversee major consultations and make recommendations to the Cabinet, Joint Committee or the Full Council.
- To give advice on any matters as requested by the Cabinet or the Joint Committee.

Scrutiny

- To hold the Executive to account through a process that seeks and considers necessary explanations, information and evidence to ensure good outcomes for our residents and communities.
- Through proactive scrutiny inquiry work, to contribute to improving the lives of our residents and communities, through an active contribution to the Council's improvement agenda.
- To scrutinise key areas of strategic and operational activity and, where necessary, make recommendations to the Full Council, Cabinet or Joint Committee in respect of:
 - i) Matters which affect the Council's area or its residents;
 - ii) Performance of services in accordance with the targets in the Corporate Plan or other approved service plans;

- iii) To provide a clear focus on finding efficiency savings in accordance with requirements in the Council's financial strategy;
- iv) To monitor expenditure against available budgets and, where necessary, make recommendations to the Cabinet or the Joint Committee;
- v) To consider proposed budget plans, service plans and any other major planning or strategic statements and to make recommendations to the Cabinet or the Joint Committee.

Key Lines of Enquiry

In selecting, refining and focusing areas for possible scrutiny, members frequently work with lead officers on a scoping exercise, looking at progress towards key outcomes within their committee's remit and asking:

- i) If we do nothing, where is the trend heading? is this OK?
- ii) What's helping and hindering the trend?
- iii) Are services making a difference?
- iv) Are they providing Value for Money?
- v) What additional information / research do we need?
- vi) Who are the key partners we need to be working with (including local residents)?
- vii) What could work to turn the trend in the right direction?
- viii) What is the Council's and Members role and specific contribution?

Key Outcomes

What have we achieved and influenced?

To give a flavour of the types of issues and the work that comes before the Committee for its consideration, the following provides examples of focussed and targeted assurance and scrutiny work which has been undertaken by the Committee during the year.

Monitoring Corporate Plan outcomes

At each of its four meetings in 2017-18, the committee received a report on progress with the "Dorset's Economy is Prosperous" outcome in the corporate plan. The reports focused on the seven big "Prosperous" issues identified in the corporate plan, as follows:

- The productivity of Dorset's businesses
- Rate of start-ups of new business enterprises
- Percentage of children gaining 5 or more GCSEs grade A* - C, including Maths and English
- Percentage of residents educated to level 4 (or equivalent) and above
- Ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile earnings
- Rate of coverage of superfast broadband
- Rate of apprenticeships starts

The monitoring reports also include performance measures by which the County Council can measure the contribution and impact of its own services and activities on the Corporate Plan's outcomes. As can be seen below, the evidence from these reports helped shape, but did not dictate, the agendas for the committee throughout the year.

Learning and Skills

The Committee's first meeting of the year was scheduled for 29 June, but not long before that date the Committee's chairman, Steve Butler, was invited to join the Cabinet. In the absence of a chairman that had been appointed at a full meeting of the County Council, as required by the constitution, no formal meeting was possible. Instead, the Committee elected to hold an informal focus group on one of the biggest issues for economic growth in Dorset - learning and skills.

As well as the committee members, a number of other members attended, and key staff from the County Council with involvement in economic development, learning and skills also participated. Representatives from a number of partner organisations - Weymouth College, Kingston Maurward College, Dorset LEP's Rural Enterprise Group, and the Dorset and Somerset Training Provider Network - were also invited to take part in the discussion.

The outcomes from the focus group were summarised as follows:

- there was consensus that a highly skilled workforce is essential to attracting modern business to Dorset;
- for this to happen, the supply of good quality, affordable housing needs to be improved, as well as the local infrastructure to support it;

- schools, colleges and businesses need to do more to encourage young people to remain in Dorset, by offering taster opportunities and apprenticeships;
- digital infrastructure (superfast broadband and mobile connectivity) needs promotion and enhancement.

The "Prosperous" outcome: Putting the committee into context

At its first formal meeting of the year, in October 2017, the committee received a series of presentations to give them an overview of the big issues affecting economic growth and prosperity in Dorset, and to introduce them to some of the County Council services most closely involved with promoting economic growth, particularly those in the Environment and the Economy directorate.

Mike Harries, the Director for Environment and the Economy and the Committee's lead officer, opened the presentation with an overview of the key themes of the Dorset Local Economic Partnership's Strategic Plan "Transforming Dorset", and drew out the links between this and the County Council's Corporate Plan and the 'Prosperous' outcome in particular. Using these key strategies, the Director discussed some of the main economic challenges facing Dorset - below average productivity, an aging workforce, the limited availability of sites and land - and looked at some of the ways the County Council seeks to address these challenges.

The Director then introduced **Andrew Martin**, the Service Director for Highways and Emergency Planning, who outlined the role of Highways in promoting economic growth and discussed his service's priorities, anticipated issues for the future and likely challenges.

This was followed by a presentation by **Matthew Piles**, Service Director for Economy, a service which includes Dorset Travel. Mr. Piles explained the priorities for his service, which include successfully procuring and implementing new contracts for public and school transport; developing and promoting the Dorset Innovation Park; refreshing and delivering the pan-Dorset Enabling Economic Growth Strategy; and supporting health and wellbeing to ensure a resilient and productive workforce.

Peter Moore, the Service Director for Environment, followed with an explanation of the important links between a healthy environment and a healthy economy.

Finally, **Richard Pascoe**, the Service Director for Digital, ICT and Customer Services, gave an overview of the role of his service in promoting economic growth, prominent among which is the provision of as close as possible to 100% coverage of superfast broadband, developing ultrafast broadband aimed at businesses, and understanding and addressing issues with mobile connectivity across Dorset.

Mobile Coverage

Also in October, the Committee discussed a further report by Richard Pascoe on the extent of mobile coverage in Dorset and what the County Council is planning to do to support improvement. The lack of good mobile phone connectivity is a barrier to economic growth and social inclusion, particularly in rural communities, and Dorset lags significantly behind the national average for 4G coverage.

The report argued that resources need to be focussed on engaging with mobile network operators more often and at a higher level, to support them in improving coverage and showing Dorset to be an easy place for them to invest in mobile infrastructure. "Not spots" need to be mapped to inform bids for government funding. More work is also needed to understand the 'passive infrastructure' owned by the public sector (e.g. ducts, masts, and tall buildings) which could be utilised by network providers. Opportunities could be explored to maximise the benefit of Dorset's superfast broadband coverage,

utilising the core fibre optic network to provide 4G coverage into areas unviable for conventional commercial deployment.

The Committee agreed that good 4G coverage is increasingly essential, both for the delivery of services, and to support key economic sectors such as agriculture, advanced engineering and tourism. Members welcomed the idea of using County Council assets for mobile infrastructure.

Superfast Broadband

Richard Pascoe updated the committee on progress with the Superfast Broadband Programme, including what is being done to extend coverage to hard to reach communities with little or no reception. Between eight and nine thousand Dorset households remain without coverage and a range of technical and other solutions are being explored to address this, including use of the 4G network, and encouraging communities to contribute toward the costs of connection via the Community Fibre Partnership. Community led schemes are an important means of addressing specific local issues which might not otherwise be solved.

The Committee recognised that delivering Superfast Broadband is a core part of delivering services in a more direct, flexible, accessible and modern way, as well as being a key element in economic prosperity and social cohesion. They argued for greater emphasis to be placed on connectivity to residential properties, given the social benefits and improved access to services this would bring to households. While members appreciated the commitment being made to try to reach all of Dorset's communities, they emphasised the importance of ensuring that, even if targets were achieved for the percentage of households in receipt of a service, large, sparsely populated geographical areas should not miss out on the advantages that broadband would bring.

Brexit

In October, the Committee considered a report by Matthew Piles, the Service Director for the Economy which set out how Brexit is likely to affect the Council, and proposed how the Council should organise its resources to planning, preparing for, and shaping future policy. The report was also considered by the People and Communities Committee. It sought members' views on preparations for Brexit in order to minimise and mitigate risk and maximise any opportunities for the Council to progress corporate aims. The risk to business interests, employment considerations, wage pressure, and financial pressure on health and care were all discussed. The Committee agreed with the earlier decision of the People and Communities Committee that a Brexit Advisory Group should be established, involving members, and in order to take the matter forward and reduce duplication, the Committee referred this to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board to progress.

Minerals and Waste

The Committee received a report and presentation by Mike Garrity, the County Planning, Minerals and Waste team leader, which asked them to recommend the consultation arrangements for the Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Mineral Sites Plan and Waste Plan and its ultimate submission to the government.

Members learnt how the Waste Plan would establish the vision, objectives and spatial strategy for the development of waste management facilities in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole up until 2033, including specific sites; and how the Mineral Sites Plan would identify specific sites and areas for mineral development needed to deliver the Minerals Strategy which was adopted in May 2014. Both

plans are fundamental to ensuring that the right infrastructure is in place to support economic growth and prosperity in the county.

The proposed waste management facilities were explained by officers, including where these are to be sited and what needs they will meet. Similarly, proposals for the extraction of minerals – aggregates, clays and building stone - were detailed, including what the process entails, why the minerals are needed, where the sites are, how they were been chosen.

Subject to the agreement of Cabinet and the relevant committees for Bournemouth and Poole, it was anticipated that consultation on the plans would begin in December 2017 and last for eight weeks.

The Committee heard from a resident who expressed concern at the inclusion of a particular site at Gallows Gore identified in the Minerals Plan for future extraction. He was concerned that this would adversely impact beauty of the area, which is part of an AONB, and could adversely affect the quality of the water supply in the adjoining reservoirs. Although he recognised the need for Purbeck Stone to be extracted, he argued that the councils should consider the impact on local property values. The Chairman assured the resident that his concerns would be passed on to the Cabinet.

Members raised a number of concerns of their own, including how minerals were to be transported and how this could be better managed with increased use of trains taking pressure off the highway network. The Committee understood what the plans were trying to achieve and having had the opportunity to comment on the detail, they made the requested recommendations to the Cabinet, taking into account the concerns they had raised.

Environment and the Economy: 2018-19 Budget

Finally in October, The Committee considered a joint report by the Director for Environment and the Economy and the Chief Financial Officer on the proposed 2018-19 revenue budget savings of £1.5 million for the Environment and the Economy Directorate.

The Committee understood the financial pressures on the Council and the directorate but were frustrated by the disparity between available funding and service need. They were committed to maintaining standards of service delivery so wanted to explore how additional income could be generated. Officers confirmed that every effort was being made to maximise income generation and this already makes a significant contribution towards budgets. However, efforts will continue to seek further opportunities to generate funds.

Members argued that the inadequate funding from Central Government needs to be urgently addressed, as this is inhibiting the economic prosperity of Dorset by putting unreasonable pressure on the maintenance of infrastructure such as the highways network. The Committee maintained that Dorset MPs have a duty to argue for adequate resources. The suggestion was made that Dorset MPs should be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss this.

Local Transport Plan 2017-20

Matthew Piles presented a report to the January committee on the Local Transport Plan and what it is designed to achieve. The plan is a statutory requirement, setting out the long-term goals, strategies and policies for improving transport in the area over the fifteen years from 2011 to 2026. It covers all modes of transport, including walking, cycling, public transport, car based travel and freight, the management and maintenance of the highway network, and the relationships between transport and wider policy issues such as the economy, environment, air quality, climate change, health and social inclusion. The County Council receives an annual funding allocation from government of £2.088m for

small capital infrastructure schemes (footways, cycle routes, traffic signals, junction improvements, public transport, rights of way improvements) the Plan informs how this funding is prioritised.

The Plan has been shared with the Bournemouth Borough Council and the Borough of Poole for a number of years and is considered to be a beacon of good practice in partnership working. It seeks to promote economic growth through good connectivity, while also promoting health and wellbeing by focusing on safety, active travel, reducing the need to travel and green technology. It involves collaboration with the Clinical Commissioning Group, and with Sustrans, a charity that works to make it easier for people to walk and cycle, and aligns with the strategic priorities of the Sustainability and Transformation Plan. There is a focus on education and working with and in schools, to instil healthy choices for getting to and from school for pupils.

Mr. Piles explained that the LTP was designed to look at transportation needs holistically, so that the best solutions could be found for a range of different scenarios. It is recognised, for example, that the transport needs of urban areas differ markedly from those of rural areas.

The Committee discussed the importance of an integrated parking strategy between the County Council and District and Borough Councils, in order to sustain and deliver managed parking to cover on-street and off-street provision. The LTP provides the means for this to be delivered. The pilot scheme established for Dorchester through the Dorchester Transport and Environment Plan (DTEP) provides a good example for other schemes in market towns.

The Committee supported generating income from sponsorship of highway and County Council assets. Mr. Piles confirmed that much success has already been achieved in this respect, with roundabout sponsorship currently bringing in £150,000 per annum and a dedicated team identifying opportunities to make further gains where possible.

The "Working Together Highways" Initiative

In January Andrew Martin presented the Committee with an update on the "Working Together Highways Initiative" - a partnership arrangement with the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils enabling parishes and towns to undertake certain highways improvement works for themselves. Because the Highways Service can now, with reduced funding, largely only fulfil its statutory obligations and ensure the safety of the highway network, the initiative enables local communities to determine local priorities for themselves and undertake works in excess of those that can be carried out by the County Council, so that more aesthetic enhancements can be made, with the costs being borne by the town or parish council's precept.

A 2016 consultation exercise into this initiative generated considerable interest from the majority of DAPTC parishes, and the offer has now been extended to parishes not aligned to the DAPTC. A specialised webpage is available to help parish and town councils identify the maintenance needs in their area.

The presentation described the types of maintenance that can be undertaken, how contracts agreements are managed and risks assessed, how volunteers can be recruited and managed, and the legal obligations that need to be observed. Supervision is provided by County Council employees at no cost, demonstrating the County Council's commitment to the initiative.

Members were interested in the initiative and congratulated the Highways Service for its innovation. However, there was also some concern that the outcomes monitoring report showed a slight deterioration in the condition of both principal and non-principal roads, after several years where conditions have remained consistently good. The Committee decided to establish a Policy

Development Panel on Highway Maintenance Management to assess what is being done and whether any improvements could be made. Comparisons will be made with other highway authorities to help put the County Council's performance into context. It was agreed that the Dorset LEP should be invited to any meeting where the fabric of the network is being discussed and what capital implications there are.

The Chairman also re-emphasised that Dorset MPs should advocate the need for sufficient funding to be made available for the delivery of essential services, with highway maintenance a priority.

Social Mobility

Following the presentation of the outcomes monitoring report to the January meeting, the discussion broadened to the lower than average productivity of Dorset's economy. Attention was drawn to the low wages in the more deprived parts of the county and what this means for standards of living. Weymouth was a particular focus for discussion, and it was noted that Weymouth shares economic characteristics with many British seaside towns - low average income, relatively high unemployment compared to the rest of Dorset, poor economic growth and low skill levels. Melcombe Regis in Weymouth is within the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in England, and Mike Harries noted that the government's Social Mobility Commission recently ranked the prospects for disadvantaged young people growing up in Weymouth and Portland as the third worst in the country. The Committee discussed what scope there is for this to be addressed and for improvements to be made. Mr. Harries reminded the Committee that government funding to tackle low mobility has recently been allocated to 12 "Opportunity Areas" across the country. Weymouth has not been included among these in spite of being the area with the third lowest mobility levels, and members asked for inquiries to be made as to how this opportunity was missed and whether further opportunities exist.



The County Councillor for Weymouth Town, John Orrell, agreed to work with the Melcombe Regis Board on this. Since the meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board has taken an interest in the issue of mobility, and is considering what additional information could contribute to a better understanding of it, including the areas of educational attainment and housing.

Educational Attainment

The January outcomes monitoring report showed that educational achievement at Key Stage 4 in Dorset has noticeably declined between 2014 and 2016, and Doug Gilbert, the County Council's Schools and Learning Service Advisor, attended the meeting to answer questions about this. The Committee asked to be updated on a regular basis on what is being done to support schools to raise standards, and when, in March, the outcomes report showed a further decline in attainment levels in the 2017 results, Mr. Gilbert and Rosie Knapper, the Senior Advisor, came to the Committee to discuss the issue again. It was also noted that the People and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been focusing on this and it was suggested that it would be sensible to let the Overview and

Scrutiny Management Board decide where this area is best scrutinised in order to avoid any duplication.

The Advisors pointed out that while some schools in Dorset have declined, around half have either stayed the same or improved. There are specific concerns around the four schools in the Weymouth and Portland area. Two of these are Academies (The Wey Valley Sports College and the Atlantic Academy) and two are still maintained by the Local Authority (Budmouth College and All Saints School).

One member highlighted the substantial drop in funding being experienced by schools in Weymouth and Portland but was pleased to hear that efforts are being made to secure additional funding to support school improvement.

Following a question from the Vice-Chair, Cllr. Cherry Brooks, about the length of time the Local Authority has been involved with these particular schools, the Advisors said that the Wey Valley Sports College and Atlantic Academy have been a concern for some time, although the Wey Valley Sports College is now showing signs of improvement. All Saints School definitely requires improvement and their decline has been more recent. This year's results have impacted on Budmouth College quite significantly. With both of these schools, there is clearly an issue around their leadership management and officers have been working closely with both of them.

Members discussed apprenticeships and commented on the need for young people to have a good foundation in Maths and English. Matthew Piles advised members of a recent meeting he attended about a Skills Academy for Dorset, and reported that that discussions are ongoing about how to move forward with this. He and the Director have been asked to lead on apprenticeships for the County Council. Members noted the importance of having young people ready for work, and argued that this was the responsibility of schools. The Director advised members that the four schools in Weymouth and Portland all now have a Careers and Enterprise Company Advisor in place.

The Chairman, Cllr. Ray Bryan, closed the discussion by stating strongly that one year in a child's life in education is crucial, and the Committee needs to do all they can to help improve the situation.

The Government's 25 Year Environmental Plan and Dorset County Council "Green Assets"

In its final meeting for the year in March, the Committee considered a report from Dr. Ken Buchan, the Coast and Countryside Service Manager, summarising the key implications for Dorset County Council of the government's 25 Year Environment Plan. The report also presented the interim conclusions of a review of the County Council 'green assets'.

Members then received a series of related presentations. The first, on The Healthy Places Project, focused on the natural environment and collaborative work with Public Health Dorset. This project promotes and facilitates the value of the natural environment for improving mental and physical health and increased physical activity. The second, "Stepping into Nature", highlighted important work to alleviate the impact of dementia by encouraging involvement in the countryside. The third looked at social, economic and environmental initiatives concerning the coast - e.g. by reducing litter and plastics and promoting yoga. The final presentation looked at Low Carbon Dorset, an important element of the County Council's industrial strategy.

Members welcomed all of these initiatives, and made a number of comments. It was noted that historically cycling and walking has been aimed at fitter, more energetic people, whereas a different approach would be to design routes closer to people's homes to avoid reliance on cars and public

transport. Matthew Piles advised that the Health and Wellbeing Board were currently discussing these issues and the improvements that could be made. The focus needs to be on localities, making small improvements that can make a big difference. The Director said that the real challenge is to work with those groups who choose not to access the coast and countryside, understand why, and try to remove any barriers.

The Vice-Chair drew attention to the widespread removal of stiles and gates, which mainly impacts the elderly, and she urged officers to ensure that gates are accessible. Another member referred to the huge network of horse riders and the difficulty they have with the increasing amount of traffic when trying to get to areas in which to ride. Mr. Piles agreed, and emphasised the importance of looking at all users and all modes of transport to ensure equal, easy access for everybody.

The point was raised that, although the Environmental Plan that gave context to the discussion is a 25-year plan, so far no mention had been made to Local Government Reform, and no reference made to the district and borough councils or to the fact that two new unitary council will be in place in a year's time. Mr. Piles advised that colleagues in Planning are in constant discussions about planned changes and that all local authorities are reviewing their local plans. It was also noted that a number of projects already involve joint working with the Districts and Boroughs.

A member asked if the report could be more ambitious in respect of Dorset Topsoil, the cutting down of trees and the sustainable catching of fish. Dr. Buchan described a number of designated marine protected areas and that Rights of Way officers are doing work across the county, including tree conservation in Dorset. It was also confirmed that there is no fracking taking place in Dorset and that any change will be subject to consultation with members.

Affordable Housing

At the Committee's final meeting for the year, it was reported in the Outcomes Monitoring Report that the principal measure of affordability - the ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile earnings - has worsened again and has been increasing consistently over a number of years. The report drew the Committee's attention to the area of modular housing, which the Cabinet discussed at their meeting on 7 March 2018. The Cabinet had agreed in principle to purchase a number of prefabricated modular housing, to meet the needs of people with an Adult Social Care need, as well as key workers to care for them. Following discussion on this, the Director noted that the County Council has significant land assets and suggested looking at the model that Dorchester Town Council has used. He suggested that members might wish to consider hosting an Inquiry Day on housing in order to get all the relevant people together to think about it further.

Conclusion - Looking to the Future

The thematic approach to scrutiny adopted by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees has identified and sought to better understand a range of key issues facing Dorset and its communities, and constructively challenged public sector approaches to making a positive difference with the resources that are available.

Through 2018-19 the committees will work to refine the conclusions that arise from this work, so that they can contribute to the base of evidence available to the various committees of the new Dorset Council. Armed with the best information available, the new unitary council can enable better, more joined-up approaches to the issues with which this committee and others have wrestled, such as social mobility, educational attainment, and infrastructure..