

# Public Document Pack



## DORSET COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 16 FEBRUARY 2021

**Present:** Cllrs Rod Adkins, Tony Alford, Jon Andrews, Mike Barron, Pete Barrow, Shane Bartlett, Pauline Batstone, Derek Beer, Richard Biggs, Dave Bolwell, Alex Brenton, Cherry Brooks, Piers Brown, Ray Bryan, Graham Carr-Jones, Simon Christopher, Kelvin Clayton, Susan Cocking, Robin Cook, Tim Cook, Toni Coombs, Janet Dover, Jean Dunseith, Beryl Ezzard, Tony Ferrari, Spencer Flower, Les Fry, Simon Gibson, Barry Goringe, David Gray, Matthew Hall, Paul Harrison, Jill Haynes, Brian Heatley, Ryan Holloway, Ryan Hope, Rob Hughes, Nick Ireland, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones, Stella Jones, Andrew Kerby, Paul Kimber, Rebecca Knox, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Howard Legg, Robin Legg, Cathy Lugg, Laura Miller, David Morgan, Louie O'Leary, Jon Orrell, Emma Parker, Mike Parkes (Vice-Chairman), Andrew Parry, Mary Penfold, Bill Pipe, Val Potheary (Chairman), Byron Quayle, Molly Rennie, Belinda Ridout, Mark Roberts, Julie Robinson, Maria Roe, David Shortell, Jane Somper, Andrew Starr, Gary Suttle, Clare Sutton, Roland Tarr, David Taylor, Gill Taylor, David Tooke, Bill Trite, Daryl Turner, David Walsh, Peter Wharf, Kate Wheller, Sarah Williams and John Worth

**Apologies:** Cllr Mike Dyer

**Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):**

Jacqui Andrews (Service Manager for Democratic and Electoral Services), Hayley Caves (Member Development and Support Officer), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Susan Dallison (Democratic Services Team Leader), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Fiona King (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Jonathan Mair (Corporate Director - Legal & Democratic Service Monitoring Officer), David McIntosh (Corporate Director (HR & OD)), Matt Prosser (Chief Executive) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

**47. Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Mike Dyer.

**48. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2020 were confirmed and agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman in the future.

In response to a question about the supplementary question raised by Cllr Trite, the Democratic Services Manager undertook to ensure this would be included when the minutes were published.

**49. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made at the meeting.

In respect of agenda item 9, Harbour Budget and Fees, Cllr Turner advised that his brother held a licence for Lyme Regis harbour.

In respect of agenda item 11, Weymouth Rowing Club Lease, Cllr Orrell advised that all of his family were members of the Rowing Club.

**50. Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman advised she had no announcements at this time.

**51. Public Participation - Questions and Statements**

Public questions, statements and the responses from the Leader of the Council and appropriate Portfolio Holders are set out in Appendix 1 attached to these minutes.

**52. Public participation - petitions and deputations**

There were no petitions or deputations.

**53. Announcements and Reports from the Leader of Council and Cabinet Members**

The Leader of the Council advised members that his bulletin would be published following the meeting and a few of the areas that would be included in this were as follows:-

Climate change  
Challenges of a further lockdown  
Vaccines being rolled out very successfully  
Dorset Council News was due out next month  
The emerging Dorset Local Plan  
Explanations were given around the budget  
Acquisition of St Mary's School, Shaftesbury  
Update on Covid-19 in Dorset  
Results from the recent Residents survey  
The Leader's continuing role as an advocate for Dorset  
Keeping residents well informed during the pandemic for the past year.

**54. Questions from Councillors**

Questions put by councillors to the Leader and relevant Portfolio Holders are attached to these minutes at Appendix 2, together with the responses.

Cllr Tooke asked a supplementary question relating to the recent PSPO consultation on dog fouling that ran for a longer period than the local Plan. He

felt that the Local Plan was a far more significant piece of work and how did the council plan to address any reputational damage that might occur as a result of this. The Portfolio Holder for Planning advised that the community involvement consultation had been planned for 6 weeks and this was extended to 8 weeks. There was another consultation planned for later in the year. Dorset Council was very vulnerable without a Local Plan in place. It was not just about particular local areas but about various other issues. He made reference to a recent ministerial statement that stated the Council needed to have a Plan in place by the end of 2023.

#### **55. Harbours Budget and Fees and Charges 2021-22**

The Chairman of the Harbours Committee set out the recommendations from the Harbours Committee for members.

Proposed: Mark Roberts  
Seconded: Rob Hughes

Questions from members focused on the Harbours Committee's confidence in the proposed increases and the good value that they represented.

#### **Decisions**

That the following related to budget requirements for the Harbours' Budgets for 2021/22 be approved, including:

1. The Weymouth Harbour Budget for 2021/22;
2. The fees and charges for 2021/22 for Weymouth Harbour;
3. The Asset Management Plan Improvements for 2021/22 for Weymouth Harbour subject to a mid-year review;
4. The budget request for Bridport Harbour for 2021/22;
5. The budget request for Lyme Regis Harbour for 2021/22; and
6. The fees and charges for 2021/22 for Bridport and Lyme Regis Harbours.

#### **Reason for Decisions**

The Harbours Committee has the responsibility for the harbours' finances including budget setting, budget monitoring and the final outturn at the year end.

#### **56. Budget Strategy**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy set out the recommendations from the Cabinet.

An amendment had been proposed from Cllr Ezzard which had been attached as a supplement to the agenda. Cllr Brenton seconded the amendment and noted that all councillors realised they needed to mitigate on climate change. To the residents of the Dorset it seemed all the action was being undertaken by volunteer groups. She felt Dorset Council needed to lead on this and this would show that the Council had a commitment to climate change.

There were a number of comments and questions relating to the amendment including:-

A small step to giving the climate emergency a proper place

The budget had not addressed the need to meet the needs of this area

£19m funding had been awarded to the Council to help with climate change

The work that Cllr Bryan had undertaken in respect of climate change

The effects of climate change

Assumptions in the budget made and decisions on this made by Town Councils

No wish to revisit the budget on member allowances

No wish to ask the Dorset tax-payer to pay anymore

Disappointment the amendment submitted so late following all the budget consultations that had taken place with members

Climate change costs were already in the budget

Procedural issue raised with the Monitoring Officer who responded that the amendment was procedurally valid.

In accordance with procedure rule 19.6 a recorded vote was taken. Those who voted in favour of the amendment: Cllrs Alex Brenton, Kelvin Clayton, Tim Cook, Janet Dover, Beryl Ezzard, Brian Heatley, Ryan Holloway, Ryan Hope, Nick Ireland, Paul Kimber, Robin Legg, David Morgan, Jon Orrell, Maria Roe, Andrew Starr, Clare Sutton, Gill Taylor and David Tooke.

Those who voted against the amendment: Cllrs Rod Adkins, Anthony Alford, Jon Andrews, Shane Bartlett, Pauline Batstone, David Bolwell, Cherry Brooks, Piers Brown, Ray Bryan, Graham Carr-Jones, Simon Christopher, Susan Cocking, Robin Cook, Toni Coombs, Jean Dunseith, Tony Ferrari, Spencer Flower, Les Fry, Simon Gibson, Barry Goringe, Paul Harrison, Rob Hughes, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones, Andrew Kerby, Rebecca Knox, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Cathy Lugg, Laura Miller, Louie O'Leary, Emma Parker, Mike Parkes, Andrew Parry, Mary Penfold, Bill Pipe, Val Potheary, Byron Quayle, Belinda Ridout, Mark Roberts, Julie Robinson, David Shortell, Jane Somper, Gary Suttle, William Trite, Daryl Turner, David Walsh, Peter Wharf, Kate Wheller and John Worth.

Abstentions: Cllrs Michael Barron, Peter Barrow, Derek Beer, Richard Biggs, David Gray, Matt Hall, Howard Legg, Stella Jones, Molly Rennie, Roland Tarr, David Taylor and Sarah Williams

Following a recorded vote, 18 for, 49 against and 12 abstentions the amendment was LOST.

Group Leaders were initially invited to speak on the budget strategy.

Nick Ireland, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group read out a prepared statement.

Comments from members were also received including:-

Thanks and congratulations to all staff and volunteers for the past year especially in respect of the distribution of business grants  
Consideration of a tax emergency in the future.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy appreciated all the comments and undertook to continue to lobby the Dorset MPs.

The Leader of the Council advised that whilst this had been a challenging although balanced budget it was capable of meeting service delivery and would fulfil statutory obligations. The Budget café and Scrutiny committees had been really helpful in the budget process. He also undertook to continue to lobby for a better deal for Dorset.

Proposed: Gary Suttle  
Seconded: Spencer Flower

In accordance with procedure rule 19.6 a recorded vote was taken. Those who voted in favour of the recommendations:- Cllrs Rod Adkins, Anthony Alford, Jon Andrews, Michael Barron, Peter Barrow, Shane Bartlett, Pauline Batstone, Derek Beer, Richard Biggs, David Bolwell, Alex Brenton, Cherry Brooks, Piers Brown, Ray Bryan, Graham Carr-Jones, Simon Christopher, Kelvin Clayton, Susan Cocking, Tim Cook, Robin Cook, Toni Coombs, Jean Dunseith, Tony Ferrari, Spencer Flower, Les Fry, Simon Gibson, Barry Goringe, David Gray, Matt Hall, Paul Harrison, Jill Haynes, Brian Heatley, Ryan Holloway, Rob Hughes, Sherry Jespersen, Stella Jones, Carole Jones, Andrew Kerby, Paul Kimber, Rebecca Knox, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Robin Legg, Howard Legg, Cathy Lugg, Laura Miller, David Morgan, Louie O'Leary, Jon Orrell, Emma Parker, Mike Parkes, Andrew Parry, Mary Penfold, Bill Pipe, Val Potheary, Byron Quayle, Molly Rennie, Belinda Ridout, Mark Roberts, Julie Robinson, David Shortell, Jane Somper, Andrew Starr, Gary Suttle, Clare Sutton, Roland Tarr, David Taylor, Gill Taylor, William Trite, Daryl Turner, David Walsh, Peter Wharf, Kate Wheller, Sarah Williams and John Worth.

Those who voted against: Cllrs Janet Dover, Beryl Ezzard, Ryan Hope and Maria Roe.

Abstentions: Cllrs Nick Ireland and David Tooke.

Following a recorded vote, 74 for, 4 against and 2 abstentions the recommendations were approved.

### **Decisions**

1. That the revenue budget summarised in Appendix 1 of the report be approved;
2. That the increase in general council tax of 1.997% and to levy 2.995% (3%) as the social care precept, providing a band D council tax figure for Dorset Council of £1,779.39 be approved;

3. That the capital strategy set out in Appendix 3 and the capital programme set out in Appendix 4 be approved;
4. That the treasury management strategy set out in Appendix 5 be approved;
5. That the assumptions used to develop the budget strategy and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) as set out throughout this report and summarised in Appendix 6 be approved;
6. That the recommended balances on earmarked reserves and on general funds, including the minimum level of the general fund be approved;
7. That the responses to the recommendations and comments made as part of the budget scrutiny process (Appendix 7) be agreed.

### **Reasons for Decision**

1. The Council is required to set a balanced revenue budget, and to approve a level of council tax as an integral part of this. A balanced budget is essentially one where expenditure is funded by income without unsustainable use of one-off, or short-term sources of finance.
2. The Council is also required to approve a capital strategy, a capital programme and budget, and a treasury management strategy, each of which are included with this report.
3. The draft budget proposals have been considered (and endorsed) by the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee and by the People and Health Scrutiny Committee.

## **57. Weymouth Rowing Club Lease**

The Chairman of the Harbours Committee set out the recommendation from the Harbours Committee.

Proposed: Mark Roberts  
Seconded: Rob Hughes

### **Decisions**

1. That the lease for the Weymouth Rowing Club be renewed for an interim period of 3 years from 25 March 2020.
2. That the Harbours Committee be given delegated authority to determine further interim renewals of the lease if necessary.
3. That the Harbours Committee be given delegated authority to determine whether to grant a full lease for a period of 25 years from 25 March 2020 once the Harbour Revision Order has been approved.

### **Reason for Decisions**

The Gig Rowing Club continues to be an integral part of the harbour and have an active membership. The renewal is a short-term temporary arrangement until a longer term lease can be considered once the Harbour Revision Order has been approved

## **58. Appointment of Co-Opted Independent Member of the Harbours Committee**

The Chairman of the Harbours Committee set out the recommendation from the Harbours Committee.

Proposed: Mark Roberts  
Seconded: Rob Hughes

The Chairman confirmed that 3 applications had been received and all 3 applicants were interviewed.

### **Decision**

That the nomination of the Harbours Committee's Appointments Panel for a new Co-opted Independent Member, Mr William Ellwood be approved.

### **Reason for Decision**

To ensure that the membership of the Harbours Committee is in accordance with the Dorset Council Constitution and industry best practice.

## **59. Pay Policy Statement 2021/22**

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development and Change advised members that, in accordance with the Localism Act 2011, Council was responsible for approving the annual pay policy statement for 2021/22.

Cllr Ireland proposed the following amendment to the Pay Policy Statement:-

Appendix A, add after item 7.4 (page 142)

7.5 Dorset Council resolves to work to the lowest wages it pays being in accordance with the minimum Real Living Wage as defined by the Living Wage Foundation by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 and seek accreditation for such from the same.

Cllr Howard Legg seconded the amendment.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed this was a valid amendment in that it added words to the proposal before members. In terms of councillors being able to make evidence-based decisions, notice of this type of amendment was not required. With reference to the principles for good decision making, members had not received financial advice or HR advice for this amendment and therefore was possibly not in accordance with good decision making.

Several comments were made by members including:-

Reference made to the lowest paid workers

Reference made to retaining good staff and paying them enough

Concern letting residents down by making decisions ad hoc

Importance of following proper consultation and agreements

The statement does not change the pay strategy but would like to see it applied to terms and conditions and go through proper channels

Being a socially responsible council

No opportunity to discuss properly or receive relevant advice

The Leader advised members that the Council relied on national pay bargaining which was a platform to put this forward as a national point. He was happy to acknowledge the point made and ensure it was brought forward to the national conversation in relation to pay bargaining.

The Deputy Leader advised members that this was a factual statement that met the requirements of the Localism Act and was not a policy statement.

On being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

Proposed: Peter Wharf  
Seconded: Spencer Flower

### **Decisions**

1. That the provisions of the Localism Act and content of the Pay Policy Statement for the 2021/22 financial year be noted; and
2. That the Pay Policy Statement for 2021/22 be approved.

### **Reason for Decision**

The Full Council is responsible for approval of the annual pay policy statement.

## **60. Calendar of Meetings 2021-22**

The Leader of the Council presented the draft calendar of meetings for the municipal year 2021 to 2022 for formal adoption.

Proposed: Spencer Flower  
Seconded: Les Fry

One member was disappointed there was not a mix of daytime and evening meetings.

### **Decisions**

1. That the Calendar of meetings for the period May 2021 to May 2022 be adopted.
2. That authority be delegated to the Corporate Director – Legal and Democratic Services to make any necessary changes, in consultation with the relevant Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen, to ensure effective political management.

### **Reason for Decisions**

To ensure effective political management, comply with the Dorset Council Procedure Rules and to put into place appropriate arrangements for Council committee meetings.

## **61. Urgent items**

There were no urgent items to report.

## **62. Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

**Duration of meeting:** 6.30 - 9.13 pm

**Chairman**

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## Cllr Bill Trite – Supplementary Question

Since, compared with the situation prior to the advent of Dorset Council, these figures show a steep reduction in the number of planning applications being determined directly by the public's elected representatives, can the portfolio holder - who is not the author of this reduction - think of any ways in which this decline represents an improvement in local democracy, or demonstrates the greater involvement of elected Members in the discharge of the Council's functions?

## Response by Cllr David Walsh

The decision as to whether or not a planning application needs to be considered by a planning committee is based on Dorset Council's Constitution which sets out a scheme of delegation at part 3 para 6 of Constitution. I would like to point out that in the way we have been running the planning committees and the delegation decisions that Government this year helpfully set out some interim measures to enable urgent decisions to be taken involving a consultation process with committee members while councils could still opt to use powers of urgency if necessary. I am pleased to say that in Dorset such powers were never followed and instead we awaited the legislative green light for virtual committees. Consequently, all planning applications that are required to go to committee under our Constitution have been. The only way to change things is if we actually change the Constitution because those that warrant going to committee I assure you do go to committee, but those that can be done under delegated powers do and as we saw from the Peer Review one of the things that shocked me is that the resource needed to take an application to committee is 10 times the resource needed for delegated powers. Now that isn't a reason for moving things towards delegated powers but when you think of how many you asked for the % but the actual numbers were over 6000 by delegated powers and 140 by committee. That is still a huge number by committee and I will stand by this and I do agree with you that we must be seen to be transparent and representing the constituents who elected us and planning is a hugely vital department in a local planning authority so I take all your points on board but as I say we are doing things as specifically as the Constitution says, if that needs to be changed it has to go through the proper legal channels.

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**Full Council  
16 February 2021  
Questions submitted for the Public Participation Period**

**Question 1 - submitted by David Redgewell, South West Transport Network and Railfuture Severnside**

What Budget is set aside for social support buses services in Dorset separate from the Department for transport Covid 19 bus operators grant and concessionary fare grant?

This funding is important to maintain vital buses service across the county for essential journeys for key workers and access to Food shopping, chemist, banks post office banks health care and very importantly to The Bus minister and the Department for transport Covid 19 vaccinations centres as per recent guidance to Dorset council and Bus companies. From Stephen Fiddler Director of buses and taxis at the Department for transport

**Response by Cllr Ray Bryan**

Dorset Council is continuing to provide funding for the supported public bus routes, in order to enable key workers to get to work and for people to access essential services. A number of these services are duplicated for the school run when a dedicated school bus is provided for students, to allow correct social distancing for members of the public. These additional vehicles are funded by the Department for Education. Commercially operated routes in Dorset are running at around 80-90% of the full timetable, in order to provide a public transport service for essential travel. Service levels are regularly reviewed with the bus operators to ensure they meet demand. Public Health Dorset (PHD) and the Clinical Commissioning Group are working together to identify transport solutions for those people who are unable to get to vaccination centres by driving themselves or using public transport. PHD will apply to the COVID-19 Contain Outbreak Management Fund for the required amount of funding, once the level of demand for the service is established.

**Question 2 – submitted by David Redgewell, South West Transport Network and Railfuture Severnside**

What capital budget is set as railway improvements programmes for Bus rail interchange work at Weymouth town station and Dorchester south station, bus stop real time information and bus stop shelter maintenance?

**Response by Cllr Ray Bryan**

The Weymouth Station Gateway project is being led by the Dorset Coast Forum, in partnership with Dorset Council, Public Health Dorset, Weymouth Town Council, Weymouth BID and South Western Railway. The project's aim is to make a number of improvements to the forecourt and the walkway to

make it a more welcoming and user-friendly place for visitors and residents. These improvements include improving the sustainable transport infrastructure including bus links, cycle ways and pedestrian access. The budget is £596,000 and Dorset Council's current contribution to the project is £100,000 from the Local Transport Plan funding. The scheme is still in the design phase and full costings of the preferred design is underway. The project team are investigating other public transport links that could sit alongside the project and we are working closely with the local bus companies to do this. The capital budget for bus stop improvements is an annual sum of £25,000 from the Local Transport Plan. In addition, when appropriate, Dorset Council will collect contributions for bus stop infrastructure from new developments through Section 106 or CIL. The current budget for maintenance/ operation of Real Time Information is £112,100 and for maintenance/ cleaning of bus shelters is £9,000.

**Full Council  
16 February 2021  
Questions from Councillors**

**Question 1 – submitted by Cllr Andrew Kerby**

During the COVID pandemic, the majority of Dorset residents have followed the law by staying at home and only leaving for essential reasons. The lockdown for many, including myself has been particularly difficult, with families split and children unable to attend school. Though I get frustrated with the lockdown, I understand the need to reduce the amount of interactions to slow the spread of Coronavirus.

I find it exasperating that over lockdown and the tier restrictions that a minority of holiday lets and guesthouses are still remaining open for business, in clear breach of COVID measures. This is wrong and I feel very little seems to be done to enforce those rogue businesses and individuals. Additionally, I believe that many of these 'rogue' let's have claimed government grants designed to support closed businesses over the tough lockdowns. This is fraud and is taking funds away from legitimate struggling industries.

My concern is that Dorset Council is not being proactive enough in identifying rogue businesses, nor acting on information passed to the council from residents and the police. There is the additional worry that Dorset Council is failing to use its own data to identify potential fraud – particularly around government grants. I ask for assurance that Dorset Council is taking all necessary steps to ensure that our residents are safe and that fraud to the taxpayer is swiftly acted on.

Upon doing my own research, I have found just how easy it is to book a property online using some well-known national websites, with no questions asked to whether my stay was legitimate. I ask members to join me in condemning those online holidays letting websites, that are still operating and putting the lives' of our residents at risk.

**Response from Cllr Jill Haynes**

As regards keeping people safe, from the first Lockdown until now, regulatory officers within Community and Public Protection have been operating as a combined virtual team, following up complaints and answering business enquiries on closure and permitted safe opening. Where issues are not enforceable by the Council, or support is required, Police liaison follows – remembering that the Local Authority can deal with the behaviour of businesses not customers' behaviour which is a Police issue, including the wearing of face coverings.

All complaints and enquiries are responded to whether it involves licensed premises, food businesses, close contact personal services or all manner of

other businesses and activities by a range of organisations. Businesses in Dorset have attained very high levels of compliance without the need to resort to formal action, although not without initial resistance in all cases. When the law, or the tiers of control, have changed is when these enquiries and complaints have spiked.

There have been exemptions for many businesses to continue to operate, sometimes in modified ways. Investigation has often revealed legitimate refurbishments and other activity taking place in some premises. If any resident or community representative is concerned about a business being open when it should not be or is concerned with how it is operating they are encouraged to report this and [details are on our website](#).

The website has continued to be an up to date reliable starting point for any such enquiry, with links to Government guidance and specialist health and safety material.

The officers working on this are from Licensing and Community Safety (Licensed premises); Food, Safety and Port Health (Food premises) and Trading Standards (anything else). Covid Marshals, managed through Licensing and Community Safety, also add eyes and ears to Covid breaches by businesses as well as assisting with issues in the high streets of Dorset.

### **Response from Cllr Gary Suttle**

I thank Councillor Kerby for raising this issue.

The national restrictions state that during this lockdown period accommodation such as hotels, hostels, guest houses and campsites should close except for specific circumstances, such as

- where these act as someone's main residence
- where the person cannot return home
- for providing accommodation or support to the homeless
- or where it is essential to stay there for work purposes.

The restrictions are also clear that overnight stays and holidays away from primary residences will not be allowed - including holidays in the UK and abroad.

So I agree with Cllr Kerby - all businesses and individuals must comply with the national restrictions. Compliance is the quickest route for us to exit this terrible pandemic.

But sadly we know that there are a small minority of businesses and individuals who don't think the rules apply to them. Throughout the pandemic Dorset Council's regulatory officers have been following up complaints and answering business enquiries on closure and permitted safe opening. Our teams have worked alongside the Police, talking to businesses, talking to the public, working hard to ensure compliance and thus keep our residents safe.

Cllr Kerby believes that there may have been a number of unscrupulous grant claims. May I firstly reassure him that the vast majority of Dorset business owners are highly professional and act only in accordance with the formal scheme criteria and in fact many have checked directly to make sure they are acting correctly before claiming. The revenues and benefits teams in Dorset Council and Stour Valley Poole Partnership have worked tirelessly and have so far paid out grants totalling £143M to Dorset businesses.

As part of the process the applicants have to go through a strict validation process, to ensure the legitimacy of the claim. But we have taken a belt and braces approach and as part of our follow up are sharing the data with government departments, including HMRC. If there are false grant claimants out there who think you have 'got away with it' they shouldn't be surprised if they hear from us soon!

And this brings me to my final point. I can assure him that Dorset Council has a zero tolerance approach to fraud.

Thankyou

### **Question 2 – submitted by Cllr David Tooke**

The current Local Plan Consultation strategy largely relies on people having access to, and sufficient familiarity and experience with, the internet.

Whilst there are copies lodged with local Libraries people need to be able to book, collect, read and return these in a short space of time. Given the three-week loan period it's likely that each copy will only be read by two, or at most three people, in the time available.

Many people are suffering extreme hardship and stress, many juggling home working whilst having to home educate children, many battling with grief, or loss of their livelihood. A great number of people do not have access to on-line facilities or are simply unable to engage with it. This is not the time to be conducting a "public consultation" when a large number of local residents are unable to participate.

I am sure the whole Council would prefer a fully franchised, democratic process, which would lend significant weight to the eventual published plan, rather than the democratically limited process currently in hand.

In light of this, should the Council not extend the Consultation until later in the year, when we hope to be able to have some face to face contact and the ability to run well-structured road shows, and fully involve as many of our residents as possible?

## **Response by Cllr David Walsh**

There is nothing “democratically limited” about our current Local Plan consultation process. Simply put, we are doing more than we have ever done before to ensure that as many Dorset residents as possible, both online and offline, can engage with the process and have their say.

Around 90% of residents have internet access and are therefore fully able to take part in the consultation online. There is no requirement in legislation to make individual hard copies available. Planning regulations were amended in response to the pandemic to remove the requirement for even inspection hard copies to be available.

But, in the best interests of all our residents and to ensure no-one is excluded from taking part, we have planned for those who are not online. This includes the library copies, and we are making more copies available to those libraries where demand is greater. The libraries can also arrange delivery if people are unable to collect a copy.

While the pandemic has prevented traditional face-to-face events such as roadshows, we have worked hard to provide a range of alternatives. This includes social media advertising, online webinars that can be accessed via the telephone and watched at any time, podcasts, surgeries where people can talk to us directly and a dedicated telephone line for people who would like to speak to planning officers and discuss anything to do with the plan.

We've had around 50 articles in the traditional media and an article was sent to all parish and community magazines back in December to publicise the consultation. I myself have been interviewed on several local radio stations regarding the Local Plan consultation process.

This may be a different approach for those who have responded to local plan consultations previously, but we can potentially reach a much wider number of people and different audiences from those normally involved. We have already reached over a million people on social media and had around 21,500 visitors to our web pages. We have had over 3,500 viewings of our webinars, and over 600 listens of our podcasts.

Delaying the consultation would have a major impact on the programme for preparing the local plan and would be an extremely high-risk strategy. Cabinet have previously agreed that we are aiming to adopt the plan by spring 2023, and indeed a ministerial statement has recently been sent to all local planning authorities stressing the need for all to have up to date local plans by the end of 2023. All of our currently adopted local plans are more than five years old, and we do not have any parts of the council area that have both a five-year land supply and sufficient housing delivery in the last year to pass the 'housing delivery test'.

This means that we currently have less control over the development that takes place in our area, until we can adopt an up to date plan that allocates enough land to meet our development requirements. Therefore, it is vitally important for us to avoid any delay in preparing the plan. In short, waiting for the pandemic to blow over and everything to get back to normal is simply not an option for us.

We understand that some organisations and individuals may attempt to undermine the consultation process itself as a means of protesting some of the proposals and policies outlined in the Local Plan. But I, alongside our hardworking officers on the Local Plan team, remain 100% confident that we are going above and beyond what we need to do to ensure the consultation is robust and fully accessible. In the meantime, if anyone has views on any part of the draft Local Plan, now is the time to tell us – we are listening and want to know what you think.

### **Question 3 – submitted by Cllr Beryl Ezzard**

We have always been conservationists and conscious of reducing our carbon footprint year on year, but will our actions be fast enough? Members on this Council agreed to the Climate & Ecological Emergency in May 2019 in an urgent call to action. We need action now to slow down and reverse the current temperature rising.

Why, when other Councils nearby has, this Council has not, budgeted for Climate & Ecological emergency action in the coming year? A £100,000 at the very least, should be a priority for this Council; although we face many difficulties and trials currently, we need to focus on the objective of being carbon neutral by 2030 not by 2040.

We need to give the Dorset Community a solid commitment to quicken our pace, to reverse the trend and save our only Planet for future generations. It may mean the initial outlay is more expensive using renewal energy; solar and wind, however, within a few years, reduced heating costs and pollution will give priceless return for future generations to enjoy.

There are several budget items of lesser priority, in our opinion, that would allow for this Fund. Will the Council now act and amend the Budget Statement to include £100,000 for the Climate & Ecological Emergency action this coming year?

Thank you

### **Response from Cllr Ray Bryan**

I was surprised to see the words We need action now to slow down and reverse the current temperature rising.

We have since May 2019 worked tirelessly to learn and understand the actions needed to reduce the carbon footprint of Dorset Council. With some amazing results already achieved.

The production of the action plan and strategy document took a number of meetings & time with officers over several months to compile the report that has recently been out to an extended public consultation the results of which are currently being analysed. Early indications show that most of the respondent's opinions are very much in line with our strategy and that includes our 2040 target date.

I said from day one that I would only support an action plan that I was confident we could achieve that includes the date.

The question is, to achieve a 2030 target date, will the local taxpayer be willing to pay a considerable increase in their current council tax which would be many millions per year over a very much shorter period. Our chosen route is to seek financial support from Central Government rather than ask our residents to fund our plans.

To obtain funding from Government they look at our Strategy and Action plan which includes dates and approve them.

The recent resident's survey shows when residents were asked to rate their views on what is important to them, out of 15 levels of importance, Climate Change came in at no 9 down two places from last year's survey.

As far as the rest of Cllr Ezzard's question is concerned this is a duplication of her suggested amendment to the budget and I would not want to pre-empt that debate.