

Full Council
14 December 2021
Questions from Councillors

Question 1 submitted by Cllr Louie O'Leary

Her Majesty the Queen ascended to the throne in Nineteen Hundred and Fifty-Two. She is this country's longest serving head of state in history, she is Defender of the Faith and head of the Commonwealth of Nations. She is a symbol of public service and we all should be very proud of her and all her years of service to this nation.

Question:

In the year of Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee we, as the principal elected authority of Her people in Dorset and as a council, should reaffirm our support and admiration of her.

Could I request that the first verse of the National Anthem be sung by all councillors at the beginning of each full council and at the annual council meeting?

Question 2 submitted by Cllr Nick Ireland

Back in the early noughties, Dorset County Council entered into block contracts with Care South which include care homes such as Buxton House, Maiden Castle and Fairlawn. The contract wasn't tendered, ends in 2040 with no review until 2039, and we pay for beds regardless of whether they are occupied or not.

Neither the contracts nor the costs are confidential - the information on them is easily found in the public domain such as NHS Digital, EU Contracts and the provider's own website. One such example can be found at <https://procontract.due-north.com/ContractsRegister/ViewContractDetails?contractId=6599c380-1a95-e511-8105-000c29c9ba21>

A recent incident where a resident at one of the care homes moved (due to a change in personal circumstances) from being paid for by Dorset Council to a self-funder highlighted that the weekly cost was considerably higher than at other comparable care homes not under this block contract. The outcome was that the resident relocated and DC eventually refunded the difference. DC also agreed to notify anyone else whose circumstances changed in a similar manner that they were paying over the odds but have refused to do this retrospectively i.e. anyone similarly overcharged in the past will be none the wiser. It seems grossly unfair that those who have potentially lost thousands of pounds through no fault of their own but as a result of this council's inflexible contracts will neither be notified nor compensated.

In addition, the continuing use of these contracts exacerbates the cost pressures on our Adult Services; one estimate is that the ongoing excessive cost is approximately £42k per week (£2.2m/year!). It is interesting to note that these contracts aren't highlighted in our budget papers nor mentioned as a potential area where we can make savings (yet we quote possible savings of £350k in the Dorset Care Framework). For example a recent care sufficiency report to People & Health Scrutiny gave an example of a service user moved into residential care at a cost of £850/week; If the service user had been placed in one of the block contract care homes, that cost would have been over £1200/week.

Given that the contracts still have nearly 20 years to run, what is Dorset Council intending to do to regarding the continued waste of our council tax payers money on them?

Question 3 submitted by Cllr J Orrell

We face a new wave of COVID. I am keen to know the situation for adult social care. We hear of care homes losing workers who are unimmunised, gone due to Brexit or attracted to better pay in other sectors. The NHS has been closing hospital beds on the mantra of care closer to home over the last decade. The recent new settlement for lifetime costs seems to have been consumed largely to backfill NHS under investment leaving a smaller share for social care. Does Dorset adult social care have capacity in people and money to pick up the strain of the coming Omicron wave?