

Full Council 18 July 2019
Notice of Motion
Social Mobility in Dorset – proposed by Cllr P Barrow

To consider the following motion proposed by Cllr P Barrow, seconded by Cllr P Kimber and supported by:

Cllrs H Legg, C Sutton, L O’Leary, J Andrews, J Worth, A Canning, A Starr, S Cocking, L Fry, R Hughes and N Ireland

Background

Recent reports have revealed that low wages and poor social mobility are key issues in some areas of Dorset. Weymouth and Portland is particularly disadvantaged, but so are some other areas of the County.

The Social Mobility Commission’s “State of the Nation 2017” report, assessed social mobility across all local authority areas in the Country. Weymouth and Portland was placed third from bottom of England’s 324 local authority areas.

A House of Commons Library Briefing Paper, CBP 8400, published in 2019, assessed social mobility across all parliamentary constituencies. South Dorset was placed last among the 533 constituencies in England.

A report on the future of seaside towns, published in 2019 by The House of Commons Select Committee on Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities assessed challenges faced by all seaside areas. Weymouth and Portland was referred to on several occasions, with the report noting particularly severe problems with low levels of attainment in secondary schools; reliance on part-time jobs, with the lowest wages in the UK; severe difficulty in encouraging students to return after graduation; and a population of transient renters in low-cost housing that is three times higher than the rest of Dorset.

End Child Poverty released a report in May 2019 on children living in poverty across the UK. In Weymouth and Portland 30% of children live in poverty, with particularly high levels in Weymouth East (39%), Melcombe Regis (39%) and Underhill (40%).

The GMB Union released a report in May 2019 that assessed wage levels across the UK using ONS statistics. This revealed that 25% of jobs in Weymouth and Portland pay less than the Real Living Wage with 6,500 working residents in Weymouth and Portland being paid less than £9 an hour. More than half of this total was represented by part-time jobs, giving evidence of an under-employed workforce on poverty wages. There are also many other areas in Dorset that have similar issues with low pay.

Many of our most disadvantaged residents are denied life chances to which they aspire. If we fail to improve social mobility we risk parts of our County becoming blighted communities.

Dorset's micro-climate and world-class environment attracts older more affluent residents to live in the County and our economy benefits significantly from their personal spending. They in turn rely on a resilient and economically successful semi-skilled and skilled workforce for their lifestyle aspirations. It's in all our interests that the workforce is supported and encouraged to remain in Dorset. Improving social mobility will provide the key underpinning to Dorset's aspirations of future prosperity and is therefore vitally important to all of us.

It is recognised that work to improve social mobility is already underway with activity in areas such as economic growth, housing, community safety, health and education. However, given the evidence in recent reports we need to acknowledge that we need to do more.

There is much to do to set up our new council and it is appreciated that it is very early days. However, surely this does not stop us being ambitious for our community and committing to a clear course of action from the very beginning.

Motion

“Council acknowledges that improving social mobility requires a decisive co-ordinated effort. Council needs to provide visible and effective leadership to lead a multi-agency approach that drives improvement.

Council resolves that a Cabinet member, together with an Executive Director, will be accountable for improving social mobility in Dorset, with an initial focus on Weymouth and Portland. Together, they will be tasked to create and lead a multi-agency Team that will develop and deliver an overarching strategic plan. This Team should ensure all action is effectively targeted, accountability is clear and that progress can be effectively assessed. The initial Team meeting should take place as soon as possible and an initial Plan should be in place within twelve months.

Council has already declared it will work in an inclusive manner across all its work. Council will ensure that the Team involves all stakeholders with relevant experiences and skills. There is a pressing need to ensure that action is taken where it is most needed and that communities can see progress being made. To this end Council will invite relevant community groups to join the Team, both to provide valuable inputs and to provide progress reports to the community.

Council will task the relevant overview and scrutiny committee to review progress at quarterly intervals so that independent challenge and scrutiny is in place.

A progress report should be a standing agenda item for all Cabinet meetings, so that progress can be assessed and momentum maintained.”

Report references

Social Mobility Commission report “State of the Nation 2017”

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/662744/State_of_the_Nation_2017 -
_Social_Mobility_in_Great_Britain.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/662744/State_of_the_Nation_2017_-_Social_Mobility_in_Great_Britain.pdf)

House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number CBP 8400

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-8400#fullreport>

The future of seaside towns report

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldseaside/320/320.pdf>

End Child Poverty

<http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/poverty-in-your-area-2019/>

GMB report on wages

<https://www.gmb-southern.org.uk/news/dorset-wilts-residents-earning-less-living-wage>