

Public Document Pack



DORSET COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 21 NOVEMBER 2019

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

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

Susan Dallison (Democratic Services), Andy Frost (Community Safety and Drug Action Manager), Jonathan Mair (Corporate Director - Legal & Democratic Service Monitoring Officer), James Potten (Communication and Engagement Officer), Matt Prosser (Chief Executive), John Sellgren (Executive Director, Place), Jennifer Lewis (Service Manager for Communications and Engagement) and Jacqui Andrews (Service Manager for Democratic and Electoral Services)

44. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Shane Bartlett, Graham Carr-Jones, Simon Christopher, Les Fry, Matt Hall, Jill Haynes, Cathy Lugg, Laura Miller, Emma Parker and Mike Parkes.

45. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2019 were confirmed and signed.

46. Declarations of Interest

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

47. Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman paid tribute to Les Ames, former Councillor of Portland Town Council, Weymouth & Portland Borough Council and Dorset County Council, who sadly passed away on 4 November 2019 aged 100. His funeral would

take place on 26 November at 12.30pm. A minute's silence was held in his memory.

The Chairman congratulated Cllr Sarah Williams on being awarded the National Association of Local Councils "Councillor of the Year" Award 2019.

48. Public Participation - Questions and Statements

The public questions together with the responses from the Highways, Travel and Environment Portfolio Holder are set out in Appendix 1 to the minutes.

49. Public participation - Petitions and Deputations

No petitions or deputations were received at the meeting.

50. Announcements and Reports from the Leader of Council and Cabinet Members

The Leader reported that work to mitigate climate change continued to progress, with Cllr Ray Bryan leading the Climate Change Executive Advisory Panel and providing verbal updates at each Cabinet meeting. Sixty officers were involved in supporting the Panel and regular updates were available online. These would increase now that the various Task and Finish groups had been set-up and work gathered pace. The climate emergency declaration was being treated with the urgency and transparency it deserved and demonstrated a full commitment by the Council to play its part.

Key areas of focus included transport, waste and energy, buildings and assets, leadership and influence and the natural environment. The Friends of the Earth recently placed Dorset in its top 20 most climate-friendly areas in the country, with Wiltshire County Council being number 1. It would be important to maintain momentum in the development of the climate change strategy and action plan over the coming months.

The Leader had been invited to attend the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Council's Annual General Meeting as a guest speaker on Saturday 9 November. He placed great importance on establishing strong working relationships with parish and town councils in order to effectively work together to achieve a shared goal of meeting the needs of local residents. Since the creation of Dorset Council and the reduction in tiers of local government in Dorset, the need to explore how the councils could best work together in future to achieve that shared goal had been recognised. Four workshops had recently been held in Bridport, Blandford, Wareham and Horton attended by Dorset Council officers and colleagues from town and parish councils which had resulted in some key areas for joint action that were now being progressed.

The Leader also reported that he was in the process of meeting with neighbouring council leaders to discuss matters of common interest such as economic growth, Local Plans, travel and transport and waste and recycling facilities. So far, he had met with Wiltshire, Somerset, Devon, Hampshire and

South Somerset Councils. These meetings had been very constructive with all parties showing a real commitment to working closer together across council borders. He would meet the Leaders of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council and New Forest District Council before the end of the year.

Asked whether the urban extension of Yeovil had been discussed during the Leader's meeting with South Somerset District Council, he confirmed that this topic had been discussed in the context of the approved Local Plan that was currently under review. Dates of future meetings would be shared in order that members could forward any comments to enrich his conversations with the leaders of other councils.

51. Questions from Councillors

Councillors asked questions of the Leader and relevant Portfolio Holders. These along with the responses are attached in Appendix 2 to the minutes.

52. Community Safety Annual Report

Cllr Andrew Kerby, Chairman of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) presented the report and recommendation in the absence of the Portfolio Holder, explaining that the 3 strategies (Community Safety Plan, Reducing Reoffending Strategy and Alcohol and Drugs Strategy) were required by legislation to be adopted by Full Council. He welcomed the opportunity to highlight this work and remind members of the Council's statutory responsibility to reduce crime as much as the Police Force and the continued involvement of the Place Scrutiny Committee in developing future plans.

Cllr Clare Sutton welcomed the crime trend information in appendix 2 of the report that included benchmarking against the rest of UK, however, she was disappointed that the statistical information had not been used fully in any of the strategies. The statistics highlighted a tenfold increase in incidents of crime in Melcombe Regis compared to the rest of Dorset. Whilst she appreciated the special circumstances including seasonal influx of visitors, she wished to be reassured that steps would be taken to narrow the gap in Melcombe Regis.

Cllr Andrew Kerby responded that the Melcombe Regis Board had been formed by a predecessor CSP Chairman who had previously written to Weymouth & Portland Borough Council to say that a multi-agency approach would be required to tackle some complex issues in that area in order to deliver the necessary outcomes. He sought to ensure that recommendations of the Melcombe Regis Board came through to the CSP. In relation to the statistical information, he advised that all of the documents were in the public domain and crime data was readily available by searching on the internet.

Cllr Jon Orrell asked whether existing policies were working and safe to continue, in particular with regard to the Alcohol and Drugs Strategy. He provided examples in the report, including the considerable increase in deaths by liver disease which could be reduced by increasing the minimum price of

alcohol. He suggested that the next review should investigate the available international evidence of what worked well.

Proposed by Cllr Andrew Kerby, seconded by Cllr Bill Pipe.

Decision

That the Community Safety Plan 2017-2020 (2019 refresh), Reducing Reoffending Strategy 2018-2021 (2019 refresh), including the amendment, and Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset 2016-2020 Alcohol and Drugs Strategy to Dorset Council for adoption as amended by the Supplement for Item 6, Appendix 4 – Amendment of Wording in the Reducing Reoffending Strategy (Page 4 – Dorset, Devon and Cornwall Community Rehabilitation Company) be approved.

Reason for Decision

To ensure Dorset Council met its duties as set out in relevant legislation.

The meeting was adjourned for a short period.

53. Lyme Regis Harbour Revision Order

Cllr R Bryan, Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment presented the report and recommendations.

Proposed by Cllr Ray Bryan, seconded by Cllr Daryl Turner.

Decision:

1. That an application be made to the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) for a Harbour Revision Order (HRO) in respect of Lyme Regis Harbour to consolidate and modernise the applicable current local legislation;
2. That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment to determine the wording of the HRO based on legal advice and undertake all procedures for the submission of the HRO to the MMO;
3. That a budget of £31,500.00 be allocated for this work to include legal advice, the application fee and public notices.

Reason for Decision

To secure approval for the submission of an HRO to modernise the local legislation for Lyme Regis Harbour.

54. Calendar of Meetings

Cllr S Flower, Leader - Governance, Performance and Communications, presented the report and recommendations.

Members highlighted that only 5 Council meetings had been scheduled in the next Municipal year, including the Annual meeting, and that this did not

adequately represent the Dorset electorate. A minimum of 6 meetings of Council was specified in the Constitution. Further comment was made regarding the lack of evening meetings that might benefit some working Councillors and members of the public.

The Leader explained that 6 Council meetings had been scheduled, including a reserve meeting. Members had been canvassed for their opinions on timing of meetings prior to the inception of the Dorset Council that had resulted in many variations. The views of Councillors would be taken into account in the governance review following 12 months of the Dorset Council.

Proposed by Cllr Spencer Flower, seconded by Cllr Peter Wharf.

Decision

1. That the Calendar of Meetings for the period May 2020 to May 2021, as amended by Cabinet, be adopted.
2. That authority be delegated to the Corporate Director – Legal and Democratic Services to make any necessary in-year changes, in consultation with the relevant Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen, to ensure effective political management.
3. That a review of the Calendar of Meetings be carried out as part of the fundamental review of the Council's Constitution.

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.

55. Polling District Review

Cllr S Flower, Leader - Governance, Performance and Communications, presented the report and recommendations. He assured members that the proper processes had been followed despite some locations that remained of concern.

Cllr Bill Trite stated that Swanage Town Council had not had the opportunity to comment on the rationalisation of its polling stations which it did not support. He raised the possibility of lack of capacity in the event that there were simultaneous 3 tier elections. He proposed an amendment "2a -That no changes will be made to existing polling arrangements in Swanage" which was seconded by Cllr Gary Suttle.

The Corporate Director for Legal & Democratic Services advised that the review had been based on guidance from the Electoral Commission that included the potential for 3 polls to be carried out simultaneously, therefore the assertion that the polling stations would be unable to cope was not supported by officers. He advised that there was evidence to demonstrate that Swanage Town Council had been consulted about reducing its polling stations during the two stage consultation process.

A vote was subsequently taken on the amendment which was agreed by the Council.

The debate proceeded on the substantive motion, including the amendment 2a. Members highlighted that due to high turnouts in Rodwell and Wyke Regis it was pleasing that this area would remain under review. However, there were other deprived areas in Weymouth where there was a reduction in bus service or car usage meaning that residents needed to travel long distances to reach a polling station. In response, the Leader advised that the polling stations would be kept under review.

Proposed by Cllr Spencer Flower, seconded by Cllr Ray Bryan.

Decision

1. That having undertaken the statutory review, amendments are made to DRE1, DRE3, FEN2, FEN3, STA4 and STA5 polling districts as well as a revision of those polling districts in Gillingham GIL5, GIL6 and GIL7.
2. That subject to 2a, having undertaken the statutory review, the polling places and stations remain as listed in Appendix 1 apart from those where further investigation is required with regard to possible change of premises or location as noted in Category 2 of the report. This would be completed with regard to submissions received.
- 2a That no changes will be made to existing polling arrangements in Swanage.
3. That the Returning Officer reserves the right to change or alter polling stations at short notice.

Reason for Decisions

To enable the Returning Officer to fulfil the statutory responsibility to complete the review, and ensure polling districts, polling places and polling stations used are accessible, practicable and appropriate.

56. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

57. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 8.00 pm

Chairman

.....

This page is intentionally left blank

Full Council – 21 November 2019

Questions submitted for Public Participation Period

Question -1 Submitted by Cllr David Harris (Weymouth Town Council)

“Will the council please reconsider its policy of charging residents for having disabled parking bays close to their accommodation which is both discriminatory, against the council policy of encouraging people to remain in their homes for as long as possible, and is asking residents to pay for something which they have no ownership of afterwards?”

Response from Cllr Ray Bryan

“Any applications for disabled bays or any changes to an existing Traffic Regulation Order have to be judged on their individual merits but any disabled bay on the Highway can only be for general use rather than a personal dedicated bay.

It is by no means a given that an application for a disabled bay would be granted because it is dependent on a number of logistical factors.

The provision of disabled parking bays is discretionary, there is no statutory obligation for them to be provided on the public highway. I understand that there are a number of local authorities who do not offer the installation of disabled parking bays. Dorset Council recognise the benefit that disabled parking bays can have however, there is no budget allocated to their installation which is why we charge for their installation; the charge also takes into account future maintenance costs. This approach is consistently applied across the Dorset Council area.

If an application meets with the policy criteria but applicant is not able to afford the installation charge, then I believe there are ways for the costs to be provided via a means test. I believe that this can be applied for via various charities, such as Age UK and/or Occupational Therapists.

Whilst it is true that disabled parking bays, advisory or enforceable can be used by any blue badge holder, they are typically well respected particularly so in residential areas and if neighbouring residents are aware of the reason for the bay.”

Question - 2 Submitted by Luke Wakling

“A recent report published in BioScience magazine, warns that humanity is facing a catastrophic threat from climate change including rising sea levels. The report is signed by 11,224 scientists from 153 countries.

I recently measured height of the spring tide. Near Weymouth Lifeboat Station, the sea was just 12 inches from overtopping.

There are over 2,300 properties in Weymouth at Risk of Flooding from Rivers and Seas. **What is Dorset Council planning to do and when, to defend our town from rising sea levels?**

After the general election, I shall also be writing to our MP to ask how the government will be funding sea defences to protect our communities.

Regarding the current works underway to replace Wall D. I understand this is phase one of a £1.9M project to repair existing defences. The new shuttering is being installed at the same height as the old wall, and on the spring tide the top of new shuttering is less than 1m above the water level.

I am concerned that these works are insufficient, and there will be a need increase the height of Wall D in the near future. **Why aren't we raising the wall height by at least a couple of feet, as part of the current works? “**

Responses from Cllr Ray Bryan

Response to Question 1

“Dorset Council engineers are aware of the need to raise flood walls around the harbour and eventually along the promenade over the course of the next 100 years, primarily due to sea-level rise and more severe storm events caused by climate change. Extensive modelling work has been carried out in conjunction with the Environment Agency to determine the future risk to the town. These studies were based upon UK Climate Prediction figures, the Strategy document was carried out using figures from UKCP2018. ‘UK Climate Projections’ is a climate analysis tool that forms part of the Met Office Hadley Centre Climate Programme. More information about UKCP18 can be found at <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/approach/collaboration/ukcp/about> and is the industry best-practice assessment of sea level rise and climate change predictions.

WPBC completed several flood risk modelling, strategy and asset condition studies in 2019 that highlight future flood risk, and the requirement to manage it, within Weymouth. Within the harbour this is likely to require existing flood walls to be raised and new flood walls to be installed within 10 years in some locations, but not all. In reality this will probably occur when harbour quay walls are replaced or significantly repaired. The harbour may also require a tidal barrier in approximately 2060 but this will require further analysis of environmental factors such as sea level rise.

Along the coast, Dorset Council Coastal Engineers & the Town Council Beach Manager are using the newly developed Weymouth Beach Management Plan (BMP) in order to manage the beach more effectively as a coastal defence structure, alongside its existing amenity use. A set-back seawall along the promenade may not be required until 2060. The BMP also gives clear recommendations for coastal defence intervention over the coming decades.”

Response to Question 2

“Wall D, according to the aforementioned modelling we have undertaken, is already of a suitable height to act as a flood defence until at least 2065. The wall will require replacement in approximately 2070 and it would be prudent then to consider incorporating a flood wall into its design. The Strategy mentioned above shows the phasing of both replacing and raising of the harbour walls, in larger sections. This shows that some wall sections require raising now in order to maintain the required standard of protection, whilst others are able to wait for another round of wall replacement in approximately 2060

If Sea level rise is significantly greater than currently predicted, then we could potentially raise the capping beam of the quay wall in order to form a flood defence structure. This will require additional design and we do not have a cost estimate for this eventuality at present.”

Question -3 Submitted by Laura Baldwin

“Members from Extinction Rebellion in Dorset were invited to attend a meeting on 10th June with Cllr Ray Bryan and Officers from Dorset Council

The main thrust of the meeting included; sharing views on the climate emergency, exploring ways of working together and discussing existing and future plans and actions to address the climate and ecological crisis.

During this meeting XR requested the Council to amend the declaration made on 16th May to reflect the wider environmental crisis, (not just a focus on climate), adjusting it to a Climate and Ecological Emergency. There was commitment from Councillor Ray Bryan, supported by the Dorset Council team present, that this would be addressed through the required processes. The process was described as follows:

1. Check with the legal team if it was possible to make the amendment without consulting the Full Council of members, if this was not possible then
2. Ask members at the next Full Council Meeting for a vote on changing the declaration to a Climate and Ecological Emergency.

At a further meeting with Councillor Ray Bryan and a Dorset Council team on 5th August, members of XR asked Cllr Bryan for an update on the amendment. We were informed that as there had not been a Full Council meeting between the original request and this reminder there had been no opportunity to seek agreement from members on the amendment.

There was a Full Council Meeting on Thursday 18th July, but the item was not raised at this meeting.

Question: Is there any reason why the Council have not made this change, and any reason why this change cannot be agreed upon here this evening?"

Response by Cllr Ray Bryan

"Through our Climate Emergency work so far, we have established key themes and working groups related to the Services that Dorset Council provides. One of these groups is focused on the Natural Environment, and this group will be considering not only how green space owned and managed by Dorset Council may be used to reduce our carbon footprint, but also how our operations can be delivered to protect and enhance biodiversity. I am happy to amend the terms of reference for the Climate Change Executive Advisory Panel to include the ecological emergency and for this to happen with effect from the meeting of the advisory panel tomorrow."

Question -4 Submitted by Caz Dennett

“At the Full Council meeting in July 2019, Cllr Clayton expressed his concern for the way in which considerable Council business and decisions are being pushed into Executive Advisory Panels. Panels which have no decision making power and which can effectively block the opportunity for Full Council to discuss, debate, review and make decisions. Adding to the potential reduction in democracy is the Panels’ lack of transparency and openness. The Climate Emergency Executive Advisory Panel appears to be operating “behind closed doors”. Meeting dates are hard to find, minutes are not published and meetings are not open to public viewing or to the press. This lack of transparency is a genuinely serious concern. Surely there is no need for Dorset Council’s Climate Change Panel to be so covert. **Is there any good reason why the Panel’s meetings cannot be viewed by the public either in person (preferred) or as the very minimum through a video live stream or video recording in order to improve transparency and public trust?”**

Response by Cllr Ray Bryan

“There appears to be some misunderstanding and suspicion around Dorset Council’s Executive Advisory Panels – or EAPs and also some misunderstanding about how decisions are made within Dorset Council. I’m glad to have the opportunity to clarify.

Dorset Council decision making is transparent. Decisions are made by the full Council, by the Cabinet or a Committee and those decisions are made after publishing the date, time and agenda for the meeting and are almost always made in public. Only on an exceptional basis, for instance when we are considering an individual’s personal information or something that is commercially sensitive, will we meet in private.

EAPs have been set up to look at a range of issues and topics across the council. They are not decision making meetings. Instead they are advisory meetings led by a Portfolio Holder on a specific issue. The panels are made up of councillors with particular skills, knowledge or interest in a subject area and they are supported by officers with the relevant knowledge and by anyone else that the Cabinet member believes may be able to contribute to the work of that EAP.

The use of EAPs to explore and develop policy ideas on a ‘task and finish’ basis is standard practice in local government and is used primarily for councillors and officers to have free flowing discussions ahead of bringing any proposals to the more formal decision making structures of the council. They can make

recommendations which will then be taken to the appropriate committee, Cabinet or Full Council for discussion, debate and review, enjoying the same level of openness and transparency as any other decision made by the Council.

We have to be realistic about how we go about developing policy and bringing about real change in areas as complex as climate change or any of the other areas for which we have established Executive Advisory Panels. A formal full Council meeting of 82 people in this chamber or a meeting of the Cabinet with its very wide remit are not the right places to consider from scratch the detail of the impacts of alternative policy proposals and to hear detailed evidence and opinion.

Executive Advisory Panels are not about blocking discussions or debate. Quite the opposite. The Climate Change Executive Advisory Panel that I chair, has already invited outside organisations to speak directly to us at meetings. As soon as purdah ends we will be launching an extensive call for evidence from members of the public so they can contribute to our work. We have recently published information on the panel in our Dorset Council News magazine, which is posted to over 200,000 Dorset households.

We have published information after each Climate Change EAP meeting to keep everyone up to date with our work and we have uploaded supporting documents on our Climate Emergency webpages online. And I know that I speak for everyone on the panel when I say we are always more than happy to discuss our work with members of the public.

These are not the actions of a group that is operating in a “covert” manner.

Councillors working on Executive Advisory Panels need to be able to concentrate on hearing and considering the evidence so that we can develop proposals for change. A public meeting with large numbers of individuals and different groups all clamouring to bring forward their own proposals is not the right forum to do that. I therefore do not support opening up the meetings to public attendance.

The Climate Change Executive Advisory Panel is simply doing what we are expected to do in our capacity as Dorset councillors and officers. We will continue to keep Dorset residents up to date with our work and when we bring forward our proposals individuals and groups will be able to engage with the outcome of our work just as they would with any other aspect of the Council’s decision-making process.”

Question -5 Submitted by Amy Smith

“267 Councils in the UK have declared a climate emergency; of these 74% have stated a target date to reach zero carbon emissions, 26% are currently undecided including Dorset. The majority, 62% have stated a target of 2030 or sooner. Will the Leader of the Climate Emergency Executive Advisory Panel Councillor Ray Bryan inform the Council and Dorset residents the target date that is being set by Dorset Council? Will he please confirm that Dorset will join the 62% rather than setting our goals to only achieve the lowest-level performance, thus reflecting his confidence in Dorset’s ability to “change the way we deliver services, and take action decisively and with real impact”?

Response by Cllr Ray Bryan

“I understand the benefits of setting targets in providing urgency and impetus to seek solutions that will enable us to meet a carbon zero position. However, I am keen to ensure that any targets that are set are realistic, where possible taking into account the evolving technology which will be necessary to meet our aim and considering the investment which will be necessary from the Council and Central Government. Council Officers are currently working on themed areas of work and will be developing action plans to be presented as part of a climate change strategy next April. At this stage we will have a clearer idea of a sensible target date for meeting our zero-carbon goal. “

This page is intentionally left blank

Full Council – 21 November 2019 Questions from Councillors

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr Les Fry (to be asked by Cllr Bill Pipe)

“Safeguarding our vulnerable people is a key priority for all of us here in Dorset. Working in partnership is always more efficient and cost effective to achieve this outcome. Working in close collaboration, sharing information with the ability to be dynamic with responses to protect people has to be the way forward, especially given that County Lines is a significant threat, risk and harm here in Dorset.

Dorset currently has pan Dorset Strategies for Child Sexual Exploitation, Slavery and Vulnerability issues, as well as a pan Dorset MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub).

The two Unitaries have announced that they are in process of creating two separate unitary solutions for safe guarding. Indeed Dorset Council has already withdrawn its staff from the MASH

I understand that this decision was around CAROL (Children at risk of/or linked to Exploitation)

This extremely disappointing decision taken without the knowledge of members has caused a Fragmentation of the system, creating staffing and communication challenges for all public services involved in Safe Guarding. For example the Police now have to find more officers for two units instead of one.

Safe guarding is paramount for all our people here in Dorset, especially our children, the elderly and the vulnerable and to have two different policies in Dorset is completely unacceptable and unworkable.

1. How did this change come about?
2. When will the business case and costings for these single Safe Guarding units (that will have submitted to the portfolio holder) be coming to full council for ratification? “

Response by Cllr Andrew Parry:

To be circulated.

Question 2 – submitted by Cllr Brian Heatley

“The Review of Polling Arrangements proposes that the approximately 1400 non-postal voters of part of Weymouth West, ROD3, should have to go to a polling station outside that Polling District. This contravenes the excellent principle set out in the paper before Council tonight that where possible polling stations are allocated centrally to residential areas to keep travel to a minimum.

It is suggested in the review that because turnout from the polling district was relatively high in the May 2019 election when there was no polling station in the ward, voters are prepared to travel further. Turnout did hold up, but an alternative explanation is that this is a ward where there has been a very lively political contest in most recent years.

Please could you reconsider this decision and undertake to make a serious effort to find a new polling station in a large polling district which on the face of it contains a number of alternative possibilities.”

Response by Cllr Spencer Flower, Leader of Council

“Electors in the ROD3 polling district previously voted at St Nicholas Church Hall in Buxton Road. When this venue became unavailable, the Electoral Services Team made arrangements for the polling station to move to The Old Castle Inn. However, having set this up and made all the necessary arrangements, they were advised not long before the poll in May that The Old Castle Inn had closed. The decision was made that due to the short notice to make other arrangements, the polling station would be moved to the Weymouth South Scout HQ on Rylands Lane, just outside of the polling district.

During the public consultation period for the Polling Place Review, 2 comments were received from Dorset Council members in respect of the distance the electorate had to travel to be able to vote. Two alternative locations were suggested. One of these was The Old Castle Inn which the Team had previously tried to utilise, and the other was a school. However, as turnout was actually higher at the May elections than in previous polls during the last few years, and no complaints had been received from electors in respect of this polling station, no changes were proposed.

I have asked the Electoral Services Team to review the arrangements for this polling district in the New Year to ascertain whether there is a suitable alternative venue with appropriate facilities for the staff working at the station and that is accessible for local electors.”

Question 3 – submitted by Cllr Louie O’Leary

“Weymouth has either the highest or one of the highest car park fees in the county it costs for 4 hours £4 and that goes to £5 in the Summer and while in Dorchester it is £4 all day or 2.60 for up to 3 hours. With Weymouth’s high street suffering and with such high levels of deprivation in Weymouth how is it meant to compete with other towns? Now we are one council one authority surely Weymouth deserves a better deal and a standard balanced rate county wide.”

Response by Cllr Ray Bryan

“It is recognised that following the inception of the Unitary Authority on 1st April there are a number of anomalies relating to both the cost of parking and hours of charging across the Dorset Council Area.

There is a working group already actively looking at **three** particular strands relating to this subject with a view to simplifying and harmonising cost of parking, charging hours, special permit including resident permits.

We are also looking at whether there is a need for a differential between Coastal Towns and Villages and Market Towns and Villages.

As we are now a single Council we will be looking at the potential for a Monthly and Yearly permit that allows residents and visitors the potential to park in any area of this council.

In addition we will be looking at the provision of electric car charging spaces in the majority of our car parks this is a result from our

The working group is meeting twice-weekly at this stage to facilitate the process and enter into dialogue with key stakeholders.

It is hoped that users of car parks will benefit from a much simpler and consistent pricing structure across all of the Dorset Car Parks once the project is completed.

I thank Cllr O’Leary for his question and his passion for representing his constituents and I hope that my response will show that all of Dorset Councils area is considered special and will be treated as such.”

Question 4 – submitted by Cllr Bill Trite

“In view of this Council's recognition of the importance of village halls to local communities - including the role village halls play in improving social cohesion and combating rural isolation - can the Leader confirm that there are no plans to remove or reduce the present level or levels of discretionary rate relief for charity-based village halls in Dorset?”

Response by Cllr Spencer Flower, Leader of Council

“Members approved a Discretionary Rate Relief policy for Dorset Council at its meeting of Cabinet on 3rd September 2019. The policy takes into account the various policies that had previously existed across the predecessor billing authority areas, government guidance and key stakeholder feedback, having regard to developing a consistent approach moving forward.

Members raised questions regarding any negative impact on the organisations already in receipt of support and were advised that the policy looked to target support to those organisation which make a maximum contribution towards the community. It was anticipated that the majority of existing recipients would continue to receive Discretionary Rate Relief.

With regard specifically to village halls, a number currently receive 20% discretionary rate relief in addition to any mandatory rate relief awarded. It is recognised that well maintained village halls have enormous benefits to rural communities and it was agreed to continue to award 20% discretionary rate relief as a top up to the mandatory relief to those halls that are managed by registered charities with open access policies.

Revenues & Benefits have recently invited applications from all current recipients of Discretionary Rate Relief, as all awards currently end on 31st March 2020. As long as the village halls make an application for the relief for the 2020/21 financial year and continue to meet the criteria, there will be no detriment.

The adopted policy, however, is due for review during 2020 in accordance with the portfolio holder's suggestion to ensure that the new policy is fit for purpose.”