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CABINET

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 28 FEBRUARY 2023

Present: Cllrs Spencer Flower (Chairman), Peter Wharf (Vice-Chairman), Graham Carr-Jones, Ray Bryan, Tony Ferrari, Laura Beddow, Andrew Parry, Gary Suttle, Jill Haynes and David Walsh

Cabinet Leads in attendance: Cllr Simon Gibson, Cllr Andrew Kerby, Cllr Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Cllr Byron Quayle and Cllr Jane Somper

Also present: Cllr Shane Bartlett, Cllr Richard Biggs, Cllr David Gray, Cllr Beryl Ezzard, Cllr Clare Sutton, Cllr Les Fry, Cllr Jon Andrews, Cllr Rob Hughes, Cllr Carole Jones, Cllr Sherry Jespersen, Cllr Val Potheary, Cllr Barry Goringe, Cllr Brian Heatley, Cllr Toni Coombs, Cllr Mark Roberts and Cllr Simon Christopher

Also present remotely: Cllr Cherry Brooks, Cllr Molly Rennie and Cllr Gill Taylor

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

Matt Prosser (Chief Executive), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), John Sellgren (Executive Director, Place), Sean Cremer (Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Megan Rochester (Democratic Services Officer), Vivienne Broadhurst (Executive Director - People Adults), Theresa Leavy (Executive Director of People - Children), Dawn Adams (Service Manager for Commercial and Procurement), Andrew Billany (Corporate Director for Housing), Laura Cornette (Business Partner - Communities and Partnerships), Ed Denham (School Admissions Manager), Louise Drury (Head of Service Children in Care and Care Leavers), Deborah Smart (Corporate Director – Transformation, Innovation and Digital), Terry Sneller (Local Plan Team Leader), Mark Tyson (Commissioning Consultant), Christopher Whitehouse (Transport Project Officer), Jonathan Price (Interim Corporate Director for Commissioning), Katie Hale (Head of Revenues and Benefits), Steven Ford (Corporate Director for Climate and Ecological Sustainability), Lisa Cotton (Corporate Director for Customer and Cultural Services), Paul Dempsey (Corporate Director - Care & Protection) and Amanda Davis (Corporate Director for Education and Learning)

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

David Bonner (Service Manager for Business Intelligence and Performance), Dugald Lockhart (Service Manager Digital Place) and Lisa Trickey (Service Manager for Digital Strategy and Design)

103. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

104. **Declarations of Interest**

The following members declared an interest in respect of item 17 on the agenda 'Council tax premiums on second homes and empty properties' and indicated that they would leave the room during the discussion and voting on this item; Cllrs S Flower, G Carr-Jones, G Suttle, and D Walsh.

Cllrs T Coombs and N Lacey-Clarke also left the room for the consideration of this item.

105. **Public Participation**

There were 10 questions/statements from the public. A copy of the full questions and the detailed responses are set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

106. **Questions from Councillors**

There were 5 questions received from Councillors J Andrews, B Heatley, R Legg, C Sutton, and G Taylor; these along with the responses are set out in Appendix 2 to these minutes.

In response to supplementary question from Cllr C Sutton, The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Communities and Customer Services advised that as a separate piece of work, there was already several workstreams for community grants which were awarded to groups that supported young people and youth groups.

In response to a supplementary question from Cllr R Legg (asked by Cllr J Andrews in his absence) regarding comments about another local member, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that he would respond in writing, to the local member concerned, after the meeting.

In response to a supplementary question from Cllr G Taylor, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy advised that any item of expenditure that was over £500k must be considered by Cabinet for a decision.

In response to a supplementary question from Cllr B Heatley, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy advised that any additional expenditure that was outside of the agreed budget would need to come before Cabinet or Full Council and therefore would become approved expenditure.

107. **Forward Plan**

The Cabinet Forward Plan for March was received and noted.

108. **Cost of Living Challenge**

The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Communities and Customer Services presented a report that set out proposals for various activities and schemes which would

provide immediate and medium-term support to Dorset residents hardest hit by the cost-of-living crisis.

The proposals, which were driven by data, were costed at £2m in total, to be funded from council reserves. The proposed activities and schemes would supplement the support provided to date by central government and by Dorset Council. The Portfolio Holder acknowledged that there had been concerns about this piece of work not forming part of the 2023/24 budget proposal but considered it to be a stand-alone item.

Cllr L Beddow proposed the recommendation, and this was seconded by Cllr S Flower.

Non-executive members asked questions and made comments around Food security, energy efficiencies, prioritising community areas, and those most at need, the need to consider support to youth centres, in terms of revenue costs, and rural poverty and the lack of transport facilities in rural areas.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that extensive support had been provided to residents over recent months and the proposals within the report aimed to supplement the support provided to date by central government and Dorset Council.

Cabinet supported the proposals and recommendations within the report.

Decision

That, to support Dorset Council residents who were hardest hit by the current cost-of-living crisis, the proposed activity and funding from council reserves be approved.

Reason for the decision

Extensive support has been provided to Dorset Council residents over recent months to help them cope with the impact of rising prices, particularly affecting energy bills, fuel, food, and housing costs.

The proposed support should be seen as a preventative intervention that aimed to help households, families and individuals avoid falling into deeper crisis which could lead to consequences such as homelessness, debt, mental illness and so on.

109. LGA Peer Progress Review - September 2022

The Leader of the Council presented a report on the outcome of a recent return invite from a Local Government Association (LGA) Peer team. The team was made of peers who had taken part in the Council's previous peer challenges. A copy of the action plan was attached at appendix 2 of the report.

It was proposed by Cllr S Flower seconded by Cllr P Wharf

Decision

- (a) That the report from the Local Government Association (LGA) team be welcomed.
- (b) That the action plan, prepared in response to the findings set out in the LGA Peer Progress Review report (at appendix 2), be approved.

Reason for the decision

To ensure the Council acts on the LGA Peer Team's recommendations.

110. Data and Business Intelligence Strategy

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development and Transformation presented a report on the Data and Business Intelligence (BI) Strategy which provided strategic direction to the next steps in the council's ambition to place the use of data and intelligence at the core of decision making and policy development. There was a recognition that there was a need to evolve into a proactive data driven organisation to support effective and efficient decision-making which would improve outcomes for the people of Dorset.

It was proposed by Cllr J Haynes seconded by Cllr P Wharf

Decision

That the Data and Business Intelligence Strategy and action plan be adopted.

Reason for the decision

1. The strategy would drive forward the council's ambition to evolve into a proactive data driven organisation.
2. The strategy was aligned with the themes of the Councils Plan and positions data and BI as enablers to deliver all the council's priorities.
3. The approach to data and BI was approved by members of the two overview committees at an informal workshop on Wednesday 23 November 2022.

111. Procurement Forward Plan Report - over £500K (2023-24)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy presented a report on the procurement forward plan – over £500k (2023-24).

It was proposed by Cllr G Suttle and seconded by Cllr J Haynes

Decision

It was agreed:

- (a) To begin each of the procurement procedures listed in appendix 1 to the report of 28 February 2023.
- (b) That in each instance the further step of making any contract award should be delegated to the relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holder, after consultation with the relevant Executive Director.

Reason for the decision

Cabinet is required to approve all key decisions with financial consequences of £500k or more. It is good governance therefore to provide Cabinet with a summary of all proposed procurements, that individually are estimated to be total value of £500k or more, prior to procurement procedures formally commencing.

112. Commissioning Strategies for Adult Social Care 2023-2028

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health presented a report on the commissioning strategies for Adult Social Care 2023-2028. This included a period over autumn 2022, where a series of roadshows and other events were held to engage people in their development. Members also received a short presentation from the Commissioning Consultant (the PowerPoint is attached at appendix 3 to these minutes)

Cabinet members spoke in support of the data rich report and its recommendations but welcomed its fundamental focus on helping residents to live their idea of "A Better life".

It was proposed by Cllr P Wharf seconded by Cllr A Parry

Decision

- (a) That the strategies as presented, to shape activity for the coming years on the development of the local adult social care system, be adopted.
- (b) That the suggested priorities for co-production work for the coming year be noted.

Reason for the decision

If people were to be able to engage meaningfully with the council about the future of social care, it was important that there was a clear account of the Council's view on future priorities. This should not be set in stone but having a clear starting point for the discussion was central to the Council's commitment to involve those who draw on support, its staff, local service providers, and partners. Additionally, it was important that there was a strategy in place that could help to shape the future decisions about the financial frameworks within which social care operates,

particularly in the context of the interface with the care market during a period when it is under significant pressure.

Even with further work to be done, this set of documents outlined a current view on the future of care services and some of the priorities for their improvement, stabilisation, and development. The documents also sought to set out some interventions for the management of demand and the improvement of service quality.

113. **Consultation on reforms to national planning policy**

The Portfolio Holder for Planning set out the report and proposed the recommendation. This was seconded by Cllr G Carr-Jones.

Decision

That a full response to the consultation questions, as set out in the appendix to the report of 28 February 2023, be sent to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

This response included welcoming those changes that gave greater weight to the development plan in decisions and that simplify the process of calculating five-year housing land supply requirements.

Reasons for the decision

To ensure that the Council could influence the direction of changes to national planning policy.

114. **Potterne Park, Verwood, Dorset**

The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Communities and Customer Services presented a report on behalf of the Portfolio Holders for Corporate Development and Transformation and Economic Development, Assets and Property.

The aim of the proposals was to develop and provide improved sporting facilities for the benefit of the local community through partnership working. This would assist the council to further enhance the green space offering and provide health and wellbeing benefits to non-sporting users across the Verwood community.

The Local Ward Member, Cllr T Coombs expressed her support for the report and its proposals but asked that the project be progressed as quickly as possible once the market engagement had been completed.

It was proposed by Cllr L Beddow seconded by Cllr J Haynes

Decision

- (a) That a market engagement to obtain expressions of interest for leasing of all the site, be approved.

This engagement was to be open to any operators that have interest in the opportunity, with the aim to attract operators with experience in accessing leisure grant monies and could maximise the leisure offer within Verwood community for existing and future leisure users.

- (b) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of Place, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Communities and Customer Services and the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Assets and Property and after evaluation of the expressions of interest (short-listing interviews and the undertaking of due diligence and best offer consideration) to select a preferred party and agree with them the terms of a new lease.

Reason for the decision

To promote and assist in the delivery of improved leisure facilities through investment funds not available to Dorset Council. To retain the freehold of the site and to deliver the improvements by way of a new lease and if necessary, an additional agreement referring to investment by the preferred bidder.

115. Dorset Council Plan Priorities: Dorset Council's Digital Vision Update

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development and Transformation presented a report on the Dorset Council's refreshed Digital Vision Update. She highlighted the progress that had been made to date, including the inward investment into Dorset for digital innovation and connectivity programmes.

It was proposed by Cllr J Haynes and seconded by Cllr L Beddow

Decision

- (a) That the refreshed Digital Dorset Vision updated delivery plan attached to the report of 28 February 2023, be adopted.
- (b) That the Place and Resources Overview Committee be asked to examine the role and potential benefits of a Digital Infrastructure Strategy for Dorset.
- (c) In the meantime the roles of a Local Authority Digital Champion and Digital Co-ordinator as envisaged in [Government guidance](#) be confirmed with the Portfolio holder for Corporate Development and Transformation and the Service Manager for Digital Place.

Reason for the decision

The delivery plan has been updated to reflect progress over the last 18 months and to align with our refreshed council plan outcomes:

1. Digital connectivity is widely available.
2. We work together as 'one Dorset Council', with partners to provide easy to access, responsive services that meet the needs and expectations of our customers.

3. We develop our use of data and insights to support evidence-led decisions and targeted and timely delivery of our services to improve outcome.

116. **School Admissions Arrangements and Coordinated Scheme 2024-2025**

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education, Skills, and Early Help set out the recommendations from the People and Health Overview Committee of 31 January 2023.

It was proposed by Cllr A Parry seconded by Cllr D Walsh

Decision

That the following policies that make up Dorset Council's School Admissions Arrangements and Co-ordinated Scheme 2024-25 for school place allocations from September 2024 be approved and adopted:

- (a) Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme Timetable 2024-2025
- (b) Primary Co-ordinated Scheme 2024-2025
- (c) Secondary Co-ordinated Scheme 2024-2025
- (d) In Year Co-ordinated Scheme 2024-2025
 - (e) Admissions Arrangements for Community & Voluntary Controlled Schools 2024-2025.
 - (f) Admissions to Maintained Nursery Units Policy 2024-2025
 - (g) Sixth Form Admissions Policy 2024-2025
 - (h) Guidance on Placement Outside of Normal/Chronological Age Group 2024-2025
 - (i) Armed Forces Policy 2024-2025

Reason for the decision

To determine admissions arrangements in accordance with statutory requirements including the Schools Admissions Code September 2021.

To ensure compliance with the latest legislation and any subsequent regulation/statutory guidance.

117. **Update on Children in Care Strategy and Plan**

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education, Skills, and Early Help presented the recommendation from People and Health Overview Committee of 31 January 2023.

It was proposed by Cllr A Parry seconded by Cllr J Haynes

Decision

That there be a 15% increase to the overall payment for Dorset foster carers and supported lodging carers.

Reason for the decision

To progress work to ensure that foster carers and supported lodgings carers receive financial uplift in their overall payment to support sufficiency of Dorset Council carers and ensure carers were suitably financially rewarded for the invaluable role they play for our children in care and care leavers. Successful recruitment and retention of foster carers would support the health and wellbeing of our children in care and result in cost efficiencies for the Council through the reduced use of high-cost residential placements.

Declarations of interest in respect of "council tax premiums on second homes"

The following members left the room for the debate and decision in respect of minute 118 below: Cllrs S Flower, G Carr-Jones, G Suttle, and D Walsh.

The Monitoring Officer took this opportunity to remind members that any councillor, including non-executive councillors, who had an interest in the following item, as they owned an additional property in Dorset, should also withdraw from the meeting.

Cllrs T Coombs and N Lacey-Clarke also left the room for the debate and decision of minute 118 below.

Cllr P Wharf (Vice-Chairman in the Chair)

118. Council tax premiums on second homes and empty properties

The Deputy Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health advised that, the report before them derived from the proposed legislation within the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill that acknowledged some of the impact that second and empty homes could have on communities.

The proposed changes would allow councils to place a council tax premium on second homes and permit a 100% premium on empty properties at an earlier one-year commencement point.

The Portfolio Holder acknowledged that the proposals had caused concern from some second homeowners, and he invited the Head of Revenues and Benefits to set out some 'frequently asked questions' in respect of this matter. (These would also be circulated to members after the meeting).

However, it was also recognised that this matter was linked to housing issues, including the levels of people on the housing register and the number of people living in temporary accommodation and homelessness.

The Portfolio Holder appreciated the cross-party support of the Place and Resources Overview Committee for the report and welcomed their additional recommendations.

Cllr P Wharf proposed the recommendations, and this was seconded by Cllr L Beddow.

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services advised that the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill was currently at the committee stage of Parliament, and it was not clear when it would be enacted. However, the government had made it clear that, as a billing authority, if the council wished to adopt any of the flexibilities on council tax, a determination must be made by Full Council at least 12 months prior to the financial year in which the changes were to take effect. If members wished any changes to take effect in 2024, a decision must be made by the end of March 2023. If the Bill was not enacted by the end of March 2023, any flexibilities could not be put into place until 2025.

Non-executive members asked several detailed and technical questions with the majority supporting the proposals in the report. In respect of a question around having an exact percentage within recommendation (c), the Portfolio Holder agreed that he would discuss this with the Executive Director for Corporate Development prior to the report coming forward to Full Council.

At this juncture it was proposed by Cllr J Haynes and seconded by Cllr T Ferrari that in accordance with Procedure Rule 8.1 the meeting should be extended beyond the three-hour threshold to complete the business on the agenda. Upon being put to the vote this was unanimously agreed.

In continuing the discussion, Cabinet members agreed that there was recognised data on the impact of rural communities in respect of second homes and noted that the delivery of services in shire authorities did come at a premium. In addition, the council received lower levels of central government funding and therefore they unanimously supported the recommendations.

Recommendation to Full Council

- (a) That Full Council approve the following additional council tax premiums to be applied from 1 April 2024, or as soon as possible thereafter, subject to the required legislation being in place. That approval is given to:
 - (i) 100% premium for dwellings occupied periodically.
 - (ii) 100% premium for properties which have been empty and unfurnished for a period of between 1 (previously 2) and 5 years.
- (b) That Cabinet review the council tax premiums for second homes and empty properties after two years of implementation.
- (c) That consideration be given to using a percentage of the additional income received through the premiums to support affordable housing projects, if the Council has a balanced budget.

Reason for the decision

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill has an avowed aim to reverse geographical disparities between different parts of the UK. The Bill is wide-ranging, including provisions for more widespread devolution across England, changes to local planning and enhancing the ability of local authorities to take forward regeneration schemes. Additionally, the Bill will create a legal duty upon which the government must report on a number of missions for levelling up the country.

A growing number of local authorities across England were now making decisions in support of adopting the council tax premiums on second homes and empty properties, including a number in the Southwest. Within this context, it was important to recognise that the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill contained enabling elements to go beyond the council tax premiums on second homes and empty properties. How councils embraced additional freedoms and flexibilities that come through legislation, especially when pertaining to more financial discretionary powers, could influence future discussions on substantive issues such as devolution.

There was a short adjournment at this juncture of the meeting

The Leader of the Council in the Chair

119. Consultation and Engagement Policy and Protocol

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development and Transformation presented a recommendation from the Place and Resources Overview Committee of 9 February 2023.

In response to a question from the Chairman of Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that the time of 18 months for a review was set out to allow for appropriate results to be obtained before any review took place.

It was proposed by Cllr J Haynes and seconded by Cllr L Beddow

Decision

- (a) That the Consultation and Engagement Policy be approved
- (b) That the Consultation and Engagement Protocol be adopted as a baseline standard for all consultations and engagement activity delivered to Dorset Council residents, with any minor adjustments to be authorised by the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development and Transformation
- (c) That consideration be given to the potential creation of a database of community groups and individuals that are frequently in contact with hard-to-reach groups, in order to promote consultation and engagement.

- (d) That the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee be asked to undertake a review of the effectiveness of the Consultation and Engagement Policy and Protocol, after 18 months of implementation.

Reason for the decision

Prior to Dorset Council there was an adopted Consultation and Engagement Policy from a sovereign council. As part of the harmonisation work, a transformation programme of the Consultation and Engagement function is being conducted, of which the policy and internal protocol were key elements to underpin the standards. It was deemed imperative there was a minimum set of standards and defined consistent process for how Dorset Council conducts consultations and engagement with our residents.

120. **Portfolio Holder /Lead Member(s) Update including any Policy referrals to report**

Cllr A Kerby, Cabinet Lead member for Safeguarding and Sustainable Aquaculture, addressed the meeting in respect of the council's statutory responsibility to support Care Leavers up to the age of 25 and in their role as Corporate Parents. There were currently 293 care leavers and councillors were also corporate grandparents to a further 83 children in Dorset Council's care.

He took this opportunity to remind members of the areas where improvements were required within the care leaver offer and reported on the work of the Care Delivery Group. He further reminded portfolio holders to consider care leavers in all aspects of their work and policy development.

121. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items considered at the meeting.

122. **Exempt Business**

It was proposed by Cllr J Haynes

Decision

That the press and the public be excluded for the following 3 item(s) in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the meaning of paragraph 3 of schedule 12 A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

123. **The Proposed Sale of the former Bere Regis Primary School, Rye Hill, BH20 7LP**

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Assets & Property presented the exempt report and set out its recommendations.

It was proposed by Cllr T Ferrari and seconded by Cllr P Wharf

Decision

That recommendations 1 to 3 as set out within the exempt report of 28 February 2023 be approved.

Reason for the decision

To approve a delivery approach for this project.

124. **Charging Ahead: Public Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Programme**

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment presented the exempt report and set out the recommendations, including an amendment to recommendation 2 “for delegated authority to include consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment and the Public Electric vehicle Charging Infrastructure Programme Board”.

It was proposed by Cllr R Bryan seconded by Cllr G Carr-Jones

Decision

That recommendations 1 to 2 (as amended) as set out within the exempt report of 28 February 2023 be approved.

Reason for the decision

As part of the Council’s work to address the climate and ecological emergency there is a programme of public electric vehicle ChargePoint (EVCP) installation.

125. **Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) Acquisition of 30 family homes under the LAHF grant programme**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety presented the exempt report and the recommendations.

It was proposed by Cllr G Car-Jones and seconded by Cllr L Beddow

Decision

That the detail set out in recommendations 1 to 4 of the exempt report of 28 February 2023, be approved.

Reason for the decision

To agree to receive DLUHC grant funding to support the acquisition of 30 family homes.

126. **Potterne Park, Verwood, Dorset - Exempt appendix**

The exempt appendices associated with the report 'Potterne Park, Verwood Dorset' had been made available to members of the Cabinet. However, the meeting did not move into exempt business to discuss the information.

Appendix 1 - Public Participation Q&A's

Appendix 2 - Councillor Q&A's

Appendix 3 - Power point Presentation in respect of minute 112

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 1.45 pm

Chairman

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Public Statements for Cabinet – 28 February 2023

Questions from Cllr Karen Tippins, East Ward Shaftesbury Town Council

Question 1 Cllr Karen Tippins, East Ward Shaftesbury Town Council

I have requested information from Dorset Council before regarding the s106 contributions that have been collected by Dorset Council (and historically by North Dorset District Council) designated for Shaftesbury. Sadly, I have received no updates on the s106 contributions now for years, this includes - how much has been collected, what s106 money earmarked by organisations, plus the outstanding values, and what has been spent to-date on what by which organisation. Previously, this information was made available to all Cllrs in Shaftesbury Town Council and Shaftesbury residents every quarter. Now there is nothing, no s106 communications received by Cllrs from Dorset Council and the public are very much in the dark as well on the status of on the s106 money, even though many houses have now been built in Shaftesbury and are now occupied. There has been virtually no promised infrastructure made planned, built and made available for the residents in Shaftesbury funded by Developers s106. Please can this be addressed by Dorset Council, please will you send this requested s106 contributions information directly to me? I do not want the data to be edited or changed by a third party.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning

Thank you for your question. Dorset Council has a responsibility to report on developer contribution activity through the Infrastructure Funding Statement which is a requirement of national Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations. In December, Dorset Council published online its third annual funding statement which sets out in general terms developer contribution income, expenditure and commitment. The response to your question requires a level of detail which cannot be fulfilled through the monitoring requirements set by national regulation. However, more detailed information can be provided on request and I trust you have received an initial response from the Officers setting out in some detail the position regarding developer contributions from major development in Shaftesbury. Further information can be provided if required.

Though Dorset Council may not be able to offer the same channels of reporting as predecessor councils, it is committed to ensuring important information is accessible. The Planning Convergence and Transformation Project which has seen six legacy planning systems come together sits at the heart of this commitment.

Question 2 Cllr Karen Tippins, East Ward Shaftesbury Town Council

The government is considering draft road planning regulations that will put pedestrians and cyclists first. A draft version of Manual for Streets from the FfT states 'for residential streets a maximum design speed of 20 mph should normally be the objective...' A default speed limit of 20 mph would be introduced on new or redesigned urban and residential streets under planning guidelines.

I cannot see that Dorset Council is implementing these changes either in their planning policies nor in the recent Cabinet protocols for 20mph.

The accepted DC protocol for road speed reduction issued recently by Dorset Council Cabinet appears to be expecting residents to justify reducing speeds down to 20 mph on some form of weighting system based on recorded fatalities or injuries or accidents; whereas, the government is not stating 'weighting' by fatalities or accidents etc, but stating prioritisation 20mph for all built up urban areas where the roads are mixed use - mixed use with pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles. The government regulations are promising to place pedestrians and cyclists as the priority for pushing through change from 30 mph down to 20 mph speed limits for built up areas.

Two Shaftesbury Town Council East Ward Cllrs, myself and Cllr Yeo are trying to obtain agreement with Shaftesbury Town Cllrs at STC to put forward a request to Dorset Council to reduce the road speed on Allen Road in East of Shaftesbury estate from 30 mph to 20 mph; Allen Road is a mixed use road with many small children living on the road. Personally, I don't believe we Cllrs should be blocked by Shaftesbury Town Council or Dorset Council protocol by putting this request directly to Dorset Council and the assessment being made on 'mixed use' and not weighted by fatalities/injuries.

For example, I strongly believe the spine road, Allen Road or any new road on this estate should never have been adopted to be 30 mph, and without any information on the speed limits with adoption, I have to assume Allen Road is now 30mph. Please can Dorset Council re-think both its planning policy for new developments and its 20 mph policy Cabinet procedures to be more in line with the new push by government on introducing a blanket limit of 20 mph limit in built up/mixed use road developments? Can Dorset Council seriously consider implementing 20 mph through-out all the roads on the new estate East of Shaftesbury based on a revised imminent government regulation of placing pedestrians and cyclists as priority? And that all these roads are mixed use, with a high density of children living on the estate.

Response of the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

Dorset Council will actively promote the installation of 20mph schemes, where appropriate, on new residential developments. In line with our recently agreed policy on 20 mph speed limits, we'd be happy to receive any requests for the new estate East of Shaftesbury. The policy allows requests from the local Dorset Ward Member and/or the town/parish council.

Question 3 from Graeme Neale

I have a question regarding the Councils proposals to double the Council Tax on second homes. I am a second home owner as I own a small two bedded property in Swanage.

As way of background I first came to Swanage with my parents in 1969 when I was 8 (I am now 61) and in 1994 when my wife and I had our first child we took him to Swanage and have been back every year since.

6 Years ago my parents died and, due to some money they left me, this gave me the golden opportunity to purchase a property in Swanage, a place where I have always wanted to live.

Whilst I would quite happily move down to Swanage from Harrow permanently, it is, unfortunately, not an option. Although I am retired, I have an aging mother-in-law living near us in a care home and a brother who suffers with Asperger's syndrome living in local care facilities. I also now have a 24 year old daughter who still lives with us, as she cannot afford to move away from home, and needs to commute to London for her work.

Last year my family spent 118 days in our second home in Swanage. We come here as often as possible. Either myself and my wife or my children with their spouse/friends. We spend considerable money in local restaurants and shops. Last year I employed a Swanage builder to put in a new bathroom for me together with some new decking in the garden and extra work inside the house. I have employed other local plumbers and workmen. We belong to the Swanage Conservative Club and the British Legion. We support many of the festivals each year and the annual carnival, all boosting the local economy.

I understand from the proposals that 2nd home owners can be exempt from paying the additional council tax by transferring their properties to business rates as holiday lets, and evidencing that alongside having their property available for let for at least 20 weeks in a year, it must also have been actually let for at least 70 days.....but..... I spend way in excess of that time myself in my second home each year but there is no exemption for me.

So my question is; will the council make any provision for people who love this part of the country, spend considerable time and money here but for very good reasons cannot permanently move here, or are we to be penalised just for having a home where we would really love to live permanently but cannot.

Response from the Deputy Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health

Thank you for your question. Second homes owners cannot be exempt from paying any potential additional premium by simply transferring a property to the business rates list. I should reaffirm that there are strict rules providing a firm evidenced basis for when a property being let on a commercial basis as self-contained holiday let accommodation can be moved out of the Council Tax list and over to the Business Rates list which is set out in law, updating on 1 April 2023 this year. This is supported by the decision making of the Valuation Office Agency. If a property meets the criteria and the required supporting evidence standards are met then the property has changed use. The property is now being used and managed as a commercial entity with all that goes with that change. You ask " Will the council make any provision for people who love this part of the country, spend considerable time and money here but for very good reasons cannot permanently move here, or are we to be penalised just for having a home where we would really love to live permanently but cannot" What you ask is not measurable and is wholly subjective, individual to individual and I can confirm that Dorset Council are not considering such a provision. I would wish to highlight that we are not seeking in any way to penalise those who enjoy spending time in their second home with the Dorset Council area.

Question 4 from Arthur Schaefer

With regards to the proposed increase in council tax on 'second homes' will there be any exemption from this surcharge, for retirement properties which are age restricted and warden controlled?

Statement

Cloverdale Court , Anning Road, Lyme Regis DT7 3ED consists of 44 retirement flats . Several are classed as second homes purchased for the eventual full time habitation by the owner of which my wife and I are one. There are strict requirements and conditions imposed on any tenant or buyer.

- * Minimum age requirement is 55+ years
- * No families with children
- * The property cannot be used as a holiday let
- * Our flat attracts a 'D' band council tax of £2240p/annum with no discount applied and in addition a service charge in excess of £4000 p/annum

The suggestion that:

- * Second home owners, because of the limited time occupying these premises, make no contribution to the local community is false. We occupy our flat about 5 months in the year, mostly out of season. During that time we use almost every facility in the area in support of our local traders, during their quiet period, be it shops, restaurants, theatre etc. Our service charge contributes by securing employment for a local workforce responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the building and surrounding gardens.
- * That second home owner's place an extra burden on our emergency and local services is false. In fact the reverse would be true and the burden reduced due to the time period spent there. Carbon emissions at a local level would also be reduced
- * That second home owners take, away the opportunity from locals, especially young first time buyers from purchasing local property, by forcing house price hikes is false. As the housing supply in Lyme Regis is desirable, limited and finite, the average market price is already high and will remain very high. Forcing us to sell our property would not reduce the price and future buyers are likely to come from outside the area.

The Levelling up and Regeneration Bill addresses in part an apparent housing crisis and will allow councils to consider applying a premium tax on second homes. It refers second homes as ' dwellings 'occupied periodically' but doesn't state what that period should be . Dorset council defines it as accommodation that is not deemed a main residence. Neither has considered whether exemptions should be applied in specific cases. Placing all second homes in the same category, without examining individual cases is wrong and unfair.

It is considered that Dorset council should exempt properties such as Cloverdale Court, which is a warden controlled retirement complex, age restricted with facilities geared towards the older generation. Properties such as these are incapable of making any contribution to the local housing stock.

Response from the Deputy Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health

We are not currently considering any exemptions. The driving intention of this consideration is not to release additional rental properties from current second home owners adding specifically to the local housing market. The definition of a property that is furnished and no one's sole or main residence is not specific to Dorset Council and therefore not our definition. There is no required number of days or any inference to be drawn out of the number of days that periodically occupied means.

Question 5 from Dr Derek Tordoff

" My wife and I are both aged 75 and have had a second home in Pimperne since 2006. Each month we live in Surrey about 20 days and in Pimperne about 10 days. We have to be in Surrey to help look after our grandchildren during the week but love to escape to Pimperne at the weekends. We are not a drain on Dorset's council resources, eg we have no children at schools and we do not use Dorset adult social care facilities. We contribute to Pimperne village life, eg I have funded, built and continue to maintain a car park for use by the village and by church attendees. We do our shopping in Blandford and Wimborne, we support local restaurants, village and church activities etc.

If the proposal to charge the 100% additional council tax is adopted we will regrettably have to sell up as we would not be able to afford it in our retirement, thus driving us out of Dorset. It would change the lives and/or have significant financial consequences for many people.

Has the Council considered other options, eg to charge the extra 100% only on new build or newly purchased properties which are to be used as second homes? Has the Council done surveys of second home owners' intentions and also done a full impact assessment of the new additional costs of the proposal, eg for schools, social services, bin collections etc ?

I would estimate that, should the 100% proposal be adopted, then approximately one quarter of second property owners would each either (1) find ways around paying the tax (2) let their homes on airbnb etc and pay business rates instead (3) sell up and move away or (4) pay the extra tax. Hence little extra revenue would actually be generated (c £2.5m pa) and minimal extra housing released. This extra revenue would be at the expense of other potentially greater additional costs for the Council, plus also losing custom to local businesses and making Dorset an unwelcoming, incompassionate county for diverse populations and tourism.

I understand that the proposed Bill if passed would allow Councils to add an additional council tax of UP TO 100%. A smaller increase of, say 50%, would likely be more effective with most second homeowners endeavouring to afford it, rather than finding ways to avoid it. This would generate more revenue (c net £4m pa) for the Council (together with some housing released) compared to a likely c net £nil pa for the Council with a 100% increase. Perhaps this could be tried in the first instance. Less is often more.

We hope that the Council will be able to find a fair and reasonable solution which balances the worries about the future of long standing second homeowners with the needs for additional Council revenue and more housing."

Response from the Portfolio Holder to Adult Social Care and Health and the Deputy Leader of the Council

I am sorry to hear that you feel if passed the application of a Council Tax premium would impact your personal considerations as to the continued affordability of you maintaining a second home in the Dorset Council area. I am afraid that I cannot confirm that your assumption that many will face such similar considerations as evidenced. With 5277 second homes in the Dorset Council area there will be as many scenarios as to the decision making for each to have come to occupy a second home, the frequency of use and the financial position of each. Property and intention changes constantly and such factors as seeking to measure a person's intentions holds no measurable value as intentions alter. Once a decision is made on this consideration within the Regeneration and Levelling Up bill and Royal Assent is secured we will know if any amendments have been agreed and will receive any supporting guidance. I can provide my assurance that officers will highlight any final position statements. We have also as part of the recommendations built in a review period to evaluate the factual outcomes. We absolutely recognise the representations received and understand the value of all who pay Council Tax within our area whilst we seek to balance the revenue need of the council serving all residents.

Question 6 from Vicki Elcoate

It's a year since the start of the war in Ukraine and it was soon afterwards that refugees started flooding out of the country and heading for the UK. We have many individuals and families in Dorset, staying as guests with residents here. We are hosting a mother and two young boys who left their home, husband/father and wider family last February, eventually arriving with us in May. Dorset Council has provided an excellent support service and funding to help us with their expenses and we appreciate the extra kindness that has been shown. However there is no certainty about the future of the hosting scheme beyond the first year. We have asked our MP, Chris Loder, for clarification about what financial support will be coming from the Government and whether there is a scheme for second placements, allowing guests to move onto other hosts who have volunteered. So far there has been no clarification. In our case the financial support has been invaluable, particularly over the winter months for energy bills. Our guests know that the offer is for one year and we do not want to add to their uncertainty. So please could Dorset Council tell us what financial and other support, or arrangements for second placements, will be provided for Ukrainian guests beyond their first year here.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Communities and Customer Services

Dorset residents and community partners have provided a fabulous welcome for refugees over the past year. We continue to thank them, and you, for the care and support provided so far. In recognition of this and to support hosting to continue, Dorset Council has already been topping up the government thank you payments for hosts from month seven with an additional £250.00 payment per month and by offering hosts the £1,000 winter payment to assist with the impact and costs associated with hosting our Ukrainian Guests as well as the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

The government have recently announced ongoing support for Ukrainian refugees in its updated guidance [Homes for Ukraine: sponsor guides - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-sponsor-guides). As part of these measures, hosts will receive an enhanced monthly thank you payment from £350.00 to £500.00 for supporting Ukrainian Refugees that have been living in the UK between one to two years. To further continue to support hosts, Dorset Council will continue to top up the thank you payments to £600.00 per month for all hosts from month 7. We will be communicating this information to all hosts very soon.

Our teams have been hosting Webinars recently on housing advice and support which can be viewed on this link <https://youtu.be/QIWbzbB1Wis?t=1>. It includes information about how to receive support for your guests if they require re-matching to a new host. Please do not hesitate to contact our Ukraine Response team if you need further advice or information for your guests - ukraineresponse@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk or 01305 221000.

Question 7 from Helen Sumbler on behalf of Dorset Climate Action Network

CPRE have published a report about bus services in rural England, "Every village, every hour - A comprehensive bus network for rural England", link [here](#). Does Dorset Council support the CPRE Every Village, Every Hour vision?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel, and Environment

Dorset Council is absolutely supportive of improving rural mobility and we're currently engaged in works with the subnational transport body to help improve connectivity.

We strive to implement the best possible bus services for our towns and villages within the budgetary pressures of Local Authorities and the Bus Industry generally.

The Dorset BSIP sets out our vision for the future of bus services in the area and we have already changed the way our socially necessary 'core routes' are tendered.

As Dorset's next Local Transport Plan is developed, sustainable and reliable connectivity will be absolutely key. Dorset Council can't fully commit to the CPRE vision as there are parts of this that can only be implemented by national government. However, only last month I gave evidence to the Transport Select Committee while sitting next to Chris Hinchliff (Campaigns Manager at CPRE). As

part of my evidence I gave my full support to the idea of hourly bus services for our rural villages.

Question 8 from Sandra Reeve on behalf of Dorset Climate Action Network

'The original Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy was divided into 'Areas for Action' 'referencing, for example, Direct, Indirect (through services) and Influence & Partnership sections and these were backed up by detailed and target specific Action Plans. What has happened to these detailed Action Plans and their targets in relation to this new 2023-25 Refresh of the Natural Environment Climate and Ecology Strategy?'

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

'The original Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy was divided into 'Areas for Action' 'referencing, for example, Direct, Indirect (through services) and Influence & Partnership sections and these were backed up by detailed and target specific Action Plans. What has happened to these detailed Action Plans and their targets in relation to this new 2023-25 Refresh of the Natural Environment Climate and Ecology Strategy?'

The action plan is being refreshed alongside the strategy and will be presented to Cabinet in March.

Question 9 from Tracee Cossey

Why does the new Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy, now called the proposed 'Natural Environment Climate and Ecology Strategy (2023-2025 Refresh)' not account for longer-term planning beyond 2030 to reach the 2040 and 2050 climate action goals? Further, Is there a second document?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

Every mission and cross-cutting action within the document are applicable to the medium and longer-term, including into the 2030s, and milestone targets are included for the medium term (2030, 2035 and 2040). Emphasis on short and medium term activity is merited for three reasons (1) action cannot be delayed until the longer term, so the strategy emphasises the urgency and frontloading of action required, and counters the sense that activity may be delayed until the 2030s or later; (2) Given the expected rapid shifts in national policy, technology and delivery over that period, more long-term planning is more complex to achieve in detail owing to its contingency on those; (3) relatedly, national planning extends only to the window of the 6th Carbon Budget to 2037. For these reasons we have committed to regularly refresh the strategy in order to keep pace with that context, and this strategy aims to emphasise the significant the urgency of action required over the coming decade.

Question 10 from Tracee Cossey

Why has the word 'Emergency' been dropped from the title of the newly proposed refresh document?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

The strategy has been retitled to align it with the Council Plan priority 'Protecting our natural environment, climate and ecology', which is one of its 5 top priorities. The Council Plan is the Council's overarching strategic document. The 2019 declaration is noted within the document, and the acuteness of the climate, biodiversity and resilience risks and urgency are clearly articulated.

Statement from Andrew Foulds

I own a second home in Dorset and live here for around 16-18 weeks of the year, including in the winter months when holiday lets are empty. I love Dorset and have used my life savings to make a commitment to live in Dorset for a significant part of my time. I am happy to pay my council tax like everyone else (even though I make less use of council services) and spend money in the local economy (local shops, restaurants, tradespeople etc.) and make a contribution to the community. Family reasons mean that I cannot move here full time.

I firmly believe that the proposal to charge double council tax on second homes will have a number of unintended consequences:

- If this proposal goes through, I would expect (conservative estimate) that 25% of second homes would be sold, mostly to become holiday lets that would pay **no** council tax (small business rate exemption)
- A further 25% would convert to holiday let for part of the year or exploit other loopholes to avoid paying any council tax

The net effect would be :

- No increase (and potentially even a decrease) in council tax collected
- No significant reduction in property prices to make them more affordable
- No increase in the availability of affordable housing
- An oversupply of holiday let properties or properties that purport to be holiday let to avoid council tax
- An increase in holiday let visitors (**in peak season only**) who make little or no contribution to the local community and contain a small minority that misbehave
- No improvement (possibly worsening) in community life and vitality

- Loss of people like me who truly love Dorset and am happy to contribute to the community and to the local economy on a year-round basis

I am very sympathetic to the need for more affordable housing, but this proposal will do **nothing** to help with that. An increase in the availability of affordable housing will only be achieved by building more affordable new homes. The Council should be looking at policies and incentives to achieve that, rather than to fall victim to "the politics of envy" by increasing council tax for second homes.

Councillor Questions – Cabinet 28 February 2023

1. Question from Cllr C Sutton

As you will know, in 2016, our predecessor Authority withdrew support from the 22 youth clubs it previously ran or supported. A number have since closed, but many are now run by community organisations and charities. However, like many voluntary sector organisations, they are struggling with the cost of living crisis. Whilst they can apply for up to £5,000 per year for project funding from Dorset Council's Youth Fund, many may close without additional support. For example, at STEPS Club for Young People, where I am a trustee, utility costs have risen from around £6,000 to £14,000 per annum. In addition, Dorset Council is about to finally complete the Lease arrangement with the Charity, after which they will be responsible for additional building contracts totalling around £5,000 and a further £5000 for building insurance every year. The Club, the only full time youth centre in Weymouth & Portland, will have to find an additional £18,000 per year, an overall rise in expenditure of almost 30%. In this context, my question is:

Can the Cabinet please consider making a 'cost of living' grant available to youth clubs which have been working so hard to keep youth work alive in Dorset and support our young people through these difficult times?

Response from the Leader of the Council

Youth organisations are able to apply for grants from any of the 3 core community support grant schemes available in addition to the specifically created grant fund for youth support from Children's services. Several youth organisations in Dorset have successfully done this. Please contact our communities and partnerships team for further information.

There are about 4000 voluntary community sector organisations across Dorset, all of which have been feeling the impact, firstly of covid recovery and now the cost of living challenge. Dorset Council needs to support the whole VCS in a balanced and proportioned way within our available resources.

2. Question from Cllr J Andrews

There is growing concern at the danger to pedestrians and School children, mothers with push chairs and disabled persons using the single narrow pavement on Marston Road, Sherborne. In places it is less than a metre wide so if you meet someone walking in opposite directions one of you must step into the road to pass.

Above the junction with Coombe where both the highway carriage way and the pavement are particularly narrow there is a well-documented history of large vehicles riding on the footway as they try to squeeze past each other. This is a great concern for parents on the Barton Farm Estate whose children use this as a route to both the Gryphon and Sherborne Primary School and I don't believe this area has been assessed as a safe route to school for both the gryphon comprehensive or Sherborne primary school.

Similar considerations apply in the short section of Coombe from its junction with Marston Road to the point where it meets Blackberry Lane. Last week a Gryphon pupil cycling to school was knocked from her bike at the Marston Road junction. The road at Coombe meets Marston Road at an acute angle which makes turning from Marston Road into Coombe difficult. Coupled with the high volumes of traffic passing through the junction at peak times makes this one of the most dangerous crossing places for pedestrians in town.

Will the Highway Authority commit to an urgent and proper evaluation of road safety issues in this locality and could cameras be set up for a short period to record traffic movements so that highway officers have a clear understanding of what is happening here both at the Coombe junction and on the narrow section of Marston Road?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

We were sorry to hear about the recent collision involving a young cyclist and a car at the junction of Coombe and Marston Road. Correspondence relating to this incident has been responded to directly by the Road Safety Team.

As you are aware, the Council has received correspondence from a range of people regarding the traffic calming measures on Marston Road, the recent incident involving a young cyclist being knocked from her bike, issues with the narrow footways, vehicles mounting the footway and vehicle speeds in general on Marston Road.

A full response on the issues surrounding the traffic calming installed on Marston Road was provided by the Development Team in September 2022. This outlined the processes and responsibilities for outstanding works and Safety Audits relating to the traffic calming works specifically. These processes are ongoing and the scheme will remain under review. If necessary, it will receive a stage 4 Safety Audit as is provided for within the Section 278 under which the works are being delivered.

There are ongoing investigations into changes to the 30mph limit gateway location on Marston Road aimed at making this more effective and intuitive for drivers.

With regards to the specific question, yes, our Road Safety team can commit to undertaking a review of the issues at this location and to utilising a camera survey to inform that work (if required). As a result of this, some proportionate interventions that could assist in improving any identified problems may be proposed. If more extensive works or schemes were required to resolve identified issues, and were thought to be deliverable within the very restricted road space in this location, then it should be noted that the threshold for delivery is high for road safety schemes and is necessarily evidence based due to the limited funding and resource available. This site would need to be compared with other sites across Dorset, if no evidence emerges that issues here are worse than elsewhere in the County, then it would be unlikely to be prioritised for delivery.

3. Question from Cllr R Legg (to be read out by Cllr J Andrews)

Have the Dorset Highway Authority and Network Rail finally agreed on the text of a joint submission to the Office of Rail and Road to determine whether the Hummer railway bridge is a brand-new bridge or merely a repaired old one? If they rule it is a new bridge then the new barrier system on the approach to the bridge could cost £300,000. In that case will Network Rail foot the bill but if the ruling goes the other way will we accept that the existing installed bollards are sufficient to protect the railway line?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

Dorset Council sent Network Rail final approval of the proposed joint submission on Thursday last week. We anticipate Network Rail's confirmation of this letter within the next week, after which the letter will be jointly issued to the ORR. We will need to receive the ORR's response before the second part of your question can be considered.

4. Question from Cllr R Legg (to be read out by Cllr J Andrews)

A post appeared on social media yesterday about the long-delayed repair of the damaged wall at Kitt Hill, Sherborne. The post contained the full text of a long letter from Chris Loder MP to a constituent. It is hard to believe that the letter was written without the intention of it being published in this way. (A copy of the post and letter are appended to this question for completeness). In the letter he accuses the authority of putting appalling and unfair pressure on the owner, flatly refusing to help, and issuing an inaccurate press release to take scrutiny away from the Council's actions. Will you now issue a detailed point by point rebuttal of the MP's claims? If not is there any reason why local councillors should not support any claims for maladministration brought against the authority by those affected by the severe disruption of the last twelve months, including the owner of the property?

Have you seen this, "WE NOW HAVE THE TRUTH OF THE STORY RE KITT HILL!
ABSOLUTELY UNBELIEVABLE THAT DORSET COUNCIL HAVE NOT SORTED
THIS GIVEN THE VERY SAD CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE HOUSE OWNERS.
IF WE HAD BEEN TOLD?

I AM SURE WE WOULD HAVE PURSUED DORSET COUNCIL FOR
MAINTENANCE AND NOT THE OWNERS!

Dear Vicky

I'm grateful for your patience following your correspondence about Kitt Hill in Sherborne.

I know that for a year now, the issues surrounding the A30 at Kitt Hill have been the bane of our lives - for motorists, pedestrians and businesses alike in Sherborne. In normal circumstances, it would have been a quick and easy fix. But the situation has been complicated by a multitude of issues causing it to drag on for far too long - albeit with a lot of effort behind the scenes and I'm pleased to be able to give you a full explanation of the situation as I see it.

It was a year ago that a lorry hit the wall on Kitt Hill and drove off. The impact destabilised the wall, including the property above leaving a heap of rubble in the road. Dorset Council also closed Cornhill at the request of local Councillors. The reason this mess has taken so long is two-fold. The property insurers refused to cover the hit and run damage and Dorset Council, despite early indications of help refused to do any work directly and have dragged out a decision for months and months. In September, I chaired an urgent meeting with all parties concerned to get a remedy to this. Four months afterwards, in January, the responsible director finally said that any cost to reopen the road was not a justifiable use of public money. It ended with an impasse and generated a growing colossal bill for a very elderly and poorly couple to have to bear – most of which is the Council's cost of traffic lights and scaffold rather than actual structural works.

Time and time again, I use my role to bring relevant parties together to try and expedite solutions to seemingly impossible issues. It has secured resolutions to perennial road issues like flooding on the A35 in Dorchester in a way that has not been done before. The difference between the A35 and the A30, is that the government run the A35 through National Highways where I would typically hold them to account, but Dorset Council operate the A30 where a Dorset Councillor should hold them to account.

The Sherborne West Councillor Matthew Hall has been totally absent in all of this. The local Councillor has not been in touch once with these poor residents to help them and despite his yellow leaflets being distributed in Sherborne and further afield, I understand that Matthew actually lives in Exeter – and has done so for some time - leaving this poor elderly couple, not just to cope with costs of the work, but with the constant demand from the Council itself of many tens of thousands of pounds – just for their traffic lights. Even though the Council has had the road dug up for months at the bottom of Greenhill where these traffic lights would be required anyway!

It is my opinion, that Dorset Council has put the most appalling and unfair pressure on an elderly lady, herself poorly with cancer and did not just flatly refuse to help, but did so only, after many months. The Council even issued a press release, which local councillors pushed out two weeks ago saying the work would start 'tomorrow'. But if you regularly drive passed, you will know that nothing happened. Despite a direct request not to issue a press statement (that was incorrect) this appears to have been done to take the public scrutiny away from the Council's and Councillor's actions. It really is appalling.

But, whilst it has been a very difficult period, there is hope! We have seen the first real meaningful works take place yesterday and whilst a timeline is unclear, I think we are talking about weeks until the road is fully re-open. Not because the Council are sorting it out, nor insurers - but the elderly couple themselves using up their own savings to reopen the road.

I hope this update explains fully the situation to you and I'm grateful again for your patience in waiting for this reply.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

Dorset Council works positively with Chris Loder as MP for West Dorset and we are grateful for his continued efforts in speaking up for Dorset in Parliament.

Knowing that we have such a positive relationship makes it all the more disappointing that Mr Loder did not contact the Council to check the facts before writing an open letter to a newspaper about events following an incident when a lorry was driven into a privately owned wall at Kitt Hill, Sherborne. If Mr Loder had contacted us first then I hope that we could have avoided the false impression that Dorset Council is responsible for repairing the property owners' wall, that pressure has been put on the property owners and that the Council is responsible for delays in repairing the wall. We could also have avoided an untrue headline and the false impression that councillors have not worked hard to resolve the problem so that the road can be fully re-opened.

We respect the important role played by MPs in speaking up on behalf of residents. Sometimes this will involve an MP questioning or disagreeing with the Council but I hope that in future we can work through concerns together and not through letters to newspapers.

5. Question from Cllr G Taylor

I refer to the confidential paper 'Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF). Acquisition of 30 family homes under the LAHF grant programme'. I would like to question the financial section, para 15. 40% of the funding for the acquisitions is from a government grant; the remaining 60% is proposed to be from Dorset Councils Capital programme for 2023/24.

As the capital programme was approved at Full Council on 14 February 2023, just two weeks ago and the capital programme was fully committed albeit with £2M in contingency reserves can I please have confirmation as to which of the items from the capital programme are to be removed from this programme or alternatively if there is going to be borrowing to ensure the capital programme is retained as approved by FC.

Responses from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy

Full Council approved the Budget Strategy at its meeting on 14th February. The Budget Strategy contained details of the funding requirement for the 23/24 capital programme and explained that the specific projects within that programme are currently being reviewed for affordability given the recent rise in interest rates. The updated Capital programme is on the Cabinet forward plan to be considered on 28th March 2023 once the review is complete.

6. Question from Cllr B Heatley

In the first 4 years of its operation, it looks like Dorset Council will have financed around **£35m** of its operations from freeing up earmarked reserves, of which about £20m arose in the exceptional pandemic year of 2020/21. See Table 1 below.

In addition, as a result of the Safety Valve agreement with the Department for Education, a further **£20m** of earmarked reserves will be applied over the next two years to reducing the cumulative deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant, principally arising from the Higher Needs Block.

At the Budget meeting on 14 February 2023 the Leader announced that a further **£2m** of earmarked reserves were to be made available to fund in 2023/24 a (very welcome) Cost of Living Crisis Fund that was not in the Budget proposals, although Members generally were not aware before that date that such funds were available.

Our total reserves are finite, and Dorset Council will have spent around **£57m** of them over its first four years.

Two questions:

Would the Portfolio Holder be prepared to find a way to make the process of deciding that earmarked reserves can be made available for general revenue expenditure rather more transparent?

For how long does the Portfolio holder expect to be able to continue to fund Dorset Council's operations at this rate from this source?

Table 1

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
General notes		Pandemic		
General reserve at year start	29	28	33.2	33.2
Deficit for that year	5	15	0.6	8.4
General reserve at year start less deficit	24	13	32.6	24.8
General reserve next year start	28	33.2	33.2	34.7
Implicit contribution from earmarked reserves	4	20.2	0.6	9.9

Source: Budget papers and Q4 and Q3 (for 2022/23) Outturn papers for the years in question. These may have been superseded by later audited figures, but the broad picture should be about right unless I've misinterpreted or misunderstood something.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy

1. When we report the quarter 4 outturn the reserves are reported at that time. the report gives the figures for the reserve balance of the general fund and earmarked

reserves. in this year £33.2m and £157.8m – I would add that the earmarked reserves have risen from £146.5m in the proceeding year.

In the govts policy announcement in December last the made us aware of their intention to focus on levels of council reserves as such govt intend to explore a user-friendly publication on local authority reserves and I will work with officers to ensure that we as a council comply with any such regulation. We will also ensure that the what the govt may consider to be user friendly is in fact actually in a readable and understandable form for members as I am sure we will all agree what govt considers to be such is not always the case.

2. As you have stated it is not a normal period and past figures are skewed by the pandemic. The council's budget is a balanced budget and therefore there can be no intention to use reserves from the outset, only if an anomaly or unexpected outcome occurs do we use reserves. In the budget strategy the s151 officer has stated the levels of reserves are "adequate for the risks that the council is currently able to anticipate".

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