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DORSET COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 14 JULY 2022

Present: Cllrs Val Potheary (Chairman), Tony Alford, Jon Andrews, Shane Bartlett, Pete Barrow, Pauline Batstone, Laura Beddow, Derek Beer, Richard Biggs, Dave Bolwell, Alex Brenton, Cherry Brooks, Piers Brown, Ray Bryan, Andy Canning, Graham Carr-Jones, Simon Christopher, Kelvin Clayton, Susan Cocking, Tim Cook, Toni Coombs, Jean Dunseith, Beryl Ezzard, Tony Ferrari, Spencer Flower, Les Fry, Simon Gibson, Matthew Hall, Paul Harrison, Jill Haynes, Brian Heatley, Ryan Holloway, Ryan Hope, Rob Hughes, Nick Ireland, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones, Andrew Kerby, Paul Kimber, Rebecca Knox, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Howard Legg, Cathy Lugg, Louie O'Leary, Jon Orrell, Andrew Parry, Mary Penfold, Bill Pipe, Byron Quayle, Molly Rennie, Belinda Ridout, Mark Roberts, Julie Robinson, David Shortell, Andrew Starr, Gary Suttle, Clare Sutton, Gill Taylor, Bill Trite, David Walsh, Peter Wharf, Kate Wheller and John Worth

In attendance remotely: Cllrs Robin Cook, Barry Goringe (Vice-Chairman), Jane Somper, David Morgan, David Tooke.

Apologies: Cllrs Rod Adkins, Mike Barron, Belinda Bawden, Janet Dover, Mike Dyer, David Gray, Stella Jones, Robin Legg, Emma Parker, Mike Parkes, Maria Roe, Roland Tarr and Sarah Williams.

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

Susan Dallison (Democratic Services Team Leader), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), John Sellgren (Executive Director, Place), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Jacqui Andrews (Service Manager for Democratic and Electoral Services) and Theresa Leavy (Executive Director of People - Children)

16. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2022 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

17. Declarations of Interest

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

18. Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman reported the death of former Weymouth & Portland Councillor, Margaret Leicester. She invited Cllr P Kimber to pay tribute.

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

Public questions and the responses from the Leader or the Council or appropriate portfolio holder are set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

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

There were no petitions or deputations.

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

The Leader of Council advised councillors that his bulletin would be published following the meeting and areas that would be included were as follows:

- The cost-of-living crisis and energy rebates
- Support for Ukraine refugees
- Dorset Council sofa session
- Dorset Education Conference
- Dorset Council's Key Priorities

Councillors asked questions regarding, the local plan, support provided and associated with all refugees, including those from Ukraine and the support being provided in respect of the cost-of-living crisis.

In respect of the "Household Support Fund" and Food Projects, and any additional plans to address the cost-of-living crisis, the Leader of Council agreed to report back to members on the position of any possible supplementary government funding.

22. **Questions from Councillors**

A copy of the councillor questions and the response is attached at Appendix 2 to these minutes.

As a supplementary to Cllr B Bawden's question relating to the termination of bus services, the Portfolio Holder for Highways Travel and Environment confirmed that the council continued to work with its neighbouring authorities to make sure that cross-border issues were addressed collectively.

As a supplementary question from Cllr Ireland in respect of allegations and complaints from parents with children at Coombe House, the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education, Skills, and Early Help advised that if there was evidence of such behaviour, it should be reported to the appropriate Executive Director for People (Children). He continued that as Corporate Parents all allegations must be taken seriously and investigated accordingly.

23. **Youth Justice Plan 2022/23**

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education, Skills, and Early Help set out the Cabinet recommendation to approve the Youth Justice Plan. In proposing the recommendation, he also advised that the plan was considered and supported by People & Health Overview Committee on 3 May 2022.

Decision

That the Youth Justice Plan 2022/23 be approved.

24. Community Governance Review - Final Recommendations

The Leader of Council presented the report in respect of the Community Governance Review following the public consultation exercise and the cross-party working group.

Cllr L Fry seconded the recommendation.

In supporting the reports proposals, several councillors welcomed the removal of certain parishes from the final recommendation.

Decision

- (a) That the proposals set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be adopted by the Council as Final Recommendations for the purposes of the Community Governance Review.
- (b) That, save as set out in the Final Recommendations, the existing parishes in the Dorset Council area, and the names, boundaries, council size, groupings, and other parish governance arrangements in respect of those parishes, remain unchanged.
- (c) That the Final Recommendations form a Reorganisation Order to take effect on 1 April 2024.

25. Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and proposed its recommendation. This was seconded by Cllr N Ireland.

Cllr N Ireland put forward the following amendment.

That part 5 (7.) of the Scheme of Allowances in the constitution be amended to read: -

“A dependent carers’ allowance paid to members of up to £11* per hour, i.e. actual expenditure incurred up to a maximum of £11 per hour, *or in exception and by prior arrangement with the Service Manager for Democratic & Electoral Services invoiced expenditure above £11 per hour*, will be paid for care of dependants, whether children, elderly people or people with

disabilities, while a member is on Dorset Council business where travelling allowances are payable.”

The Leader of the Council confirm that he was supportive of the amendment and seconded the motion.

Upon being put to the vote the amendment was **CARRIED**.

Cllr B Quayle left the meeting at this juncture.

Decision (Substantive)

That the attached report and recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel, in respect of the review of allowances for co-opted and independent members, as set out in paragraph 8.2 of the Dorset Council Scheme of Members' Allowances, and other matters reviewed, be adopted by Full Council and that the Panel be thanked for their work in arriving at the recommendations.

- (a) To increase the allowance for the Co-opted Members of the Police and Crime Panel (PCP) to £2,000 per annum in recognition of the significant role that they perform and the huge impact they have on the success or otherwise of the PCP.
- (b) To increase the retainer for the Independent Person appointed to contribute to the arrangements of promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct to £1,000 per annum and that any significant additional duties are agreed and remunerated at an hourly rate to be determined in the discretion of the Monitoring Officer.
- (c) To increase the allowance for the Co-opted Members of the Harbours Committee to £1,000 per annum to recognise the role performed outside of the formal meetings of the Committee.
- (d) To increase the allowance paid to Co-opted Members of the Overview Committee to £500 per annum on the basis that this might increase the likelihood of recruiting members to these positions.
- (e) To include an allowance within the Travel Allowances section of the Scheme to reimburse the cost of charging an electric vehicle and that this should be set at the same rate as for petrol and diesel vehicles.
- (f) That a consultation be undertaken of Dorset Councillors regarding the possible introduction of a policy for Parental/Adoption/Sick leave and that the response be considered as part of the Panel's next fundamental review of the Scheme.
- (g) That part 5 (7.) of the constitution's Scheme of Allowances be amended to read: -

“A dependent carers’ allowance paid to members of up to £11* per hour, i.e. actual expenditure incurred up to a maximum of £11 per hour, or in exception and by prior arrangement with the Service Manager for Democratic & Electoral Services invoiced expenditure above £11 per hour, will be paid for care of dependants, whether children, elderly people or people with disabilities, while a member is on Dorset Council business where travelling allowances are payable.”

26. Honorary Aldermen/Alderwomen of the Dorset Council Area

The Leader of the Council introduced a recommendation from Audit and Governance Committee of 22 June 2022. The recommendation was seconded by Cllr M Hall.

Several councillors spoke against the proposed scheme as they failed to see how the proposal was of benefit to Dorset’s residents. There were no projected costs for the scheme or its administration and there were also concerns expressed on how an “outstanding contribution” would be measured.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was **LOST**.

27. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

28. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business to report.

Appendix 1 - Public Questions

Appendix 2 - Councillor Questions and Responses

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 8.06 pm

Chairman

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Full Council 14 July 2022

Questions and Statements submitted for the Public Participation Period

Question 1 – submitted by Richard Lonsdale - WITHDRAWN

Recently a telegraph pole in the parish I live in was knocked down resulting in a loss of phone line & internet for a number of residents and businesses. My understanding is that, whilst Openreach only needed a day to install a new pole and re-connect the lines, it required however a road closure which took several days to approve. As a result, phone & internet lines were out for a week.

In 2022 surely a communication line (especially in a rural area) would be deemed an essential service & warrant an emergency road closure without the need to wait for Dorset Council's permission (rather than merely inform them)?

Question 2 – submitted by Jane Ashdown

A number of local media outlets (West Dorset Magazine <https://westdorsetmag.co.uk/editions/edition-9/> Dorchester Nub) recently reported that Dorset Council has received £135,000 from the Government's Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). According to MP Chris Loder, these funds are to support Dorset Council in reworking their Local Plan. In particular Mr. Loder claims that this reworking will allow the Council to shelve the 4,000 houses proposed for the north of Dorchester (DOR13). Given how unpopular this latter proposal is and given the water quality, traffic, environmental, heritage and cultural degradation this development would bring such news is to be welcomed. As is the prospect of rethinking the overall Plan.

However, in a May press release the Government's DLUHC web site (May 21st, 2022 – see link below) lists North Dorchester (DOR 13) as a Garden Village project in receipt of £135,000 to promote its development for housing.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/garden-communities-set-to-flourish-across-england#:~:text=Today's%20investment%20brings%20total%20funding,North%2C%20Midlands%20and%20South%20West.>

This is puzzling - two different announcements about the proposed housing development north of Dorchester and the same amount of funding in each case. The people of Dorset and particularly Dorchester could be forgiven for being confused. And amidst these possibly conflicting announcements Dorset Council has not issued any statement or press release about receiving government funding which might clarify the situation. Indeed, since Councillor Flower's press release back in January reflecting his concerns about the Local Plan there has been radio silence in terms of changes to the Local Plan as a result of the consultation well over a year ago and silence on a timetable for moving forward.

As taxpayers we should be the first to know about changes to the Plan. Can Councillor Flower clarify how this £135,000 will be used? Can he also clarify the status of the north of Dorchester (DOR 13) proposal for 4,000 houses in light of this funding?

Response by Cllr David Walsh

The £135,000 is in fact part of the Garden Communities initiative and is not related to reworking of the emerging local plan. Dorset Council has been provided with funding to evaluate the feasibility of bringing forwards a garden community in North Dorchester and work is taking place with the involvement of local communities to consider options. The site at North Dorchester will need to be taken forward through the emerging Dorset Local Plan.

Question 3 – submitted by Giles Watts

At a recent planning meeting for Town and Parish Councils on 29th May, Dorset Council published a timetable for Dorset's Local plan which shows submission of the new plan between October 2022 and March 2023. This is contrary to Spencer Flower's suggestion that he is negotiating a 2-year extension with the government along with mitigation against failing the 5-year housing supply and the housing delivery. In public, the council have been silent on the schedule for the Local Plan and what changes they plan to make. Furthermore, they have not published any analysis of the initial public consultation that took place over a year ago. Can the council please confirm the schedule for the Local Plan going forward and clarify what further opportunities there will be for consultation with the general public when a revised plan is published.

Response by Cllr Spencer Flower

The dates quoted at the meeting with the town and parish councils were the dates from the current adopted local development scheme. We have not yet confirmed a revised programme, but are likely to do so later this year. There will be a further opportunity for people to comment, at the next stage when a revised version of the plan will be published. There will also be a public examination, where all the issues will be considered by an independent inspector, before the plan is adopted'

Question 4 – submitted by Sandra Reeve

Energy Efficiency.

I welcome the recent changes to building regulations, which came into force on 15th June, that require new homes in England to produce significantly less CO2. I also welcome the phasing out of gas boilers by 2025 which will support the change towards heat pumps. These changes pave the way for the Future Homes and Buildings Standard in 2025 which will mean that all future homes will be net zero ready and will not need retrofitting. However, it is within Dorset Council's power to act faster. It is wrong that new houses are being built now that will require retrofitting in a few years' time. It is also wrong that houses are not being built with rooftop solar as standard in this time of very high energy prices and rising cost of living. Will Dorset Council use its powers to make sure new developments conform to the highest possible standards of insulation and have rooftop solar as standard for clean, renewable energy generation?

Response by Cllr David Walsh

Building Regulations are being stepped up to improve the energy performance of new buildings and this is a vital step forward in tackling the climate emergency. Planning applications must be considered in the context of the adopted local plan and government policy, which currently do not require such measures to be included. However, Dorset Council is reviewing its policies on new development to ensure that development is optimised for minimising its carbon footprint and resilient to climate change.

Question 5 – submitted by Alistair Chisholm

Nutrient Neutrality.

In June, Dorset Council generated a report on the "Five Year housing land supply" and its impact on the Purbeck Local Plan. The conclusion was that, due to the new guidance issued by Natural England about nutrient neutrality for nitrogen and phosphorous, no new developments in the Poole Harbour watershed which are not yet started can be included in the five-year housing supply. As a result, the Council is unable to identify a deliverable housing supply for the 2021-2026 plan period. Presumably this advice will also impact any similar developments in Local Plan such as DOR13. Please can the council provide more information on the implications for both the Purbeck and the Dorset local plans?

Response by Cllr David Walsh

Dorset Council will be assessing the implications of the need to secure nutrient neutrality across the various catchment areas that affect Dorset. In the case of Poole

Harbour catchment and the Purbeck Local Plan, Dorset Council is awaiting clarification from Natural England on the degree to which current nutrient mitigation measures secure nutrient neutrality for both nitrogen and phosphorus. Dorset Council will provide updates to its evidence and understanding of the issue as and when it has further information to publish.

Question 6 – submitted by Tracee Cossey

The County Hall site in Dorchester is barely used. The library has moved, the County Court has closed and many of the remaining buildings have few permanent staff with many people choosing to work from home. This is a large site with considerable potential for brownfield development that would have a much lower carbon footprint than any greenfield development in the area. Would the council consider a full redevelopment of the site by adding it to the official Brownfield register with the purpose of providing affordable and social housing for the people of Dorset?

Response by Cllr Tony Ferrari

We are very aware of the changes occurring in office use over recent times and made the strategic decision to either reuse South Walks House or County Hall. The decision was taken that despite the reduced numbers of staff coming in every day, significant staff numbers still need an office location and Dorset Council needed to retain a substantial building in Dorchester. We will continue to look for efficiencies across our office usage but a site needs to be retained.

Although it did not generate housing, the solution adopted was to lease South Walks House to the NHS. Doing so enabled the NHS to provide additional health facilities for Dorset residents. This was the right use of a building offsetting any negligible carbon footprint increase, with healthcare facilities into the centre of Dorchester that in turn is generating increased footfall and trade to local businesses and substantially reduced Dorset Councils property costs which is a fantastic outcome for Dorset residents"

**Full Council
14 July 2022**

Questions submitted by Councillors

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr Andrew Starr

Given that Dorset is blessed with many outstanding protected sites some benefiting much needed statutory protection and in light of the fact that this council has quite rightly declared an environmental emergency. Can I ask for a response to the worrying news that the Environment Secretary has declared his intention to scrap the habitat directive as part of the forthcoming Brexit freedoms bill.

The stated aim of this move is to “cut red tape” or as some see it make it easier for developers to encroach on nationally and internationally important conservation areas. Given that the present legislation has been used in numerous cases to protect habitats and species and that this move has been objected to by such organisations as the RSPB. Can I ask if this Council will be making representations to the Environment Secretary expressing their concern about this seemingly backwards step in environmental protection at a time when it is needed more than ever.

Response by Cllr Ray Bryan

Indeed we are blessed with an outstanding natural environment here in Dorset. Under the Environment Act 2021 (already enacted through Parliament), there is a mandate for a Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Dorset Council responded to the government’s recent ‘Nature Recovery Green Paper: Protected Sites and Species’ consultation in May 2022. This included future options for wildlife designated sites. In it we said: ‘In order to deliver the Government’s ambitions for nature recovery, there is a need to strengthen the protected site network. There is strong scientific evidence that the UK’s most important wildlife designations (European sites, which include Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs)) are effective in protecting the habitats and species for which they are designated.

In the consultation response we supported options which provided even greater protection to the most important wildlife sites emphasising the need for protected sites to be given the same level of protection that is currently given to European Sites. This will prevent the deterioration of SAC and SPAs and deliver improvements to the condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest. We asked that the process of designating sites should be expediated to deliver the Defra promise of protecting 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030.

Dorset Council places great value upon the protection and stewardship of our unique environment, reflected in commitments expressed in our policies, including statutory local plans and our Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy. The Government has committed to reviewing retained EU law following Brexit, via a ‘Brexit Freedoms’ Bill. Dorset Council will pay close attention to this Bill as it progresses through Parliament, including any draft consultation stages, and we will continue to respond

as necessary once further details of the Bill are known where it is appropriate to do so.

Question 2 – submitted by Cllr Belinda Bawden

The recent sudden announcement by Stagecoach that they would be terminating their bus service from Exeter to Lyme Regis at Seaton from 31st July has left many people in Seaton, Lyme Regis and the villages in between very anxious indeed. Many rely on the service to get to work, to attend medical, dental or hospital appointments, to go shopping, or for leisure travel. Devon County Council has agreed to subsidise the new service but the majority of passengers are, we are told, from Lyme Regis. I hope that Dorset Council will also agree to provide support to retain an adequate bus service between Lyme Regis, Seaton and Exeter.

Could the criteria for and the process by which decisions are made by Dorset Council over which bus services could be subsidised be explained, particularly when the route crosses county boundaries and what assessment could be done of the impact on community resilience, mental health, the cost of living crisis and the climate and ecological emergency strategy and action plan if people lose their jobs or have to increase the use of private cars when buses they rely on are withdrawn?

Response by Cllr Ray Bryan

When deciding whether a bus route receives subsidy, a number of factors are taken into consideration and each route is considered on a case by case basis.

The main priorities are

1. Does the route provide home to school transport for Dorset students?
2. Does the corridor form part of Dorset's Interurban Network? (Attached)
3. Are there other public or community transport alternatives for residents along the route?

The number of passengers that use the service is also taken into consideration when assessing the value for money.

Dorset Council does not currently subsidise Saturday, Sunday or evening services. In 2016, Dorset Council withdrew support for all Market Day services (those that ran from villages to market towns on market days only).

With regards to the impact on the community, Dorset Travel has a remit and limited resources to help people get from A to B. The wider remit of mental health, cost of living crisis and climate & ecological emergency rests with other services within the Council, that may have resources to assist with public transport if it meets their criteria.

I am currently waiting for a date from the BSIP team at DFT to explain why our bid failed.

We met with Baroness Vere a few weeks ago and asked for an explanation, sadly nothing received so far.

Chris Loder MP asked again at a recent Transport Select Committee meeting in London and was assured that a explanation would be given. My patience is running out fast.

To enable us to become carbon zero by 2050 we need to provide the Dorset Residents with a public transport system that gives them an alternative to use of their car.

Question 3 – submitted by Cllr Alex Brenton

In response to the climate and biodiversity emergency, and Dorset Council aims to become Carbon neutral by 2050.

As we all know the public demand that we **Plant More Trees!** However experts agree that preserving mature trees does more for biodiversity and air quality and cooling than a new sapling will, for approximately **15 -20years**. It takes that long for a new tree to capture carbon at a rate approaching that of a mature tree. Therefore, planting two new trees to replace one felled tree is **not** a solution to our problems. The solution is to save existing trees from danger as well as to plant more young successional trees.

In my ward, we seem to have a many cases of the felling of mature trees on possible development sites before planning is agreed, on the principle that if they do not have a TPO (Tree Preservation Order) the owner can do what they like. I would not be surprised to hear that happens elsewhere.

Could Dorset do more to publicise that anyone especially Parish & Town Councils can ask for a TPO to be put on significant trees if there is a perceived risk of felling?.

Could a blanket temporary TPO be put on all trees on a site as soon as any Planning Application is registered to prevent trees ‘disappearing’ before planning conditions can be agreed. This can then be assessed by Tree Officers as to whether that should be permanent.?

Response by Cllr David Walsh

It is fully acknowledged that trees play a vital role in terms of amenity, biodiversity and carbon capture. Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) are made by local planning authorities where they have an amenity value that justifies the tree’s preservation, assuming it is justified. Whilst biodiversity and climate change can be taken into consideration, these alone are not grounds for making a TPO. Trees within conservation areas are also protected under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

The Council’s website provides information about Tree Preservation Orders and how to notify us if people have concerns about a particular tree, but it is acknowledged that the relevant pages could be improved to provide better and more proactive

information about TPOs. This is something we will be rolling out as part of our improvements to the web portal.

Under current legislation, local authorities can only make a TPO if it appears to them to be 'expedient in the interests of amenity to make provision for the preservation of trees or woodlands in their area'. Orders are provisional until confirmed 6 months after they come into effect, but should only be issued where it is considered necessary to do so. Therefore, it is not possible to issue blanket TPOs as a default position as each tree or group of trees need to be assessed. However, biodiversity net gain is due to become a statutory requirement in 2023, and retaining existing trees will therefore be a potentially significant way of ensuring a net overall benefit can be achieved. The LPA will be exploring this further as part of its policy approach to Biodiversity Net Gain and the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy.

Question 4 – submitted by Cllr Nick Ireland

Allegations have been made in the press, social media and directly to some members of this Council that Coombe House opened prematurely with too many pupils, insufficient staff trained to or having experience at the required level for the needs of the pupils, some fire doors that didn't open, windows without safety glass that were subsequently broken by pupils and, if that isn't enough, some pupils 'escaped' the school site.

Are any of these allegations true?

Response by Cllr Andrew Parry

Coombe House School is an Independent Special School, situated on the site of the Dorset Centre of Excellence – the building is owned by Dorset Council.

The school is run by a company, called Dorset Centre of Excellence. The company structure has a Chief Operating Officer COO (this role is currently vacant and being recruited to) who reports into an Independent Board of Non-Executive Directors. The Chair of the Independent Board is Ian Comfort.

The premises were purchased as part of Dorset Council's legal duty to ensure that there are sufficient suitable places in education for children and young people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). This decision was met with 92% agreement in public consultation and with cross party support

Responsibility for the running of the school, including pupil wellbeing, staffing, and the curriculum, sits with the Independent Board of Dorset Centre of Excellence, the COO and the Schools Leadership Team.

The school received its notice of registration from the Department for Education on 6 May 2022. The inspection report from Ofsted associated with that registration was very positive.

It independently confirmed that appropriate policies, procedures, and safeguards were in place to open the school. The Independent Board considered the Ofsted report and the advice of the Chief Operating Officer and Headteacher. It decided for the school to open with a staggered start on 16 May 2022. The school opened on that day with 15 children. It was the independent board's understanding that the individual needs of child had been jointly assessed by Coombe House Leadership and Dorset Council SEND Service and that they had been allocated to a class with an appropriate number of suitable qualified and experienced staff.

It was also the independent board's understanding that a significant amount of planning and training had been undertaken since January 2022 with most of the staff. The numbers of children attending the school increased each day, reaching a capacity of 47 by the Wednesday of that first week. The board was assured by the COO and the head teacher that the staggered start could be managed as all of the children had been involved in transition visits prior to opening.

At the point of opening there remained challenges with fencing supply and delivery of the contract to fence the school site, and the site boundary, with welded wire mesh fencing leading to some requirement of infill in small areas with Heras fencing. This had been risk assessed although this was not ideal it could be managed. There were incidences of children climbing over or simply moving the fences in the first week, a child left the site and walked home which was close by.

Some matters were dealt with straight away with an appropriate intervention from staff, as part of the School's management of its boundary; there were no intruders to the site. Some areas of the site remain under development – all windows on the fenced school site have the required glass, there was an incident where a child threw a stone and a window was broken - no one was hurt.

All other areas where there is a plan for use in September are scheduled to have suitable glass and or covering by the time they are being brought into use.

The independent fire assessment undertaken states 'fire safety on this small site is adequate and will be improved further with planned works over the summer'.

However, the first week of school was bumpy with children and staff coming together, and despite assurances from the COO and the Headteacher, not sufficiently well planned to ensure that children could be safely and effectively managed. Following a letter of concern to the Council the Executive Director and the Chair of the Board reviewed the situation and determined to close the school for one week from 23rd May. This joint decision was the first stage in bringing forward the 'Enhanced Co-operation' element of the commissioning framework. The Chair of the Independent Board considered, along with the Executive Director, the matter of how the leadership of the school had managed events both in the lead up to opening and during that first week and as a result the Headteacher is presently not in school; and as has been communicated previously, COO Mark Blackman resigned from his post.

The Enhanced Cooperation allows the Executive Director and her team to provide support to the Board to ensure everything that we require to be in place to ensure

safe and effective delivery is in place, this has been welcomed by the Independent Chair and his Board.

Following half term 32 children on roll have been in school for set days each week, but none full time, and some of the original 47, have now not been considered by the school to be ready or able to return, the Council are working with those families to source a suitable education offer elsewhere as they would do when any educational placement does not work for whatever reason.

All these families have a single point of contact at Dorset Council, and I am confident they are being kept informed as to why the school feels we need to make these changes.

In acknowledgment of the help needed at the school, Sean Kretz the Head of Westfield Arts College, the Executive Director and her leadership team have been providing day-to-day support to the staff and children and support and challenge to the Board to develop a suitable recovery plan.

That work continues and involves other members of our special school system too.

The school has now closed for the summer on Friday 8 July in line with other Independent Schools.

This allows a crucial couple of weeks at the close of term to ensure that staff have an opportunity to make sure all training and development requirements are up to date. It will also allow for some vital works to be completed on the site in preparation for a September start.

We are continuing to recruit at pace again to ensure sufficiently experienced staff will be available for September.

We plan the school opening in September with 36 children on roll – slightly lower than planned initially but this allows a secure and steady growth as we progress with plans and the school's senior leadership team recruitment.

Children and young people are at the heart of our decision making and we must make sure the school can offer the first-class education that we know we can provide them by supporting the Board, the staff and our families. There is not an overnight solution to this, it will take a bit more time than we had envisaged but we are confident that it is going in the right direction.

I appreciate your patience as we support the Independent School in settling. I was on the school site for the last week and the children in school were engaged and positive.