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DORSET COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 14 FEBRUARY 2023

Present: Cllrs Rod Adkins, Tony Alford, Jon Andrews, Mike Barron, Pete Barrow, Shane Bartlett, Pauline Batstone, Belinda Bawden, 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, Robin Cook, Tim Cook, Toni Coombs, Jean Dunseith, Mike Dyer, Beryl Ezzard, Tony Ferrari, Spencer Flower, Simon Gibson, Barry Goringe, Paul Harrison, Jill Haynes, Brian Heatley, Ryan Holloway, Rob Hughes, Nick Ireland, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones, Stella Jones, Andrew Kerby, Paul Kimber, Rebecca Knox, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Howard Legg, Robin Legg, Cathy Lugg, David Morgan, Louie O'Leary, Jon Orrell, Emma Parker, Mike Parkes, Andrew Parry, Mary Penfold, Val Potheary (Chairman), Byron Quayle, Molly Rennie, Belinda Ridout, Mark Roberts, Maria Roe, David Shortell, Jane Somper, Andrew Starr, Gary Suttle, Clare Sutton, Roland Tarr, David Taylor, Gill Taylor, David Walsh, Bill Trite, Peter Wharf, Kate Wheller, Sarah Williams and John Worth

Apologies: Cllrs Susan Cocking, Janet Dover, Les Fry, David Gray, Matthew Hall, Ryan Hope, Bill Pipe and David Tooke

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

Susan Dallison (Democratic Services Team Leader), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Matt Prosser (Chief Executive), Hayley Caves (Member Development and Support Officer), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Jennifer Lowis (Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement), Jacqui Andrews (Service Manager for Democratic and Electoral Services), Sean Cremer (Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial), George Dare (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Kathryn Dillon, Katie Hale (Head of Revenues and Benefits), Chris Matthews (Interim Head of HR), Kirstie Snow (Business Partner - External Affairs) and Elaine Tibble (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

46. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Susan Cocking, Janet Dover, Les Fry, David Gray, Matt Hall, Ryan Hope, Bill Pipe and David Tooke.

47. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2022 were confirmed and signed.

48. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

49. **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements to report.

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

Public questions, statements and the responses from the Leader of the Council and appropriate Portfolio Holder are set out in Appendix 1 attached to these minutes.

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

There were no petitions or deputations.

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

The Leader of the Council advised councillors that his report would be published following the meeting and he report included the following points:

- Support for cost of living – The Council had an opportunity to reflect upon its responsibilities as to how it can assist those residents most in need and £2M was being allocated from unearmarked reserves.
- The Facebook Live session on the Budget had been viewed 1800 times and provided a unique opportunity for members of the public to engage with the council – The session had been well received and more sessions would take place, covering differing themes.
- Cllr Ray Bryan had participated in a Parliamentary Transport Select Committee to highlight difficulties faced by rural authorities, including Dorset, in relation to transport.
- Levelling Up Bid – The Council had been successful in obtaining £19.4M of funding for investment in Weymouth.
- The outcome of the LGA Peer Review would be reported to Cabinet in February – Feedback had been largely positive.

Cllr Walsh added that he was encouraged by the results of lobbying and that the Government was indeed listening and taking notice of Dorset Council, having recently referred to the work it was undertaking. He added that this was something to be proud of and that the Council must continue its lobbying to ensure that it received the recognition it deserved.

In response to a question relating to the announcement for £2M to be allocated to fund the cost-of-living support, Cllr Beddow explained that the Council would be working with charities and other organisations to ensure that the funding went to those most in need and it was hoped that it would leave behind a legacy that would benefit people in the years to come.

53. **Questions from Councillors**

There were five questions received from councillors. A copy of the questions and the responses are attached as Appendix 2 to these minutes.

54. Budget Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Plan

The Finance, Commercial & Capital Strategy Portfolio Holder presented the Budget strategy and medium-term financial plan (MTFP). A copy of his speech is attached as an appendix to these minutes.

The Chairman invited the Group Leaders to present their replies to the budget proposals.

Cllrs Ireland, Sutton and Hughes presented their budget speeches which are attached as appendices to these minutes.

Cllr Ireland proposed an amendment to the budget, which was seconded by Cllr Jill Taylor.

Members debated the amendment as proposed, comments included:

- The proposal was not necessary as a separate piece of work was being undertaken to provide a fund of £2M, which would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting later in February.
- Surprise was expressed that no prior notification of the proposal to offer a £2M fund had been received. It would also be favourable to have allow for both options – i.e. the £2M fund and the sum requested in the amendment.
- There was no information in relation to the item on the Cabinet Forward Plan, with the exception of a report title.

In accordance with procedure rule 19.6 a recorded vote was taken.

Those who voted in favour of the amendment:- 30

Jon Andrews, Peter Barrow, Shane Bartlett, Belinda Bawden, Derek Beer, Richard Biggs, David Bolwell, Alexandra Brenton, Andy Canning, Kelvin Clayton, Tim Cook, Beryl Ezzard, Brian Heatley, Ryan Holloway, Nick Ireland, Stella Jones, Paul Kimber, Robin Legg, Howard Legg, David Morgan, Jon Orrell, Molly Rennie, Maria Roe, Andrew Starr, Gary Suttle, Clare Sutton, Roland Tarr, David Taylor, Gill Taylor, Sarah Williams

Those who voted against the amendment:- 43

Rod Adkins, Anthony Alford, Michael Barron, Pauline Batstone, Cherry Brooks, Piers Brown, Ray Bryan, Graham Carr-Jones, Simon Christopher, Robin Cook, Toni Coombs, Jean Dunseith, Mike Dyer, Tony Ferrari, Spencer Flower, Simon Gibson, Barry Goringe, Paul Harrison, Jill Haynes, Robert Hughes, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones, Andrew Kerby, Rebecca Knox, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Cathy Lugg, Laura Miller, Louis O'Leary, Emma Parker, Mike Parkes, Andrew Parry, Mary Penfold, Valerie Potheary, Byron Quayle, Belinda Ridout, Mark Roberts, David Shortell, Jane Somper, William Trite, David Walsh, Peter Wharf, Kate Wheller, John Worth

Those who abstained:- 0

Following a recorded vote, 30 for, 43 against and 0 abstentions the amendment was LOST.

Following the amendment being lost, Members continued to debate the budget as originally proposed.

The Finance, Commercial & Capital Strategy Portfolio Holder was confident that the budget was balanced but still encouraged prudence when committing reserves.

Members were appreciative of the officer work that had gone into producing the budget and the opportunity of attending budget cafes, cross party working and input from the Scrutiny Committees.

Cllr Flower presented his speech as seconder of the budget proposal, attached as an appendix to the minutes.

Proposed by Cllr Suttle, seconded by Cllr Flower.

In accordance with procedure rule 19.6 a recorded vote was taken.

Those who voted in favour of the recommendations:- 59

Rod Adkins, Anthony Alford, Jon Andrews, Michael Barron, Shane Bartlett, Belinda Bawden, Pauline Batstone, Derek Beer, David Bolwell, Cherry Brooks, Piers Brown, Ray Bryan, Graham Carr-Jones, Simon Christopher, Kelvin Clayton, Tim Cook, Robin Cook, Toni Coombs, Jean Dunseith, Mike Dyer, Tony Ferrari, Spencer Flower, Simon Gibson, Barry Goringe, Paul Harrison, Jill Haynes, Brian Heatley, Ryan Holloway, Robert Hughes, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones, Andrew Kerby, Rebecca Knox, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Cathy Lugg, Laura Miller, David Morgan, Louis O'Leary, Jon Orrell, Emma Parker, Mike Parkes, Andrew Parry, Mary Penfold, Valerie Potheary, Byron Quayle, Belinda Ridout, Mark Roberts, David Shortell, Jane Somper, Andrew Starr, Gary Suttle, Clare Sutton, Roland Tarr, David Taylor, William Trite, David Walsh, Peter Wharf, Kate Wheller, John Worth

Those who voted against the recommendations:- 11

Peter Barrow, Richard Biggs, Andy Canning, Beryl Ezzard, Nick Ireland, Stella Jones, Paul Kimber, Robin Legg, Howard Legg, Molly Rennie, Maria Roe

Those who abstained:- 2

Alexandra Brenton, Sarah Williams

Following a recorded vote, 59 for, 11 against and 2 abstentions the recommendations were approved.

DECISION:

1. the revenue budget summarised in Appendix 1 was agreed;
2. the increase in general council tax of 1.9987% and 1.9987% in the social care precept, providing a band D council tax figure for Dorset Council of £1,905.93; an overall increase of 3.9974% was agreed;
3. the council tax resolution in Appendix 2 was agreed;
4. the council tax base agreed by the S151 Officer earlier in this budget setting process was noted;
5. no change to the current scheme of Local Council Tax Support as set out in this report was agreed;
6. the capital strategy set out in Appendix 3 and note the review in progress around the current capital programme and emerging bids was agreed;
7. the treasury management strategy set out in Appendix 4 was agreed;
8. the assumptions used to develop the budget strategy and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), as set out throughout this report and summarised in Appendix 5 was agreed;
9. the recommended balances on earmarked reserves and on general funds, including the minimum level of the general fund, the application of a further £3.5m of reserves to support the safety valve agreement, and the repurposing of £3m of the Council's other reserves for spend-to-save investment in transformation was agreed;
10. the fees and charges policy set out in Appendix 6 was agreed;
11. the responses to the recommendations and comments made as part of the budget scrutiny process (Appendix 7) were agreed;
12. recommendations 1-6 from the 8 December 2022 Harbours Advisory Committee meeting regarding fees and charges, budgets and asset management plans were agreed;
13. the flexible use of £5.3m of capital receipts for the purposes of transforming the Council's asset portfolio over the next three to five years was agreed.

Reason for the Decision

The Council was required to set a balanced revenue budget, and to approve a level of council tax as an integral part of this. A balanced budget is essentially one where all expenditure is funded by income without unsustainable use of one-off or short-term sources of finance.

The Council was also required to approve a capital strategy, a capital programme and budget, and a treasury management strategy, each of which were included with the report.

55. Community Governance Review - Parishes of the Vale of Allen Group, the Winterborne Farrington Group, Chickerell and Weymouth - Draft Recommendations

The Leader of Council presented the report of the Community Governance Review, which set out the draft recommendations to be put forward for public consultation.

Cllr P Wharf seconded the recommendation.

Some Members expressed that they were not able to support sending the draft recommendations as set out in the report for consultation and that the right questions were not being asked of the public.

The Leader explained that there was an opportunity for the community to get involved in shaping the electoral boundaries and that all feedback would be taken on board.

The Deputy Leader confirmed the arrangements that had been in place for the process so far. He highlighted that there was no “perfect solution” and that a degree of compromise would be needed. He further encouraged Members to work with their communities to work up alternative arrangements that satisfied the requirements of the boundary commission, the community and numbers during the consultation stage.

Decision:

1. That the proposals set out in this Appendix be adopted by the Council as Draft Recommendations for the purposes of the Community Governance Review.
2. That the Draft Recommendations be published for consultation purposes for a period of 8 weeks from 20 February 2023 to 17 April 2023.
3. That the results of the consultation, together with proposed Final Recommendations, be reported to Full Council on 11 May 2023.

Reason for Decision:

To ensure that community governance arrangements within the areas specified were reflective of the identities and interests of the community in that area and achieve electoral equality.

56. Calendar of Meetings 2023-2024

In presenting the calendar of meetings for 2023/2024, Cllr S Flower, Leader of the Council proposed its formal adoption.

Cllr L O’Leary seconded the recommendation.

Comments were made in relation to the timings of meetings and a request was made of the Leader to consider that meetings be held in the evenings in the future, as currently it did not allow all members of the public to participate and also precluded some elected members and also put some who wished to stand as elected members off.

A counter-argument was put forward that reminded members that there were often other commitments in the evening, such as town and parish meetings which they were expected to attend. Additionally, it was highlighted that employers were required to allow employees reasonable time off to conduct public duties.

The Leader suggested that it might be appropriate to discuss establishing a Task and Finish group with the Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee outside of the meeting.

Decision:

1. That the calendar of meetings for the period May 2023 to May 2024 be approved.
2. That authority be delegated to the Director – Legal and Democratic Services to make any necessary changes, in consultation with relevant Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen, to ensure effective political management.

Reason for Decision:

To ensure effective political management, comply with the Dorset Council Procedure Rules and to put into place appropriate arrangements for council committee meetings.

57. Pay Policy Statement 2023-2024

The Corporate Development and Transformation Portfolio Holder presented the Pay Policy Statement 2023/24.

Proposed by Cllr Haynes, seconded by Cllr Heatley

In the absence of comments or questions, the Chairman went straight to the vote.

Decision:

- (i) That the provisions of the Localism Act and content of the Pay Policy Statement for the 2023/24 financial year were noted.
- (ii) That the Pay Policy Statement for 2023/24 was approved.
- (iii) That the changes to the pay policy for Chief Officers determined by the Cross-Party Working Group in 2022 were approved.

Reason for Decision:

The Full Council was responsible for approval of the annual pay policy statement.

58. Urgent items

There were no urgent items

59. Exempt Business

There was no urgent business.

Appendix 1 - Public Questions and Responses
Appendix 2 - Councillor Questions

Appendix 3 - Budget Presentation and Responses by Group Leaders and Seconders

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 9.30 pm

Chairman

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Full Council 14 February 2023

Questions and Statements submitted for the Public Participation Period

Question 1 – submitted by Tom Villiers, on behalf of the North Dorset Beekeepers Association - WITHDRAWN

North Dorset Beekeepers Association is a registered charity with the objects of “advancing the education of the public and beekeepers in the craft of a beekeeping and the importance of bees in the environment”. Its aims dovetail with the Dorset Council Pollinators Action Plan 2019-2024. Although beekeepers are not listed as a partner organisation, we believe we are in a strong position to help the council fulfil its action plan, by raising awareness and promoting pollinators. As we are run entirely by volunteers, there would be no cost to either residents or the council.

Currently operating from a small and inconvenient site in the grounds of the Forum School in Shillingstone, we have been searching for an improved site where we could better meet our object to provide education and assistance to beekeepers and those interested in pollinators throughout the county. With the help of Cllr Pauline Batstone, a suitable site was identified on Dorset Council owned land at Holloway Farm, Shillingstone, and we are very grateful that the council’s County Farms Department agreed in September 2020 that half an acre could be made available to us on a long and affordable lease. Subsequently the site was identified on the ground and pegged out by a council employed surveyor, supervised by Amy Foster of the County Farms Department.

Heads of terms for the lease were agreed in April 2021 and on the assumption that the full lease would be completed swiftly, we applied for planning permission to erect a purpose designed an eco-friendly building, which would include disabled access and facilities. This was granted in December 2021 and included the standard term that building a must commence within three years.

Before construction can start funds have to be raised and we plan to do this and nationally and locally, principally by seeking individual donations, by applications to grant making trusts, such as the National Lottery, and by members fundraising efforts. For instance, we have recently made an application to Dorset’s Capital Leverage Fund, which was supported by a number of councillors. But despite the members of the association having already raised more than £40,000, we cannot approach most potential donors until a lease for the site has been signed.

The lack of a lease is therefore a significant hindrance to fundraising efforts and may prejudiced our ability to comply with the terms of the planning permission. Our solicitor last wrote to the council’s legal department on 29 November 2022 but has yet to receive a substantive reply, although a meeting is scheduled for 7 February.

We are very grateful to the council for making this land available. Regrettably, discussions on the lease have become very protracted and we believe that they could and should be concluded.

Question

Is the council able to authorise the signing of this lease now? If not, could you please explain what has to be done to complete the process?

Question 2 – submitted by Mrs S Bennett

“We fix around 20,000 potholes every year. We aim to permanently repair potholes on our first visit. Our pothole repairs include more extensive patching of 'failed' areas surrounding the defect, instead of just repairing the immediate pothole. This approach will reduce the likelihood of further potholes forming in the future.” From current DCC Highways website page: Roads: highways and maintenance: Fixing Potholes.

In our village of Shroton on 15th January 2023 I reported with photographs, 14 of the very worst potholes, not all the potholes that existed, but all that were over 4cms in depth and longer than 23cms, the width of a dinner plate. 5 were filled on 19th January 2023 by a Velocity 1 method. By 27th January 2023 I was re reporting the worst that had been 10.5cms deep and was already breaking up with a large deep pocket at its edges. It was refilled on 31st January 2023, again leaving a large deep pocket. I re reported this plus 2 of the other original 5 potholes on the 2nd and 3rd of this month, as they were all beginning to break up and showing jagged edges. The reporting of potholes in our village is now a weekly if not daily task for the villagers.

We acknowledge that we are not a large village, but we have a thriving rural economy. We have: Wessex Internet, Meggy Moo Award Winning Farm Shop, a large dairy farm, a well-known local pub sited the bottom of an historic earthworks owned by the National Trust and several Work From Home Enterprises. All of these rely on the good standard of the roads to conduct their business. Suffice it to say, ordinary villagers would also like to travel in safety.

The team of workers return over again but are fighting a losing battle as the roads are not able to hold the fill. I have some sympathy for these teams as they are being asked to do a job for which an adequate solution is not being given. To borrow a quote from Geoffrey Howe:

It's rather like sending our opening batsmen to the crease only for them to find that before the first ball is bowled, their bats have been broken by the team captain.

I am now receiving updates which say not to use the Velocity 1 as site managers' report the fill “will not stay”. This was evident to parishioners in the first instance. The practice of dob and fill and not to return is clearly not working, it is inadequate on our roads and a complete waste of time and money.

What arrangements are in place for monitoring the repairs so that the right repair is made the first time?

Response from Cllr Ray Bryan:-

Thank you for your question regarding the condition and maintenance of roads in Shroton and Iwerne Courtney.

Our Highways Maintenance Plan, which can be viewed on the Dorset Council website, sets out clear service levels for maintenance activities, which includes our reactive response to potholes.

We acknowledge your concerns for public safety and the frustration of repeat repairs. We are committed to a right-first-time approach. However, during the coldest and wettest months of the year we sometimes need to carry out temporary repairs to make them safe before a permanent repair can be made.

All Dorset's roads are part of an inspection regime where our officers inspect defects and monitor repairs. However, if anyone wants to report a pothole, the best way to do it is online via the council's website.

Question 3 – submitted by Mr N Bennett

INFRASTRUCTURE, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, MAINTENANCE

Twelve rural roads are being reconstructed in Dorset this autumn thanks to the Department for Transport's Pothole Fund. Dorset Highways has identified roads that have evolved from tracks and have very little construction, and have significant cracking, undulation or pothole damage, for permanent repair. This programme of work will use in-situ recycling to strengthen the foundation of the road before a double surface dressing is applied to seal the roads from water damage and provide a textured surface for vehicles.

Jack Wiltshire, Dorset Council Head of Highways, said: "These roads have become so damaged they require extensive repairs to ensure that homes and businesses can continue to be safely accessed. They have little to no foundation, and under the road surface is essentially the gravel track they have evolved from over many years. "Our contractor will use a specialised machine to simultaneously crush the existing carriageway and mix it with cement to create a hydraulically bound material for the road foundation. This process is around a third of the cost of a conventional carriageway reconstruction method and is also a more sustainable treatment – by reusing material already in place and producing zero waste from the site. "He added: "Without the money we've been awarded from the DfT's Pothole Fund we would have to continue with costly reactive, piecemeal, short-term repairs on these roads, which isn't good enough. "Mr Wiltshire's 3rd Paragraph perfectly describes the state of large stretches of Telegraph St, Bessell's Lane, Fairfield Rd and New Field Lane, which surround Shroton, and are used by the heavy lorries, tractors, delivery lorries etc. hauling for Park Farm, the Solar Farm and Wessex Internet, as well as private cars. These stretches, apart from the very numerous potholes, are breaking up, some with extensive cracking which releases

large stones and flints. Other areas show where the surface is so worn that the bed rocks are exposed and are in the process of breaking free. Proper surface rebuilding, as described by Mr Wiltshire, would extend the life of the road for many many years, obviating the inadequate and very temporary yearly patch up job, which as Mr Wiltshire said, "isn't good enough". Saving considerable costs in the long term.

My question is: - When can we expect proper repairs, as described by Mr Wiltshire, just 15 months ago, to take place?

Response from Cllr Ray Bryan:-

Most of our highway funding comes from the Department for Transport. As this is a set amount, roads nearing the end of their life are assessed by experienced engineers to establish the best treatment option. A works programme is then setup based on our available funding.

Last year we produced a forward looking road maintenance programme based on the most up to date road condition, primarily for the A, B and C road network. New Field Lane and Fairfield Road have been identified for work to be carried out this financial year.

January's pattern of very cold overnight temperatures on already wet roads has had a significant impact across the country. We're taking this into account as we assess the rest of the programme that will need to be delivered this year. Based on the prioritisation criteria set out in our policy, the full list of schemes planned for the financial year 2023/24 will be ready by the end of March.

Question 4 – submitted by Jane Ashdown

When members of STAND – Save the Area North of Dorchester - have met Councillors to discuss the progress of the revised Dorset Local Plan, and in particular DOR 13, we have frequently been told that Councillors are unable to comment in case their remarks are seen as predetermination.

This seems to us to run counter to the role of a local councillor as set out on the council's website: "Councillors act as a communication channel between the council and its citizens. They promote citizens' interests and needs to the council and assist the public to better understand the issues being addressed by local government and the services it provides."

STAND trusts that the Council does not wish to stifle continuing public discussion regarding the draft Local Plan, and therefore values the role of Councillors as a "communications channel."

In December Councillor Walsh was quoted in the media as saying: "The North Dorchester Garden Community development is already part of the adopted West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland local plan and is part of the future of Dorset."

He later apologised for this misleading statement, saying it was not an indication of predetermination on his part, but simply a mistake.

Will the Leader of the Council now accept that members of the Council may express opinions in public about the proposals in the draft Local Plan, and that this may be considered an indication of predisposition rather than predetermination or, in the final analysis, that they could simply be mistaken?

Response from Cllr Spencer Flower:-

Like anyone else a councillor can be predisposed to a particular point of view. That is to be expected and is, I am told, perfectly lawful. What we must not do is approach decisions having already made up our minds in advance and unwilling to listen.

There are dangers in a councillor associating themselves closely with one particular pressure group and speaking after having listened only to that group. Doing so can give the impression that they have made up their mind in advance and even that they are speaking on behalf of that group.

My encouragement to councillors is to seek advice from the Monitoring Officer before committing in public to a particular point of view.

Question 5 – submitted by Cllr Luke Wakeling and Cllr Colin Huckle

It is extremely disappointing, that the CGR Steering Group has taken the view of an extremely small minority of residents. With 9 comments for "Option One", and 32 comments for "Option Two", that is a net response of 23 comments. From two towns with a combined population of 60,000, the Steering Group has eliminated one option, based on the input of just 0.04% of residents.

The LGBCE guidance is quite technical, but clear what principles should be followed, to create good community boundaries. Even more disappointingly, within the responses received, very few responses actually address the principles required by the guidance. Whilst some people have strong opinions about boundaries for emotional or historical reasons, the task at hand is to set boundaries fit for the 21st century, and in accordance with the applicable laws. In the evidence collected, there is very little to support the option carried forward.

WTC's proposal was a modification of Option One, improving those parts which offered poor democracy and did not follow the principles in the guidance. In particular; the requirement to address anomalous boundaries (§15-17, §26 and §84-85), the need for good electoral equality (§161-162, §165-166), and creating good building-blocks to improve the upper boundaries (§85), for whenever they might next be reviewed. It is also notable that the guidance, which speaks of Parish Councils up to 31 members in size (§154), was published before the Localism Act 2011, which has drastically changed the role that Parish Councils fulfil. WTC is an elected body, representing the 53,000 residents of Weymouth, and made an honest submission, that follows the guidance, in good faith. It is quite undemocratic, that this alternative will not be taken forward for public consultation.

The draft warding in your papers tonight, has two wards proposed – Nottingham and Lanehouse, that have extremely poor electoral quality, fewer than half the number of electors/members of the other wards. This impacts negatively on the fairness of elections across Weymouth and is contrary to §164,166 & 167 of the guidance.

WTC provides significant services, particularly in relation to the visitor offer and tourism, that support huge economic benefits to the area. Residents who are connected to Weymouth, and benefitting from the services that WTC provides, should be within the Weymouth boundary, and sharing the cost for these services.

The option that most closely met the requirements of the LGBCE, has been discarded before the main public consultation, without good reason. The residents of Chickerell and Weymouth have now got no choice, just a bad option.

Why has the Steering Group ignored the very clear guidance? To have done this makes the proposal flawed.

Response from Cllr Spencer Flower:-

When formulating the Draft Recommendations for public consultation, the Community Governance Review working group have taken into account many factors, not solely the responses received during the initial public consultation that ran from 1 November to 28 December. This includes the requirements of legislation, the Guidance issued by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, electoral forecasts for the distribution of electors likely to occur in the next 5 years, as well as responses to the public consultation. The working group has also taken into account the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) report that was prepared for the creation of Dorset Council wards. The Commission state that their final recommendations for Dorset Council wards, based on evidence received, reflect the three statutory criteria of: • Equality of representation • Reflecting community interests and identities • Providing for effective and convenient local government.

The working group were particularly mindful of the Guidance that says that no parish ward should be divided by a district boundary where reasonably practicable and have strictly applied this principle wherever possible. The situation in Weymouth is fairly unique in Dorset where the majority of parish wards cross principal council boundaries as a result of Dorset Council and Weymouth Town Council being created at the same time, and neither the principal council that created the Town Council warding, nor the LGBCE creating Dorset Council warding, having an awareness of each other's proposed warding arrangements.

Dorset Council attended a meeting with Weymouth Town Council prior to the closure of the most recent period of public consultation, and reiterated that the Council would strictly apply the Commission's Guidance that parish wards should not be divided by Dorset Council ward boundaries wherever this was reasonably practicable. Contrary to this guidance offered at that meeting, Weymouth Town Council submitted warding proposals, not based on either of the two options being consulted on, which crossed Dorset Council ward boundaries.

Whilst the Commission have based Dorset Council wards on evidence received that the Council has sought to follow wherever possible, the working group recognise that Weymouth Town Council do not feel that the boundaries accurately reflect the communities and for this reason, Full Council today is being asked to agree an undertaking to work with the Town Council when the Dorset Council Wards are next reviewed to put forward a proposal that both parties feel represents the communities within the parish of Weymouth.

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**Full Council
20 October 2022**

Questions submitted by Councillors

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr Paul Kimber

The Portland community are clearly very upset and disappointed by the headlines on the 16th of December regarding the future of the Portland hospital, despite the need to get the MIU reopened.

As the Dorset Council knows the Portland community showed their concerns, and reiterated the need for the MIU to reopen, by linking arms around the hospital.

Leading members of the Portland community recently campaigned for COVID vaccination clinic to be held at the Portland hospital. This was very successful, and again the feedback from the Portland community this was very well received.

The Portland hospital development unit has also continually campaigned for the Portland hospital MIU to reopen.

Portland needs a MIU when will this much needed MIU will reopen?

Response from Cllr Peter Wharf:-

Thank you for the question. As you know, I forwarded you an update via email in advance of full Council which highlighted that while the Portland MIU remains closed, residents are able to access the urgent care unit at Weymouth hospital. In my response I pointed out that this is a decision that rests with Dorset Healthcare, as the provider of the service. However, I did also say that I would raise the matter with NHS Dorset, and Dorset Healthcare NHS Trust, as the provider of the service.

I have since received this response from Dawn Dawson, acting Chief Executive of Dorset Healthcare. She states: 'There are no immediate plans for changes with the MIU position. We continue to try and manage the urgent care demand across the system in the most efficient way according to the resource available, vacancies and sickness levels, Weymouth Urgent Treatment Centre is the local alternative for residents.' Dawn also highlighted that the Trust was holding a listening event on 8 February to hear first-hand from local people and to try to understand the needs that may not be being met locally – not just from urgent care.

Question 2 submitted by Cllr Matt Hall

As Dorset Council moves towards a new Local Plan, will Cllr Walsh confirm that D.C. will use this time wisely to develop additional Supplementary Planning Documents such as a Householders Guide to Extension Design to enable a better understanding of planning requirements and a more consistent approach to the decision-making

process? Such documents are proven to assist Councillors, Town & Parish Councils, Developers, the wider public and Town Planners.

Response from Cllr David Walsh:-

The priority area of work for the planning policy team continues to be the local plan. If resources allow, informal guidance for applicants may also be prepared, though we are likely to be cautious about preparing further Supplementary Planning Documents at the moment, as the changes currently proposed by national government suggest that existing Supplementary Planning Documents will only remain in force for a limited period once the new system is introduced.

Question 3 submitted by Cllr Matt Hall

As the Kitt Hill situation in Sherborne rapidly approaches its first birthday with no current sign of a solution, can the Portfolio Holder for Highways please confirm what Dorset Council is doing to speed up the much needed and overdue repairs to the property wall that has so negatively impacted residents, businesses, and tourists for far too long.

Response from Cllr Ray Bryan:-

Dorset Council fully recognises the concerns raised by the Local Councillors in relation to Kitt Hill. Throughout this complex issue both Officers from Dorset Highways and Building control have made sure that the safety of the public has been maintained and the road is passable with traffic control. We have been in constant engagement with the owners, and we believe that the works needed will be agreed and more information will be given in the near future.

Question 4 submitted by Cllr Nick Ireland

With so many large commercial roofs across the county, could the respective portfolio holders outline what Dorset Council is doing to promote the system of prior approval for solar panel installations on commercial premises?

Response by Cllr David Walsh:-

It is recognised that Dorset Council has a positive role to play in securing a net zero future and our commitment to this is set out in the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Strategy and Action Plan, a refresh of which is due to be considered by Cabinet in March. The planning system also has a vital role to play in supporting this, and Dorset Council is currently preparing interim guidance and a position statement on climate change, together with a sustainability checklist for planning applications and guidance for occupiers of listed buildings. With the agreement of Cabinet at its meeting in March, the position statement will be the subject of consultation before it is finalised.

The installation or alteration of solar equipment on non-domestic premises benefits from permitted development rights. This is subject to limitations and conditions, one of which requires prior approval in some cases, such as where sites are within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, conservation areas, or on listed buildings. Dorset Council must exercise care not to predetermine its position as the Local Planning Authority in considering prior approval applications when these are needed. However, through our pre-application advice service (which is accessible via the Council's website) we can help any commercial or business operator to understand what may or may not require planning permission and, where permission is required, will be able to positively advise on any proposals for renewable energy generation.

Question 5 – submitted by Cllr Howard Legg

Church Street, Upwey, gets flooded regularly following moderate or heavy rainfall. This has been experienced by local residents for decades.

The appropriate local authority, currently Dorset Council, places flood signs on the road, puts cones in place, clears debris and cuts escape channels for the water, all of which have limited effect and follow the occurrence. The latest example of this follow up action occurred in late January. No substantial works are undertaken to either prevent water covering the road or to drain it away before flooding occurs.

When can local residents expect Dorset Council to fulfil its obligations to manage this problem before the road gets flooded and to ensure partners such as the Environment Agency as well as local landowners do what they are obligated to do?

Response by Cllr Ray Bryan:-

Thank you for raising your concerns about the drainage at Church St, Upwey. Let me assure you that Dorset Council recognise that there is an issue here and that they are fulfilling their obligations to manage this problem. Colleagues from the Highways and Flood Risk Management teams are working with the Environment Agency to agree the next steps that need to be taken. The Highways team are currently designing a drainage improvement scheme that will involve replacement of about 60m of pipework. This still needs to be agreed by the Environment Agency, but we are working closely with them to obtain their support.

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Appendix

As I normally do in preparation for this meeting, I looked back on my previous responses to the proposed budget of the day and the theme that stands out, despite my various efforts to phrase the same thing in different ways, is that the burden of providing services to our residents and the inequity in having to support a significantly skewed demographic, falls vastly on the resident population of our area.

There is of course an argument that this is genuine local government, where we all pay for what we receive. But it isn't, because what we do pay is via our Council Tax bills, the system which replaced Thatcher's Poll Tax and which is increasingly regressive with regard to property values, takes little account of ability to pay, and is widely regarded as fundamentally unfair.

This budget for a change doesn't take the maximum council tax increase possible, a move presumably designed to try and move Dorset Council down from the 3rd highest council tax in the country to somewhere lower in the top 10 but has consequences in both permanently reducing the funding available to this council until it ceases to exist, so forever essentially, and possibly impacting on the success of future funding bids

to central government. It also fails to match inflation, with most estimates of UK inflation for the remainder of 2023 and early 2024 averaging out at about 6%.

And because of the nature of Council Tax, the benefit of this decision isn't targeted by any means at all to those most in need. Other councils in England have proposed taking the maximum possible and then been creative in establishing a method of redistribution, acknowledging both the system's failures and the diverse needs of their populations. It is regrettable that this administration didn't propose to do similar but here we are relying on our long suffering residents and phase of the moon dependent government handouts.

I hope that all members of this council have read the 'Forgotten Towns' treatise published last year, highlighting the preventable decline of Weymouth and Portland over the last thirty years with shocking statistics, amongst others, relating to social mobility and how far below the national average wage the area is, with the associated deprivation that brings.

The cry we hear every year is that Dorset doesn't get enough funding from government and yet nothing changes. The RSG is still absent and much of what we do receive involves this council investing considerable time and expense to take part in the current bidding

system, where London-based civil servants decide how and where regional money is spent.

Most agree the bidding system is no longer fit for purpose, but we did at least receive notification of £19m in 'levelling up' funding for Weymouth recently.

£19m, which you'd like to think will be spent constructively but in reality, much will go on necessary harbour repairs which previous administrations have failed to carry out due to the failure to reinvest harbour profits, and literally destructively to demolish buildings on land we own in the forlorn hope that it will attract capitalist investment rather than us seizing the opportunity to make a difference to our residents and developing it ourselves. The ghost of 'Charles Street' truly has risen.

And in case you missed it, the funding is just for Weymouth, not Portland; when you take Weymouth out of the equation, Portland's statistics are even worse, yet it receives nothing, and the plague of poverty will continue to spread.

So, we're left as usual with a government that is not only now kwartenging our nurses and doctors, but also its own Tory administrations.

This budget fails to acknowledge or address the damage caused by Trussonomics and turns a blind eye to the demographic timebomb of social care in Dorset, because the current administration won't be in power when it explodes.

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When Dorset Council was formed in 2019 we were told that our immediate ambition was to be 'safe and legal.' That limited ambition, with the addition of action on the Climate and Ecological Emergency, seemed reasonable in those early days.

And since then we've been buffeted by the Covid pandemic, a range of other budgetary pressures, particularly in Adult Social Care, and now the inflation crisis.

In this context, with gross expenditure set to increase by 8.5% to enable us to basically carry on doing what we've done this past year, no projected cuts to frontline services, and a large contingency fund to mitigate against inflationary pressures, this is another safe and legal budget, and we'll vote for it, because that's the responsible thing to do.

But, whilst thanking officers and members for all their hard work on this, we do feel this budget lacks ambition. Three areas where there is some agreement across this chamber are:

- First, the recognition, which has come through strongly in Scrutiny, that we must do much better on housing, to keep our young people and essential workers in the county
- Second, the need to reverse the ongoing decline of public transport, especially in rural areas, to improve the mobility of mainly younger, poorer and elderly residents
- and third, that we should be expediting a more commercial approach to our surplus assets to resource greater ambition in these and other areas, such as Youth Services. In Weymouth and Portland alone, 6 Youth Clubs have closed since the swingeing cuts implemented by our predecessor council and I'm disappointed that the Youth Fund has been frozen at £100k.

Significant improvements to housing and public transport would require significant resources but, to contemplate the re-introduction of Council Housing and, as Councillor Bryan has suggested, running our own public transport, we'd expect to see in this budget at least some modest funding for capacity building, but it's not there. In relation to climate mitigation we invested in staff to work out how to do it, prior to securing substantial funds to get on with it, and we'd like to see the same with social housing and public transport.

So, whilst we will support this budget, we think this Council can do better than safe and legal, and should be preparing itself to tackle some of our more entrenched issues.

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Thank you Chair:

Cllr Rob Hughes the Isle and Royal manor of Portland.

Speaking on behalf of the independent group, we are happy to accept this budget as proposed.

I take this opportunity, to thank Cllr. Suttle and his team of officers, along with the other cabinet members and their teams, who have also worked hard over the past months to bring in this budget at a rate of just under 4%. for this year.

The 2 budget cafes did an excellent job of informing members of the issues faced by the council going forward, as well as the cost savings already made since this council was formed in 2019.

Thank you also to the members of the two scrutiny committees for your time and careful consideration of this budget.

I'm sure It cannot have been easy for those involved to keep our costs down in these challenging times for people across the whole county, whilst maintaining a high level of service for all our residents and communities within Dorset for the year ahead within a well-balanced budget.

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