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DORSET COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 12 OCTOBER 2023

Present: Cllrs Val Potheary (Chairman), Bill Trite (Vice-Chairman), Tony Alford, Mike Barron, Pete Barrow, Shane Bartlett, Pauline Batstone, Belinda Bawden, Laura Beddow, Derek Beer, Richard Biggs, Dave Bolwell, Cherry Brooks, Piers Brown, Ray Bryan, Simon Christopher, Kelvin Clayton, Susan Cocking, Robin Cook, Tim Cook, Toni Coombs, Richard Crabb, Jean Dunseith, Beryl Ezzard, Tony Ferrari, Spencer Flower, Les Fry, Simon Gibson, Barry Goringe, David Gray, Jill Haynes, Ryan Hope, Rob Hughes, Nick Ireland, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones, Stella Jones, Andrew Kerby, Howard Legg, Robin Legg, Cathy Lugg, David Morgan, Louie O'Leary, Jon Orrell, Emma Parker, Mike Parkes, Andrew Parry, Mary Penfold, Byron Quayle, Molly Rennie, Belinda Ridout, Mark Roberts, Jane Somper, Andrew Starr, Gary Suttle, Clare Sutton, Roland Tarr, Gill Taylor, David Tooke, David Walsh, Kate Wheller, Sarah Williams and John Worth

Present remotely: Cllrs

Apologies: Cllrs Jon Andrews, Alex Brenton, Andy Canning, Graham Carr-Jones, Janet Dover, Mike Dyer, Paul Harrison, Brian Heatley, Ryan Holloway, Paul Kimber, Rebecca Knox, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Bill Pipe, Julie Robinson, Maria Roe, David Shortell, David Taylor and Peter Wharf

Also present:

Also present remotely:

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

Hayley Caves (Member Development and Support Officer), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Susan Dallison (Democratic Services Team Leader), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), Matt Prosser (Chief Executive), John Sellgren (Executive Director of Place) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

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

33. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2023 were confirmed and signed.

34. Declarations of Interest

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

35. **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman reported the death of Honorary Alderman Della Jones MBE, who served as a Member of North Dorset District Council and Dorset County Council. She also reported on the death of Honorary Alderman Jeffrey Miller who also served as a member of North Dorset District Council. She paid tribute to both Honorary Alderman.

The Chairman took this opportunity, on behalf of the council and residents, to thank John Sellgren, Executive Director of Place, who had recently announced his retirement at the end of the year. She thanked him for his service and commitment to the Council over the last 5 years.

Finally, the Chairman shared that Councillor Spencer Flower, Leader of the Council since 2019, had been shortlisted for the Local Government Information Unit "Leader of the Year" Award. She wished him luck at the awards ceremony due to be held on 16 November 2023.

36. **Public Participation**

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

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

There were no petitions or deputations to report.

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

The Leader of the Council advised members that his bulletin would be published at the conclusion of the meeting and some of the areas covered by the bulletin included:-

- Lobbying Government for a better deal for Dorset
- Congratulating officers of their recent success at the Highways Awards
- Congratulations to the Digital Champions scheme at the Connected Britain Awards
- Dorset Council was also shortlisted for Decarbonisation Work, and he also reported on the Community Safety Team's recent visit to the Home Office.

39. **Questions from Councillors**

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

40. **Devolution Deal for Dorset**

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth and Levelling Up advised that at its meeting on 25 July 2023, Cabinet considered a report titled 'A devolution deal for Dorset'. Set out in the context of a further announcement by Government about

devolution deals being struck and against a commitment for all areas of England which wanted one, to have a devolution deal by 2030, Cabinet thought it appropriate to consider this proposal for Dorset Council.

He continued by reporting that work had commenced to progress a devolution deal for Dorset; but it was clear that such a deal would be finalised not in the current but under a future Parliament. However, for this to occur work needed to commence now. The Portfolio Holder reported that it was generally considered that English devolution had gained a strong foothold and therefore he considered it to be prudent for Dorset Council to prepare proactively in order to be able to secure the best outcome for Dorset in the future.

The report set out the potential wider policy implications of a devolution deal and sought council's endorsement of the need to widen the scope of the Council Plan. The Portfolio Holder acknowledged that there was no appetite for a directly elected mayor model, however, there were other models to be considered and these were set out within the report.

Councillor N Ireland, Group Leader for the Liberal Democrats group indicated that the group would be supporting the recommendation, however he advised that he did find the report vague, which was indicative of the current situation around devolution in England. He saw no reason not to support the recommendation, but expressed concerns that it would not be the financial solution for properly funded local government going forward.

Other members expressed similar concerns and sought assurances around governance, a reduction in autonomy and the potential impact on council sovereignty.

In response to questions and concerns, the Leader of the Council agreed that Council needed more information to build on this proposal before any final decision was made. However, he sought support from members to continue conversations regarding a devolution deal for Dorset. He confirmed that this would not affect the sovereignty of individual councils and advised that the government had acknowledged that the mayoral model doesn't work for all areas. In response to a question around which councils Dorset was in conversation with, the Leader of the Council indicated that he was in early negotiations with some local authorities and needed to respect the Leaders of those councils, who needed to have further discussions with their own councillors and Chief Executives before proceeding. He confirmed that all councillors would be kept fully informed of progress.

It was proposed by Cllr S Gibson and seconded by Cllr S Flower

Decision

- (a) That the pursuit of a Devolution Deal for Dorset be added to all sections of the approved Council Plan, be agreed.
- Protecting our natural environment, climate, and ecology
 - Creating stronger, healthier communities

- Creating sustainable development and housing
- Driving economic prosperity
- Becoming a more responsive, customer focused council

(b) That work, which the Leader of the Council had progressed following the resolution made by the Cabinet on 25 July 2023, to secure a Devolution Deal for Dorset be supported.

41. Appointment of Co-opted Members to the Audit & Governance Committee

The Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee set out the committee's recommendation to appoint 2 new co-opted members to the Audit and Governance Committee.

It was proposed by Cllr R Biggs seconded by Cllr S Cocking

Decision

That Mr S Roach and Mr R Ong be endorsed as co-opted members of the Audit and Governance Committee.

42. Appointment of Co-opted Committee Member to the Harbour Advisory Committee

The Chairman of the Harbours Advisory Committee set out a report on the recruitment process and recommendation for a new co-opted member of the Harbours Advisory committee.

It was proposed by Cllr M Roberts and seconded by Cllr R Hughes

Decision

That the co-option of Mr Mark Saxby as a co-opted member of the Harbours Advisory Committee be endorsed.

43. Dispensation Under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972

Cllr S Flower, Leader of the Council introduced a report to approve a dispensation for Cllr P Wharf due to ill health.

It was proposed by Cllr S Flower and seconded by Cllr N Ireland

Decision

That a dispensation for Cllr P Wharf from attending meetings of the Council until 2 May 2024, by reason of ill health be approved.

44. Urgent items

There were no urgent items to report.

45. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business to report.

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

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 7.41 pm

Chairman

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Full Council– 12 October 2023 Public Participation

1. Question from Edd Moore Damers Eco Crew. (Edd Moore, Eco Coordinator)

We have been campaigning with support from DTAG and Sustrans for a safe cycle route/lane between Dorchester and Poundbury for the past 12 months. This was something that was promised by Dorset Council and The Duchy in 2017 but sadly hasn't happened.

We have the support of Jason Bowerman, Estate Manager at the Duchy who wants to get round a table with everyone to get the wheels in motion for this project.

We put a questionnaire together and found:

- 81% said they would use the route other than the school run.
- 72% said they would use a cycle lane to get to Poundbury

We wrote a letter to Chris Peck, Head of Highways who at first dismissed the idea saying Poundbury and Dorchester were in a better position than most towns and cities in Dorset thanks to the environmental work of our school. They were focusing on Bournemouth and Ferndown where they could make a difference with bigger impact.

We wrote back to Chris and eventually he agreed to a meeting to discuss the route during May Half Term but only with Mr Moore, Eco Coordinator and DTAG.

From this meeting with Chris Peck Mr Moore told us it could take 5 - 10 years to complete depending on funding, when it becomes available. We will all be at University by the time it might be ready to use.

It was agreed that the Dorchester War Memorial to Dorchester West Station Bridge would be the first phase. Phase 2 from Bridge to Damers First School, then Phase 3 to Monkey Jump Roundabout. Phase 1 needs to go through Public Consultation first.

All these phases will support other cycle routes and lanes within the town and afar too connecting up cycle lanes/routes that are in place or could be in place.

We have been measuring the air quality around our school and neighbouring roads with Sustrans over the last 4 weeks to add more evidence to our case.

We do not want to wait 5 - 10 years to have a safe cycle lane/route that was already promised to Damers First School, local schools, Dorchester and Poundbury in 2017. We have already waited 6 years!

Why can't there be a safe cycle lane/route from Dorchester Town to Poundbury built in the next 12 months?

Response by Cllr R Bryan

It's positive to hear of such enthusiasm from Damers School for improvements for walking and cycling.

Dorset Council supports a dedicated team from Sustrans who work with schools, including Damers, on promoting sustainable transport, including holding regular events and activities with students. We've already constructed a route linking the Victoria Park area of Dorchester to the new school site in Poundbury in advance of its opening, including a new crossing of Bridport Road at Whitfield Road which was completed in 2017. This is well used by children walking, scooting and cycling to both the school, and for other trips in the area.

We continue to work with the Dorchester Transport Action Group on potential routes between Dorchester town centre and the existing active travel routes near Poundbury. We are looking to see if funding from central government could be made available for such projects.

Dorset Council teams are currently working on schemes to improve links to schools in many parts of the county, including Dorchester, and I very much hope that we can secure funding for similar projects, such as the link between Poundbury and Dorchester town centre, in the future.

Full Council – 12 October 2023

Questions submitted by Councillors

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr K Clayton

On September 9th the first Dorset CoP took place in Dorchester. This was a very successful and inspiring event. Attendees included a number of high-profile climate activists, a number of Dorset Council officers, and 5 Dorset councillors.

Unfortunately, none of these councillors were from the controlling party. Whilst the portfolio holder has my full confidence, this wider lack of support, together with the recent ‘watering down’ of the Government’s climate actions, could imply a lack of commitment – that our climate crisis is not the priority it needs to be. Should the residents of Dorset be concerned?

Response by Cllr R Bryan

Dorset Council has put tackling climate change and supporting our natural environment as a core priority in our 2022-2024 council plan, and we refreshed our strategy this year to reiterate our commitment to a carbon neutral, nature positive and resilient Dorset, spurred on by the decisive and acute warnings of the IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report. The council has made a substantial commitment to its delivery, including through a £10m capital programme which forms part of a wider £70m investment programme largely utilising external funds, and our progress was recognised through our nomination for best climate action at this year’s Association for Public Service Excellence awards. I remain as committed as ever to delivering on this generation defining challenge. Nothing has changed.

As I have made clear on a number of occasions, the council cannot achieve this alone. Our residents will be at the heart of our journey to a greener, cleaner Dorset, and it is notable that public concern about climate change is significantly higher in the South West than in other regions of the UK according to government’s own public attitudes tracker. The Dorset COP event was a clear indication of this, with a constructive day of discussion and debate. Our officers attended not only to ensure that the council’s position was represented and understood, but also to learn from our residents themselves on how we might better facilitate wider change, and took an active role on the day. The COP was an exceptionally well-organised community event that was a testament to our residents’ seriousness about net zero.

Notwithstanding the coverage of the government’s recent announcement, it should be noted that the Prime Minister’s recent statement recommitted the UK to net zero, and there were positive commitments including the boost to the grant for heat pumps. The acknowledgement that tackling our emissions and the cost-of-living crisis hand in hand is a principle that I am sure many of us here would agree with. As such, from a local leadership perspective, nothing has changed. I remain committed to our ambitions that are set out at the heart of our council plan. I am not watering down our commitments, and I will continue to work with colleagues throughout this organisation and beyond as part of the leadership required to meet our collective

ambitions to protect and enhance our environment and climate. Local leadership matters, and that comes from all sections of society throughout this wonderful county of ours.

Question 2 submitted by Cllr B Trite

Assuming that Dorset Council is successful in its commendable objective of becoming carbon neutral in or by the year 2040, do we yet have an estimate (at present monetary values) of what the total net cost of achieving this will have been to the Council between 2019 and either 2040 or any earlier date of neutrality? If we don't, when will such a projection be available?

Response by Cllr R Bryan

Dorset Council has clear ambitions to deliver on its natural environment, climate and ecological strategy, and these ambitions are also clearly articulated in our council plan. As a council, we are currently delivering a programme that is worth around £70m, which includes a £10m capital investment from this council. As I have stated on many occasions, it is not possible for the council to fund all of the change required on its own, and to date we have been extremely successful in securing external funds for programmes such as the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and for Low Carbon Dorset, which alone have a combined value of £35.5m. We are committed to continuing to source these external funds, ensuring that the costs to the council remain as low as possible. As part of our ongoing programme, we are determined we will be ready with off the shelf plans when we are asked to bid for money from either government or private bodies. We are also in the process of creating a programme that will help residents decide how to reduce their personal carbon emissions.

Given the changing legislative environment, the rapid development of technology and the way that we are trying to embed different ways of working within existing budgets to reduce our environmental impact, it is not possible to predict net costs for the council from now until 2040. However, we will continue to ensure that we get best value from our own and external investments, and we are actively looking at invest to save models in areas such as renewables and storage where it should be possible to deliver financial returns and savings that would result in no net costs to the council.

Question 3 – submitted by Cllr M Parkes

Before the dissolution of East Dorset District Council, a plan was created to improve Ferndown Town Centre.

There is an urgent need for these plans to be revived and updated and for the residents of Ferndown to be reassured that Dorset Council will deliver the improvements that our Town Centre needs.

Dorset Council owns several prominent assets in Ferndown that allow for a brilliant opportunity to improve Pennys Walk and the surrounding area. At a time when several major retailers are exiting the town, a proactive approach from Dorset Council would be welcomed in Ferndown. Will the relevant Cabinet member give me the assurance that plans for Ferndown will be progressed and delivered please?

Response by Cllr S Gibson

Dorset's Market and medium sized towns are hugely important. They provide employment, entertainment and social services both for those living in them but also the communities that surround them. Ferndown is no exception.

The council is very conscious of the role that these towns play within the wider economy and will be looking to develop a specific strategy document, as an addition to the Economic Growth strategy, that recognises this role and sets out how the council will look to support the economic development of Market Towns and medium sized towns. This document will recognise the recent good work undertaken by communities such as Bridport where they have produced an Investment Plan and Blandford where a small public / private partnership is emerging to develop positive change and growth in their area. I have asked the relevant Overview Committee Chair to consider starting this work and I am delighted that Cllr Jones has agreed.

With specific regard to Ferndown, the plans developed by the former East Dorset District Council provided a positive vision for the future of Ferndown. It remains a good plan and I agree with the local ward Councillors that the plan ought to be revisited and refreshed.

The Regeneration Service will work with officers across the Council to deliver improvements to Ferndown Town centre and will work with Ward Councillors to ensure that the commitments made to Ferndown are progressed. Funding via Dorset Councils Shared Prosperity Fund allocation will be provided to help achieve this.

Question 4 – submitted by Cllr A Starr

NUTRIENT NEUTRALITY

Following my recent question to this council regarding stories in the press about the scrapping of EU derived laws that provide much needed protection to the natural environment, I was reassured that this council would be watching the situation carefully and making representations to the government if required.

There has been a stop on new house building in the Dorset river catchment areas to prevent more nutrient run off causing eutrophication, particularly in my ward of Lytchett & Upton, which includes part of the very vulnerable Poole Harbour.

The recent announcement by the government, that Planning restrictions on nutrient run off are to be scrapped in favour of a promise to increase investment in a nutrient mitigation scheme, is very worrying. This would seem to be letting the developers build new homes and having the public pick up the bill for mitigation. It would also

seem that the extra pollution could well be an issue long before the answer to the problem is in place. The Environment Agency seems to be very quiet on this issue at present. Can I ask then if it is going to work in Dorset?

Given that this council has declared an environmental and ecological emergency, can I ask if any representation has been made to the government about this issue. Have we assurances that funds are available from Central Government to put in place nutrient mitigation before houses are built or will the local taxpayer be expected to cover the cost?

Response by Cllr D Walsh

The House of Lords on 13 September voted against the Government's proposed amendment to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill that would have seen the end of nutrient neutrality rules for new development. This means that development in the affected catchment areas will still need to demonstrate nutrient neutrality in order to be permitted. We are still waiting for the final details of the Bill to be confirmed and for it to receive Royal Assent.