

# Public Document Pack



## DORSET COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2025

**Present:** Cllrs Stella Jones (Chair), Jon Andrews, Jindy Atwal, Mike Baker, Shane Bartlett, Belinda Bawden, Laura Beddow, Derek Beer, Matt Bell, Richard Biggs, Bridget Bolwell, Dave Bolwell, Louise Bown, Alex Brenton, Piers Brown, Ray Bryan, Andy Canning, Will Chakawhata, Simon Christopher, Simon Clifford, Toni Coombs, Barrie Cooper, Richard Crabb, Peter Dickenson, Neil Eysenck, Beryl Ezzard, Scott Florek, Spencer Flower, Alex Fuhrmann, Simon Gibson, Barry Goringe, Jill Haynes, Hannah Hobbs-Chell, Sally Holland, Ryan Holloway, Ryan Hope, Rob Hughes, Nick Ireland, Jack Jeanes, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones, Paul Kimber, Chris Kippax, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Robin Legg, Cathy Lugg, Rory Major, Craig Monks, David Morgan, Steve Murcer, David Northam, Louie O'Leary, Jon Orrell, Emma Parker, Mike Parkes, Andrew Parry, Val Potheary, Byron Quayle, Steve Robinson, Pete Roper, David Shortell, Andy Skeats, Jane Somper, Duncan Sowry-House, Andrew Starr, Gary Suttle, Clare Sutton, Roland Tarr, David Taylor, Gill Taylor, Andy Todd, David Tooke, Bill Trite, James Vitali, Claudia Webb, Kate Wheller, Ben Wilson and Carl Woode

**Present remotely:** Cllrs Les Fry (Vice-Chair)

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

Jan Britton (Executive Director for Places Services), Sean Cremer (Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial), 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), Jonathan Price (Executive Director of People - Adults and Housing), Matt Prosser (Chief Executive), Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Alice Deacon (Corporate Director for Commissioning and Partnerships), Beth Whittaker (Interim Corporate Director for Education and Learning) and Jack Wiltshire (Corporate Director for Highways and Engineering)

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

Julia Ingram (Corporate Director for Adult Social Care Operations)

**64. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr L Fry (attended the meeting virtually), B Ridout, J Robinson and S Williams.

**65. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting(s) held on 5 December 2025 were confirmed and signed.

66. **Declarations of Interest**

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

67. **Chair's Announcements**

The Council received and welcomed a short presentation from members of Dorset Youth Voice and the Youth Council.

The Chair of the Council and Group Leaders paid tribute to the Chief Executive, Matt Prosser, who would be leaving the Council after 5 years of service for the new role as the Chief Executive of Wellington City Council in New Zealand.

The Chief Executive took this opportunity to respond to those tributes.

68. **Public Participation - questions**

There were 2 questions from the public and a copy of the questions and responses are set out at Appendix 1 to these minutes.

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

There were no petitions and deputations received.

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

The Leader of the Council reported on the following matters and answered any questions:

- The progress of the Chief Executive Recruitment Process
- Update on the Devolution following the announcement that the joint bid for Wessex had not been accepted onto the Devolution Priority Programme.
- The Wareham Level Crossing.

71. **Questions from Councillors**

There were 6 questions from councillors and a copy of these are set out in Appendix 2 to these minutes.

In response to a supplementary question from Cllr B Quayle, the Cabinet Member for Education, Children's and Skills advised that any investigation should sit with the Charity Commission, and she did not consider that a detailed report to this council was appropriate.

Responding to a supplementary question from Cllr B Quayle regarding the "Veteran Friendly Framework and Care Dorset being part of that framework, the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care confirmed that he would be happy to take this proposal forward.

## 72. **Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan Strategy Report**

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Strategy presented the Budget Strategy and Medium-term Financial Plan (MTPF).

In presenting the report the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Strategy, Cllr S Clifford paid tribute to members and officers for their support in producing the budget for 2025/26. Following his budget speech Cllr Clifford proposed the recommendations (a) to (k) as set out in the report, and these were seconded by Cllr Ireland.

The Chair invited the Group Leaders to present their replies to the budget proposals. Cllrs A Parry, C Sutton, R Hughes and K Wheller presented their budget speeches and some of these are attached at appendix 3 to these minutes.

Cllr G Suttle proposed the following amendment, and this was seconded by Cllr S Flower.

“That:

Council land should be used in conjunction with community land trusts to deliver the priority of building local houses for local people.

As a consequence, the revenue budget summarised in appendix 1 be amended by reallocating up to £1.5M of the housing transformation funding anticipated from dwellings occupied periodically (second homes) to enable the following allocations:

- (i) The budget to address the cost-of-living pressures faced by residents to be increased from £500,000 to £1.5M
- (ii) Removal of the proposed introduction of evening and nighttime car parking charges at a cost of £235,000
- (iii) The budget for youth work to be doubled from £100,000 to £200,000.”

Members debated the amendment proposed and the comments included:

- The proposed budget would support the delivery of the Housing Strategy whereas the amendment would have a significant negative impact on that work.
- Concerns expressed about matters raised that were not set out within the current budget proposals for example charging for nighttime parking. This proposal was not raised or debated during the scrutiny process; however other councillors indicated that it had been discussed.
- This budget was committed to transformation.
- Disagreement regarding the Youth Fund budget line.
- Concerns expressed regarding void properties.

As the seconder to the motion, Cllr S Flower addressed the Council, and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Strategy responded to the amendment before it was put to the vote.

Cllr Suttle confirmed that the amendments (i) to (iv) should be taken as one vote.

In accordance with procedure rule 19.6 (*recorded votes at budget meetings*) a recorded vote was taken.

Those who voted in favour of the amendment:

Cllrs L Beddow, P Brown, R Bryan, S Christopher, T Coombs, P Dickenson, S Flower, S Gibson, B Goringe, J Haynes, S Jespersen, C Jones, N Lacey-Clarke, C Lugg, C Monks, S Murcer, L O'Leary, E Parker, M Parkes, A Parry, V Potheary, B Quayle, D Shortell, A Skeats, J Somper, G Suttle, W Trite, J Vitali and K Wheller.

Those who voted against the amendment:

Cllrs Andrews, J Atwal, M Baker, S Bartlett, B Bawden, D Beer, M Bell, R Biggs, B Bolwell, D Bolwell, L Bown, A Brenton, A Canning, W Chakawhata, S Clifford, B Cooper, R Crabb, N Eysenck, B Ezzard, S Florek, A Fuhrmann, H Hobbs-Chell, S Holland, R Holloway, R Hope, R Hughes, N Ireland, J Jeanes, S Jones, P Kimber, C Kippax, R Legg, R Major, D Morgan, D Northam, J Orrell, S Robinson, P Roper, D Sowry-House, A Starr, C Sutton, R Tarr, D Taylor, G Taylor, A Todd, D Tooke, C Webb, B Wilson, C Woode.

Following the recorded vote of 29 for and 49 against, the amendment was **LOST**.

Members debated the original proposal, continuing to make comments around the charging for nighttime parking proposals and impact that might have on the nighttime economy, second home monies, the youth fund and housing.

The Leader summed up the original motion prior to going to the vote. In accordance with procedure rule 19.6 (*recorded votes at budget meetings*) a recorded vote was taken.

Those who voted in favour of the substantive motion:

Cllrs Andrews, J Atwal, M Baker, S Bartlett, B Bawden, D Beer, M Bell, R Biggs, B Bolwell, D Bolwell, L Bown, A Brenton, A Canning, W Chakawhata, S Clifford, B Cooper, R Crabb, N Eysenck, B Ezzard, S Florek, A Fuhrmann, H Hobbs-Chell, S Holland, R Holloway, R Hope, R Hughes, N Ireland, J Jeanes, S Jones, P Kimber, C Kippax, R Legg, R Major, D Morgan, D Northam, J Orrell, S Robinson, P Roper, D Sowry-House, A Starr, C Sutton, R Tarr, D Taylor, G Taylor, A Todd, D Tooke, C Webb, B Wilson, C Woode.

Those who voted against the substantive motion:

Cllrs L Beddow, P Brown, R Bryan, S Christopher, T Coombs, P Dickenson, S Flower, S Gibson, B Goringe, J Haynes, S Jespersen, C Jones, N Lacey-Clarke, C Lugg, C Monks, S Murcer, L O'Leary, E Parker, M Parkes, A Parry, V Potheary, B Quayle, D Shortell, A Skeats, J Somper, G Suttle, W Trite, J Vitali and K Wheller.

Following the recorded vote of 49 for and 29 against, the amendment was **CARRIED**.

**Decision**

- (a) That the revenue budget summarised in Appendix 1 of the report, be agreed.
- (b) That the increase in general Council Tax of 2.9953% and 1.9969% in the Social Care Precept, providing a Band D Council Tax figure for Dorset Council of £2,101.05; an overall increase of 4.9921%, be agreed.
- (c) That the Council Tax base of 160,793 Band D equivalents (186,917 households in total) agreed by the S151 Officer earlier in this budget setting process, be noted.
- (d) That the continuation of the unchanged scheme of Local Council Tax Support, and the revised income tables following the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) uplift of benefits by 1.7%, be noted.
- (e) That the Capital Strategy set out in Appendix 3, of the report and the changes to the programme contained within the appendix, be approved.
- (f) That the Treasury Management Strategy set out in Appendix 4, of the report be agreed.
- (g) That the assumptions used to develop the Budget Strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), as set out throughout, the report be noted.
- (h) That the recommended balances on earmarked reserves and on general funds, including the minimum level of the general fund, be agreed.
- (i) That the responses to the recommendations and comments made as part of the budget scrutiny process, as set out in Appendix 6, be agreed.
- (j) That the recommendations 1 – 5 from 4 December 2024 Harbour Advisory Committee meeting regarding fees and charges, budget and asset management plans, as set out at Appendix 7 of the report, be agreed.
- (k) That a transfer of £5.1m reserves to a ring-fenced reserve to support the Dedicated Schools Grant Safety Value program as reported in section 13.42 of the report, be approved.

Duration of the meeting (Procedure Rule 8)

In accordance with procedure rule 8.1, members of the council voted to continue the meeting beyond 3 hours until the business on the agenda was concluded.

The Full Council meeting adjourned at 9.20pm for a short comfort break and returned at 9.30pm.

### **73. Councillor Code of Conduct Complaint Process**

The Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, Cllr G Suttle introduced the committee's recommendation on the adoption of the Councillor Code of Conduct Complaint Process. The recommendation was seconded by Cllr S Flower.

Decision

That the proposed new Councillor Complaint Process be adopted.

**74. Staffing Committee for the recruitment of the Head of Paid Service**

The Leader of the Council set out a report proposing to vary Officer Employment Procedure rules in the constitution to create the flexibility for all political groups to be represented on the Staffing Committee when it recommends to Full Council the appointment of a new Chief Executive.

The report also recommended that the Staffing Committee be given authority to approve the interim arrangements, including the appointment of an Acting Chief Executive.

It was proposed by Cllr N Ireland and seconded by Cllr R Hughes.

Decision

- (a) That the Constitution be amended, so that for the appointment of a Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service and for the approval of interim arrangements the composition of the Staffing Committee shall be agreed by the Director of Legal and Democratic in consultation with all political group leaders
- (b) That authority be delegated to the Staffing Committee to approve interim arrangements, including the appointment of an Acting Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service.

Jonathan Mair, Director for Legal and Democratic left the meeting for the consideration of the following item.

**75. Appointment of Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer**

The Leader of the Council presented a report seeking approval to appoint Jonathan Mair, Director for Legal and Democratic Services, as Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for Dorset Council as an interim appointment, as the Chief Executive was leaving the Council.

It was proposed by Cllr N Ireland and seconded by Cllr D Beer

Decision

That Jonathan Mair, Director for Legal and Democratic Services be appointed as Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for Dorset Council.

Jonathan Mair, Director for Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer returned to the meeting.

**76. Calendar of Meetings 2025-2026**

The Leader of the Council proposed, and Cllr M Bell seconded the motion

Decision

- (a) That the calendar of meetings for the period May 2025- May 2026 be approved.
- (b) That, to ensure effective political management, authority be delegated to the Director of Legal and Democratic to make any necessary changes to the calendar, in consultation with the appropriate Chair and Vice-Chair.

All members of the Senior Leadership Team, present, left the meeting for the consideration of the following item.

**77. Pay Policy Statement 2025-26**

It was proposed by Cllr B Wilson and seconded by Cllr B Ezzard

Decision

- (a) That the provisions of the Localism Act and content of the Pay Policy Statement for the 2025/26 financial year, be noted.
- (b) That the Pay Policy Statement for 2025/26, be approved.

**78. Urgent items**

There were no urgent items to report.

**79. Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

- Appendix 1 - Public questions and responses**
- Appendix 2 Councillor Questions and Responses**
- Appendix 3 Budget Speeches**

**Duration of meeting:** 6.30 - 9.47 pm

**Chair**

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## Full Council

11<sup>th</sup> February 2025

## Public Participation

### **Question 1 – submitted by Mr R Thomas, Chair, Sustainable Shaftesbury Advisory Committee to Shaftesbury Town Council, Member, Dorset Climate Action Network**

A previous Dorset Council unanimously agreed to note the proposal for a Dorset National Park and the evidence for it, and to keep it under review, stating that: "The proposal for a National Park could potentially support Dorset Council's corporate outcomes in relation to a healthy and prosperous Dorset."

In recent years, the Dorset National Park team community interest company (CIC) has further developed a strong and well-evidenced case for an extended Dorset National & Marine Park (DNMP) which would be England's first to coordinate action across the joined-up ecosystems of land, coast and sea. The DNMP team has stated it would like to 'work in close partnership with Dorset Council and local communities to help address the climate and nature emergencies, care for and improve the environment, people's health and wellbeing, and benefit our communities, environment and economy throughout Dorset.'

Following the DNMP team's submission to Natural England and to the government-appointed Glover Review of Designated Landscapes, whose 2019 report recommended that Dorset be 'seriously considered' for National Park status, will the new administration confirm its commitment to supporting the creation of Dorset as Britain's first combined land and sea national park in the full knowledge that the proposal has the cross-party support of many town and parish councils throughout Dorset as well as Dorset CPRE, Dorset Wildlife Trust and most other environmental and nature conservation charities and organisations in Dorset, and will it also now press the new Government for an early decision on the creation of such an exciting and pioneering entity in Dorset?

### **Response from Cllr N Ireland**

Thank you for your question. Dorset Council is committed to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty within our National Landscapes as well as the Outstanding Universal Value of our Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site. We are also actively working to promote nature recovery and to address the climate and ecological emergency through our plans, programmes and well-established partnerships, which stretch across many organisations and community groups. This includes engaging with the Marine Management Organisation on addressing local marine nature recovery. This Council has set out its strategic priorities and will continue to engage in initiatives where these demonstrably add value in helping us to deliver better outcomes for Dorset and its communities.



## Question 2 – submitted by Mr A Bailey

For the first time, the Dorset Council's budget will be hitting a record £416 million—nearly £1.2 million per day (1). I could dwell on the penny-pinching of new evening parking charges, despite election promises to reduce costs. Instead, let's focus on where our money is really going (2) from the pennies to the pounds, and then the big ticket item.

Monthly, Dorset Council spends tens of thousands on agency staff, yet smaller sums are just as eyebrow-raising. £3,000 was handed to ACTIVIST GROUP LIMITED in December 2024 for a Director's Office—reminiscent of a Boris-like Downing Street refurb, I wonder (3). In July, £51,000 went to CARE DORSET LIMITED for fireworks, oddly categorised as "Health & Safety"—supposedly a lavish show at the taxpayers' expense. In April and August, UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS DORSET got £72,000 for "Smoking & Tobacco" with little explanation. One can only hope this isn't funding smoking breaks!

In June, the council forked out £400,000 (4) to BERYL BIKES who supplied 121 e-bikes, only for the firm to partly pull out this month (5). October saw £840,000 spent on snow management from AEBI SCHMIDT UK LTD; despite just a light dusting of January snow, gritters were out at 8:30 PM last Wednesday in 7-degree weather. Wouldn't expanding contracts with local farmers have been a more practical solution. Then, in September, NEWTON CONSULTING LTD bagged £400,000 for Adult Social Care consultancy, adding to the £14.5 million already spent yearly—nearly 3% of that budget!

There's much more to scrutinise. The big ticket item is CARE DORSET LIMITED (6), with six highly paid directors and costing £2.3 million per month, alongside agency staff spending. Wouldn't it be more cost-effective to contract private care homes per bed rather than run services in-house, avoiding costs like pensions, HR, administration, and the overheads of owning six properties. The Guardian (7) notes 84% of care home beds in England are privately owned, highlighting the sector's dominance.

To my question: Nearly £340,000 has been spent over nine months on internal audits with SOUTH WEST AUDIT PARTNERSHIP LIMITED. While internal audits serve a purpose, they are ultimately conducted by an organisation working closely with the council. Will the Cabinet commit to commissioning an independent external financial audit to effectively address wasteful and unnecessary spending?

Such an audit should be fully transparent to the public, going beyond a routine review of figures to scrutinise the **justification** behind spending decisions. It should ask *why* certain expenditures were made, whether they delivered genuine value for money, and how future financial decisions can be more accountable. A truly independent review would help rebuild public trust and ensure that every penny is spent wisely.

## References

1. <https://www.dorsetecho.co.uk/news/24845258.dorset-council-job-losses-maximum-rise-council-tax-expected/>
2. <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/w/payments-to-suppliers-over-500>
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-56878663>
4. <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/news/beryl-e-bike-share-launch-in-weymouth-on-20-august>
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c9d5qgzl8l2o>
6. <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/13873953>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/sep/19/84-of-care-home-beds-in-england-owned-by-private-firms>

## Response from Cllr S Clifford

"Thank you for your question Mr Bailey and for your commitment to monitoring Council finances, as the Council is spending public funds, it is crucial that we all play our part in ensuring funds are used appropriately and achieve value for money.

Before turning to your question, I must attend to some of the areas where your interpretation of spend is inaccurate.

1. Activist Group assisted with a review of the operating model for the Dorset Innovation Park. Their website gives examples of the type of work they are typically engaged in.
2. The payments to Care Dorset are described on the report as "Fire Works" not fireworks. These are correctly categorised as health and safety as they relate to fire warden cover to continue to keep our residents safe.
3. The payments to University Hospitals Dorset referring to smoking & tobacco are not to fund smoking breaks. The payment is for a smoking cessation programme.
4. £840k to Aebi Schmidt UK Ltd was part of vehicle replacement i.e. buying gritters. Gritters are deployed when cold weather is forecast and where possible in a preventative manner where there is a forecast that temperatures will drop to the threshold of +0.5C.
5. The 6 directors listed for Care Dorset are employed in a non-executive directors.

Hopefully providing this additional information provides some reassurance and serves as a reminder of the subjective nature of expenditure.

Turning to your question seeks an independent view of Council Finances, and in particular an independent view on wasteful spending - in essence, where value for money to the taxpayer has not been achieved.

I can confirm that through the Public Sector Audit Appointment Appointments (PSAA) the Council appoints its external Auditors, Grant Thornton UK LLP, to undertake the external audit. This includes a full audit of the Council's statement of accounts and also reports on the Council's arrangements for Value for Money. Grant Thornton are scheduled to present their findings later this month at the Audit & Governance Committee on 24 February 2025 and I would encourage you to review these once published in the week prior to the meeting.

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## Full Council

11<sup>th</sup> February 2025

### Questions submitted by Councillors

#### **Question 1 – submitted by Cllr C Lugg (on behalf herself, Cllr Julie Robinson, Cllr Mike Parkes and Cllr Andrew Parry)**

The A348, Ringwood Road runs through Longham, the centre of Ferndown, and on to Tricketts Cross where it joins the A31. Residents constantly complain about the large number of HGVs travelling through the town, many coming from the port of Poole, and going on to other routes upcountry. After years of trying, last year Cllr Parkes and I persuaded Dorset Council to reduce the speed on this road to 30mph, thanks to Cllr Ray Bryan and the TCF team. A resident who lives along Ringwood Road at Longham, tells me this has had some impact on HGV traffic, as during busy times, it no longer shows as the fastest route.

When the A31 bypass was built, the opportunity to direct traffic away from Ferndown Town Centre was missed. More recently Dorset LEP funded an upgrade to Gravel Hill which was again meant to address the issue. Again, Ferndown were let down.

As well as travelling through the Town Centre traffic has to negotiate Longham Bridge. This bridge is unsuitable for HGVS as only one can traverse the bridge at a time, and there have been collisions, vehicles stuck and frequent damage to the bridge. It needs a weight restriction but as an A road this isn't possible.

I believe that Cllr Bryan, when he was cabinet member for Highways, had conversations with Highways England about downgrading the A348 to a B road, to facilitate a weight restriction.

Will Dorset Council commit to working with National Highways to make this a reality?

#### **Response by Cllr J Andrews**

The current arrangement is that freight traffic travelling to the Port of Poole is signed along the A349 Gravel Hill and traffic leaving the port is signed along the A348 Ringwood Road. Any change to this arrangement would require a joint agreement with National Highways, and BCP Council to sign all port related traffic along the A31 and A349 rather than the A348. However, not all freight traffic is going to the Port and there are other significant industrial estates in the North Poole and Bournemouth area that are more easily accessed via the A348. With limited numbers of river crossings and associated primary routes to and from the BCP area, the impact of any new weight limit on one corridor on the others must be carefully considered.

While we have no intention of downgrading the route at the current time, we will continue to work to deliver highway improvement schemes on Ringwood Road and through

Ferndown town centre that will help to reduce vehicle speeds, improve the public realm and dissuade HGV's from using the A348 in future. We are also investigating what minor improvements could be made to the approach to Longham Bridge to help reduce bridge strikes.

I will ask officers to advance discussions with National Highways and BCP regarding changing the signed freight route and report back to me.

## **Question 2 – Submitted by Cllr M Parkes**

As local ward councillors Cathy Lugg and I would like to fully understand what Dorset Council's intentions are for Victoria Road in Ferndown.

Following our ward member work with the excellent team from Litter Free Dorset we welcome the funds that have been made available to make some improvements with regards to the seating and planters adjacent to the library which has acted as a catalyst for the Town Council to fund the removal of all the trees and replace street furniture in the road.

Many shop keepers and local residents have asked us why the planters and trees have been removed when no consideration is being given to the issues of people parking on the pavements as on street parking was very much a fundamental to any regeneration of the street scene.

Without the planters we are left with a lifeless concrete street which has given the even wider pavements exacerbating the existing inappropriate parking issues.

When Dorset Council publicly committed to the regeneration project in early 2024, officers were actively seeking pots of money they believed could fund the much needed improvements and we are saddened that this activity has ceased to the detriment of our residents however we understand that the Town Council has been promised £89,000 as part of the Capital Leverage Fund to carry out works in Victoria Road which we welcome, although it seems strange that Dorset Council would give money to the Town Council to carry out work on Dorset Council land rather than retaining the project itself.

We now understand that Dorset Council Officers have been tasked with designing the new streetscape. We would like to know what the timescales for the design and implementation and how this is going to be funded by Dorset Council. We'd also like to understand when we will be involved as ward members in a project that we were previously leading on at a local level rather than finding out through third parties as is currently the situation. It does seem like for some inexplicable reason we are currently being excluded from something that sits in



the heart of our ward and that we have both been actively campaigning about for at least the past ten years.

Ferndown's town centre not only serves the residents of the largest inland town in Dorset but also used regularly by its surrounding communities of West Parley, West Moors, St Leonards & St Ives and Verwood. The residents of Ferndown and the wider East Dorset deserve commitment and project ownership from Dorset Council.

### **Response by Cllr J Andrews**

All the trees in Victoria Road were subject to a full tree survey. This confirmed that the health of all trees was deteriorating, and they would all need to be removed within the short to medium term. In addition, all the planters which contained trees were a health and safety risk. As a result of these two facts, it was decided that the safest and most cost-effective decision was to remove all trees and planters immediately.

Dorset Council are currently working with Ferndown Town Council on producing a variety of options for Victoria Road. These will be fully costed and will take account of the current pavement parking. The two councils will work together to identify an appropriate and suitable budget for the work. As soon as plans are available, there will be a consultation exercise with residents and business owners.

Design and delivery is being managed by the Strategic Projects Team within Highway Improvements. Their work being funded by the Local Transport Plan. The design team was briefed in late Jan '25 and are developing the project plan. They intend to contact the Town Council and ward members for detailed scoping discussions to establish aspirations for the area such as holding a Christmas market. This more detailed scoping discussion will help to ensure the proposals meet and accommodate these aspirations. The project programme is in development and it is not possible to give an implementation date at this stage. However, the team will undertake the detailed scoping discussion in late February. The team, in consultation with local members, will approach the FTC in late March to discuss and refine emerging options. It is expected that the feasibility design options will be ready for further public engagement in May 2025 which is to be led by Ferndown Town Council.

This is a joint project between FTC and DC. The infrastructure going in will be owned and managed by FTC and not by DC, therefore it is important that FTC take a leading role in this and involve the DC councillors. The design team will contact the ward members for the more detailed scoping discussions. Joseph Rose also informed Cllr. Lugg that his team were looking at the project on 31 January 2025.

### **Question 3 – Submitted by Cllr M Parkes**

Whilst I appreciate there may be commercial sensitives please can I have an update on the sale of the former East Dorset District Council site at Furzehill which has been ongoing for over five years.

Like most of the elected members in the East of Dorset we would like to understand if this money will be ringfenced for capital projects that would be of benefit to residents in the former local authority's geographical area or whether we will see this money propping up funding shortfalls in places such as Weymouth and Dorchester.

**Response by Cllr R Biggs**

Following a marketing campaign in 2024 the Council appointed a preferred bidder for the site. The bidder is proposing a residential development. Formal approval will be required from Dorset Council Cabinet to proceed with the transaction. Before seeking Cabinet approval and before the transaction can proceed, Council officers are working with the preferred bidder to resolve a public right-of-way claim across the site to the satisfaction of the applicant and the prospective purchaser.

Capital receipts from property disposals are not ringfenced for the benefit of specific geographical areas within the County.

**Question 4 - Submitted by Cllr B Quayle**

**The Blandford Youth and Community Centre**

Will the Cabinet Member for Children's Services formally launch an investigation into the recent collapse of the Blandford Youth and Community Centre? This facility has been an integral part of the community, providing essential services and support to local youth and residents. The abrupt closure has caused significant concern among community members, who are keen to understand the circumstances leading to this decision.

As one of the local members, I ask that you investigate the matter thoroughly and provide a detailed report on the reasons behind the closure, any contributing factors, the steps being taken to address the situation, and how previous Dorset Council funding was used to support the Blandford Youth and Community Centre.

**Response by Cllr C Sutton**

Thank you Cllr Quayle for your question, and I share the concern of community members at the closure of youth club delivered by Blandford Youth Centre Charity. The final decision to close the provision was taken by the trustees, which is their right. As the centre was not run or managed by Dorset Council it would not be appropriate for us to undertake an investigation.

I know considerable efforts were made during the autumn to keep the club open, which you and Cllr Lacey-Clarke were involved in, alongside the then Service Manager for Young and Thriving and the CEO of Dorset Youth Association, which is grant funded by the council to provide support and advice to VCS organisations. Several actions were considered, including how new trustees could be recruited, negotiation with the school about the building costs, and whether the building could be used as a Family Hub - which under the DfE Guidance was not possible.

I can also confirm that the Youth and Community Centre received grants from our Youth Fund in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024.

I absolutely recognise the impact that this will have on the Blandford community and will be meeting with trustees from the Treads Youth Advice and Information Centre, alongside officers from Children's Services and Dorset Youth Association, on 20<sup>th</sup> February.

This meeting will look to identify how we can work with community partners to mitigate the loss of the youth centre and ensure local young people have access to a trusted adult and a safe place to go, and I welcome your support and involvement in how we address these challenges. The Head of Commissioning for Family Help would also be happy to meet with you to discuss.

#### **Question 5 - Submitted by Cllr B Quayle**

##### **The Veteran Friendly Framework (VFF)**

The Veteran Friendly Framework (VFF) is a collaborative initiative spearheaded by the Royal British Legion, Royal Star & Garter, and the Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance. Its goal is to enhance the health and wellbeing of veterans residing in care homes across England. Although there is no specific mandate requiring all councils to have their care providers enrol in the VFF, some councils and care providers choose to participate voluntarily to better support veterans.

The VFF comprises eight standards that care providers must meet to gain accreditation. These standards include identifying veterans' wellbeing needs, addressing social isolation, and providing signposting to local support services, among others.

Can the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care confirm whether Dorset Council mandates our care providers to enrol in the Veteran Friendly Framework? If not, could you please explain why?

##### **Response by Cllr S Robinson**

Thank you for the question. It raises an important point about how well our local residential care sector supports the needs of veterans in their later life. Dorset has a strong connection with the armed forces. Nationally, 8% of people in residential care are estimated to be veterans; for Dorset this would be around 250 people – and probably, in reality, more.

All residential care providers are expected to work closely with residents to understand their backgrounds, interests and experiences, and to build a personalised support plan for them. This should include past armed forces service where it is a significant part of a person's life story. The Veteran Friendly Framework would strengthen this.

Nationally, there are 120 care homes signed up to the Framework. There are none in Dorset. It would appear from this that no local authorities mandate the Veteran Friendly Framework as part of contracting.

We don't have the authority to mandate the Veteran Friendly Framework across all of the 100 or so residential and nursing homes in the county. Because of where we are in the award of contracts under the Dorset Care Framework, the timing would be problematic right now to try and mandate the Framework through those contracts. We can look to build this up over time, however.

As a first step we intend to immediately start raising awareness of the Framework amongst our local residential care sector. Prompted by your question, I have asked the Corporate Director for Commissioning & Improvement for adult social care to make contact with the Dorset Care Association to explore how this can be moved forward. Early engagement has been very positive, and there is a shared sense that local homes would be eager to understand more and engage with the Framework.

#### **Question 6 - Submitted by Cllr R Bryan**

Can the Portfolio Holder for Place Services explain why the failed trial of reducing the cost of parking in a select number of tier three car parks is to be continued.

The word failed is not my word but those of the most senior officer in Place Services and was used at the scrutiny meeting when discussing the result of the trial.

The cost of the failure is circa a quarter of a million pounds.

This resulted in a quarter of a million pounds being unavailable to spend on road repairs or other Highways issues such as pot holes, cleaning drains etc.

When the parking review took place on my watch as Portfolio Holder, we spent a year looking at how we could better control the churn of motorists so that spaces would become available to those wishing to visit the areas for a short time to enable them to shop etc.

The result was to introduce three tiers of car parking charges across the Dorset Council area.

Tier 1 was for the smaller type car parks found in villages and rural areas.

Tier 2 was for the larger towns

Tier 3 was for those areas of high demand of both local and visiting motorists where local people found difficulty finding car park spaces and therefore drove around these areas looking for an available space. Hence burning fuel and emitting exhaust gases into the local air.

To help the local residents we also introduced a totally new system of car parking permits. These were only available to residents and people permanently working in the Dorset Council area.

The result of the failed experiment is reduced income.

Highways repairs feature in the top three priorities in the residents survey so a loss of funding created by this failed exercise was a loss of money to repair our roads.

I am proud of the work of our highways team, we have some of the best maintained roads in the country. These are not my words but words of the many visitors who visit the lovely county of Dorset.

To improve our network of roads we need more revenue for Highways not less.

My question is as the experiment failed and cost money what is the thinking behind the decision to repeat this experiment.

### **Response by Cllr J Andrews**

Thank you Cllr Bryan. We've been clear that we will listen to our residents, and act on what they said in a meaningful and positive way. The trial reduction in car parking charges at Swannery in Weymouth, West Bay Road in West Bay, and Charmouth Road in Lyme Regis shows how we are delivering on this commitment. The reduced charges in those car parks will continue as this has been well received by residents and local businesses.

I've looked at the recording from Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 14 November 2024 and note that rather than describing the trial as 'failed', the Executive Director for Place explained that it would be statistically impossible to link any change in behaviour to changes in car park pricing alone. In the upcoming parking review, part of the scope will involve determining if there is available data that can link car parking charges with local economic activity. Retaining the reduced prices again this summer will allow two years of data to be produced, which will help to give a better understanding of the trial's impact and benefits to local businesses.

Increasing parking charges is always a difficult decision, and I thank you for highlighting that the money generated from parking income funds work like clearing drains and keeping our roads safe. Within the overall changes in parking tariffs proposed for this year, there will be a net increase in the amount of money generated, which will go back into providing the essential services you've described.

# Appendix

Those of us who were councillors prior to 2024 know that this is always challenging, largely because successive Conservative governments have decimated funding to local government, and because Dorset has fared particularly poorly, despite having a full suite of Conservative MPs until last year. And now the Labour government has indirectly walloped us on National Insurance, and so it goes on. Quite simply though, whilst we'll continue to express our consternation and to lobby, we have to serve our residents to the best of our ability regardless.

This is why I voted for last 4 budgets and, subject to this evening's debate, intend to vote for this one. The Green Group doesn't 'whip' – we each vote as our judgement and conscience dictates - but we seek consensus where possible.

On balance, we all intend to support this budget for the following reasons:

- The Lib Dem manifesto which informs it was similar to our own. We too prioritised housing and responding to the climate crisis, but also Children and Young People, which is captured in 'Communities for All' and which I push as a priority through my Cabinet role, and Public Transport, where we continue to push for greater investment
- The transfer of assets and some services to town and parish councils is long overdue, as is the disposal of surplus assets, so we welcome the capital investment which will kick start this process in terms of getting them up to standard
- We also welcome the priority pot, not least because it will enable us to green our fleet and hence contribute significantly to carbon reduction
- And, in uncertain and challenging times, rebuilding reserves which were substantially eroded under the previous administration is surely essential

We also believe that change can be an opportunity as well as a threat. It is vital that we communicate openly and effectively with our staff so they are engaged in rather than alienated by the transformation programme.

In conclusion, we won't all agree with everything in here – Cllr Bawden would like more for buses, Cllr Gibson would like more for Economic Development, I'd like more for Youth Clubs – but we have statutory responsibilities and increasing levels of need within adults' and children's social care, and are obliged to set a balanced budget. In the interests of ALL Dorset residents we have a collective responsibility to prioritise and, on balance, my Green colleagues and I believe this budget does that.

Councillor Clare Sutton

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Budget speech 25-26

Thank you Chair,

Cllr Rob Hughes ward member for the isle and Royal Manor of Portland, the jewel in Dorsets Crown.

On behalf of the Independents of Dorset I would like to say the following regarding this Budget for 25-26.

I had hoped to have started my speech by thanking the new Labour Government for increasing their grant support aid. Alas I can't do that as they have given so little funding to Dorset, whilst forcing the council to raise the highest available council tax from our residents.

Setting a budget of £417m for the year ahead and with rising costs, the council has calculated we are looking at an increase in spending of over £85 million pounds to deliver its services in 25-26. This is due to the ever-growing need for the support services within our community, with extra demand for housing and children's services and a population that is getting older every year. In fact, we have the oldest demographic in the country and one of the highest levels of council tax.

To meet this £85m spending increase, the Government has provided us with an extra £3.9 million of funding. The remainder is to come from £18.3 million raised by increasing the council tax to the allowable maximum of 4.99% (this includes 2% for the adult care precept), giving us a sum of £22.2 million increasing to £40.5m of revenue when combined with other income sources that the council

receives, leaving the council with a shortfall of £44.6m to meet its statutory commitments. This Shortfall will be met by savings and efficiencies that have been identified by the council.

The Officers of the council have worked hard to bring in a balanced budget in these difficult circumstances and we take this opportunity to thank them for the time spent in grappling with the budget for the fiscal year ahead.

The two scrutiny committee members have also worked with our officers, we have attended the budget cafes that were arranged for us, and we all understand the pressures ahead of us.

Despite the continuing lack of government funding we will be supporting this budget and all the difficult adjustments that will have to be made in-order to fund this shortfall, as we are forced to transform the council to meet our obligations.

In future the Government must change the way it delivers local authority funding or else it could well be facing a whole raft of councils going bust in the coming months ahead, despite their best efforts.

11<sup>th</sup> February.

Cllr Kate Wheller, Leader, Labour Group, Rodwell and Wyke Ward.

May I start by thanking Aiden and all the finance team for their work on the budget for 2025/26. A task that becomes more difficult every year.

Each year we complain that the RSG formula does not favour Dorset and representations have not been heard. If I reiterate that sentiment I know there will be sneers from opposition colleagues. However, that is still the case and there has been insufficient time for our new Labour MP's to make any meaningful difference. We must collectively work for those changes over the coming year.

We regularly speak of the low base rate in Weymouth and Portland but actually 51% of Dorset homes are in Bands A – C. Dorset is currently home to a high percentage of over 80's, very many of these are not self funding when they require care. We are seen as rural but we have a large conurbation with high house prices and low wages, where there are jobs at all. All these factors impact on the budget setting process.

Accepting that we are in a difficult position this year and unpalatable decisions need to be made we are alarmed by many of the elements of the budget. Cllr Kimber and I are concerned about the proposed redundancies, we have sought reassurance that loss of staff will be managed sensitively and will not seriously impact upon our ability to deliver services. We will be monitoring this.

Proposals for spending our income across the County seem ill -thought through. We are concerned at how small the budget is for supporting business and creating jobs. We believe this should be given a greater priority. Growing our local economy is our way out of our difficulties, both financial and social. We know this and yet still this administration insists on woolly aspiration completely devoid of all substance.

We pride ourselves on the diverse cultural offer across the County, and yet we intend to charge to park at night. That will seriously impact not just Weymouth but all our towns. Suggesting that a season ticket will mitigate, is I am afraid nonsense. Many of our residents will simply stop coming into town at all. No

increased revenue for the Council and reduced income for our businesses. We are selling assets, sometimes rightly so, but let's look more imaginatively at how those assets could create more sustainable wealth.

I cannot support a budget that will impact so heavily upon the Counties night-time economy., and pays so little attention to investment for growth.

Please colleagues when agreeing this budget do not just grab at the quick wins think more imaginatively with more true vision. The Liberal Democrats promised a new broom, would they like me to buy one.

Thank you.