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CABINET

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 29 JANUARY 2026

Present: Cllrs Nick Ireland (Chair), Richard Biggs (Vice-Chair), Jon Andrews, Shane Bartlett, Simon Clifford, Ryan Hope, Steve Robinson, Clare Sutton, Gill Taylor and Ben Wilson

Also present: Cllr Andrew Parry, Cllr Les Fry and Cllr David Northam

Also present remotely: Cllr Louise Bown, Cllr Belinda Bawden, Cllr Alex Brenton, Cllr Ray Bryan, Cllr Simon Christopher, Cllr Beryl Ezzard, Cllr Barry Goringe, Cllr Jill Haynes, Cllr Rob Hughes, Cllr Jack Jeanes, Cllr Sherry Jespersen, Cllr Carole Jones, Cllr Stella Jones, Cllr Chris Kippax, Cllr Craig Monks, Cllr David Morgan, Cllr Byron Quayle, Cllr Belinda Ridout, Cllr Jane Somper, Cllr Gary Suttle and Cllr Andy Todd

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):
Jan Britton (Executive Director - Place), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic & Governance Services Officer), Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic and Governance Officer), Jonathan Price (Executive Director of People - Adults and Housing), Lisa Cotton (Corporate Director for Transformation, Customer and Cultural Services), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), Catherine Howe (Chief Executive), Jack Wiltshire (Corporate Director for Highways and Engineering), Nina Coakley (Head of Transformation and Design) and Mike Garrity (Corporate Director for Planning)

Officers present remotely (for all or part of the meeting):
Sean Cremer (Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial), Sam Crowe (Director of Public Health), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children) and Steven Ford (Corporate Director for Strategy, Performance and Sustainability)

19. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

20. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest to report.

The Director of Legal & Democratic and the Monitoring Officer advised that in respect of Item 19 “Weymouth Neighbourhood Plan”, three members of Cabinet, Cllrs Simon Clifford, Ryan Hope and Gill Taylor were members of Weymouth Town Council as well as councillors at Dorset Council.

Weymouth Town Council had met on 20 November 2024 to endorse the submission of the draft Neighbourhood Plan to Dorset Council, independent inspection and a referendum.

The Director of Legal & Democratic and the Monitoring Officer confirmed that these councillors had not predetermined the report before Cabinet and he had advised those members concerned that they were able to take part in the debate and decision.

21. **Public Participation**

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

22. **Questions from Councillors**

There were no formal questions from Councillors.

23. **Forward Plan**

The draft Cabinet Forward Plan for March was received and noted.

STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader of the Council made a statement explaining how reports 7 to 10 on the agenda demonstrated the way investment, planning, and financial decisions combined to deliver tangible progress against each of Dorset Council's Plan Priorities. The statement is provided at Appendix 2 to these minutes.

24. **Climate programme capital workstreams over £500K**

The Leader of the Council, Climate, Performance and Safeguarding introduced a report outlining the Capital Programme and the proposed capital investment across a broad range of projects within the Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy 2023 – 25. The remaining funding allocation for 2025-2027 (£4m) involved expenditure exceeding the £500k threshold, meaning Cabinet approval was required for the projects detailed in the report.

It was proposed by Cllr N Ireland and seconded by Cllr J Andrews

Decision

(a) That the spend from the corporate climate capital programme for those elements identified as over £500k, as set out in the report to Cabinet or 29 January 2026, be approved.

Specifically:

(i) £700k for the installation of the next phase of solar PV across the council's estate, and

(ii) £1.3m for replacement of more old, obsolete street lighting with LED street lighting using the PFI contract and in line with the Council’s street lighting policy adopted September 2025.

(b) That authority be delegated to the Corporate Director for Strategy, Performance and Sustainability in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate, Performance and Safeguarding, to approve further individual item spend within the remaining climate capital allocation, for the identified projects.

Reason for the Decision

There was £4m remaining in the climate capital programme. Two workstreams allocated within the current climate capital programme had identified the requirement for spend above the £500k cabinet approval threshold, with the total of these amounting to £2m. Delegating approval for the further spend within the remaining allocation would allow the projects outlined in the report to proceed.

25. **Active Travel Infrastructure Plan**

The Cabinet Member for Place Services set out the referral from the Place and Resources Overview Committee meeting held on 25 September 2025, seeking Cabinet’s support to approve the Active Travel Plan.

It was proposed by Cllr J Andrews and seconded by Cllr S Robinson

Decision

That the Active Travel Infrastructure Plan be approved.

Reason for the decision

To enable the Active Travel Infrastructure Plan to be implemented.

26. **Transforming Public and Community Transport**

The Cabinet Member for Place Services presented a report outlining the strategic direction for transforming public and community transport in Dorset. The report identified current challenges and set out the intention to develop a Full Business Case to deliver a more inclusive, reliable and community-focused transport system from 2027.

Non-executive members expressed support for the proposals and welcomed the future development of the detailed business case. Questions were raised regarding the approach to community engagement, particularly ensuring that local action groups could contribute, and about providing adequate support for smaller parishes where the need for community transport was significant.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Place Services welcomed members' comments and confirmed that consultation would take place following completion of the Full Business Case. This would involve both public and stakeholder engagement.

It was proposed by Cllr J Andrews and seconded by Cllr S Clifford

Decision

(a) That the strategic direction for transforming public and community transport, as set out in the report of 29 January 2026, be endorsed

(b) That the development of a Full Business Case exploring the range of options for delivering a modern, integrated and community-focused transport system, including financial, procurement, and consultation plans to enable implementation from April 2027, be approved.

Reason for the decision

To secure Cabinet endorsement for the strategic direction and authorise preparation of a Full Business Case for improving public and community transport, ensuring alignment with the council's community-focused agenda, and enabling timely planning for investment, procurement, and consultation ahead of implementation in 2027.

27. **Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan Strategy Report (MTFP)**

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Capital Strategy presented the Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan Strategy report for recommendation to Full Council.

In setting out the report and its recommendations, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Strategy gave a wider overview of the context influencing the Council's financial position. He highlighted that Dorset, as a predominantly rural county with a significantly aging population, continued to face challenges which were not fully reflected in national funding allocations. Also, the Council received comparatively less transport support than neighbouring authorities, and the area's seasonal economy contributed to younger residents leaving the county in search of stable employment.

The Cabinet Member continued that the introduction of a three-year financial settlement was welcomed; however, in real terms Dorset would see a reduction of £6 million over that period. He explained that business rates have fallen by 15%, and this financial backdrop contributed to the need for a 4.99% increase in council tax, which, while disappointing, was presented as a direct consequence of the national approach to funding distribution and its impact on Dorset.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged the contributions of the budget cafés, and the recommendations and comments from the Scrutiny Committees; and these along with the responses were set out in Appendix 9 to the report (circulated as a supplement).

Non-Cabinet members asked several questions around Adult Social Care and Children Services. There was also frustration expressed regarding the government's settlement, and it was hoped that the Council would continue to apply pressure on central government for improved funding.

Members welcomed the introduction of the budget simulator and expressed a hope that it would be utilised again next year.

Before the recommendations were put to the vote, individual Cabinet members were given an opportunity to draw attention to how the budget specifically impacted their portfolio areas, and the steps being taken to manage financial pressures through efficiencies while continuing to support vulnerable residents and essential infrastructure.

Cllr S Clifford proposed the recommendations 1 to 13 of the report and these were seconded by Cllr S Robinson.

Recommendation to Full Council

1. That the revenue budget summarised in Appendix 1 of the report to Cabinet of 29 January 2026, be agreed.

2. That the increase in general Council Tax of 2.9985% and 1.9919% in the Social Care Precept, providing a Band D Council Tax figure for Dorset Council of £2,205.90; an overall increase of 4.9904%, be agreed and that the Council Tax resolution in Appendix 2 be agreed.

3. That the Council Tax base of 163,765.1 and Band D equivalents (188,374 households in total) agreed by the Section 151 Officer earlier in this budget setting process, be noted.

4. 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 3.8%, be noted.

5. That the Capital Strategy set out in Appendix 7, be agreed.

6. That the "standing items" included with the Capital Programme as set out in Appendix 3 to be report, be agreed.

7. That the introduction of three formal gateways for capital projects: (i) Business case approval, (ii) Budget allocation, and (iii) Procurement approval by Cabinet or delegated authority, set out in the capital section of the report to cabinet be agreed.

8. That the Treasury Management Strategy set out in Appendix 8 be agreed.

9. That the assumptions used to develop the Budget Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), as set out throughout the report to Cabinet, be noted.

10. That the recommended balances on earmarked reserves and on general funds, including the minimum level of the general fund, be agreed.

11. That the responses to the recommendations and comments made as part of the budget scrutiny process, as set out in Appendix 9, be agreed.

12. That the recommendations 2.1.1 and 2.2.2 from 3 December 2025 Harbour Advisory Committee meeting regarding fees and charges, budget and asset management plans, as set out at Appendix 6, be agreed.

13. That the fees and charges for 2026/27, as set out in Appendix 10, be agreed.

Reason for the recommendation

In accordance with its statutory duties, the Council was required each year to set a balanced revenue budget, including the determination of the Council Tax Level. A balanced budget ensures that all planned expenditure was met from the councils regular and sustainable income, rather than from one-off or short-term sources of funding.

The council must also approve a Capital Strategy, a capital programme and budget, and a treasury management strategy, all of which were presented within the report.

28. **December 2025 Quarter 3 financial management report 2025/26**

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Strategy introduced the quarter 3 financial management report which provided a comprehensive overview of Dorset Council's financial position as of 31 December 2025. The report also highlighted key challenges, risk and actions for the 2025/2026 fiscal year.

Cabinet noted

(a) That the Senior Leadership Team's forecast as of December 2025 including progress on the transformational and efficiency savings incorporated into the budget, be noted.

(b) That the capital programme for 2025/26, be noted.

(c) That the number and extent of contract exemptions, be noted.

Reason for the report

To ensure the Council could set and deliver a balanced budget, this report provided an update on the forecast financial position for 2025/26 and the significant operational and financial pressures facing the organisation. In a challenging national context for local authorities, effective oversight of activities and budgets was essential to maintain financial sustainability, support delivery of

Council Plan priorities, and ensure the Council continued to provide vital services and wider economic benefits.

29. **School Admission Arrangements 2027-2028**

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills presented the annual report that asked members to approve the policies that make up Dorset Council's School Admission Arrangements. Members were also asked to consider reductions in Pupil Admission Number (PAN) for William Barns Primary School and Wyke Regis Junior School.

It was proposed by Cllr C Sutton and seconded by Cllr S Robinson

Decision

(a) That the following policies that make up Dorset Council's School Admissions Arrangements and Coordinated Scheme for school place allocations for September 2027, be approved and adopted:

(i) Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme Timetable 2027-2028
(ii) Primary Co-ordinated Scheme 2027-2028
(iii) Secondary Co-ordinated Scheme 2027-2028
(iv) In Year Co-ordinated Scheme 2027-2028
(v) Admissions Arrangements for Community & Voluntary Controlled Schools 2027-2028.
(vi) Admissions to Maintained Nursery Units Policy 2027-2028
(vii) Sixth Form Admissions Policy 2027-2028
(viii) Armed Forces Policy 2027-2028

(b) In addition, the following reductions in Pupil Admissions Number (PAN), be approved.
(i) William Barnes Primary School reduction of their PAN from 30 to 20 with effect from September 2027.
(ii) Wyke Regis Junior School reduction of their PAN from 90 to 60 with effect from September 2027.

Reason for the decision

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

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

30. **Independent Reviewing Officer's Annual Report**

In presenting the report, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills advised that the paper had also been considered and scrutinised by the Corporate Parenting Board on 11 December 2025.

The annual report reviewed and monitored all plans for children's services and the evidence demonstrated that the service continued to develop and supported children to be well cared for.

In response to a question relating to support for the most vulnerable children including SEND and children with speech and language difficulties, the Cabinet Member agreed to have a conversation with the individual member outside of the meeting.

It was proposed by Cllr C Sutton and seconded by Cllr S Robinson.

Decision

That the contents of the annual report be received and noted.

Reason for the decision

To ensure that the QARO service continued to develop and evolve to offer the best possible support and challenge to the Local Authority in meeting the needs of our children in care, and to ensure voices of children and young people in care were heard and acted upon.

31. **LADO (Local Authority Safeguarding Officer) Annual Report**

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills presented the annual report, which had also been considered and scrutinised by the Corporate Parenting Board on 11 December 2025.

It was proposed by Cllr C Sutton, seconded by Cllr R Biggs

Decision

That the annual report be received.

Reason for the decision

To provide a clear and comprehensive overview of the LADO service and ensure all stakeholders were fully informed via the LADO Annual Report.

32. **Coombe House Annual Performance Report 2025**

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills presented the referral from the Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence that met on 1 December 2026, to approve the Coombe House annual report.

In response to questions, the Cabinet Member reaffirmed the administration's commitments to Coombe House, noting that an options appraisal was currently underway to explore how different areas of the site could be further developed. It was acknowledged that, while significant progress had already been made with the school, there remained clear opportunities to do more and these were being actively considered as part of the appraisal process.

It was proposed by Cllr C Sutton and seconded by Cllr R Biggs

Decision

That the Coombe House annual report be received and noted.

Reason for the decision

To ensure that Cabinet was fully informed of the activities and work of Coombe House.

33. **Printing of Electoral Registration and Election Materials - procurement arrangements**

The Leader of the Council, Climate, Performance and Safeguarding outlined the report regarding the need to ensure continued provision of electoral registration and election printing services. The current contract had reached its approved duration and value, and therefore a short extension was required to maintain continuity of service while officers undertook a full review and procurement process.

It was proposed by Cllr N Ireland and seconded by Cllr R Hope

Decision

Cabinet agreed

(a) To a contract modification, in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015, Regulation 72, to the existing electoral registration and elections printing contract extending the term for a period of 6 months to 31 August 2026. The value of the permitted modification under Regulation 72 is no more than 10% of the initial contract value of £805,000 i.e. £80,500.

(b) To the commencement of a procurement exercise for a contract for electoral registration and election printing.

Reason for decision

The Council must maintain its ability to meet statutory obligations for delivering elections and electoral registration services, and the current supplier had provisionally agreed to extend the existing contract pending internal approvals. As the estimated value of the new electoral registration and elections printing contract is £1.85 million, exceeding the £500,000 financial threshold for key decisions, Cabinet approval was required to proceed with the procurement.

34. **East Devon Local Plan Consultation**

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning presented a report on the East Devon local plan consultation. The response to East Devon District Council was set out in detail as an appendix to the report and it ensured that the Council's views were considered in preparing the East Devon Local Plan and maintain appropriate co-operation during the production of both councils' local plans.

It was proposed by Cllr S Bartlett and seconded by Cllr B Wilson

Decision

That the response to East Devon District Council, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report of 29 January 2026, be agreed.

Reason for decision

To ensure that this Council's views were considered in preparing the East Devon Local Plan and maintain appropriate cooperation during the production of both councils' local plans.

35. **New Forest National Park Local Plan consultation response**

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning presented a report on the New Forest National Park Local Plan response.

The response to the consultation was set out at Appendix B of the report and Members were asked to endorse the comments that had been agreed by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning.

The Cabinet Member and Corporate Director for Planning confirmed that all approved development in Dorset included sufficient mitigation for impacts on internationally protected habitats. In the case of the New Forest, Dorset had a duty to ensure mitigation was in place; without it, those developments could not be approved. While the New Forest District Council delivered the mitigation, Dorset Council ensured the necessary contributions were passed to them. This process was based on the actual habitat impact not on administrative boundaries. The cost of Dorset Council's administrative process was met by the Community Infrastructure Levy.

It was proposed by Cllr S Bartlett and seconded by Cllr B Wilson

Decision

That the response agreed with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning, be endorsed.

Reason for the decision

Dorset Council must engage constructively with the New Forest National Park Authority in preparing its Local Plan, including responding to cross-boundary matters such as housing need and provision for gypsy, traveller and travelling showpeople. A draft consultation response, agreed with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning and included at Appendix B of the report of 29 January 2026, had been submitted to the Authority. Following Cabinet's consideration, Dorset Council would confirm that this response was final or amend and resubmit it to replace the original draft.

36. **Weymouth Neighbourhood Plan**

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning set out the report on the Weymouth Neighbourhood Plan that had been subject to independent examination and referendum. The Neighbourhood Plan would also replace the Sutton Poyntz Neighbourhood Plan.

In proposing the recommendation, the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning took the opportunity to thank Weymouth Town Council, the members of the Neighbourhood Plan Group and officers for producing the plan.

Cllr N Ireland seconded the motion.

Cabinet supported the recommendation and congratulated Weymouth Town Councillors and in particular Cllr D Northam for their hard work. Cllr D Northam spoke in support of the recommendation and thanked all those involved.

Decision

(a) That the Council ‘makes’ the Weymouth Neighbourhood Plan (as set out in Appendix A of the report of 29 January 2026) part of the statutory development plan for the Weymouth Neighbourhood Area, replacing the made Sutton Poyntz Neighbourhood Plan.

(b) That the Council offers its congratulations to Weymouth Town Council and members of the Neighbourhood Plan Group for producing a successful neighbourhood plan.

Reason for the decision

To formally ‘make’ the Weymouth Neighbourhood Plan part of the statutory development plan for the Weymouth Neighbourhood Area, replacing the made Sutton Poyntz Neighbourhood Plan. In addition, to recognise the significant amount of work undertaken by the Town Council and members of the Neighbourhood Plan Group in preparing the plan and to congratulate the Council and the Group on their success.

37. **Melbury Abbas and Cann Neighbourhood Development Plan**

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning set out the report on the Melbury Abbas and Cann Neighbourhood Plan that had been subject to independent examination and referendum.

In proposing the recommendation, the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning took the opportunity to thank Melbury Abbas and Cann Parish Council and members of the Neighbourhood Plan Group for producing a successful plan.

Cllr R Hope seconded the motion.

Cllr J Somper spoke in support of the recommendation and took the opportunity to thank the parish council and volunteers for their hard work in shaping the plan.

Decision

(a) That the Council 'makes' the Melbury Abbas and Cann Neighbourhood Development Plan (as set out in Appendix A of the report to cabinet 29 January 2026) part of the statutory development plan for the Melbury Abbas and Cann Neighbourhood Area.

(b) That the Council offers its congratulations to Melbury Abbas and Cann Parish Council and members of the Neighbourhood Plan Group for producing a successful neighbourhood plan.

Reason for the decision

To formally 'make' the Melbury Abbas and Cann Neighbourhood Development Plan part of the statutory development plan for the Melbury Abbas and Cann Neighbourhood Area. In addition, to recognise the significant amount of work undertaken by the Parish Council and members of the Neighbourhood Plan Group in preparing the plan and to congratulate the Council and the Group on their success.

38. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items considered at the meeting.

39. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business scheduled for this meeting.

Appendix 1 - Public Participation
Appendix 2 Statement of the Leader of the Council

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 8.13 pm

Chairman

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Cabinet 29 January 2026

Public Participation

Questions

1. Question from James Gillet

PREAMBLE

I have reviewed Section 11.1e of the Transforming Public and Community Transport report, which sets an 'hourly' target for core routes. In the Dorchester and Weymouth areas, busy services like the 1, 2, and 10 already run every 12–15 minutes; reducing these would be a major downgrade for this vital public transport link. Furthermore, residents are frustrated by First's aging fleet of buses and the lack of reliable, frequent direct links to major regional hubs like Poole and Yeovil, which restricts local job opportunities. I also support cheaper fares for 16-25s and a unified ticketing system to modernise our network in line with the high-quality Morebus model seen elsewhere in Dorset.

QUESTION

To achieve the modern vision in Section 4.3, will the Council commit to maintaining 10–15 minute high-frequency targets for busy urban routes across both Dorchester and Weymouth and include requirements for newer vehicles, a restored frequent and direct link to Poole and Yeovil for commuters, and a unified ticketing system rather than applying the lower hourly standard to these vital services?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Place Services

Thank you for your question. The Cabinet report does not propose reducing the frequency of any bus routes including the 1, 2 and 10 in Weymouth. We are seeking to find solutions in rural areas, where services are not commercially viable. Our strategic approach aims to build a more reliable and modern network, including working with operators to protect well used frequent routes, introducing newer and more accessible vehicles, strengthening regional links, and developing simpler and more affordable fares. Community input will be central to shaping the detailed proposals through the Full Business Case and consultation later this year. The next stage will examine these improvements in detail to ensure Dorset's network meets local needs, including the concerns you have raised.

2. Question from Karen Tippens

Statement on Use of Council Tax Where Section 106 Funding Exists

The proposed 12% increase in Shaftesbury Town Council's precept is not being driven by unavoidable costs, but by the use of Council Tax to fund projects that already have allocated Section 106 developer contributions and which, under proper governance, should not be impacting residents' council tax at all.

1. First, the Mampitts Hub.
Dorset Council Cabinet agreed in October 2025 that this project would be subject to strict project cost control and that early drawdown of Section 106 funds would be available. Despite this, over £60,000 of Council Tax has already been used to fund Mampitts Hub costs, with only a partial Section 106 reimbursement claimed. There is no evidence of a ringfenced project account, no clear reconciliation between Council Tax and Section 106 expenditure, and no published cost-control framework, despite Cabinet direction.

2. Second, Wincombe Recreational Park.
Dorset Council Cabinet papers confirm that £200,000 of Section 106 funding has been agreed with Shaftesbury Town Council for this project. Despite this, the Town Council has added £164,000 of Council Tax to the precept for Wincombe, without published project plans, delivery dates, or cost breakdowns. This represents Council Tax being used in place of developer contributions, contrary to the purpose of Section 106.

3. Third, the Youth Club.
There is £128,000 of Section 106 funding allocated, yet the Town Council has added £5,000 of Council Tax for this project. Again, Council Tax is being used where ringfenced developer funding already exists.
In addition, the precept includes:

- £19,000 in 'Professional and Legal' Cost Centre for “Dorset Council devolution”, with no definition, scope, or supporting agreement published.
- £25,000 for High Street traffic management under Ear Marked Reserve, despite Dorset Highways previously indicating that surveys could be undertaken at no cost to the Town Council.

Taken together, these decisions show a pattern where Council Tax is being used as a substitute for Section 106 funding, rather than Section 106 being used to reduce pressure on residents’ bills.
This matters because Section 106 contributions are intended to be spent as a priority in towns like Shaftesbury, which have experienced rapid housing development. When substantial Section 106 funding is allocated and available, Council Tax precepts should not be rising to fund the same infrastructure.
Question to Dorset Council Cabinet
Given the Cabinet decision of October 2025 requiring strict cost control on the Mampitts Hub, and given the confirmed allocation of Section 106 funding for Wincombe Recreation Park and the Youth Club, what action will Dorset Council now take to ensure that Section 106 funds are properly ringfenced, transparently accounted for, and used to reduce — rather than increase — Council Tax for Shaftesbury residents

Response from the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning

Thank you for your question. Dorset Council recognises the importance of good partnership working with town and parish councils and other organisations to deliver positive outcomes for Dorset’s communities. Therefore, Section 106 funding can be accessed by town and parish councils and some third-party organisations to deliver infrastructure. A protocol exists to support the review of projects and the eligibility of organisations. This process helps ensure that the transfer of contributions is transparent and fair to all.

Section 106 funding is a form of developer contribution which is secured through the planning process. In some cases, single contributions are insufficient to fund major transport, education, flood or community infrastructure, and new development will only be expected to pay for its fair and reasonable share. The use of s106 funds does not prevent the combined use of other sources of funding, as long as the s106 funding is spent on the infrastructure/purposes for which it was collected. When combined with other relevant contributions, government grants, regional funding or borrowing, s106 funds allow infrastructure to be delivered at scale that genuinely supports growth.

With regard the setting of local Town Council precepts, this decision lies with the Town Councillors so I can't comment on the basis for their decisions nor how they choose to allocate resources.

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The North Dorset Trailway Network is a registered charity working closely with Dorset Council to establish an uninterrupted off-road route (the Trailway) along the course of the old Somerset & Dorset Railway line, through the centre of Dorset between Stalbridge and Corfe Mullen, eventually to connect with the Castleman Trailway at Broadstone. The section of Trailway between Sturminster Newton and Spetisbury is of course now well established, and we are encouraged by the fact that the recent joint Dorset Council and BCP Council Local Transport Plan consultation included specific reference to completing the Trailway as a strategic objective. The Somerset & Dorset Railway once linked Bath and Poole and its closure in 1966 was one of the most controversial cuts of the Beeching Plan. Its repurposing today as an accessible cross country trailway could potentially be transformative. Most of the station sites may have been redeveloped, but the route of the old railway between the urban areas remains to a very large extent free of obstruction. The cost of repurposing a derelict railway route as a trailway for inclusive community use is significantly less costly than comparable travel schemes.

The Dorset Council Greenspace Service team, and all officers and councillors we meet or speak with are very supportive of our aims and appreciate the tremendous amenity and value to public health and wellbeing that a completed Trailway would provide. Proactive extension strategies are in place, both northwards from Sturminster Newton and southwards from Spetisbury. Completion of the southern extension to Sturminster Marshall would leave a tantalisingly 1.4 mile short gap to the A31, south of which the old railway trackbed is already Dorset Council owned and now used as a permissive path. Completion would also enable a far safer traffic free link between Wimborne and Blandford than the existing NCN 25 through the Stour Valley which utilises country lanes via Cowgrove, White Mill, Shapwick and Tarrant Crawford. This route can often be intimidating due to speeding traffic using the narrow lanes as a 'rat run'.

We welcome the proposed approval of the Active Travel Infrastructure Plan at today's Cabinet meeting. However, we are disappointed that the North Dorset Trailway, and its extensions north and south, have low, or non-existent profiles. With the increase in developments (and residents) in Stalbridge, the impetus to link with Sturminster Newton is overwhelming, yet this is not included. Spetisbury to Sturminster Marshall, where extensive new housing developments are proposed, and the new off-road section from Blandford St Mary to Wards Drove are both included as **'Long'** timescale schemes in the Blandford Forum delivery plan. We would therefore respectfully request that the priority of extending the North Dorset Trailway be increased. Thank you.

(447 words)

Mark Woolley
Secretary, North Dorset Trailway Network
Email: secretary@northdorsettrailway.org.uk
Tel: 07775 976559

Registered charity number 1145442

25th January 2026

Colleagues,

As we move into items **7 through 10**, we are brought right to the heart of our Council Plan and its four strategic priorities: **providing affordable and high-quality housing**, **growing our economy**, **supporting communities for all**, and **responding to the climate and nature crisis**. Tonight's sequence of reports shows how our investment, our planning, and our financial choices knit together to deliver tangible progress against each of those priorities.

Item 7, on *Climate Programme capital workstreams*, demonstrates our continued leadership in responding to the climate and nature emergency. The proposals to invest **£700k in additional solar PV** across our estate and **£1.3m in replacing obsolete streetlights with LEDs** directly accelerate our decarbonisation pathway—cutting emissions, reducing energy costs, and building a resilient, modern public estate. These projects are not just technical upgrades; they are enablers of a more sustainable Dorset, supporting cleaner air, safer streets, and long-term savings that protect frontline services. This is climate leadership in practice. 1

Item 8, the *Active Travel Infrastructure Plan*, strengthens our commitment to **communities for all** and to creating places where people can move safely and confidently. With more than **700km of walking, wheeling and cycling corridors assessed** and a prioritised programme of improvements, the ATIP will open up active, healthy, low-carbon travel for residents of all ages. It supports safe routes to school, improves independence for those without access to a car, and helps reduce congestion and emissions. Crucially, having this plan in place unlocks future Active Travel England funding—ensuring Dorset remains competitive when bidding for national investment. This is infrastructure that supports health, inclusion, and climate action side by side.

Item 9, on *Transforming Public and Community Transport*, speaks directly to our priorities around **growing the economy** and **strengthening communities**. Dorset's dispersed rural geography means we must think differently about mobility. Endorsing this strategic direction allows us to develop a Full Business Case for a modern, integrated system—bringing together public transport, school transport, community transport and demand-responsive services into a coherent network designed with and for our towns and parishes. This is a shift from fragmented provision to a genuine mobility partnership: giving people better access to work, learning, healthcare and community life; tackling rural isolation; helping local businesses; and supporting a greener future through reduced car dependency.

Finally, **Item 10**, our *Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan*, is the financial framework that makes all this delivery possible. Despite a very challenging national funding picture—and a continued, significant reliance on locally raised Council Tax—the proposed **2026/27 budget of £482.6m** protects essential services, prioritises our Council Plan commitments, and embeds the strategic investments we have just heard about. It includes substantial transformation, £18m in savings and efficiencies, and a responsible approach to risk and reserves. This is how we ensure financial sustainability while still making progress on housing, the economy, community resilience and climate action.

Taken together, items 7 to 10 show a council that is **clear in its priorities**, **responsible in its decision-making**, and **ambitious for Dorset's future**. Whether it is reducing our carbon footprint, enabling more sustainable travel, rethinking rural mobility, or safeguarding our financial stability, these papers demonstrate how we are delivering—practically, transparently, and in partnership—for the residents and communities we serve.