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CABINET

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 3 MARCH 2026

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

Present remotely: Cllrs Ben Wilson

Also present: Cllr Matt Bell, Cllr Simon Christopher, Cllr Spencer Flower, Cllr Les Fry, Cllr Rob Hughes, Cllr Andrew Parry, Cllr Gary Suttle and Cllr Chris Tomes

Also present remotely: Cllr Belinda Bawden, Cllr Ray Bryan, Cllr Beryl Ezzard, Cllr Sally Holland, Cllr Sherry Jespersen, Cllr David Morgan and Cllr Andy Todd

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

Catherine Howe (Chief Executive), Julia Ingram (Corporate Director for Adult Social Care Operations), Sean Cremer (Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic & Governance Services Officer), Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic and Governance Officer), Alice Deacon (Corporate Director for Commissioning and Partnerships), Lisa Cotton (Corporate Director for Transformation, Customer and Cultural Services), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children), Iain Sim (Interim Corporate Director for Housing), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), Sharon Attwater (Service Manager for Housing Strategy and Performance), Jon Bird (Service Manager for Economic Development and Skills), Laura Cornette (Business Partner - Communities and Partnerships), Mike Garrity (Corporate Director for Planning), Sarah How (Service Manager for Housing Register and Lettings), Jennifer Lewis (Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement), Jessica Maskrey (Head of Service – Assets & Property), Terry Sneller (Strategic Planning Manager) and Jack Wiltshire (Corporate Director for Highways and Engineering)

40. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader of the Council made a short statement regarding how the Council was addressing the impacts of the recent flooding in the short, medium and long term.

The Statement and supporting slides are provided at Appendix 1 to these minutes.

41. **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 2 to these minutes.

42. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest to report.

43. **Questions from Councillors**

There were no questions from Councillors.

44. **Forward Plan**

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

45. **Biodiversity Duty report 2023-24**

The Leader of the Council, Climate, Performance and Safeguarding advised that the Environment Act 2021 required public authorities to consider, conserve, and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of their functions.

The report outlined the strategic objectives, current activity, and future ambitions aligned with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and highlighted the legal, environmental, and reputational implications of non-compliance.

It was proposed by Cllr N Ireland and seconded by Cllr C Sutton

Decision

That the Dorset Council's Biodiversity Duty Report 2023–25 be endorsed and its publication and subsequent submission to Defra, be approved.

Reason for the decision

To ensure that Dorset Council met its statutory requirement to prepare, approve and publish a Biodiversity Duty Report for the 2023–25 period and for it to be submitted to Defra by the required deadline.

46. **Authority to Grant Farm Business Tenancies on County Farms**

The Cabinet Member for Property & Assets and Economic Growth set out a report seeking delegated authority for the Executive Director of Place to approve Farm Business Tenancy (FBT) agreements where the aggregate rental value exceeded £500,000. The delegation was required to support timely implementation of the Farms Estate Strategy 2026–2036 and to enable efficient decision making for current and future re-lettings, particularly for Progression Farms where long tenancy terms routinely exceeded the existing approval threshold.

The report further outlined the benefits of streamlining the process, maintaining strong governance, and ensuring alignment with strategic aims.

It was proposed by Cllr R Biggs and seconded by Cllr Clifford

Decision

That authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Place to grant Farm Business Tenancies (FBTs) with an aggregate rental value exceeding £500,000, including those for the four farms currently being relet as well as any future re-lettings, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Property & Assets and Economic Growth and the S151 Officer, on terms to be agreed.

Reason for the decision

To enable a responsive and efficient approach to granting Progression Farm FBTs, where contractual terms were typically 20–25 years and market rents meant the aggregate rental value routinely exceeds £500,000.

This delegation ensured alignment with the Farms Estate Strategy.

47. **Entering into South West Flood and Coastal Shared Service**

The Cabinet Member for Place Services presented a report on the proposal for Dorset Council to join the South West Flood and Coastal (SWFaC) shared service. He further advised that the aim of the partnership would strengthen the council's capacity to manage flood and coastal erosion risks, improve access to specialist expertise and external funding, and enhance regional collaboration.

In response to questions and concerns, the Cabinet Member for Place Services confirmed that the BCP Council was responsible for the management of the partnership, but there was a governance procedure in place, and these details were set out in the report.

In answering a question about the non-involvement of the Overview Committee with this particular item, the Director for Legal Services explained that there was no requirement in the constitution for proposed all new policies to be considered by an Overview Committee before being presented to Cabinet. He added that this proposal had been brought forward more quickly due to the need to respond to recent flooding and severe weather events.

Following a question from a member regarding staffing and resources, the Chief Executive explained that this was an important operational function for Dorset Council to strengthen, and that the proposed approach was the quickest and most effective way of addressing the issue. She added that the work required under the Section 19 investigations necessitated a resilient team with sufficient resources to support those inquiries. From an operational perspective, this was considered the most appropriate way forward.

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

Decision

- (a) That entering into a Shared Service Agreement for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management with South West Flood and Coastal (BCP Council & East Devon District Council) be supported.
- (b) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Services to negotiate, authorise and enter into the Shared Service Agreement, following Dorset Council's governance processes for entering into agreements.

Reason for the decision

Joining the partnership would deliver climate resilience, increased external funding, stronger local networks, improved service capacity, and reduced reliance on consultancy support, whilst enabling closer collaboration with local councils and the Environment Agency.

48. **Swanage Beach Coastal Protection Scheme**

The Cabinet Member for Place Services presented a report on the Swanage Beach Coastal Protection Scheme and outlined the need for enhanced coastal defences to address increasing risks from flooding and erosion.

The local member spoke in support of the proposal.

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

Decision

- (a) That the Swanage Beach Coastal Protection Scheme outline business case be approved.
- (b) That the budget allocation within the Capital programme and as detailed in Table 1.0 section 7 of the report, be approved.
- (c) That the Outline Business Case be submitted to the Environment Agency's National Project Assurance Service.
- (d) That the draw-down of all external Flood Defence Grant-In-Aid and Local Levy funding be authorised, on an ongoing basis throughout the duration of the project.
- (e) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Place in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and Cabinet Member for Place Services, to procure and award the works and associated professional services.

Reason for the decision

- Scheme delivery was required to provide resilience against coastal erosion and flooding.
- National flood funding rules change on 1 April 2026, the outline business case must be submitted before 31 March 2026 to avoid the risk of extensive rework, delays, and additional costs under the new requirements.
- The outline business case setting out the £4.987m project required cabinet approval before it could be considered for external funding.

49. **Bridport (West Bay) Harbour Walls Stabilisation & Property Works**

The Cabinet Member for Place Services set out a report seeking support for stabilisation work of the West Bay Harbour walls and associated council-owned buildings. The report proposed to restore structural strength to Wall B, raise its height to reinstate its flood-defence function, and undertake additional stabilisation works to Wall A.

The Chair of the Harbours Advisory Committee spoke in support of the report and its proposals.

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

Decision

- (a) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Place to agree a specification for required works, procurement and award of contracts for harbour wall repairs up to a maximum spend (as shown in Appendix 1 of the report to Cabinet of 3 March 2026), following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Services and the Section 151 Officer.
- (b) That a series of options for the council owned buildings affected by the localised ground movement be investigated.

Reason for the decision

Delegating authority for the overall harbour wall repair works would ensure that essential stabilisation and repair activity could proceed in a coordinated and efficient manner, maintaining the safety, functionality and resilience of key harbour infrastructure. Consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Services and the Section 151 Officer would provide appropriate oversight and financial assurance.

The full options for the related buildings could not be suitably assessed until the works to the walls had been completed. The options for the buildings would need to be investigated, with a subsequent report presented to Cabinet if further substantial works were required.

50. **Dorset Council Housing Allocation Policy**

The Cabinet Member for Health and Housing set out the proposed key revisions to the policy. The current allocation policy (2020 – 2026) was due for renewal, and a

comprehensive review had been undertaken to ensure the policy remained fit for purpose and aligned with legislative requirements, local housing need, and strategic priorities.

The policy had been considered by People and Health Overview Committee at its meeting on 2 February 2026. The Cabinet Member stated the reasons why she could not support the committee's recommendations (a) to (c) as each would either conflict with legislation, had a lack of sufficient evidential justification, or created disproportionate disadvantage or operational risk to Dorset Council.

However, the Cabinet Member did propose that recommendation (d) go forward for consideration by Full Council in April, along with seeking approval for the Housing Allocations Policy.

It was proposed by Cllr G Taylor and seconded by Cllr S Robinson

Recommendation to Full Council (unanimous)

That the Housing Allocations Policy 2026–2031 be approved, subject to an amendment to section 4.15 replacing the first bullet point with the following text:

- *applicants who own, or part own, or have any legal or beneficial interest in a residential property in the UK or abroad, whether occupied by them or let to others. This includes applicants who hold such an interest directly or indirectly, including through a company, partnership, trust, or other legal entity, where the applicant has control of, or a material interest in, that entity and it owns residential property, or*

Reason for the recommendation

To ensure Dorset Council had a clear, fair, and legally compliant policy governing the allocation of social housing, consistent with the Council's statutory duties under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 considering the needs and priorities of Dorset residents.

51. **Dorset Council Tenancy Strategy 2026 - 2031**

The Cabinet Member for Health and Housing presented the recommendation of the People and Health Overview Committee of 2 February 2026, to approve the Dorset Council Tenancy Strategy 2026 – 2031.

As part of their consideration, the People and Health Overview Committee proposed an amendment to section 5.3 of the Tenancy Strategy and this amendment was welcomed by the Cabinet Member.

It was proposed by Cllr G Taylor seconded by Cllr S Robinson

Decision

- (a) That the Dorset Council Tenancy Strategy 2026 – 2031 be approved.

- (b) That the relevant part of section 5.3 of the Tenancy Strategy be amended as follows:

“We welcome an approach where any breaches of tenancy (for example rent arrears, anti-social behaviour and damaging property) are dealt with under the normal possession process, allowing a court to consider the case. We expect registered providers to avoid including tenant rent arrears in decisions on tenancy renewals. We expect registered providers to prioritise other methods to resolve rent arrears.

We also expect registered providers to avoid including complaints due to antisocial behaviour in decisions on tenancy renewals. In exceptional circumstances, if registered providers do consider non-renewal of tenancy because of antisocial behaviour, we expect that community care needs (e.g. social care needs, domiciliary care needs, health care needs, etc.) are included in any assessment.”

Reason for the decision

This strategy fulfilled the council's legal obligations under The Localism Act 2011 by explaining its expectations and outlining the approach the council would like Registered Providers to take when creating their own tenancy policies.

52. Crisis and Resilience Fund

The Cabinet Member for Customer, Culture and Community Engagement presented a report on the national Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF), which replaced the Household Support Fund (HSF) and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) from 1 April 2026.

The Cabinet Member advised that the report set out the details to ensure that there was an expedited approach to maintaining a safe and compliant service from day one. The report also sought approval for the continuation of essential crisis and resilience projects that meet the CRF criteria, pending further development work and subsequent scrutiny by the People and Health Overview Committee.

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

Decision

- (a) That the day one continuation of critical crisis and resilience projects in line with the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) criteria project proposals, be approved.
- (b) It was noted that local authorities must allocate CRF funding to provide financial support towards housing needs, to those who face a shortfall in meeting their housing costs. This would replace the current Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) scheme ending on the 31 March 2026.

- (c) It was noted that once more information relating to the administration of the new fund was available from Government, a further report would be submitted to People and Health Overview Committee for consideration.

Reason for the decision

To ensure Dorset Council was safe, legal and compliant with the CRF criteria and that there was no loss of critical crisis and resilience support whilst further development work was undertaken within Dorset Council and with our strategic community delivery partners.

CRF Guidance stated that authorities were expected to maintain existing levels of spending on Housing Payments, using the FYE March 2026 allocations for DHPs as a guide. The Housing Payment would closely replicate existing DHP guidelines and would adopt a phased transition over the 3-year funding period.

53. **Working with Communities**

The Leader of the Council presented the report, which had been considered on two occasions by the Place and Resources Overview Committee.

He further explained that the council plan set a clear objective for Dorset Council to work more closely with communities, supported by feedback from residents and partners which distinctly showed that the Council did not always join up its working practices effectively. Partners had also indicated that since becoming a unitary authority, the Council had at times, been difficult to work with.

The increase in demand and financial pressures, particularly in social care, required the council to change how it worked, by becoming more connected, focusing on prevention, and reducing demand. Similar changes were taking place across partner organisations including more integrated neighbourhood models and supporting more people to be treated and cared for at home.

The Leader continued, that these developments provided an opportunity to improve how Dorset Council worked with its partners to deliver more joined up, preventative services. The purpose of this report was to support this shift and ensure further work was informed by listening to communities and Dorset Councils' partners.

In seconding the motion, the Cabinet Member for Customer, Culture and Community Engagement expressed support for the proposals to strengthen partnership working with town and parish councils, as well as with key community partners, including the voluntary and community sector.

In response to a question about performance measures and monitoring progress, the Chief Executive confirmed that maintaining ongoing dialogue with town and parish councils would be critical. She added that feedback from ward members

and dual hatter councillors would also be important. Formal tangible measures would come through the Council's performance system.

Before the vote, the Leader advised that a workshop for all Councillors would be arranged in due course and an Executive Member Advisory Panel, with cross-party membership, would be established to support this development work.

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

Decision

- (a) That the Community Conversations approach outlined in the report to Cabinet of 3 March 2026, which supported how we work with communities to deliver the Council Plan objectives, be approved and prepared for the English Devolution and Community Empowerment legislation.
- (b) That the revised Statement of Reasonable Expectations between Dorset Council and parish and town councils be signed by the Leader of Dorset Council and adopted.

Reason for the decision

To enable Dorset Council to strengthen partnership working with town and parish councils, and key community partners including the voluntary and community sector, as we understand how to best meet community needs and improve outcomes for residents in a sustainable and effective way. This would help us deliver the objectives under 'Communities for All' in our council plan, and prepare for policy changes that were emerging from the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill.

Cllr G Taylor left the meeting room for the consideration of the following item.

54. **Towards a new model of day opportunities**

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care set out a report proposing a new, more flexible model of day opportunities informed by an extensive engagement and the 2025 formal consultation process. There was a continued need for both community-based activities and specialist building-based provision. The report also set out plans for a locality hub model to be aligned with wider prevention and neighbourhood-working priorities.

It was proposed by Cllr S Robinson and seconded by Cllr R Biggs.

Decision

- (a) That the review of our commissioning model with Care Dorset and the private sector, be endorsed.
- (b) That the introduction of the revised delivery model, as described within the report of 3 March 2026 at appendix 1, supporting development of a range of activities across multiple locations for implementation, be approved.

Reason for the decision

The decision established a modern, sustainable model of day opportunities that better reflected the evolving needs and aspirations of Dorset residents by promoting flexible, community-based support that built independence, wellbeing, and social inclusion, while maintaining specialist provision for people with complex needs. This approach enabled the Council to make more effective use of community assets, integrate services within local neighbourhoods, and align with wider priorities such as prevention, early help, and outcomes-focused delivery. It also ensured resources were used efficiently by optimising commissioning with Care Dorset and the independent sector, supported delivery of the Commissioning for a Better Life Strategy 2023–2028, expanded personalised opportunities beyond traditional building-based services, and ultimately created a more responsive, inclusive, and financially sustainable model that strengthened pathways to independence and reduced future care needs.

Cllr G Taylor returned to the meeting.

55. **Procurement arrangements for specified services for Children's Services**

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills set out a report that brought together and updated procurement arrangements to ensure that Dorset's children and young people had the right homes, support and education at the right time.

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

Decision

- (a) That Cabinet approves the budget and funding allocations to procurements within Appendix 1 and delegates authority to the Executive Director of People – Children's, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education & Skills and the Corporate Director Finance & Commercial / Chief Financial Officer & S151 officer to procure and award contracts, or release agreed funding to third parties delivering services, for any procurement within Cabinet approved Appendix 1 provided the cost is contained within the Children's Services budget..
- (b) That the re-opening of the existing, previously approved procurement framework to support ongoing commissioning activity within Children's Services, without the requirement of further Cabinet approval of openings, be approved.
- (c) That Cabinet notes that these frameworks had already been formally established in line with procurement regulations and governance procedures.

Independent non maintained special school and specialist post 16 placements.

- (d) That Cabinet notes that the arrangements for securing placements at independent non maintained special schools and specialist post 16 providers which was operated in accordance with the Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND) Scheme of Delegation (as set out in paragraph 3.6 of the Cabinet report of 3 March 2026).

Reason for the decision

To draw together several previous delegations against individual Children's Services budgets to ensure consistency of approach and to ensure appropriate oversight and authority was in place to allow sufficient services to be procured to meet the needs of children and young people.

56. Business Growth Dorset – Government Growth Hub Funding Financial year 26/27 to 28/29

The Cabinet Member for Property & Assets and Economic Growth set out a report regarding the Government's confirmation of a three-year Growth Hub funding allocation for Dorset.

The report proposed that the funding continue the delivery of the Business Growth Dorset Service across both the Dorset Council and BCP Council areas.

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

Decision

- (a) That the acceptance of the Growth Hub grant for 2026/27 - 2028/29 and its associated grant conditions, be approved.
- (b) That the in principle proposed budget, resourcing and activities, be approved.
- (c) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director, Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Property, Assets and Economic Growth, to implement and adjust delivery plans within grant rules.

Reason for the decision

Accepting the funding advances the Council's "Grow our Economy" strategic priority and supports delivery of the Economic Growth Strategy 2025–2040, supporting entrepreneurship and local business. It contributed towards actions in the Council Plan aiming to narrow the Dorset to UK productivity gap by 5% by 2029 and create 1000 business start-up courses for 16–34-year-olds.

57. National Planning Policy and Guidance consultation response

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning presented a report and update sheet outlining Dorset Council's proposed responses to the Government's consultations on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).

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

Decision

That the proposed responses to the NPPF and PPG consultations for submission be agreed.

Reason for the decision

Responding to the consultations meant that Dorset Council had an influence on the formation of the new NPPF and associated PPG. As one of the largest local planning authorities in England, it was important that a response was made.

58. **Adoption of local heritage list**

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning set out a report seeking approval for the Dorset Local Heritage List which had been developed jointly with BCP Council.

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

Decision

- (a) That the list of local heritage assets be approved and be published on the Dorset Council's Website.
- (b) That authority be delegated to the Director of Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning, to approve any future modifications to the list.

Reason for the decision

To approve and publish a list of local heritage assets which can be used to inform future planning decisions.

59. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items considered at the meeting.

60. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

61. **Bridport (West Bay) Harbour Walls Stabilisation & Property Works**

The exempt appendix associated with the report "Bridport (West Bay) Harbour Walls Stabilisation & Property Works" was not discussed at the meeting. The report was considered in open business as set out in min no. 49 of these minutes.

Appendix 1 - Public Participation

Appendix 2

Duration of meeting: Times Not Specified

Chairman

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Cabinet Public Question for 3 March 2026

1. Question from Cllr Steven Dickens (Weymouth Town Council, Preston Ward)

Could Dorset Council please clarify, as a matter of urgency, who holds formal responsibility for the maintenance of the planters along Preston Beach Road, given that Dorset Council owns the sea wall but claims there is an agreement with Weymouth Town Council regarding upkeep, for which no evidence or paperwork can be provided by either party? Furthermore, what immediate steps will be taken to address the deteriorating condition of these planters, which is impacting the appearance of one of the main access roads to Weymouth—a town reliant on tourism—and to ensure this situation is rectified without further delay?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Place Services

Going forward, Dorset Council will hold formal responsibility for the maintenance of the planters along Preston Beach Road and will maintain them in a suitable condition. A new lease is being prepared which will clarify the responsibility for the upkeep of the seawall.

2. Question from Danny Whyte (Group Admin WeyPortCCOS)

I have read in the recent cabinet papers that Dorset Council are looking into outsourcing some services to BCP, the main one in question is the South West Flood and Coastal Partnership.

Question 1) Why is this even proposed when we have a team within Dorset Council?

Question 2) How much is it going to cost the council to outsource this service?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Place Services

The benefits of the proposed approach are described throughout the report. In particular, Dorset Council will see the collective benefit of having access to a greater pool of knowledge, experience and bidding power. Increasing the size of SWFaC has advantages over the existing arrangement as work demands can be spread across the partnership, reducing peaks and troughs of workload. The Dorset Council investment into the Shared Service will be reflective of the current net cost of running the current service.

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Speech from Cllr Nick Ireland regarding how the Council is addressing the impacts of the recent flooding in the short, medium and long term.

Over the past several weeks, Dorset has faced some of the most persistent and disruptive flooding we have seen in many years. Groundwater levels have reached historic highs, and repeated rainfall has placed real strain on our communities, our roads, and our infrastructure. Our residents have dealt with flooded routes, damage to homes and businesses, and some very difficult daily conditions.

From the very start of these events, our council teams have been working around the clock. Crews have been out day and night - clearing drains and watercourses where it's safe to do so, putting out road signs and barriers, and coordinating closely with partners including the Environment Agency and our town and parish councils to reduce risk wherever possible. I want to express my sincere thanks to every member of staff involved.

Now I want to move on to talk about how the council will respond to the flooding risk in future over the short, medium and longer term.

In the short term, our priority is to repair the damage these storms have inflicted on the highway network. Flooding and high groundwater have led to a surge in potholes and surface failures across Dorset. We have already taken decisive steps to address this: at Full Council, members approved measures that make up to an additional £5.25 million available for urgent repair work and flood-related impacts. This includes a £5 million capital flood-resilience fund to target known hotspots and repair storm-damaged sections, as well as £250,000 for a dedicated gully-cleaning crew to keep water moving during heavy rainfall.

Work has already started to repair roads and will continue over the coming months. We are tackling the worst-hit locations first, and we will get our rural road network back into a decent state. My thanks to residents for reporting issues in their area – please continue to do this.

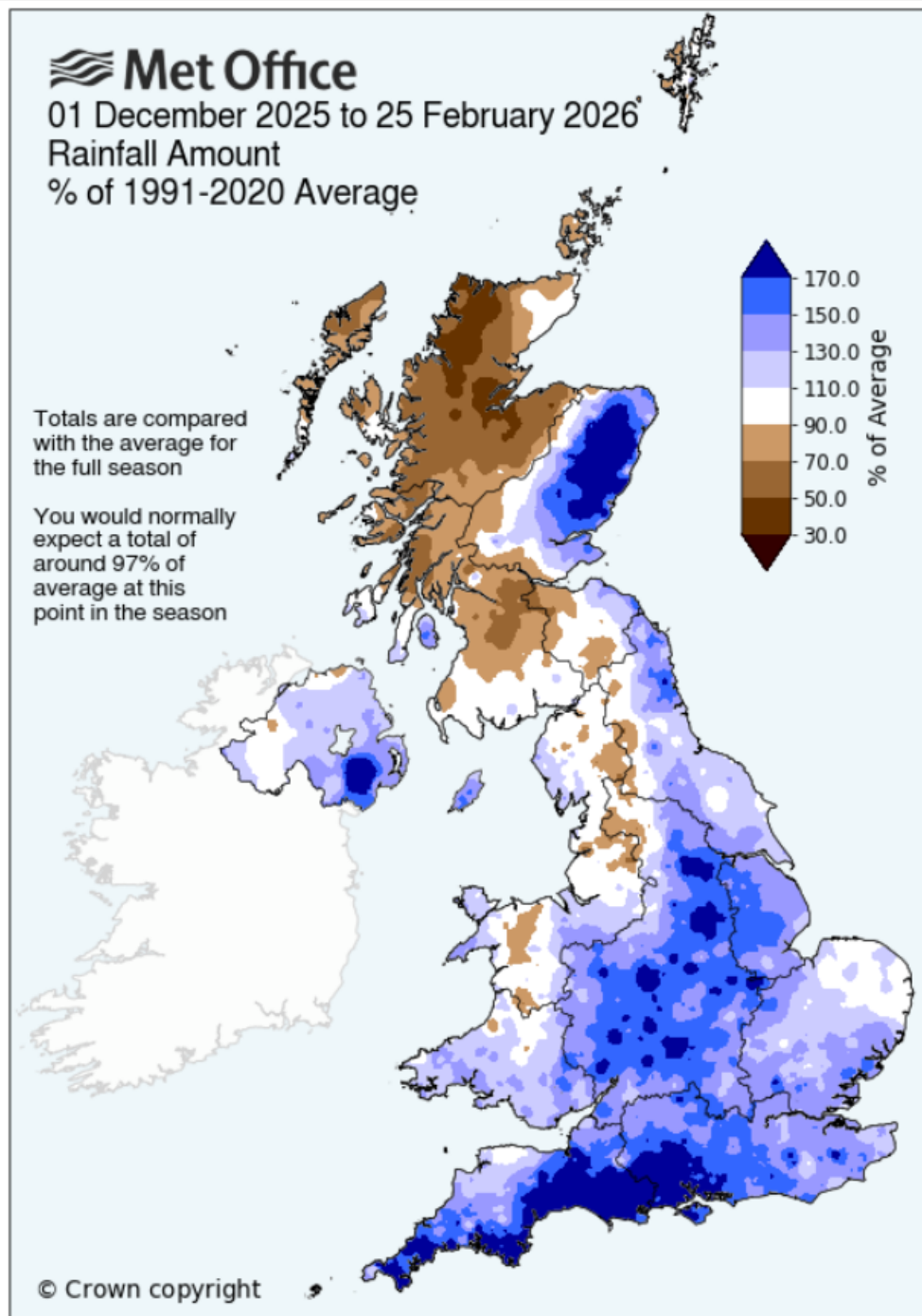
Looking medium to long term, it's clear Dorset needs to adapt to a future where episodes like this are no longer rare occurrences. Extreme weather that used to be considered "once in a century" is happening far more frequently. That is why we began developing Dorset's Climate Adaptation Strategy last year, working with a citizens' panel to involve our residents from the start. This work provides a structured, evidence-based plan for how we should strengthen our infrastructure, protect our communities, and build long-term resilience across the county. This strategy will come forward to members for approval later this year.

We also announced at Full Council on 10 February that we will launch formal Section 19 flood investigations to examine the recent flooding events, reviewing the roles and responsibilities of all agencies involved. Officers have done further work and are

proposing we have a county-wide strategic investigation, as well as a number of site-specific investigations, all with the aim of identifying meaningful, longer-term solutions, rather than just reactive interventions. A paper will come to Cabinet in May with detailed proposals for this programme of investigations. This work is technical and will take time, but it will inform our long-term approach to future flood mitigation. Understanding where flood water comes from, and how we can prevent it in future, can be surprisingly complicated. It's not just about cleaning drains. The water has to be able to go somewhere and when rivers are overflowing and the ground is completely saturated, finding somewhere for the water to go can be a difficult engineering challenge.

Nevertheless, I am committed that together we will repair the damage, strengthen our defences, and ensure Dorset is better prepared for the future. Thank you for listening.

Rainfall

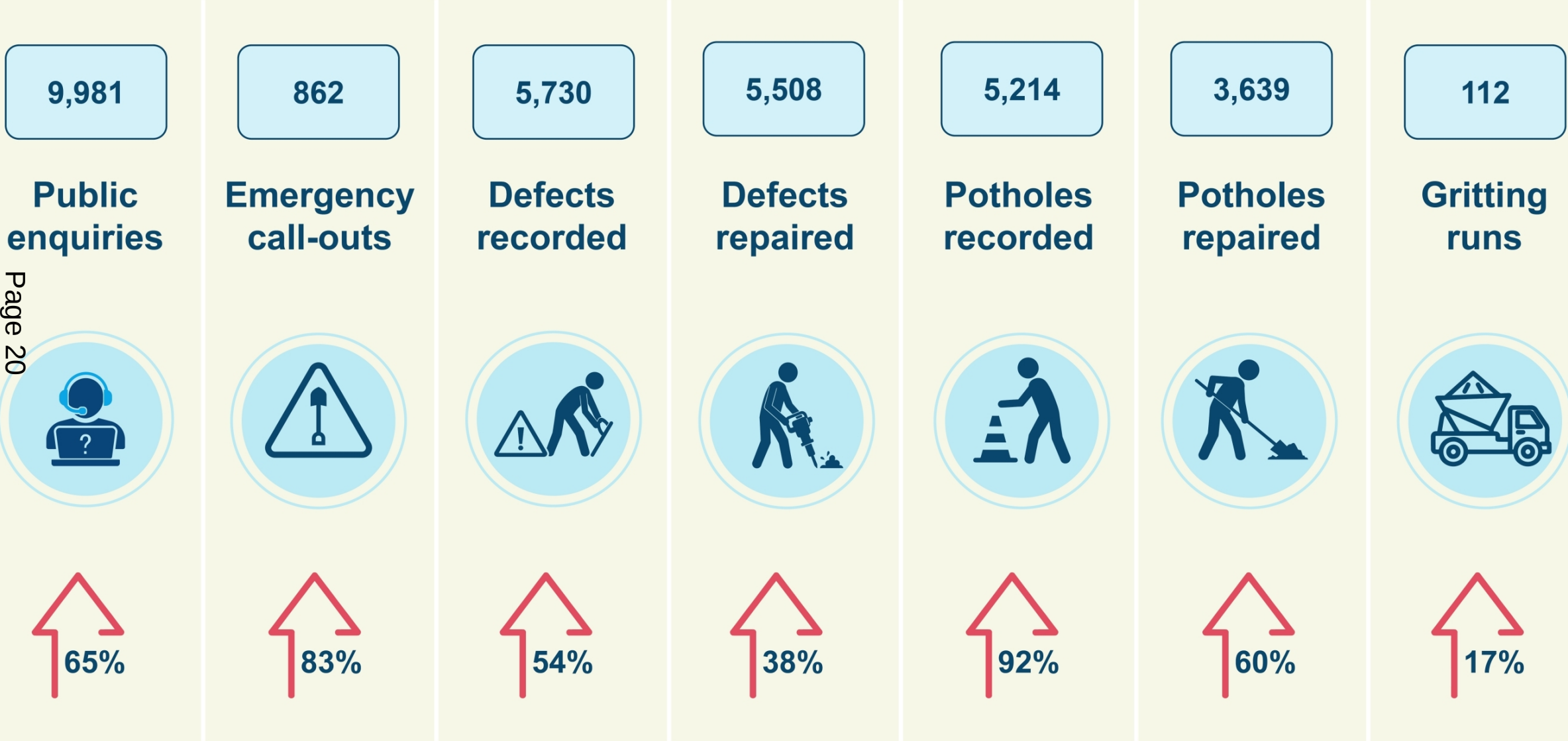


Dorset and Cornwall have both experienced their second wettest winter since records began in 1836.

source: Met Office

Highways: Key stats 22 December 2025 to 26 February 2026

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Increase since 2024/25