

DORSET COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 10 JULY 2025

Present: Cllrs Stella Jones (Chair), Les Fry (Vice-Chair), Jon Andrews, Mike Baker, Shane Bartlett, Belinda Bawden, Laura Beddow, Derek Beer, Matt Bell, Richard Biggs, Bridget Bolwell, Dave Bolwell, Louise Bown, Alex Brenton, Piers Brown, Andy Canning, Will Chakawhata, Simon Christopher, Barrie Cooper, Richard Crabb, Peter Dickenson, Neil Eysenck, Beryl Ezzard, Scott Florek, Alex Fuhrmann, Simon Gibson, Sally Holland, Ryan Holloway, Ryan Hope, Rob Hughes, Nick Ireland, Jack Jeanes, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones, Paul Kimber, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Robin Legg, Cathy Lugg, Rory Major, Craig Monks, David Morgan, Steve Murcer, David Northam, Louie O'Leary, Jon Orrell, Andrew Parry, Val Potheary, Byron Quayle, Belinda Ridout, Julie Robinson, Steve Robinson, Pete Roper, David Shortell, Andy Skeats, Duncan Sowry-House, Andrew Starr, Gary Suttle, Clare Sutton, Roland Tarr, David Taylor, Gill Taylor, Andy Todd, David Tooke, James Vitali, Claudia Webb, Kate Wheller, Sarah Williams, Ben Wilson and Carl Woode

Present remotely: Cllrs Ray Bryan, Barry Goringe, Mike Parkes and Jane Somper

Apologies: Cllrs Jindy Atwal, Simon Clifford, Toni Coombs, Spencer Flower, Jill Haynes, Hannah Hobbs-Chell, Chris Kippax and Emma Parker

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

Jacqui Andrews (Service Manager for Democratic and Electoral Services), Jan Britton (Executive Director - Place), Hayley Caves (Councillor Development and Support Officer), Sam Crowe (Director of Public Health), Susan Dallison (Democratic Services Team Leader), George Dare (Senior Democratic and Governance Officer), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), Antony Nash (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Megan Rochester (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Louis Wicks (Democratic Services Officer Apprentice)

18. Minutes

Cllr L O'Leary requested that an addition be made to the minutes of the meeting on 15 May 2025 stating that he had left the Council Chamber prior to the presentation of the deputation and then had later returned to the chamber for reasons unconnected to the deputation.

With the addition of the wording above the minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2025 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

19. **Declarations of Interest**

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

20. **Chair's Announcements**

Tributes to the Late Councillor Bill Trite

The Council observed a minute's silence in memory of Bill Trite. Members paid tribute to his 34 years of service, including his time as Mayor of Swanage and his dedication to the Swanage Railway. He was remembered for his passion for the English language, his procedural knowledge, and his commitment to public service and proper protocol. Councillors described him as a principled advocate for Swanage, a man of humour and character, and someone who valued the role of parish and town councils.

Tributes to Former Councillors

Councillor Parry gave tribute to Sally Elliott, formerly of East Dorset Council; Alan Beard, formerly of West Dorset Council, and Ron Nash, who was a Dorset County Council councillor, reflecting on their contributions to the Council and the personal qualities they brought to public life.

Aidan Dunn – Executive Director Corporate Development & Section 151 Officer

The Chair announced that the meeting was to be the last Full Council meeting that Aidan Dunn would be attending prior to taking up his new position as Chief Executive of BCP Council. On behalf of the Council the Chair wished Aidan good luck in his new role.

21. **Public Participation - questions**

Question 1 - submitted by Mr Adrian Gunner of SWAC

It is common knowledge that Education budgets are significantly stretched, in no small part due to the costs associated with High Needs education. I believe it is appropriate for Members of Dorset Council to be aware of these costs in an effort to achieve reasonable value for money to the Council.

When Combe House School was initially purchased it was on the justification to be more in control of placement costs. I have been made aware that since then the placement costs at Combe House School have increased significantly. To help us understand a little of the pressures on the High Needs Budget I would be pleased to hear the answers to this question.

What will be the annual Element 3 cost per student at Combe House School for the 25/26 academic year?

How does that compare to the range of charges made by other independent organisations, what are the student transport costs associated with Combe House School and are there other provisions that could be used to reduce both Transport

and Placement costs whilst similar provision and Preparation for Adulthood outcomes.

Response from Cabinet Member for Children Services, Education and Skills

School placement decisions are made based on an assessment of the needs of the child or young person as set out in their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), and a range of provisions are used to meet needs.

We are striving to meet children's needs as locally to where they live as possible and this aligns with our strategy of supporting inclusion in mainstream schools and colleges and the ongoing investment in additional specialist resourced provisions and special school places. This will improve outcomes for Dorset children and reduce average transport and placement costs.

Comparisons of fees and transport costs with comparable independent special school placements have been undertaken and Coombe House represents value for money.

Element 3 funding does not apply to independent special schools such as Coombe House School; there is a single placement fee.

For 2025/26 the fee for a place at Coombe House School is £52k, and the average for a comparable independent special school placement fee is £74k.

In 2024/25 the average transport cost for a pupil to Coombe House School was £14.6k, and the average for a comparable independent special school placement was £16.5k.

22. Public participation - petitions and deputations

No public petitions or deputations were made.

23. Announcements and Reports from the Leader of Council and Cabinet Members

The Leader of the Council reported attending the Local Government Association and South West Councils AGMs. Dorset was set to chair the Britain's Leading Edge group of rural authorities over the coming year.

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill had been published, outlining provisions for mayoral elections and greater local empowerment. Devolution discussions are progressing with Somerset, Wiltshire, and BCP, though Swindon's inclusion remained uncertain. A recent meeting between the chief executives of the four authorities and Director General Will Garton was positive. Additionally, Integrated Care Boards were merging, forming a cluster covering Somerset, Dorset, Bath and North East Somerset, Wiltshire, and Swindon.

24. **Electoral Review of Dorset Council Wards**

Councillor N Ireland introduced a paper on the review of council wards, outlining the background and the need to revisit current arrangements. It was confirmed that the Local Government Boundary Commission would be approached to undertake a review, with any changes expected to take effect from the scheduled elections in 2029. All members would be involved in the process, and the final decision would be made by Full Council.

During discussion, members noted the chamber's capacity sets an upper limit of 91 councillors, and concerns were raised about accessibility influencing this figure. Questions were asked about the potential lower limit, and there was general support for a flexible approach, with openness to both increasing and reducing the number of elected members.

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

Resolved (Unanimous)

That a formal request be made to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England for an electoral review of Dorset Council, with changes taking effect at the next scheduled elections in 2029.

That a cross-party task group be established that will make recommendations to Full Council on a submission to the LGBCE with the following membership: 3 Liberal Democrat councillors (Leader, and two others)
2 Conservative councillors (Group Leader and one other)
The group leaders or deputy group leaders of the Green, Independent and Labour political groups.

25. **An update to the Scheme of Delegation**

Councillor N Ireland advised that the report on the update to the scheme of delegation would be deferred to a future meeting of Full Council in light of wider changes that were required to the constitution.

26. **Notice of Motion - Recycling Booking System Challenge**

The motion was proposed by Cllr G Suttle and seconded by Cllr L O'Leary

Motion

We call on this council to scrap its proposed blanket tip appointment system and instead look at the situation centre by centre in consultation with ward members and the general public.

Debate

Councillor G Suttle introduced a notice of motion to scrap the proposed blanket booking system for Household Recycling Centres (HRCs), citing concerns over restricted access and lack of public consultation.

The debate reflected a wide range of views. Several councillors supported the motion, highlighting public opposition, poor communication, and the need for meaningful consultation. Others defended the booking system to improve efficiency, reduce trade abuse, and manage costs. Concerns were raised about the impact on specific communities, misinformation, and the erosion of public trust. The discussion also touched on broader issues such as accessibility, fly tipping, and the role of councillors in decision-making.

A request was made for a recorded vote, on being put to the vote the motion was LOST.

Recycling Booking System challenge (Motion)	
Councillor Stella Jones	Against
Councillor Les Fry	Against
Councillor Jon Andrews	Against
Councillor Mike Baker	Against
Councillor Shane Bartlett	Against
Councillor Belinda Bawden	Against
Councillor Laura Beddow	For
Councillor Derek Beer	Against
Councillor Matt Bell	Against
Councillor Richard Biggs	Against
Councillor Bridget Bolwell	Against
Councillor Dave Bolwell	Against
Councillor Louise Bown	Against
Councillor Alex Brenton	Against
Councillor Piers Brown	For
Councillor Andy Canning	Against
Councillor Will Chakawhata	Against
Councillor Simon Christopher	For
Councillor Barrie Cooper	Against
Councillor Richard Crabb	Against
Councillor Peter Dickenson	For
Councillor Neil Eysenck	Against
Councillor Beryl Ezzard	Against
Councillor Scott Florek	Against
Councillor Alex Fuhrmann	Against
Councillor Simon Gibson	For
Councillor Sally Holland	Against
Councillor Ryan Holloway	Against
Councillor Ryan Hope	Against
Councillor Rob Hughes	Against
Councillor Nick Ireland	Abstain
Councillor Jack Jeanes	Against
Councillor Sherry Jespersen	For
Councillor Carole Jones	For
Councillor Paul Kimber	For
Councillor Nocturin Lacey-Clarke	For
Councillor Robin Legg	Against
Councillor Cathy Lugg	For

Councillor Rory Major	Against
Councillor Craig Monks	For
Councillor David Morgan	Against
Councillor Steve Murcer	For
Councillor David Northam	Against
Councillor Louie O'Leary	For
Councillor Jon Orrell	For
Councillor Andrew Parry	For
Councillor Val Potheary	For
Councillor Byron Quayle	For
Councillor Belinda Ridout	For
Councillor Julie Robinson	For
Councillor Steve Robinson	Against
Councillor Pete Roper	Against
Councillor David Shortell	For
Councillor Andy Skeats	For
Councillor Duncan Sowry-House	Against
Councillor Andrew Starr	Against
Councillor Gary Suttle	For
Councillor Clare Sutton	Against
Councillor Roland Tarr	Against
Councillor David Taylor	Against
Councillor Gill Taylor	Against
Councillor Andy Todd	Against
Councillor David Tooke	Against
Councillor James Vitali	For
Councillor Claudia Webb	Against
Councillor Kate Wheller	For
Councillor Sarah Williams	Against
Councillor Ben Wilson	Against
Councillor Carl Woode	Against
Lost	

27. Questions from Councillors

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr C Monks

Can the council provide an update on the recent cuts to grant funding for towns and parishes involved in designing neighbourhood plans, and clarify what support will be available moving forward?

Response from Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning, Cllr S Bartlett

The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has informed Locality that, as a result of the spending review, they cannot proceed with commissioning new neighbourhood planning support services for 2025 onwards. Unfortunately, this means that Locality will not open applications for new grants or technical support. Locality are able to complete all technical support

packages agreed by MHCLG by the end of March 2025 and have until the end of March 2026 to do so depending on the timetable for each package.

Dorset Council has a duty to assist in neighbourhood plan preparation but this extends principally to arranging and paying for the neighbourhood plan examination, arranging the referendum, and formally making (adopting) the neighbourhood plan, as well as providing some technical guidance and advice. Unfortunately, Dorset Council's Community Planning Team will be unable to fill the void left by Locality funding over and above the support we are required to provide. Our priority will need to be the local plan, and if Town or Parish Councils wish to proceed with neighbourhood plans, they will have to think about the resources they require to fund these. For those parts of the Dorset Council area that have a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule in place there may be scope to use the neighbourhood proportion of CIL, passed to Town and Parish Councils, for neighbourhood planning related work.

Question 2 – submitted by Cllr J Vitali

In light of the Government's decision to discontinue funding for neighbourhood planning, what steps is the council taking to ensure that our local communities can continue to shape development in their area?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning (PLEASE NOTE THE RESPONSE BELOW IS THE SAME AS THE RESPONSE TO QUESTION 1 ABOVE)

The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has informed Locality that, as a result of the spending review, they cannot proceed with commissioning new neighbourhood planning support services for 2025 onwards. Unfortunately, this means that Locality will not open applications for new grants or technical support. Locality are able to complete all technical support packages agreed by MHCLG by the end of March 2025 and have until the end of March 2026 to do so depending on the timetable for each package.

Dorset Council has a duty to assist in neighbourhood plan preparation but this extends principally to arranging and paying for the neighbourhood plan examination, arranging the referendum, and formally making (adopting) the neighbourhood plan, as well as providing some technical guidance and advice. Unfortunately, Dorset Council's Community Planning Team will be unable to fill the void left by Locality funding over and above the support we are required to provide. Our priority will need to be the local plan, and if Town or Parish Councils wish to proceed with neighbourhood plans, they will have to think about the resources they require to fund these. For those parts of the Dorset Council area that have a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule in place there may be scope to use the neighbourhood proportion of CIL, passed to Town and Parish Councils, for neighbourhood planning related work.

Question 3 – submitted by Cllr A Brenton

We understand that the Dorset Local Plan is being prepared for consultation this summer but as yet have not had much information about what it may contain.

Neighbourhood Plans are the mean by which local ideas are given weight in the planning process. I am concerned that now central funding for preparation of Neighbourhood Plans has been stopped that it will be totally unaffordable for small parishes with tiny precepts to produce a full Neighbourhood Plan.

- What help is Dorset continuing to provide to allow local views to be incorporated into Planning policy.?

The assumption has been that villages without a settlement boundary in the Green Belt, can only in have rural exception sites which are 100% Social housing. In smaller villages the facilities are the people in the community, without active people small villages wither and die. This has been ignored in the Housing hierarchy in the past. However, in view of the National and Dorset push to build more houses, small proportionate mixed development growth in small villages should not be ignored.

- What consideration is there in the Local Plan to take into account the views of a Rural Community who have a housing need and desire for small mixed developments and attempt to afford a Neighbourhood Plan.

Response from Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning, Cllr S Bartlett

The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has informed Locality that, as a result of the spending review, they cannot proceed with commissioning new neighbourhood planning support services for 2025 onwards. Unfortunately, this means that Locality will not open applications for new grants or technical support. Locality are able to complete all technical support packages agreed by MHCLG by the end of March 2025 and have until the end of March 2026 to do so depending on the timetable for each package.

Dorset Council has a duty to assist in neighbourhood plan preparation, but this extends principally to arranging and paying for the neighbourhood plan examination, arranging the referendum, and formally making (adopting) the neighbourhood plan, as well as providing some technical guidance and advice. Unfortunately, Dorset Council's Community Planning Team will be unable to fill the void left by Locality funding over and above the support we are required to provide. Our priority will need to be the local plan, and if town or parish councils wish to proceed with neighbourhood plans, they will have to think about the resources they require to fund these. For those parts of the Dorset Council area that have a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule in place there may be scope to use the neighbourhood proportion of CIL, passed to Town and Parish Councils, for neighbourhood planning related work.

The Local Plan consultation will be starting on 18 August and will include options for development sites as well as some key policy issues. Local Plan policies must take account of national policy, including that on Green Belt which indicates that new buildings in the Green Belt are generally inappropriate, as they fail to maintain its openness and prevent urban sprawl. There will be the opportunity during the

consultation for all communities to respond with their views on matters such as this.

Question 4 – submitted by Cllr P Dickenson

What funds were received by Dorset council to help defray extra spending while the Bibby Stockholm was berthed in Portland and did this excuse Dorset Council from supplying any other beds to accommodate Asylum Seekers?

Are Dorset taking part in the Governments Asylum Dispersal Grant scheme or any other incentive scheme to accommodate newly arrived immigrants and what are the financial implications for Dorset Council?

Response from Cabinet Member for Health and Housing, Cllr G Taylor

Dorset Council received circa £1.4m of grant funding for DC activity in relation to the Bibby Stockholm barge. The funds were paid by Home Office in accordance with their formula (a payment of £3.5k per occupied bed at fixed points in time). These funds were spent in support of the wide range of activities necessary for the Council to provide additional services related to the Bibby Stockholm being docked at Portland Port, with no additional draw on Council finances.

At the end of 2024/2025, Dorset Council held a small underspend of less than £100,000 from the total received, largely due to the Bibby Stockholm project being ended slightly earlier than its original contract. The Home Office have stated that they expect the underspend to be returned. The exact figure to be returned is yet to be finalised between Dorset Council and the Home Office.

The Home Office run a programme of property acquisition across the whole of the UK, where their contractors manage and maintain temporary accommodation for people awaiting their asylum decision. This is named the Asylum Dispersal Accommodation Programme and is run by the Home Office, so is not a function of Dorset Council. There are currently five leased properties in the Dorset Council area, under the management of the Home Office's contractor. These have had minimal impact on the Council's services, so far. This includes having no impact on the Council's duty to permanently house people within that programme, as they are awaiting a decision on the right to remain in the UK and do not qualify during that period. Council Officers are part of the South-West Migration Partnership Board and join other local authorities in monitoring progress in the Home Office's plans for asylum dispersal and to feed back any concerns or areas for action.

Question 5 - submitted by Cllr P Brown

Will the Portfolio commit to changing Dorset Council's plan to install a discharge pipe into the River Allen at Witchampton from the planned Dorset Council-owned sewage treatment works?

Response from Cabinet Member for Place Services, Cllr J Andrews

[Thank you for the question, Cllr Brown. You will no doubt be aware that this capital project was approved in the last term of Dorset Council under the Conservative administration of which you were a part. When I first read your question, my first two thoughts were why is Dorset Council running a sewage treatment plant, swiftly followed by there's no way we can allow this.

The answer to the first is historic, inherited way back. More importantly, the answer to the second is that the plant just treats human waste and doesn't take rainwater or surface drainage. That is crucial, as it means that it won't overflow into the river – only water treated to above Environment Agency standards will ever be discharged, unlike the water company sewage outlets which can, and do, discharge untreated sewage onto our beaches all too frequently. So essentially, you won't get any turds floating down the River Allen from this plant.]

The 19 properties at Five Ash Cottages in Witchampton are served by an aging 1980s treatment works. These facilities are near end of life and will need to be replaced to prevent untreated wastewater entering the environment. The replacement for this facility will provide an upgrade to modern standards, protecting the environment and providing reassurance to residents.

We have worked closely with the Environment Agency on this matter, and with their agreement, the cleaned discharged water will meet their strict standards, helping to safeguard ecology and protect river water quality. Where the current system is so old, the water is being removed in tankers. The new system will prevent the need for this, removing carbon emissions, reducing costs and eliminating the impact on the village from the tanker movements.

Question 6 – Submitted by Cllr P Brown

Will the Portfolio use the new freedoms in the Government Procurement Framework to source more products locally, therefore directly backing the 'Dorset Pound', Dorset businesses, and Dorset food producers?

Response from the Leader of Council, Cllr N Ireland

Yes, we intend to make full use of the freedoms provided under the Procurement Act 2023 to enhance local sourcing and strengthen the Dorset economy. Dorset Council's procurement strategy prioritises maximising the Dorset Pound, and the new Act provides additional tools to do so more effectively wherever possible.

For example, under the competitive flexible procedure, we can design procurement processes that better accommodate local suppliers, including Dorset-based SMEs. We continue to conduct pre-market engagement to raise awareness among local suppliers. We embed social value and corporate social responsibility into our procurement decisions, ensuring that public spending delivers tangible benefits to our communities. Local participation is encouraged, provided this is done in line with the principles of fairness, transparency, and non-discrimination.

Question 7 – submitted by Cllr R Legg

On Monday the Audit Committee reconvened to consider a report into financial irregularities at the authority in a closed session. At what point will that report be made available to other members? How are we to learn from the changes in processes and procedures needed if elements of the report are to remain the subject of exempt information exclusions?

Response from Leader of the Council, Cllr N Ireland

The item of business considered by the Audit and Governance Committee on Monday 7 July was a very detailed, confidential report of an investigation conducted by our internal auditors. Like other councillors my instinct is to be as open and transparent as we can be but sometimes the subject matter and findings of reports from our internal auditors are confidential for the Audit and Governance Committee only.

If the Council is to be able to learn from an investigation, then the overall findings do need to be shared, even if there is a level of detail that must remain confidential. The focus of the meeting on Monday was to ensure that the Council learns lessons from the investigation report and that information will be shared with all councillors. I cannot provide Cllr Legg with a date at this time, but officers will continue to work closely with members of the committee to bring forward information as soon as possible.

Question 8 – submitted by Cllr R Legg

The Highway Authority is proposing to close the crossing of the A30 dual carriageway from Marl Lane to Old Compton Road following the receipt of a Regulation 28 letter from Dorset's Senior Coroner on the conclusion of the most recent inquest. Will there be a comprehensive study of current traffic flows in the roads likely to be impacted by a closure of the crossing before implementation of a Temporary Traffic Regulation Order to that effect? Will the authority undertake to carry out any works necessary to ease resulting changes in traffic flows?

Response from Cabinet Member for Place Services, Cllr J Andrews

There have been multiple serious collisions at this junction, including several fatalities. In response to the fatal collisions, we have outlined our intended actions to HM Coroner, which include introducing a Temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TTRO) to restrict movements at this junction. These restrictions will prevent all right-turn, U-turn, and straight-over movements. However, left-turn movements onto and off the A30 at Marl Lane and Old Compton Lane will still be permitted.

Due to the high risk at this location, the council intends to install central barriers at the end of the summer to enforce these changes once the order is in place.

A traffic flow study has already been conducted, indicating a relatively low level of usage at the junction. Once the barriers are installed, continuous monitoring will be carried out using video cameras to assess the effectiveness of the restrictions,

including their impact on other local roads and junctions. Within the 18-month period of the Temporary Traffic Regulation Order, we will monitor the results. Based on these results, we will consult with the community and other stakeholders to consider making the order permanent.

Speeding has been identified as a significant factor contributing to collisions at this junction and along the A30 between Yeovil and Sherborne. A 2022 speed survey revealed that a substantial number of drivers were exceeding the speed limit, with over 200 vehicles per day traveling faster than 80mph, and some exceeding 100mph. This survey was conducted before the 60mph speed limit was introduced in October 2024. We are now conducting new surveys to determine if this pattern of speeding continues. This effort is part of a feasibility study for the installation of average speed cameras and will be carried out in collaboration with Dorset Police.

These options require a significant capital outlay, underscoring Dorset Council's commitment to improving road safety on the A30 and particularly at the Loscombe Crossroads.

We will commit to keep local councillors updated as the project progresses.

Question 9 – submitted by Cllr D Northam

At the previous Full Council meeting I thought the behaviour of a large number of members of the Conservative Group who left the chamber before a group of residents, under item 11, presented a deputation on 'Dorset Pension Fund Investments in companies enabling crimes against humanity in Gaza and the West Bank, and violations of Palestinian rights' was most disrespectful. As councillors it is our duty to listen to our residents' opinions particularly when they have taken the trouble to formally present their views and questions at our council meetings.

I am disappointed that their individual absence is not recorded in the minutes of the council meeting.

The minutes merely record under item 10 that 'At this point in the meeting, several members temporarily withdraw from the meeting and subsequently rejoined prior to the commencement of the deputation on the "Pathways to Work" green paper. 'Nothing is recorded under item 11 Deputations. I note that under item 14 the names of members who left the chamber are recorded.

Member's presence is required during Weymouth Town Council meetings, and their individual attendance is noted along with any leaving and returning during a meeting.

The fact that the minutes records only 'several members' does not reflect what I considered was a large number of conservative members walking out. It is important that attendance is recorded throughout a meeting.

Please can the Standing Orders be reviewed and amended to require that members who leave the chamber are recorded as having left the chamber, not listened to an agenda item or taken part in any debate or vote, and then having returned?

Response from the Leader of the Council

I will certainly ask officers to review our standing orders against those of other councils. Any proposed changes would be a recommendation from the Audit and Governance Committee to full Council. The current practice is that if a councillor declares an interest in an item of business and leaves the chamber then this and the reason for leaving are recorded in our minutes. Officers have commented to me that if a member simply leaves the chamber without such a declaration, then they cannot speculate in the minutes about what the member's reason for leaving might be. Of course, that doesn't mean that we can't change things to simply record leaving the chamber without providing a reason. Leave it with me.

Question 10 – submitted by Cllr B Quayle

While I welcome the decision to keep the Blandford Day Centre open, as sole shareholder in Care Dorset can the administration reflect on the consultation process, which many residents and carers felt was poorly communicated, lacked transparency, and caused unnecessary distress, and will Dorset Council be seeking a review to influence and ensure future consultations like this are genuinely inclusive, timely, and responsive to community concerns?

Response from Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Cllr S Robinson

Officers commenced the consultation as a genuine listening exercise and ensured there was good opportunity for users of the centre and carers to feedback. The initial proposal was always intended as a starting point for wider conversations which have now led to a shift in thinking, this reflects the authentic nature of the consultation. There will be further engagement and co-production to develop the Blandford centre as a vital resource for all the community, considering the diverse nature of local residents' needs will be central in our thinking. The day services we commission will focus on building independence for people who need services and utilising local resources in the most effective and efficient way.

There will be reflection and learning from our consultation which we will share with the consultation team.

Question 11 – submitted by Cllr B Quayle

In light of declining public trust in local government, what steps is the Council taking to ensure meaningful public consultation is embedded in all major policy decisions, rather than treated as a procedural afterthought?

Response from Cabinet Member for Customer, Culture and Community Engagement, Cllr R Hope

Thank you for your question.

Let me be clear: **public consultation is not just a formality for Dorset Council. It is a key part of how we work.** We do not treat it as a tick-box exercise. We believe that listening to people is essential for making good decisions.

This links directly to our Council Plan priority — ‘Communities for All’. This means we want every voice in Dorset to be heard, no matter where someone lives or what their background is.

We have a clear Consultation and Engagement Policy. This guides how we involve residents, businesses, and other groups in shaping decisions. We consult when the law says we must — for example in planning — but also when it’s simply the right thing to do.

We use different ways to hear from people, including:

- Online surveys
- Public meetings and workshops
- Speaking directly to groups who are often not heard
- A dedicated website where people can see all consultations and give feedback

We are serious about involving all parts of Dorset — towns, villages, coast and countryside. And we make sure it’s politically fair and balanced.

Listening, engaging, and acting on what matters — this is how we build stronger communities for all.

Thank you.

Question 12 – submitted by Cllr L O’Leary

Beverley road in Littlemoor has been without a road sign for almost a year now. I have been told this due to them being short staffed and having a large amount of work. I’ve also been told there is a recruitment freeze on this department. Can I ask that this freeze be lifted so this vital basic service can be resumed back to normal.

Response from Cabinet Member for Place Services, Cllr J Andrews

Our internal sign shop team has had a peak in demand recently, which is beyond the amount of work we would expect our own employees to be able to deliver. To help with this, our private sector partners Heidelberg Materials will be assisting with the sign replacement programme to pick up the extra work. This particular road sign will be replaced by the end of August.

Question 13 – submitted by Cllr L O’Leary

The chairman of councils job is to safeguard the Constitution of this council. A key part of that Constitution is the scrutiny of the executive of this council by all those who don’t serve on it. This is a vital and healthy part of the Democratic process. Therefore, will the chairman agree to re-instate the councillors questions items towards the start of the agenda as opposed to being left at the end.

Response from the Chair of Council, Cllr S Jones

On 7 May I wrote to all councillors to explain that I had decided on a trial basis to move the item 'Councillor Questions' to the end of the Council agenda. Questions from councillors tends to be a lengthy item and I have changed the order of our agenda to see how this works with the flow of the meeting. As part of the trial I remain happy to receive any feedback from members. I will trial this arrangement once more at our meeting on 23 October and then make a decision.

The right of councillors to submit formal questions in advance and to receive replies in public has not changed. There has been no change to the ability of our scrutiny committees to hold the executive to account. Nor has there been any change to the ability of individual councillors to require items to be added to scrutiny agendas. All that has happened is that on a trial basis I have moved where questions appear on our agenda at Full Council meetings.

28. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

29. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 8.32 pm

Chair

.....