

DORSET COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 4 DECEMBER 2025

Present: Cllrs Stella Jones (Chair), Les Fry (Vice-Chair), Jindy Atwal, Shane Bartlett, Belinda Bawden, Laura Beddow, Derek Beer, Matt Bell, Richard Biggs, Dave Bolwell, Louise Bown, Alex Brenton, Piers Brown, Ray Bryan, Andy Canning, Will Chakawhata, Simon Clifford, Toni Coombs, Barrie Cooper, Richard Crabb, Peter Dickenson, Neil Eysenck, Beryl Ezzard, Scott Florek, Spencer Flower, Alex Fuhrmann, Simon Gibson, Jill Haynes, Hannah Hobbs-Chell, Ryan Holloway, Ryan Hope, Rob Hughes, Nick Ireland, Jack Jeanes, Carole Jones, Paul Kimber, Chris Kippax, Robin Legg, Cathy Lugg, Craig Monks, David Morgan, Steve Murcer, David Northam, Louie O'Leary, Jon Orrell, Emma Parker, Andrew Parry, Byron Quayle, Julie Robinson, Steve Robinson, Pete Roper, Andy Skeats, Duncan Sowry-House, Andrew Starr, Clare Sutton, Roland Tarr, David Taylor, Gill Taylor, Andy Todd, Chris Tomes, James Vitali, Claudia Webb, Kate Wheller, Sarah Williams, Ben Wilson and Carl Woode

Present remotely: Cllrs Jon Andrews, Bridget Bolwell, Simon Christopher, Sally Holland, Mike Parkes and David Shortell

Apologies: Cllrs Mike Baker, Barry Goringe, Sherry Jespersen, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Rory Major, Val Potheary, Belinda Ridout, Jane Somper, Gary Suttle and David Tooke

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

Jacqui Andrews (Service Manager for Democratic and Electoral Services), Andrew Billany (Corporate Director for Housing), Laura Brewer (Service Manager for Food, Safety and Port Health), Jan Britton (Executive Director - Place), Hayley Caves (Councillor Development and Support Officer), Sam Crowe (Director of Public Health), Susan Dallison (Democratic & Governance Services Team Leader), George Dare (Senior Democratic and Governance Officer), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children), Graham Duggan (Head of Community & Public Protection), Catherine Howe (Chief Executive), Julia Ingram (Corporate Director for Adult Social Care Operations), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), Sam Poole (Interim Corporate Director for Commissioning & Improvement), James Potten (Communications Business Partner - Place) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic and Governance Officer)

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

Sean Cremer (Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial) and Steven Ford (Corporate Director for Strategy, Performance and Sustainability)

42. **Minutes**

Subject to the inclusion of Councillor C Tomes as being present at the meeting, the minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

43. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

44. **Chair's Announcements**

A short presentation was received from a member of the Youth Parliament on the work being undertaken and the elections to the Youth Parliament to be held in March 2026. The Head of Service, Care Leavers and UASC noted that engagement was currently being undertaken with schools and other education settings to provide information for anyone wishing to stand in the elections. Support from councillors was welcomed and further information could be sought by contacting the Youth Voice Team. The Council showed their support to the Youth Parliament.

The Chair of Council thanked all councillors that attended the Remembrance Service held at County Hall and those councillors who took wreaths on behalf of Dorset Council, to their local services.

In addition, the Chair of Council congratulated Councillor J Vitali who had recently graduated from Sandhurst and who had won the award for the best Reservist. The Council congratulated Councillor Vitali.

45. **Public Participation - questions**

There was one question from a member of the public, which along with the response is set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

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

There were no petitions or deputations to report.

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

The Leader of Council thanked Councillor B Ezzard for her work and support to the People and Health Overview Committee, during her time as Chair of the committee.

In addition, the Leader announced that the Council had applied for membership of UK100 and that the application had been accepted. This was a cross-party organisation of ambitious local authorities, collaborating to reduce carbon output. Officers and councillors could benefit from support provided.

48. **Wessex Devolution - Strategic Update and Renewed Mandate**

The Leader of Council presented the report and proposed the recommendations as set out in the report. In presenting the recommendations, the Leader noted a meeting had been held with the other leaders and chief executives in the Wessex Partnership. He reported that Swindon Borough Council would be submitting an expression of interest in working with councils in the Thames Valley area. In addition, he reflected on the financial impact of not being in a Mayoral Strategic Authority, delays to the rollout of mayoral devolution in areas currently undergoing local government reorganisation and reported that a letter had been sent by leaders to Government to urge progression with elections for a Mayoral Strategic Authority in the Wessex Partnership area in 2027, due to readiness to proceed.

The recommendations were seconded by Councillor S Clifford.

A number of differing views were expressed in terms of the proposals including how this would link to the long-term funding issues for local government, how councils could work together and issues around the election of a mayor.

Decision

That Council:

- i. Note the implications for Dorset Council of not being on the pathway to a mayoral devolution agreement, including reduced access to funding and missed opportunities to drive economic growth. While recognising the potential benefits that could be realised through a devolution agreement and the establishment of a Mayoral Combined Authority, including bringing decision making closer to local residents
- ii. Support the continuation of discussions with government and partner authorities: BCP, Somerset and Wiltshire Council to secure a mayoral devolution agreement for the Wessex area
- iii. Note that any formal proposals, including governance arrangements will be brought back to Full Council for approval at the appropriate time
- iv. Note the Wessex Partnership will continue to keep Swindon Borough Council and other regional partners updated where relevant.

Reason for the decision

Devolution offers Dorset Council, in partnership with Wessex authorities, the opportunity to gain greater control over key functions such as transport, housing, skills, economic growth, and climate related priorities, including de-carbonisation. These functions are currently limited under existing governance arrangements. A Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) would unlock long-term, multi-year investment funding and provide a direct route into national decision-making. Devolution supports the de-centralisation of decision making from central government, bringing decision making closer to the interests and needs of local residents.

Recent government policy has increasingly prioritised Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs). These authorities benefit from exclusive funding streams such as the Transport for City Regions programme, the Creative Places Growth Fund, and the Mayoral Renewables Fund. In contrast, unitary authorities rely on smaller, often short term and competitive grants.

Economic analysis by the Wessex Partnership suggests that if Wessex held MCA status, it could receive an estimated £300 million in additional annual funding, the equivalent to £159 per resident. Over 30 years, devolution could deliver £16 billion in additional Gross Value Added (GVA) to the region.

Without mayoral devolution, Dorset risks reduced access to funding, fragmented regional coordination, and diminished influence in national policy. Pursuing devolution through an MSA is crucial to help secure Dorset's long-term economic resilience and prosperity.

49. **Byelaws for the regulation of businesses involved in acupuncture, tattooing, semi permanent skin colouring, cosmetic piercing and electrolysis**

The Cabinet Member for Health and Housing presented the report and proposed the recommendations as set out in the report and this was seconded by Councillor D Beer.

Decision

That Full Council:

- i. Approves the submission of the draft byelaws for the regulation of skin piercing practices across the Dorset Council area to the Government's byelaws section for provisional approval
- ii. Authorises the adoption of the draft byelaws, and for the making and sealing of the byelaws for the regulation of skin piercing practices across the Dorset Council area, subject to confirmation from the Government's byelaws section that we may do so
- iii. Approves the revocation of all existing legacy byelaws previously adopted by the former district councils on adoption of the new byelaws
- iv. Authorises the submission of the byelaws to the Secretary of State for confirmation
- v. Authorises the Director of Public Health and Prevention to implement the byelaws upon confirmation, including communication with registered practitioners and businesses
- vi. Delegates authority to the Service Manager for Food, Safety and Port Health and the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health to request Department of Health confirmation of the byelaws, provided no objections are received during the advertising period. If only minor comments or

objections requiring minimal amendments are received, they may proceed

However, if any material changes are necessary following the advertising period, the amended byelaws will be returned to Full Council for consideration and to seek authority to return to the Department of Health for confirmation.

Reason for decision

Following the formation of Dorset Council, inconsistencies have emerged in the regulation of skin piercing practices due to the legacy byelaws inherited from former district and borough councils. These include:

- East Dorset, North Dorset, and Purbeck: Regulate ear piercing, electrolysis, tattooing, and acupuncture.
- West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland: Adopted Department of Health model byelaws, covering cosmetic piercing and semi-permanent skin colouring in addition to the above.

This fragmented approach has led to unequal enforcement and potential public health risks. The proposed adoption of the draft byelaws across the entire Dorset Council area will:

- Standardise regulation and enforcement.
- Reduce the risk of transmission of blood-borne viruses (e.g. HIV, Hepatitis B and C).
- Provide clarity and consistency for practitioners and businesses.

50. **Dorchester Markets Joint Informal Panel - Revised Terms of Reference**

The Cabinet Member for Health and Housing presented the report and proposed the recommendations as set out in the report and this was seconded by Councillor L Fry.

Decision

That the revised Terms of Reference for the Dorchester Markets Joint Panel (as set out in Appendix 1 of the report to Audit and Governance Committee on 24 November 2025) be approved.

Reason for decision

To ensure effective arrangements for the provision of Dorchester Markets and satisfactory governance arrangements between the parties.

51. **Election of Chair and Vice-chair of the People & Health Overview Committee**

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

Decision

That Councillor L Bown be appointed as the Chair of the People and Health Overview Committee for the remaining part of the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

It was proposed by Councillor N Ireland seconded by Councillor L Bown

Decision

That Councillor J Atwal be appointed as the Vice-chair of the People and Health Overview Committee for the remaining part of the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

52. Questions from Councillors

There were 7 questions from councillors and a copy of these, along with the responses, are set out in Appendix 2 to these minutes.

Further to his question and as a supplementary, Councillor P Kimber wished it to be placed on record, his concern that the council was not making an objection at the late stage.

Councillor S Flower noted that he would accept the offer to meet with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning to discuss progress with drafting of the Local Plan.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor C Jones, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills provided an update on progress with implementation of a parent portal, which it was hoped would be available in mid-2026.

In response to a question from Councillor B Quayle with regard to the impact on children and families, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills reflected on the different roles of officers and councillors in this area.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor C Tones, the Cabinet Member for Health and Housing confirmed that she would be willing to meet with the community land trust in Swanage to discuss their work, and also to meet with local councillors as relevant.

53. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

54. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

APPENDIX 1 - PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Full Council – 4 December 2025

Questions submitted by the Public

Question 1 - submitted by Giovanna Lewis

As all planning legal challenges to the incinerator are now exhausted, Stop Portland Waste Incinerator will close its campaign around the end of the year - after 6 long years where we raised almost £240,000 to pay for consultants, expert reports, lawyers and barristers – even from one elderly lady who dropped in £5 cash every week.

Although we lost through legal routes, our actions have, without doubt, been successful in delaying the project, from a time when, through lack of information, people could be convinced that incineration might be a good idea, to now, when we all realise it's not, and public opinion and politicians are turning against its proliferation. Drastic waste reduction and improved recycling are the order of the day. We commend Dorset Council's excellent recycling rates.

Just over a year ago, a second campaign group was formed, SPIC (Stop Portland Incinerator Campaign), and last week we organised a public meeting, attended by over 100 people to think about what we can do. Several local Dorset Councillors attended – thank you.

Monitoring emissions came high on the list! You may not know that incineration companies self-monitor emissions and provide the data which is used by the Environment Agency. You may also not know that there is a flaw in the monitoring requirements. When incinerators power down and power back up for maintenance – a time of high filthy emission rates – there is no monitoring by anyone. No wonder it's not monitored then. Commissioning is also a high-risk emission time.

So, Dorset needs to take care of ourselves and monitor the emissions ourselves, so we know what's going on. We say this because also we know that even with the 'best available technology' things go wrong and currently around 60 hours per year 'leeway' is given to companies, who only have to report breaches over this limit. Whilst business may rationalise this, it's a whole different ball game if you have to live and breathe next to one.

So, tonight, SPIC asks Nick Ireland as Council Leader to please support our call for Dorset's own emission monitoring, should this ever be built. Please help ensure that the right equipment is purchased and placed correctly in order to provide the credible and usable data the Environment Agency will use. We ask that you involve and include use our manpower and willingness to help. We would also like to fund raise to help with costs.

Response from the Leader of Council

Thanks for your question Giovanna, and I hope the response is adequate enough that you don't superglue yourself to the seat. There's an official written answer which you will have imminently but here's my less formal response.

Dorset Council has consistently opposed the proposed Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) at Portland Port, both through the planning process and politically.

The plant would emit around 200,000 tonnes of CO₂ annually—equivalent to the emissions of 100,000 cars and more than the entire domestic heating emissions of Weymouth & Portland. At roughly 13% of Dorset's total emissions, it would severely undermine our carbon reduction targets.

In a world where the 1.5°C target is already out of reach and urgent action is needed to stay below 2°C, adding another major source of emissions is incompatible with our climate commitments.

Dorset Council has a statutory duty under the Local Air Quality Management regime to monitor air quality, not just from traffic but from industrial sources. We will consider installing monitoring equipment near the proposed site and along the A354 route, which could see 7,500–11,000 return HGV journeys annually, passing schools and surgeries.

Financially, the project faces serious risks: estimated construction costs of £150–180 million, falling returns due to market overcapacity, no confirmed waste contract, no CHP integration, no carbon capture capability, and looming carbon costs under the UK Emissions Trading Scheme.

A Private Members' Bill—the Waste Incinerators Bill—seeks to halt new incinerator construction and remove “deliver or pay” clauses. I have written to Dorset MPs urging support.

Dorset's waste strategy focuses on reduce, reuse, recycle, alongside clean energy opportunities where we can lead nationally. EfW is increasingly seen as a delay technology, not a future solution.

I was present at last week's National Emergency Briefing on Climate & Nature, where the assembled experts warned: “We need leadership as if the survival of our society depends on it—because it does.”

One of Dorset Council's four priorities is to respond to the climate and nature crisis, and this position reflects that commitment.

APPENDIX 2 - COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Full Council – 4 December 2025

Questions submitted by Councillors

Question 1 - submitted by Cllr P Kimber

[DT5 1DB, Powerfuel Portland Limited, EPR/AP3304SZ/V002: environmental permit consultation - Environment Agency - Citizen Space](#)

At a public meeting on the 20th of November 2025 at the social club on Portland, many Portlanders and People right across Dorset expressed their deep concern and worry regarding the variation that Power Fuel have submitted to the application.

This green site is very sensitive with people living and working at the Verne Prison and the Verne Housing estate. Also, this variation is very concerning for the health of our Dorset community.

The public meeting requested air quality monitors to give the public accurate measurement of the air quality in and around the plant before and after it is built will Dorset council undertake this process?

Has Power fuel provided any new information to Dorset Council regarding the variation and how they will control the discharge from the chimney and how will this be monitored and has Dorset Council made any objection regarding the Environmental Consultation, and will we be submitting an objection?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Health and Housing

Thank you for your question.

With respect to the siting of air quality monitors, I would refer you to the earlier answer given by the Leader in reply to a public question.

I appreciate the concern being experienced by communities about the application made by Powerfuel to vary the environmental permit. The application will be determined by the Environment Agency as the statutory regulator. The application is currently being consulted upon, and the Council will make its response to the Environment Agency by the closing date of 18 December.

The application contains information in support of the variation, but if this is considered to be insufficient, this will form part of the Council's response.

Question 2 – submitted by Cllr S Holland (read by Cllr N Eysenck)

HGV Traffic through Rural Villages

Introductory Statement: Thank you, Chair. I'm raising this on behalf of residents and parish councils along the Portland–Weymouth–Bridport corridor — from Wyke Regis through Portesham, Abbotsbury, Burton Bradstock, Little and Long Bredy, right out to Winterbourne Abbas. These communities are dealing daily with the consequences of heavy goods vehicles forcing their way through roads that were never designed for them. Damage to property, safety risks, noise, vibration, and the strain on older infrastructure — it's all taking a toll on both the physical environment and residents' wellbeing.

With the proposed incinerator at Portland Port, alongside wider development and investment under the Weymouth Town Masterplan, people are rightly demanding to know what Dorset Council is going to do to protect these historic rural villages and the wider Weymouth, Chickerell and Chesil Bank area. The impact is already being felt now, long before any future developments arrive.

Question

Villages such as Portesham and Abbotsbury are already suffering regular damage, congestion and danger to pedestrians from HGVs using routes that are wholly unsuitable for vehicles of that size. This is not an isolated problem. It affects the entire corridor: Wyke Regis, Portesham, Abbotsbury, Little Bredy, Burton Bradstock and Winterbourne Abbas all feel the pressure of freight movements linked to Portland Port.

Despite repeated reports and concerns raised by residents, ward councillors and parish councils, the current advisory routes remain unchanged and unenforced. Communities feel they are being left to absorb the consequences of poor route planning and lack of enforcement.

With the proposed incinerator at Portland Port set to increase HGV movements significantly — on top of other developments and the ambitions set out in the Weymouth Town Masterplan — will Dorset Council now take responsibility for safeguarding these communities?

Specifically:

Will Dorset Council guarantee that any traffic management plan connected to Portland Port or future Weymouth development actively diverts HGVs away from narrow, historic village streets such as those in Portesham and Abbotsbury, and deliver a clear, enforceable HGV routing strategy for the entire corridor?

And critically — while long-term plans are discussed, what immediate actions will Dorset Council take to protect these villages from further deterioration right now?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Place Services (Read by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning)

Thank you for raising this issue. We understand how disruptive and worrying HGV traffic can be for residents and parish councils along this corridor.

Dorset Council is working with BCP Council on a new Local Transport Plan, which will set out long-term strategies for managing transport across the county. We are also preparing a new Local Plan to guide future development. Both plans will be informed by detailed transport modelling so we can understand and address the impact of growth on our roads.

For major developments, such as the proposed incinerator, developers must provide a transport assessment. This helps us identify and require measures to reduce traffic impacts, including HGV routing. However, these conditions can only apply to traffic linked to that specific development — we cannot legally restrict the wider use of public highways.

In the meantime, we have taken steps to discourage HGVs from using unsuitable routes. Drivers are signposted to avoid the Coast Road and follow the advisory route to Portland Port. 'Not Suitable for HGV' signs have been installed at key junctions, and sat nav systems have been updated with a 7.5-tonne weight limit between Winterborne Abbas and Portesham. We have also raised these concerns directly with the CEO of Portland Port.

We know these measures do not solve every problem, and we will continue to look for practical ways to protect these villages both now and in the future.

Question 3 – submitted by Cllr S Flower

Dorset Local Plan – Regs 18 Land Allocations Public Consultation

You will recall I asked this question at Full Council on Thursday 23 October:

Waiting until August 2026 to reveal such information would be unfair and hugely concerning for those in our communities who are anxious about the significant loss of green belt and undeveloped land caused by new housing being 'pepper potted' across the Dorset Council area. What action will be taken to make members, and the public aware of which sites will not be taken forward. And will a list of these sites be created supporting evidence and submitted along with the draft Local Plan to the Secretary of State.

Your response was that a list of sites that are no longer available will be created and placed on the council's website, and that there would be an assessment as to whether identified sites are deliverable before inclusion in the next iteration of the draft Local Plan.

Can I take the opportunity to thank the Cabinet Member and planning officers for fulfilling this commitment in such a timely manner.

On behalf of residents however, I must reiterate my concerns about when the many other potentially undeliverable sites are likely to be removed during the sifting process and added to the list. This is hugely important to our residents given the level of public concern [confirmed by over 10,000 responses to the consultation] regarding the number of sensitive sites with expectations that these

will be removed from the draft plan; particularly if they do not comply with the NPPF and/or other statutory planning guidance.

My concerns remain that it would be grossly unfair to expect the public to have to wait for the next draft Dorset Local Plan being brought for Cabinet in June next year and further public consultation in August 2026.

My question therefore is to seek an assurance that the public will be made aware of the sites which have been screened out and removed from the draft local plan at the earliest opportunity and further that the council has sought to investigate best practice from other councils in this regard.

Thank you, madam chairman

Response from the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning

Thank you for your question and for highlighting the concerns of residents. We know how important it is for communities to have clarity about which sites will not be taken forward in the Local Plan, and we understand the anxiety this uncertainty causes.

The recent consultation was not on a draft Local Plan, but on a list of potential sites for consideration. None of these sites will be included in the plan until the next stage, when Full Council decides on the content of the draft plan for publication.

We received around 9,000 responses, and officers are working hard to review them, using technology to speed up the process. Where it is clear that a site cannot progress - for example, if a landowner confirms it is no longer available - we will publish that information online as soon as possible. We have already done this in some cases.

However, most sites need to be assessed against a range of factors, including national planning rules, housing targets, evidence, and consultation feedback. This is a complex process and must follow the legal requirements for plan-making. Only after this assessment can officers recommend which sites should be included in the draft plan.

We will continue to share updates as soon as we can, and we are committed to making this process as transparent as possible. Our approach is in line with best practice by other local planning authorities.

Question 4 – submitted by Cllr C Jones

Following a day of filming with Channel 4 with families being represented by the Send Nurture Group, and on visiting and talking to parents on their day of protest outside County Hall, one stand out area appears to be poor communication with parents. Parents feel that every step is a battle, they chase constantly and often do not receive updates. They even find out actions taken by chance on occasions that affect their child. Working closely with so many such parents at our Family

Hub, the stress is huge, this often affects their not being able to work set hours, they are often on medication for anxiety themselves. My question is simple - what more can we do as a council to provide a better and more proactive service for the parents.

Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills

First, I think it is important to emphasise that Dorset Council operates within a national SEND system that is widely recognised, including by national Government, as failing, and we are lobbying for urgent reform and increased funding. The Schools White Paper has now been delayed until Spring 2026 and this must deliver change. National reform is essential to deliver a fair, inclusive and financially sustainable SEND system.

Within this challenging context, Dorset Council has invested capital funds to create over 250 new special school places and over 100 mainstream inclusion hub places, with more to come over the next 12 months. We are supporting inclusivity in mainstream schools by funding outreach from special schools, through our SEND strategy work, which includes early identification, and by providing resources to create more suitable learning environments for children. This reflects the national and local direction of travel towards more inclusive education, ensuring children can remain in their communities wherever possible.

We recognise that good communication with parents is essential and continuously strive to improve.

- We have recently introduced a new case management system and will be introducing a 'parent portal' where parents and carers can track the progress of their child's assessments.
- We have brought more staff into the SEND team and are remodelling the workflow, which is already creating additional capacity for staff to pick up the phone to families.
- We are focusing on workforce development and SENCO engagement to improve annual reviews, and exploring the use of AI to improve efficiency.

Question 5 – submitted by Cllr B Quayle

What assessment has the Cabinet Member for Children's Services made of the emotional and educational impact on children and families when delays, miscommunication, or misapplication of guidance occur, and how is this factored into service improvement plans?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills

We absolutely understand the impact on children, young people and families, indeed, the impact of children's and parental mental health and wellbeing on children is one of the three priorities of the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership Board. This was also highlighted only last week by Rachael Wardell,

Executive Director – Children, Families and Lifelong Learning at Surrey County Council and ADCS President in her speech at the National Children and Adult Services Conference:

“Every delay is a further knock to parental confidence. Reform on this scale is complex and must be well thought through. It’s now over a year since government appointed a SEND strategic adviser and established an expert advisory group for inclusion. The curriculum and assessment review recently reported and offers a route forward for a broader, more inclusive, national curriculum. This is welcome but only one part of the jigsaw. Meeting the needs of children with additional needs must be a golden thread running seamlessly through our education system.”

Dorset Council offers the following related support:

- We held a themed ‘Let’s Talk’ online session in July 2025 focused on mental health and wellbeing
- We run a programme of Emotionally Based School Avoidance training for school staff, delivered by our Education Psychologists (EP) and additional support in school is provided by EPs and Specialist Teachers alongside the work of the EP team more widely
- We incorporate the impact of parental mental health on wellbeing of children in training such as:
 - o Therapeutic Thinking
 - o Attachment and Trauma
 - o Relational Practice
- We work closely with health colleagues around mental health transformation.

Question 6 – submitted by Cllr B Quayle

How many formal complaints have been raised in the past 12 months regarding SEND provision and inclusion officer conduct, and what proportion have resulted in upheld findings or changes to practice?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Skills

In the 12 months to 31st October 2025 we received two formal complaints about officer conduct. Both were investigated and upheld.

Question 7 – submitted by Cllr C Tomes

Two aster-owned flats at Sentryfields in Swanage have now been put on the open market, adding to a growing list of previous disposals Aster has sold homes in our town rather than keeping them as social housing. These repeated losses are steadily and permanently eroding Swanage's already fragile supply of social homes.

The impact on local families, many of whom are now being forced out of the community they have lived in for generations is impossible to ignore and demands urgent proactive intervention.

Can the portfolio holder for housing outline what discussions Dorset council has had with Aster group regarding both the current Sentryfields sales and the repeated pattern of past property disposals? Was the council consulted at any stage before these latest homes were put on the market, and is the council actively tracking and responding to the continuing loss of homes in Swanage.

Given the acute and worsening housing need in Swanage, what steps will Dorset council take to ensure that these sales do not further erode local housing availability within the town?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Health and Housing

Thank you, Cllr Tomes, for raising this important issue about the flats at Sentryfields in Swanage. I share your concern about the impact such disposals have on the town's supply of much needed affordable homes.

Aster is the largest Registered Provider in Dorset, managing over 7,000 homes and delivering new developments across the county. Their role in meeting housing need is vital and welcome — but so is ensuring that homes remain available in the communities that need them most. That's why we are challenging the pattern of disposals, noting the particular impact in Swanage and other areas across Dorset.

Although we understand that some sales may occur where refurbishment is not viable, the concentration of disposals without equivalent local replacement is very concerning to me as Cabinet Member and to this Administration. This issue has been raised by residents and councillors across all parties, and it is a standing item for discussion within our Housing Member Group.

Along with the Corporate Director for Housing, I have met several times with Aster's senior leadership alongside our Corporate Director for Housing, making clear our concerns. I am urging them to review their disposal policies and involve the Council in shaping a more community-focused strategy and have written to them formally requesting this. Aster do inform the Housing team of their intentions on such proposals, ahead of doing so, but our concerns remain. I will be meeting them again next week on 10 December to move forward with our demands and proposals and will include your Swanage concerns and also the concerns from Weymouth which have previously been raised with me. Our frank and robust discussions make Dorset Council's position clear: we know that sales are sometimes necessary but we expect a more balanced approach that protects community interests and reflects local housing needs. I will ensure that the concerns raised here today — including the Sentryfields sales — are part of that conversation.

Thank you again for highlighting this issue. I have shared your question with Aster and made them aware that this matter is being raised publicly. I will keep you and other Members updated as we continue to press for progress.

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 7.36 pm

Chair
