

DORSET COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 16 JULY 2026

Present: Cllrs Stella Jones (Chair), Les Fry (Vice-Chair), Jon Andrews, Mike Baker, Shane Bartlett, Belinda Bawden, Laura Beddow, Matt Bell, Richard Biggs, Bridget Bolwell, Louise Bown, Alex Brenton, Piers Brown, Ray Bryan, Andy Canning, Will Chakawhata, Simon Christopher, Simon Clifford, Toni Coombs, Barrie Cooper, Richard Crabb, Peter Dickenson, Neil Eysenck, Beryl Ezzard, Scott Florek, Spencer Flower, Alex Fuhrmann, Simon Gibson, Margaret Goringe, Hannah Hobbs-Chell, Sally Holland, Ryan Holloway, Ryan Hope, Nick Ireland, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones, Paul Kimber, Chris Kippax, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Robin Legg, Cathy Lugg, Craig Monks, Paddy Mooney, David Morgan, Steve Murcer, David Northam, Louie O'Leary, Emma Parker, Mike Parkes, Andrew Parry, Byron Quayle, Belinda Ridout, Julie Robinson, Steve Robinson, Pete Roper, Andy Skeats, Duncan Sowry-House, Andrew Starr, Gary Suttle, Clare Sutton, Roland Tarr, David Taylor, Andy Todd, Chris Tomes, David Tooke, James Vitali, Kate Wheller, Sarah Williams, Ben Wilson and Carl Woode

Present remotely: Cllrs Jindy Atwal, Jane Somper and Claudia Webb

Apologies: Cllrs Derek Beer, Jill Haynes, Rob Hughes, Jack Jeanes, Rory Major, Jon Orrell, Val Potheary, David Shortell and Gill Taylor

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

Jacqui Andrews (Service Manager for Democratic and Electoral Services), Jan Britton (Executive Director - Economy and Environment), Sam Crowe (Executive Director - Housing, Prevention and Communities), Susan Dallison (Democratic & Governance Services Team Leader), George Dare (Senior Democratic and Governance Officer), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director - Children's Services), Lee House (Service Manager for Finance), Catherine Howe (Chief Executive), Julia Ingram (Director - Adult Social Care), Jennifer Lewis (Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement), Jonathan Mair (Director - Assurance (Monitoring Officer)), Antony Nash (Senior Democratic & Governance Services Officer), Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic and Governance Officer) and Jack Wiltshire (Corporate Director for Highways and Engineering)

WELCOME TO NEW COUNCILLORS

The Chair of Council welcomed Councillor P Mooney and Councillor M Goringe to their first Full Council meeting following their election to Dorset Council.

17. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

18. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

19. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed the Youth Voice Officer and a representative of the Youth Council, who provided a short presentation on the Youth Council's plan for the year. A copy of the presentation would be sent to all councillors, and councillors were encouraged to contact the Youth Voice Team if they wanted to get involved.

The Chair reported that as part of a recent Volunteer Week, she had visited Ferndown Community Support who had received the King's Award for Voluntary Service, which recognised the dedication and commitment of the 70 volunteers at the centre. In particular, the Chair thanked Councillor Hannah Hobbs-Chell who had co-founded the organisation.

20. **Public Participation - questions**

There were three questions received from members of the public and responses were provided by the relevant Cabinet members. The questions and responses are attached at appendix 1 to these minutes.

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

There were no petitions or deputations for consideration at the meeting.

Councillor M Parkes handed in a petition on behalf of Leanne Gilchrist, regarding the school crossing patrol at Church Road, Ferndown and which had been signed by 1148 residents of Ferndown. They looked forward to receiving a formal written response in line with the council's Petitions scheme. The Chair noted that the matter would not be discussed by Full Council as it had not met the required number of signatures required to trigger a Full Council debate.

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

The Leader of Council reported that Councillor J Andrews would be stepping down from Cabinet and thanked him for his contribution and commitment to Cabinet over the past two years. A number of councillors also added their thanks to Councillor Andrews for his work as a Cabinet member. The Leader reported that Councillor J Jeanes would be joining the Cabinet with effect from 1 September 2026. There was recognition of the large scope of the Place Services portfolio area and the Leader noted that consideration was being given to how Cabinet members could best be supported.

The Leader provided updates on significant work that was being undertaken including continuing discussions on devolution and local government reform across the Wessex area. In addition, he reported that the Dorset Council and Energy Saving Trust Homewise campaign had been nominated and shortlisted for

the Chartered Institute of Public Relations Award. Although the campaign did not win, the recognition received was positive and the Energy Saving Trust would be developing a case study of Dorset Council to assist other councils in this area.

23. Capital Programme Review

The Cabinet Member for Resources and Finance presented a recommendation from Cabinet with regard to a review of the Dorset Council Capital Programme. It was noted that Appendix D to the report to Cabinet on 23 June 2026, did not form part of the recommendation as it was dealt with as 'for information' only.

It was proposed by Councillor S Clifford seconded by Councillor D Northam.

Decision

That Full Council:

1. Approve the new structured approval framework for capital projects, as outlined in Appendix A of the report to Cabinet of 23 June 2026
2. Endorse a fundamental reset of the capital programme, including removal of legacy, stalled, and inactive schemes
3. Approve the "Standing items" to be included in the capital programme, as shown in Appendix B of the report
4. Approve the revised "Approved capital schemes" to be included in the capital programme, as shown in Appendix C of the report
5. Approve the increase to the Capital Contingency budget from £2m to £10m, funded from the removal of stalled, low-value and legacy schemes with no recent activity.

24. Joint Local Transport Plan

The Cabinet Member for Place Services presented a recommendation from Cabinet with regard to the adoption of the Local Transport Plan 2026 – 2041.

It was proposed by Councillor J Andrews seconded by Councillor S Clifford.

A number of comments were made emphasising the importance of the plan and the need to progress the areas that it covered, and assurances were sought that councillors would have input into the detail of the plan and the ability to advocate for their wards in terms of future plans. The value of taking the plan through the Place and Resources Overview Committee on a number of occasions was also recognised.

It was highlighted that the Local Transport Plan was a joint plan with BCP Council and also required their approval. Any issues with the approval would need to be discussed with the Department for Transport.

The Cabinet Member for Place Services thanked those officers at Dorset Council and BCP Council that had been involved in the development of the plan over the last 3 years.

Decision

1. That the Local Transport Plan 2026 – 2041 be adopted
2. That authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Regeneration, Infrastructure and Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Services, to approve any necessary minor non-material and non-policy altering changes that such do not materially alter the substance, objectives or strategic direction of the plan before it is published, subject to the equivalent approval by BCP Council.
3. That authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Regeneration, Infrastructure and Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Services, to approve timely updates to the Implementation Plan, where the need arises, to take account of changes of national policy, local priorities or funding.

25. Motion on Notice - submitted by Cllr Holloway

Full Council received the following Motion on Notice proposed by Councillor R Holloway seconded by Councillor D Sowry-House and supported by Councillors K Wheller, B Ezzard, R Legg, B Bolwell, B Bawden, J Jeanes, A Fuhrmann, R Major, S Florek, A Todd, S Williams, R Hope, J Andrews, J Atwal, D Morgan, G Taylor, S Bartlett, C Kippax, L Fry, H Hobbs-Chell and S Clifford.

Motion Narrative and Action Required

Our beloved Ginger tabby “Pumpkin” was killed earlier this year by a motorist in the early hours who failed to stop and drove off, it was only another passing motorist who found him in the road and took him to the emergency vets where he was found to have suffered a head trauma. My wife and I were unaware that this had happened until mid-morning when the vet contacted us, and we were both devastated that this had happened knowing that someone just left him for dead. Unfortunately, this has happened to many cat owners across the country and leaves many owners devastated.

Currently Section 170 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 only applies to Dogs, Horses, Cattle, Pigs, Sheep & Goats but NOT cats, Since June 2024 all cats in England over 20 weeks old must be legally microchipped as is the same for Dogs. Recently the Government introduced the new Animal Welfare Act 2025 to crack down on pet smuggling, which of course I fully support. But I find it incredible that the Government is not even considering updating the Road Traffic Act. And yet despite multiple petitions and charities saying this must change, currently the Government says and I quote “difficult to enforce” I find that response incredibly hollow.

As the animal loving nation we are I think it's time that the law should be updated to protect cats and to give cat owners reassurance that motorists should legally stop if they collide with cat.

I ask members across the chamber to please support the following motion to put pressure on Government to change the law by writing to the Secretary of State for Transport.

Motion: -

That this council writes to the Secretary of State for Transport RH Heidi Alexander MP calling for the law to be changed so that cats are protected under section 170 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. Whereby motorists will be legally required to stop if they collide with a cat. And to ask the government to set a timetable for this to be discussed in the current parliamentary term.

Decision

That this council writes to the Secretary of State for Transport RH Heidi Alexander MP calling for the law to be changed so that cats are protected under section 170 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. Whereby motorists will be legally required to stop if they collide with a cat. And to ask the government to set a timetable for this to be discussed in the current parliamentary term.

26. Motion on Notice submitted by Cllr J Vitali

Full Council received the following Motion on Notice proposed by Councillor J Vitali seconded by Councillor L O'Leary and supported by Councillors A Parry, C Tomes, R Bryan, M Parkes, S Jespersen, C Monks, G Suttle, V Potheary, C Jones, C Lugg, L Beddow, N Lacey-Clarke, S Flower, T Coombs, S Gibson, R Crabb and S Murcer.

Motion:

That the proposed Open Spaces and Common Areas Management Governance Policy be adopted, subject to Overview Committee oversight.

In presenting the Motion on Notice, Councillor J Vitali reported that following discussion and advice received from the Monitoring Officer, the motion would not be debated by Full Council at this meeting, to allow proper consideration by the relevant Executive Advisory Panel, before a report back to Full Council from the Cabinet Member.

It was proposed by Councillor J Vitali seconded by Councillor L O'Leary that the Motion on Notice be referred to the Local Plan Executive Advisory Panel.

The Appendix – draft Open Spaces and Common Areas Management Governance Policy is attached at appendix 2 to these minutes.

SHORT MEETING ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 19.39 for a short comfort break.

The meeting reconvened at 19.51.

27. Questions from Councillors

There were 16 questions received from councillors. The questions and responses provided by Cabinet Members are attached at appendix 3 to these minutes.

Supplementary questions were received as follows:

Question 1 – Councillor D Sowry-House

Councillor Sowry-House raised a question with regard to whether there were any cumulative budget overspends during the previous council term and the impacts of this. In response, the Cabinet Member for Resources and Finance noted that based on decisions at the time, the combined overspend was in the region of £25m which would be funded from reserves and was in part related to setting up the new unitary council.

Question 2 – Councillor S Flower

Councillor Flower noted the experience in Verwood relating to missed collections, issues with grass verge cutting and reports of highways works requested that had not been resolved. Concern was expressed about the level of service being provided. In response, the Cabinet Member for Place Services requested the details of the issues so that he could investigate.

Question 3 – Councillor A Brenton

Councillor Brenton asked about claims made that council officers were acting politically in some specific circumstances. The Cabinet Member for Resources and Finance flagged that officers should not be criticised in public where there was no opportunity for them to respond. Any concerns should be discussed with the relevant senior officer.

A point of order was raised by Councillor L O’Leary with regard to the number of questions submitted by the councillor. The Chair of Council reminded all councillors that they should only include one question within each submission.

Question 4 – Councillor M Parkes

Councillor Parkes questioned whether the council had failed to comply with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act, in not providing requested information on assessments undertaken, which it had been stated were in place. The Cabinet Member for Place Services noted that he would need to provide a written response.

Question 5 – Councillor M Parkes

Councillor Parkes indicated that he would like to see the evidence as part of the Freedom of Information request.

Question 7 – Councillor C Lugg

Councillor Lugg requested that Church Road Ferndown be considered for an ANPR enforcement system, once a trial had been undertaken at Upton Junior School. The Cabinet Member for Place Services confirmed this could be looked into.

Question 8 – Councillor J Vitali

Councillor Vitali asked if the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education would visit the school to see if the issue could be expedited. The Cabinet Member indicated that she would visit but was unable to offer any commitment until the proposals had been looked at and required surveys undertaken.

Question 12 – Councillor P Brown

Councillor Brown expressed concern with the response and noted that the question was about data led decision making and how the methodology was being implemented by the traffic safety team. He questioned the actions that were looked at and whether it was the methodology that was not right or that the council did not have the right funding in place. The Cabinet Member for Place Services indicated that he would ask for an officer response.

Question 13 – Councillor R Legg

Councillor Legg asked that the response from the Leader be copied to all Members of Parliament in Dorset.

Question 16 – Councillor B Bawden

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader confirmed that councillors could contact either him, the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Prevention and Communities or the council's Climate Resilience Officer regarding community resilience planning issues and the identification of vulnerable communities.

28. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

29. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

APPENDIX 1 - PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Question for Full Council – 16 July 2026

Public Questions

1. Question from Cllr Leach – Ferndown Town Council

What was the total cost of operating the school crossing patrol in Church Road, Ferndown during the last financial year, and has Dorset Council undertaken a formal cost-benefit analysis before deciding to withdraw a post considered to be vital by our community?

Response by Cllr J Andrews

The cost of operating the School Crossing Patrol on Church Road, Ferndown, during the last financial year was £8,100. This decision is not about saving money. The new investment of over £300,000 supports a range of school safety measures including improved crossings, junction changes to slow speeds, new connecting paths and parking restrictions. This will make the area more accessible and provide a safe crossing point at all times of the day.

2. Question from Geoff Middleton

You will be aware that the people are absolutely shocked and disappointed by the decision to remove the school crossing patrol in Church Road, Ferndown.

The argument that there is confusion caused by having a school crossing patrol on a zebra crossing does not sit comfortably with residents and believe this is a financially driven rather than evidence based decision.

With hundreds of young people using this crossing to access three schools in the road, will the Cabinet Member that made this decision using Executive Powers reverse his decision or would he rather see a child serious injured or killed in Church Road?

Response from Cllr J Andrews

Thank you Mr Middleton for taking the time to raise this question and for attending Full Council, I really value hearing views directly from members of the public on issues like this. The decision here is not about saving money. It is instead about investing money into a safe crossing point that is available at all times of the day and at all times of the year. The new crossing ensures that children and people of all ages will be able to cross safely.

3. Question from Caroline Stamp

As a Grandparent of a child in Ferndown Middle School, who uses the crossing on Church Road manned by Sarah the crossing patrol lady.

My Grandson, his parents and myself along with other families who I have spoken with, have great concerns using this crossing in September with no patrol in place. We've witnessed vehicles and some bikes, failing to stop and even driving through when someone is on the crossing and the congestion at school crossing times leads to poor visibility when trying to cross. Sarah has been key to managing the flow of traffic and pedestrians, many a time I've seen her stop a child from running onto the crossing when it's unsafe to do so.

I've worked for 17 years in a school with children across the same age range using the crossing and regularly had road safety teams in for practical and theory sessions. At the end of the day these are children not always visible due to size and not always focused, quite often distracted by conversations with friends etc. The zebra crossing gives them hierarchy, a right of way across the road, but they don't remember to stop look and listen, because their focus is on something else. The age range across these three schools makes them vulnerable road users as stated in government papers and the Highway Code. Statistics show that a high percentage of drivers speed up before reaching a zebra crossing to pass through before the person steps out.

This particular zebra crossing is in a hazardous location, due to limited vision, multiple junctions, brow of a hill and heavy road use by work traffic and parents during school hours.

Several other counties/ areas have done a u turn on zebra crossings that are deemed hazardous during school hours. To prevent danger to life a crossing patrol person has been kept to man the zebra crossing as and where that extra safety measure is needed.

Question

Is the Council willing to change its policy on this particular zebra crossing to prevent unnecessary casualties or fatalities?

Response by Cllr J Andrews

Thank you for raising these important points. This particular zebra crossing has been recently designed to current standards and has taken into account the road layout of the area as well as the traffic flows. Road safety professionals have assessed it as a safe and appropriate way to cross without a School Crossing Patrol.

APPENDIX 2 - MOTION ON NOTICE APPENDIX - DRAFT OPEN SPACES AND COMMON AREAS MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE POLICY

Open Spaces and Common Areas: Management Governance Policy

1. CONTEXT

Across England, a growing proportion of new homes are built on estates where shared open spaces – green areas, play areas, roads, and drainage infrastructure – are not adopted by a public authority but instead remain under private ownership and management. Residents are bound by their title deeds to pay charges to these companies, with little transparency, limited accountability, and no meaningful say over costs or the appointment of managers. The Competition and Markets Authority's 2024 housebuilding review found that approximately 80% of new homes sold by major housebuilders were subject to such charges, and identified this as a significant source of consumer detriment.

The Law Commission is considering reform in this area but has not yet reported. The Government has indicated that the most effective remedy is to prevent new private management arrangements from arising in the first place, and that local planning authorities have a critical role to play – but primary legislation enabling mandatory reform has not been enacted.

Dorset Council faces a substantially increased housing delivery requirement under the new Standard Method. With major new residential development anticipated across the county through the emerging Local Plan, there is a clear and immediate need for a policy position on the governance of common spaces – one that protects future residents without waiting for legislation that may be years away.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to encourage a greater degree of accountability and resident control over the management of open and shared spaces on new housing estates in Dorset.

3. POLICY

3.1 Preference for Council adoption

Dorset Council establishes as planning policy that the long-term management and governance of shared open spaces on new residential developments is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

The Council's strong and explicit preference is that open space on new development is adopted and managed by Dorset Council – or by the relevant Town or Parish Council – rather than by a private management company. Applicants are expected to demonstrate that public adoption has been actively sought. Where it has not been pursued, or has been declined without evidenced justification, the application will be viewed less favourably.

Where adoption is offered, it will be considered subject to: the land meeting the Council's design, safety and accessibility standards; clear legal title free from encumbrances; and a commuted sum calculated on the basis of annual maintenance cost × 15 years (plus an RPI inflation adjustment from the date of planning permission to the date of adoption), held in a ring-fenced reserve.

3.2 Where private management is unavoidable

Where a public adoption is unachievable, the Council will require, as a condition secured by Section 106 obligation, that residents have meaningful and formalised representation on the financial decisions relating to management of the estate.

For the purposes of this policy, 'financial decisions' means decisions on:

- i) the setting of annual service charges;
- ii) the approval of annual maintenance budgets;
- iii) capital expenditure on shared assets; and
- iv) the appointment, renewal or removal of any managing agent.

The minimum requirement is that a residents' association with at least two elected resident representatives is established by the time 25% of units are occupied, and that this committee is formally consulted before any financial decision is taken. For developments of 50 or more dwellings, residents must constitute at least 50% of any management body with financial authority. These arrangements shall be secured in the Section 106 agreement.

4. RELATIONSHIP TO THE EMERGING LOCAL PLAN

This policy operates immediately as a material consideration in planning decisions. The Council's intention is to embed the requirements in Sections 2.1–2.2 as explicit Local Plan policies, or as part of any complementary Section 106 or developer contribution policy. In the interim, this policy – once formally adopted by Full Council – carries material weight in the determination of planning applications under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

The policy will be reviewed promptly following enactment of any primary legislation arising from the Law Commission's review or the Government's response to the CMA, at which point its requirements will be updated to reflect any new statutory framework.

APPENDIX 3 - QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Full Council – 16 July 2026

Questions submitted by Councillors

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr D Sowry-House

At a recent "Meet Your Councillors" surgery, a resident drew my attention to a social media post discussing Dorset Council's reported year-end underspend.

The post claimed that the underspend was achieved primarily through the use of reserves and by postponing or reducing services, particularly within the Place Directorate.

As elected members will know, residents are increasingly exposed to commentary and assertions on social media, often presented with varying degrees of evidence and context. Many residents understandably find it difficult to distinguish between opinion, interpretation and established fact.

Could the Cabinet Member therefore clarify:

How the reported year-end underspend was actually achieved, what role, if any, the use of reserves played in achieving the final outturn position, whether any material underspends arose from the reduction or delay of front-line services, such as pothole repairs for example, within the Place Directorate and what assurance can be given to residents that the Council's financial reporting provides a complete and transparent picture of its performance?

Finally, in an age where so much local political discussion takes place on social media, does the Cabinet Member agree that residents should reasonably expect claims concerning the Council's finances to be supported by original source information and verifiable evidence, rather than being asked to rely solely upon opinion occupying what might be described as the wasteland between knowledge and ignorance?

I would be grateful for any clarification that can help residents better understand the facts behind the Council's published financial position.

Response by Cllr S Clifford

Thanks for the question and the short answer is yes, it is important that the public receive accurate information about how their council tax is spent.

I've not seen the social media post you refer to but it certainly sounds misleading at best and you can use your own description at worst...

So it important to rebut inaccuracies and I will do that point by point. There are a number of similar questions so my apologies that there will be some inevitable overlap.

First, we publish all the end of financial year results and take relevant reports to Cabinet and scrutiny committees such as Audit and Governance which took place recently. That report shows very clearly that we did NOT use reserves to deliver the very small underspend of £169,000. In fact the complete opposite – we have INCREASED reserves at the same time as delivering the first underspend in the history of Dorset Council.

This strengthens our ongoing financial position.

The second inaccuracy highlighted in your question is that we did NOT achieve this underspend through cutting frontline services.

You ask how we did achieve this milestone and the answer is through tight financial controls, careful budget monitoring, delivering and savings and efficiencies. Previous holders of this finance cabinet post will recognise the frustration that comes from spending all year worrying about the forecasts of overspending only to find significant movements materialising late in the financial year – that happened here with a £4.6m improvement compared to quarter 3 forecast. That certainly helped and I'd like to thank my cabinet colleagues and senior leaders in the council for their tight financial grip.

You mention the directorate responsible for some key frontline services such as highways and waste. I'm grateful to the Cabinet member and director for Place for delivering significant efficiencies in areas such as school transport, lower energy bills for street lighting and higher income than expected as well as careful budget management.

That series of efficiencies helps deliver ADDITIONAL spending on drainage, flooding issues and emergency resurfacing road following storm damage. Had the teams not delivered better than expected energy bills we would have OVERSPENT on our road and highways. To suggest that we cut back in this area is clearly nonsense.

I have been very clear publicly that Dorset Council remains underfunded by government and although the underspend is welcome we are under huge financial pressure. Challenges remain and a tight grip on finances across all directorates is essential.

Finally your point about social media accuracy is well made. It is completely fair to hold the Administration and this Council to account for decisions we make. I would hope that where social media posts are pushed by political parties they would be based on facts rather than pure politics. Facts matter and residents deserve evidence not just speculation. That's why councils have an obligation to be transparent and to publish reports that are there for everyone to read and judge for themselves.

Question 2 – submitted by Cllr S Flower

Sustainability of Place Services following top slicing of the 2026/27 budget
Ward Members in the eastern side of the Dorset Council Area are increasingly receiving complaints about how front-line services have deteriorated since May 2024. The very outdated approach of top slicing budgets, which seems to have been adopted by the administration, will only make matters far worse.

Can the Cabinet Member for Place explain how it will be possible to sustain vital front-line services to our communities to an acceptable standard following the significant reduction in annual in Place Directorate funding.

Thank you, madam Chairman

Response by Cllr S Clifford

There is some overlap with the previous question so I'll try to not repeat myself too much!

I'm sure the councillor was robust in his pushback to residents claiming frontline services has deteriorated in the east of the County...I know he is a stickler for discussions and decisions to be led by data not gossip and speculation.

There are a couple of accidentally misleading comments contained within the question.

I'm sure all members are aware that frontline services do not get more personal than our social care services, our housing teams, benefits or other services and I know all in this chamber would thank our staff for carrying out their hugely important roles.

I'm delighted that these staff get the recognition they deserve and pay tribute to our children's services – rated as outstanding; our top rated SEND teams and our adults social care recently rated as good. Its what we are here for and these achievements are to be celebrated.

Cllr Flower refers a "significant reduction in Place Directorate funding". This is NOT the case. The budget approved by Council in February differs by just 0.5% on the previous year. We are able to do this because the directorate has proven to be efficient and have a tight financial grip – as mentioned in the previous response, it has delivered significant efficiencies in school transport, reduced energy bills for street lighting and so on.

Although not specific, I suspect Cllr Flower was referring to roads and bin collections when talking about resident complaints.

Roads – Including the local top up of £8m agree at last month's cabinet meeting, adding in the Department for Transport's four year allocation of £125m and including our own spending plans of £32m – plus the extra £5m I announced for flood resilience on our roads that comes to a total of £162m to be spent on Dorset highways over the coming four years. Certainly the biggest ever spend on general

highways maintenance and flood resilience. A record amount. And no cuts to frontline services.

And bins – I can give up the latest performance figures, between April 2025 and March 2026, Dorset Council completed 22,970,086 domestic collection jobs, with 18,881 reported missed collections. This equates to a successful collection rate of 99.92%, with only 0.08% of collections reported as missed.

The number of reported missed collections has remained broadly steady. However, the number of service disruptions (where collections do not take place on the scheduled day and are instead completed the following day or within five working days) has increased slightly. This MAY be what Cllr Flower is hearing on the doorstep and hope this gives him the facts he needs to deal with future comments.

As the councillor knows well as it started on his watch, the Council remains one of the highest performing unitary councils when it comes to recycling. My thanks to him and his own party for getting us to that important mark.

Question 3 – submitted by Cllr A Brenton

Many residents welcomed the report from Dorset Council's independent, non-political finance director confirming that the Liberal Democrat administration has delivered the first underspend in the history of Dorset Council.

It is therefore disappointing that some Conservatives appear unhappy with this outcome, particularly given that, under their administration, the council budget overspent year after year.

Claims About Council Spending

The Conservatives have publicly claimed that spending at Dorset Council is out of control, that services are being disrupted in order to balance the books, and that the council is running a deficit of millions of pounds.

Can the Cabinet Member for Finance confirm that these claims are false, and reassure the opposition that Dorset Council's budget remains in safe hands under the leadership of the finance director?

Follow-up Question

The Conservatives have also claimed in their public communications that council officers, specifically the Communications team, are acting politically. Can the Cabinet Member comment on this allegation?

Response by Cllr Clifford

I've answered large elements of her question in my previous responses but will reinforce a couple of areas.

It is disappointing that claims are made that spending at Dorset Council is “out of control”. I don’t know where the evidence of this comes from but it is clearly highly inaccurate and misleading to our council tax and business rate payers. Just plain wrong. And the easiest way to point to this is if spending is out of control, how to we deliver a balanced budget and an underspend? It just doesn’t stand up to any scrutiny.

The same for the claim that we are running a huge budget deficit.

So to be clear. Claims that services are being disrupted to deliver an underspend are false. Claims that spending is out of control are false. Claims that the Council is running a deficit are false.

I have given examples of the high quality services we deliver, and examples of the record investments being made. Together with the improved end of financial year quarter 4 figures, this is the reason the Section 151 officer – the top finance officer at the council – was able to lower his financial risk rating for the council has a whole and give a cautiously optimistic view of the future.

He would though tell me off if I didn’t add that financial sustainability is fragile with local government awaiting the new Prime Minister’s input into funding decisions. These are choppy waters and I’m delighted we steered a successful course last year, the challenges though remain for all of us for the future.

View to criticizing officers. I think this is unfortunate and would urge all cllrs to remember that our staff work hard on our behalf and remain non political. They cannot answer back and I believe it is unfair to criticise them in public without at the very least first discussing any perceived bias or favour with relevant senior officers.

Question 4 – Submitted by Cllr M Parkes

In a previous question to full council regarding the withdrawal of the school crossing patrol on Church Road, Ferndown we were advised that motorists get ‘confused’ where there the is a school crossing patrol on a zebra crossing.

Exploring this matter further I have been in contact with both Dorset Council officers and Dorset Police who are both unable to substantiate this rationale as there is no national or local data or guidance to base this decision on.

Dorset Police have confirmed in writing that they had nothing to do with the decision making and this was purely a Dorset Council decision.

It has been confirmed by both Dorset Council and Dorset Police that no risk assessment has been completed for the removal of the School Crossing Patrol which seems incredulous!

Based on the lack of data and guidance and more importantly no risk assessment, how can removal of the school crossing patrol putting young peoples safety at risk be justified?

Response by Cllr J Andrews

Combined in response to question below from Cllr Parkes

Question 5 submitted by Cllr M Parkes

Based on the lack of road safety data and evidence it would be fair to make the presumption that the withdrawal of the school crossing patrol in Church Road, Ferndown is purely a financial based decision made solely by the Cabinet holder using executive powers.

Based on the fact that the cabinet are grandstanding on the £169k saving made by the council, would the cabinet member consider using some of this funding to keep the young people of Ferndown safe?

Response by Cllr J Andrews (Incorporating response to Q4)

I understand and respect the strength of feeling in the Ferndown community about the School Crossing Patrol on Church Road. I recognise the important role the current patrol officer has played in supporting children and families, and I want to place on record my appreciation for the contribution of School Crossing Patrol Officers across Dorset.

This decision is not about reducing safety or withdrawing investment. Dorset Council continues to employ 28 School Crossing Patrol Officers across the county and will continue to fund patrols where they are needed.

In Ferndown, two zebra crossings have recently been installed following long-standing requests from the local community, as part of significant investment to improve safety on a busy route used by more than 1,500 pupils and around 8,000 vehicles each day. These crossings provide a permanent, clearly marked and legally enforceable place to cross, operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Where a formal crossing is installed, this becomes the way for people to cross safely. This ensures drivers receive one clear and consistent instruction about when to stop, which is essential for road safety. Operating both together at the same point can introduce conflicting signals about priority and driver responsibility, which is why our approach is to provide a single, clear crossing arrangement. This reflects the council's professional judgement and a consistent approach across Dorset, supported by Dorset Police.

I fully recognise the concerns raised locally, particularly regarding driver behaviour, and safety remains our highest priority. Our Road Safety Team, including dedicated School Safety Officers, will continue to monitor the operation of the crossings and work closely with the school, Dorset Police and the local community to promote their safe use and encourage driver compliance. In highway design, we use Road Safety Audits (which are effectively a higher level of risk assessment) to determine the safety impact of new highway infrastructure. I can confirm that the new zebra crossings were subject to a formal Road Safety Audit.

Our investment in the new zebra crossings helps people to cross the road safely at all times of day, during term time and school holidays.

Question 6 submitted by Cllr C Lugg

The responsible cabinet member made an executive decision to amend the policy for the third party funding of school crossing patrols which removed the ability for external funding,

As local ward councillors we reached out asking for this to be reconsidered particularly as a similar arrangement is already in place in Lytchett Minster with whereby the parish council are providing funding.

In the interests ensuring parity across the Dorset Council will the cabinet member revert back to the original policy to enable third parties to fund the crossing if Dorset Council feels unable to find the funding itself?

Response by Cllr J Andrews

The situation in Ferndown is different from the one in Lytchett Matravers.

In Lytchett Matravers, when the zebra crossing was installed, the School Crossing Patrol at that point was due to stop. However, the parish council and local ward members asked for additional support for children crossing further along the road, away from the zebra crossing. As there was no formal crossing at that location, they chose to fund a patrol there.

In Ferndown, two zebra crossings have now been installed at the main points where pupils cross Church Road. These provide clear, permanent crossing points with a legal requirement for drivers to stop.

Question 7 submitted by Cllr C Lugg

If the council continues with the withdrawal of the School Crossing Patrol in Church Road, Ferndown would the cabinet member commit to the immediate implementation of measures to reduce the risks to the young people caused by poor parking and driver behaviour at the start and end of the school day?

Specifically, the installation of ANPR cameras in both Mountbatten Drive and Peter Grant Way. Appreciating there would be a time delay in getting this installed, the immediate implementation of daily patrols by the traffic enforcement team.

Response by Cllr J Andrews

The council takes concerns about parking and driver behaviour near schools very seriously and works closely with schools, communities and partners to address these issues.

I would encourage Cllr Lugg to continue to engage with the Road Safety Team, who can assess the concerns raised in detail and advise on the most appropriate measures. This can include targeted interventions such as additional signage, site-specific improvements and education work with schools.

The council is also preparing to introduce new traffic enforcement powers, which will allow us to take action at locations like schools where restrictions are not being followed. This requires the introduction of a new enforcement system using ANPR cameras, which is expected to be in place early next year. These cameras can be used to record any moving traffic that is breaching traffic regulations. A trial is planned at Upton Junior School, with any wider rollout informed by the results from that trial.

These powers will also support enforcement where School Keep Clear markings are not being observed. In some cases, these need to be supported by formal Traffic Regulation Orders before camera enforcement can be used, and this forms part of the wider programme of work.

In the meantime, while it is not possible to commit to daily enforcement patrols given demand across the county, I have asked officers to review the concerns at Mountbatten Drive and Peter Grant Way and consider what proportionate action can be taken.

Question 8 – submitted by Cllr J Vitali

Stalbridge Primary School is going from strength to strength, with excellent staff, full year groups and a highly supportive community.

At present, however, many of its children and teachers are having to contend with mobile classrooms that are no longer fit for purpose. These portacabins have an advised lifetime of 10 years. Those being used at Stalbridge Primary School are now 30 years old and rotting. They are cold in the winter and sweltering in these summer months. When temperatures reached 34 degrees recently, the smell from the built-in toilets disrupted lessons. I've visited these mobile classrooms, so has a Dorset Council Health and Safety Consultant. It is to no one's surprise that she recommended they are replaced; they pose a serious risk to school children.

The school itself has been saving hard and can put up over half the cost of replacing the most dilapidated portacabin. Would Dorset Council urgently consider supporting the school with the additional £80k it needs to address this health and safety risk before the new academic year?

Response by Cllr C Sutton

Thank you for the question. We recognise the excellent work being undertaken by Stalbridge Primary School and understand the concerns that have been raised regarding the condition of the school's modular classroom accommodation. The concerns of both the school and the Council's Health and Safety Consultant following a recent site visit are being taken seriously.

Council officers are already in discussion with the school regarding its proposal to replace the existing accommodation. Further work is required to assess the suitability of the proposal, the procurement requirements that would need to be followed, and any associated building regulation, planning and delivery considerations.

The Council will also arrange for the existing buildings to be surveyed as soon as possible to provide a formal assessment of their condition and help inform options for refurbishment or replacement.

The Council is willing to continue discussions with the school regarding its proposal and any potential funding implications. However, it would be premature to commit to a specific financial contribution until this assessment work has been completed. While we will work with the school to explore solutions as quickly as possible, it is unlikely that replacement accommodation could be delivered before the start of the next academic year given the planning, procurement and construction activities involved.

Question 9 – submitted by Cllr J Robinson

Can the Portfolio Holder or relevant Cabinet Member explain why so many grass verges across Ferndown have been left uncut for extended periods this year; what is the agreed verge cutting schedule for Ferndown, why that schedule has not been met in many locations, what action is being taken to ensure all outstanding verge cutting is completed promptly and what measures will be put in place to prevent the same problems reoccurring?

Residents have raised repeated concerns that overgrown verges are creating safety issues by restricting visibility at junctions, making pavements more difficult to use, and giving the area uncared for appearance.

Despite these concerns being raised, many verges are still in an unacceptable condition.

Could the Council confirm:

Does the Council accept that the current standard of verge maintenance in Ferndown has fallen below residents' reasonable expectations, and if not, why not?

Residents deserve reassurance that this basic service will be delivered consistently and to an acceptable standard.

Response by Cllr J Andrews

As part of Dorset response to the nature and climate emergency - most urban verges are now cut and collected, usually twice a year.

This method was introduced to Ferndown / West Parley for the first time this year. There were public comms and a Cllr verge webinar explaining this change;

however, I appreciate the change may not have been expected by all residents, and this method does mean that verges are taller between cuts. Following the introduction of this change, verges are generally tallest in the 1st year before the removal of organic material results in lower growth rates.

The cutting of verges across Dorset is on schedule. The 2nd cut in Ferndown was started earlier this week, and the team are making good progress, all of Ferndown and West Parley will be cut and collected within the next two weeks. The verges will look neat as all clippings will be removed.

Cutting and collecting verges twice does mean verges will be slightly taller between cuts, but this method delivers a neat finish once cut and an effective balance of nature and climate objectives while ensuring highway safety.

Question 10 – submitted by Cllr L Beddow

Farm Lane in West Lulworth is a small road off the main road into West Lulworth, leading to Shepherds Way, The Triangle and School Lane.

You wouldn't know it was there for the last 18 months because, despite regular reporting by me and by local residents, the sign still hasn't been replaced.

When you drive past discarded road signs warning of ice, in July, it's hard not to feel that the important basics of organising and maintaining our street signage aren't being maintained.

May I ask for a detailed update on our maintenance in this area, not least so that people seeking Farm Lane can actually find it?

Response by Cllr J Andrews

Thank you, Cllr Beddow,

I recognise the importance of clear, well-maintained signage in helping residents, visitors and emergency services to identify street names. I am also grateful for the assistance provided by local residents and Members in bringing issues such as these to our attention.

The missing sign is the programme for our sign team to replace, and I will ask our local community highway officer to update you with the exact timings for the replacement and to discuss any other concerns about abandoned signs. We have seen more signs being left by utility companies and other contractors recently. Our community highway officers are looking out for these during their inspections, but if anyone spots one they think is abandoned, please report it on our website and we'll collect it.

Question 11 – submitted by Cllr L Beddow

This administration has cut the funding for the Arts Development Company, who provided support to and generated events with the cultural sector across Dorset. Cultural development has now been brought in-house to Dorset Council. But why does the Culture portfolio now sit with the Corporate Director for Weymouth And Portland (for whom I have huge respect)?

Response by Cllr R Biggs

Following the Chief Executive's review of the senior leadership team, a further review of management roles across the council is now underway. This will see the role of Corporate Director for Weymouth broadened into a wider role for inclusive economic growth for the whole of the county. This new structure will include arts, leisure and culture alongside tourism to reflect the importance of the visitor economy in Dorset.

Question 12 – submitted by Cllr P Brown

The Thickthorn Cross junction on the A354 remains one of Dorset's most dangerous accident blackspots. When can residents expect to see data-led action taken to improve safety, particularly through the installation of a roundabout, which remains the community's preferred solution?

Response by Cllr J Andrews

The Thickthorn Cross junction is one of our identified collision cluster sites, and we are committed to improving safety through an evidence-led approach.

Improvements so far have included maintaining good visibility, road markings and signage. In the last two years we have added two "High-Risk Collision Site" signs, giving motorists clearer and earlier warning of the junction ahead.

While these improvements have strengthened safety at the site, reducing speeds is likely to have a positive road safety benefit. We are therefore preparing to launch a public consultation in August on proposals to reduce the speed limit on the approaches to the junction from 60mph to 40mph. Installing a roundabout here would be comparatively expensive, and roundabouts are often areas where we see increased numbers of collisions. Looking to slow cars down here is the next step we need take.

I am grateful to Cllr Brown for raising this suggestion and helping to highlight the importance of improving safety at this location.

Question 13 – submitted by Cllr R Legg

In just a few days from now Andy Burnham will become the country's next Prime Minister. He has already indicated that he is open to changing how property and land is taxed. Some commentators believe that Stamp Duty and Council Tax are in his sights. If that change is signalled, will the Leader extend an invitation to the Prime Minister to visit Dorset so that we can impress upon him how unfair the

present Council Tax system is for our residents where three quarters of all our funding comes from that source?

Response by Cllr N Ireland

Thank you for the question Cllr Legg

If, as widely expected, Andy Burnham becomes Prime Minister in the coming days, I would be delighted to invite him to Dorset. Indeed, I suspect he would find no shortage of people willing to explain why the current system of local government finance no longer works for many rural areas.

Mr Burnham has recently spoken about the need to reform property taxation, describing Council Tax as a regressive system based on property valuations that are now more than three decades out of date. He has also indicated that he is open to wider reforms involving Stamp Duty and the taxation of land and property. While we await the detail of any proposals, I would welcome a serious national conversation about how local government is funded and whether the current arrangements remain fair for residents and councils alike.

For Dorset, the issue is particularly acute. Over three quarters of our core funding comes from Council Tax, leaving local residents shouldering a far greater share of the burden than is the case in many other parts of the country. Dorset's residents pay for services across a large rural geography, with an older population, dispersed communities and higher service delivery costs, yet we continue to receive less government support per head than many urban authorities.

However, Council Tax is only one part of the picture. Mr Burnham has been a strong advocate for devolving power away from Whitehall and giving local areas greater control over investment, skills, transport, housing and economic development. On that principle, I believe there is considerable common ground between his approach and what Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole councils have been arguing through the Wessex Partnership.

We have made the case that rural and coastal areas deserve the same opportunities as the major city regions. Yet Wessex remains one of the largest areas of England without the devolved powers and investment that many other parts of the country now enjoy. The consequence is that residents and businesses here continue to miss out on significant streams of funding that are increasingly reserved for devolved areas.

So if the new Prime Minister is serious about rebalancing the economy, tackling regional inequalities and empowering local communities, I would encourage him to look beyond the major metropolitan areas and visit Dorset. He would see first-hand both the challenges and opportunities of rural England: world-leading businesses, nationally important defence and clean energy sectors, thriving market towns, outstanding natural landscapes and communities that contribute enormously to the national economy.

My message to him would be straightforward. Reforming Council Tax would be welcome if it results in a fairer system for residents. But alongside that, we need fairer rural funding, genuine devolution for Wessex, and the powers and long-term investment needed to allow our communities to fulfil their potential.

Dorset is ready. Wessex is ready. We simply need a government willing to give rural England the same tools that it has already provided elsewhere.

Question 14 – submitted by Cllr R Legg

How many Freedom of Information requests have been received by Dorset Council since the formation of the authority in 2019 and of those how many have been referred to the Information Commissioner's Office for determination with what result?

Response by Cllr N Ireland

Since formation of Dorset Council in April 2019, we have received 10,387 Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Requests. We don't formally record the number of requests appealed to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), however since 1 April 2019 the indicative number is 38. These are generally resolved informally before the ICO completes their investigations, though any decision notices for requests resolved formally by the ICO can be found on their website. This site indicates that seven Dorset Council cases received an ICO judgment, of which two were partially upheld.

Question 15 – submitted by Cllr C Monks

Beaminster has experienced an increasing number of power cuts over the last two years, causing significant disruption to residents, businesses and particularly vulnerable members of our community.

Whilst I recognise that Dorset Council does not have direct responsibility for the electricity network, will the Council support local efforts to lobby National Grid and network operators to identify and upgrade failing infrastructure, and what steps will it take to strengthen consideration of power resilience within its planning policies and emergency planning arrangements, both of which fall within the Council's control?

Response by Cllr S Bartlett

Thank you for your question, which raises an important issue facing Dorset. We recognise the frustrations this causes, and we remind residents that they can call 105 in the event of an incident – as well as viewing maps of outages and planned maintenance online. We also encourage any vulnerable individuals or their carers to register for the Priority Services Register for extra support in the event of disruption.

As we know, power cuts are already happening due to events such as extreme weather, and these risks will increase with climate change. Meeting this requires better infrastructure; better inspections & maintenance; and emergency preparedness and response. Partly in recognition of this, I previously set up a cross-party task and finish group to consider the grid. I'm pleased to say there has been good progress since then – from new Ofgem requirements and a performance standard to ground compensation for power cuts; a new network operator that's set new standards on outages in force from December; and a forthcoming government Energy Resilience Strategy.

These will enable us to do more locally in three ways. First, we can work with network operators on our new plans and strategies – in particular the new Local Plan, the Wessex Spatial Development Strategy, and a Dorset Climate Adaptation Strategy. Second, the forthcoming new regional energy boards will provide a stronger means for us to engage strategically with them on network resilience. And third, network operators are already Category 2 Responders under the Civil Contingencies Act 2003 – meaning they engage with us on multiagency emergency planning and response through our Local Resilience Forum. We will continue to engage network operators through the Local Resilience Forum on this.

Question 16 – submitted by Cllr B Bawden

The 'Today' programme reported 2,700 excess deaths in the first two heatwaves in the UK, mostly people over 65 years old with underlying health conditions.

The Committee on Climate Change has been forecasting for years that heatwaves will be the 'silent killer'.

As the county with the oldest population, with some of the highest temperatures and hours of sunshine in the UK, we have a duty of care to our residents, workers and visitors to adapt to our changing climate and protect ourselves from extreme heat.

Could Dorset Council offer more guidance to schools, care homes and public and community buildings about mitigating the impact of high temperatures and humidity?

Is there any scope to introduce a byelaw to set a maximum working temperature?

Specifically, we need to support and enable the fast roll out of air conditioning for schools, care homes and hospitals alongside other measures including natural and installed shading.

Did the decarbonisation of the DC schools' estate and our community and business buildings under the Low Carbon Dorset EU funding programme include heat pumps with air conditioning?

What else could and should Dorset Council be doing more to protect ourselves from the impacts of extreme heat and humidity in our rapidly changing climate?

Response by Cllr N Ireland

Extreme heat is becoming one of the most significant climate-related risks facing Dorset. As a county with an older-than-average population, we know that prolonged periods of high temperatures and humidity can have serious consequences for people's health and wellbeing, particularly for older residents and those with underlying health conditions. Preparing Dorset for a changing climate is therefore a key priority for the council and is reflected in both our Council Plan and our Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy.

When it comes to preparing for and responding to heatwaves, we work closely with partners through the Dorset Local Resilience Forum. During the recent hot weather, we established an Incident Management Team to coordinate our response and share advice with staff, schools, care providers and local communities. Our adult social care teams also worked with providers to support vulnerable residents most at risk from extreme heat, while working with NHS colleagues to help maintain the flow of people being discharged from hospital.

I agree that guidance and awareness are an important part of building resilience. Extensive national guidance already exists for schools, care providers, employers and public buildings, but we recognise the value of ensuring that this information is more widely understood and accessible locally. As part of our wider adaptation work, we will continue to consider how best to support organisations and communities across Dorset in preparing for hotter summers.

More broadly, we are assessing the potential impacts of climate change on the council's services, assets, workforce and communities, while working with partners to develop a countywide Climate Adaptation Strategy. This will help identify the actions needed to make Dorset more resilient to the effects of climate change, including extreme heat.

In relation to our buildings, previous decarbonisation programmes have primarily focused on reducing carbon emissions rather than addressing overheating. The funding criteria available at the time did not provide for air-conditioning installations. While many heat pumps are technically capable of providing cooling as well as heating, the schemes were funded and delivered primarily as decarbonisation measures rather than as cooling solutions. Looking ahead, new funding frameworks provide greater scope to consider cooling and air-conditioning alongside carbon reduction where this can be justified as part of improving a building's resilience to extreme heat.

It is increasingly clear that climate adaptation must sit alongside decarbonisation. Through our Strategic Asset Management Programme we will continue to consider opportunities to improve the resilience of council buildings through measures such as shading, tree planting, green infrastructure, improved ventilation and, where appropriate, active cooling.

On the specific issue of air conditioning, there is unlikely to be a single solution suitable for every building. Our approach should be to prioritise passive measures that reduce overheating in the first instance, while recognising that some settings,

particularly those supporting vulnerable people, may require active cooling solutions as temperatures continue to rise.

With regard to workplace temperatures, there is currently no maximum legal working temperature in the UK and local authorities do not have powers to introduce a byelaw to set one. Employers do, however, have a legal duty to assess and manage risks to their workforce, including those arising from excessive heat, and national guidance in this area is currently under review.

Alongside our work on heat resilience, we are also investing in flood preparedness and embedding climate risks within our planning, transport, nature recovery and asset management strategies. Taken together, these measures will help ensure that Dorset's communities, services and infrastructure are better prepared for the changing climate that we know lies ahead.

Members who would like further information on this work are welcome to contact the Climate Team.

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 8.51 pm

Chair

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