

Full Council – 21 November 2019

Questions submitted for Public Participation Period

Question -1 Submitted by Cllr David Harris (Weymouth Town Council)

“Will the council please reconsider its policy of charging residents for having disabled parking bays close to their accommodation which is both discriminatory, against the council policy of encouraging people to remain in their homes for as long as possible, and is asking residents to pay for something which they have no ownership of afterwards?”

Response from Cllr Ray Bryan

“Any applications for disabled bays or any changes to an existing Traffic Regulation Order have to be judged on their individual merits but any disabled bay on the Highway can only be for general use rather than a personal dedicated bay.

It is by no means a given that an application for a disabled bay would be granted because it is dependent on a number of logistical factors.

The provision of disabled parking bays is discretionary, there is no statutory obligation for them to be provided on the public highway. I understand that there are a number of local authorities who do not offer the installation of disabled parking bays. Dorset Council recognise the benefit that disabled parking bays can have however, there is no budget allocated to their installation which is why we charge for their installation; the charge also takes into account future maintenance costs. This approach is consistently applied across the Dorset Council area.

If an application meets with the policy criteria but applicant is not able to afford the installation charge, then I believe there are ways for the costs to be provided via a means test. I believe that this can be applied for via various charities, such as Age UK and/or Occupational Therapists.

Whilst it is true that disabled parking bays, advisory or enforceable can be used by any blue badge holder, they are typically well respected particularly so in residential areas and if neighbouring residents are aware of the reason for the bay.”

Question - 2 Submitted by Luke Wakling

“A recent report published in BioScience magazine, warns that humanity is facing a catastrophic threat from climate change including rising sea levels. The report is signed by 11,224 scientists from 153 countries.

I recently measured height of the spring tide. Near Weymouth Lifeboat Station, the sea was just 12 inches from overtopping.

There are over 2,300 properties in Weymouth at Risk of Flooding from Rivers and Seas. **What is Dorset Council planning to do and when, to defend our town from rising sea levels?**

After the general election, I shall also be writing to our MP to ask how the government will be funding sea defences to protect our communities.

Regarding the current works underway to replace Wall D. I understand this is phase one of a £1.9M project to repair existing defences. The new shuttering is being installed at the same height as the old wall, and on the spring tide the top of new shuttering is less than 1m above the water level.

I am concerned that these works are insufficient, and there will be a need increase the height of Wall D in the near future. **Why aren't we raising the wall height by at least a couple of feet, as part of the current works? “**

Responses from Cllr Ray Bryan

Response to Question 1

“Dorset Council engineers are aware of the need to raise flood walls around the harbour and eventually along the promenade over the course of the next 100 years, primarily due to sea-level rise and more severe storm events caused by climate change. Extensive modelling work has been carried out in conjunction with the Environment Agency to determine the future risk to the town. These studies were based upon UK Climate Prediction figures, the Strategy document was carried out using figures from UKCP2018. ‘UK Climate Projections’ is a climate analysis tool that forms part of the Met Office Hadley Centre Climate Programme. More information about UKCP18 can be found at <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/approach/collaboration/ukcp/about> and is the industry best-practice assessment of sea level rise and climate change predictions.

WPBC completed several flood risk modelling, strategy and asset condition studies in 2019 that highlight future flood risk, and the requirement to manage it, within Weymouth. Within the harbour this is likely to require existing flood walls to be raised and new flood walls to be installed within 10 years in some locations, but not all. In reality this will probably occur when harbour quay walls are replaced or significantly repaired. The harbour may also require a tidal barrier in approximately 2060 but this will require further analysis of environmental factors such as sea level rise.

Along the coast, Dorset Council Coastal Engineers & the Town Council Beach Manager are using the newly developed Weymouth Beach Management Plan (BMP) in order to manage the beach more effectively as a coastal defence structure, alongside its existing amenity use. A set-back seawall along the promenade may not be required until 2060. The BMP also gives clear recommendations for coastal defence intervention over the coming decades.”

Response to Question 2

“Wall D, according to the aforementioned modelling we have undertaken, is already of a suitable height to act as a flood defence until at least 2065. The wall will require replacement in approximately 2070 and it would be prudent then to consider incorporating a flood wall into its design. The Strategy mentioned above shows the phasing of both replacing and raising of the harbour walls, in larger sections. This shows that some wall sections require raising now in order to maintain the required standard of protection, whilst others are able to wait for another round of wall replacement in approximately 2060

If Sea level rise is significantly greater than currently predicted, then we could potentially raise the capping beam of the quay wall in order to form a flood defence structure. This will require additional design and we do not have a cost estimate for this eventuality at present.”

Question -3 Submitted by Laura Baldwin

“Members from Extinction Rebellion in Dorset were invited to attend a meeting on 10th June with Cllr Ray Bryan and Officers from Dorset Council

The main thrust of the meeting included; sharing views on the climate emergency, exploring ways of working together and discussing existing and future plans and actions to address the climate and ecological crisis.

During this meeting XR requested the Council to amend the declaration made on 16th May to reflect the wider environmental crisis, (not just a focus on climate), adjusting it to a Climate and Ecological Emergency. There was commitment from Councillor Ray Bryan, supported by the Dorset Council team present, that this would be addressed through the required processes. The process was described as follows:

1. Check with the legal team if it was possible to make the amendment without consulting the Full Council of members, if this was not possible then
2. Ask members at the next Full Council Meeting for a vote on changing the declaration to a Climate and Ecological Emergency.

At a further meeting with Councillor Ray Bryan and a Dorset Council team on 5th August, members of XR asked Cllr Bryan for an update on the amendment. We were informed that as there had not been a Full Council meeting between the original request and this reminder there had been no opportunity to seek agreement from members on the amendment.

There was a Full Council Meeting on Thursday 18th July, but the item was not raised at this meeting.

Question: Is there any reason why the Council have not made this change, and any reason why this change cannot be agreed upon here this evening?"

Response by Cllr Ray Bryan

"Through our Climate Emergency work so far, we have established key themes and working groups related to the Services that Dorset Council provides. One of these groups is focused on the Natural Environment, and this group will be considering not only how green space owned and managed by Dorset Council may be used to reduce our carbon footprint, but also how our operations can be delivered to protect and enhance biodiversity. I am happy to amend the terms of reference for the Climate Change Executive Advisory Panel to include the ecological emergency and for this to happen with effect from the meeting of the advisory panel tomorrow."

Question -4 Submitted by Caz Dennett

“At the Full Council meeting in July 2019, Cllr Clayton expressed his concern for the way in which considerable Council business and decisions are being pushed into Executive Advisory Panels. Panels which have no decision making power and which can effectively block the opportunity for Full Council to discuss, debate, review and make decisions. Adding to the potential reduction in democracy is the Panels’ lack of transparency and openness. The Climate Emergency Executive Advisory Panel appears to be operating “behind closed doors”. Meeting dates are hard to find, minutes are not published and meetings are not open to public viewing or to the press. This lack of transparency is a genuinely serious concern. Surely there is no need for Dorset Council’s Climate Change Panel to be so covert. **Is there any good reason why the Panel’s meetings cannot be viewed by the public either in person (preferred) or as the very minimum through a video live stream or video recording in order to improve transparency and public trust?”**

Response by Cllr Ray Bryan

“There appears to be some misunderstanding and suspicion around Dorset Council’s Executive Advisory Panels – or EAPs and also some misunderstanding about how decisions are made within Dorset Council. I’m glad to have the opportunity to clarify.

Dorset Council decision making is transparent. Decisions are made by the full Council, by the Cabinet or a Committee and those decisions are made after publishing the date, time and agenda for the meeting and are almost always made in public. Only on an exceptional basis, for instance when we are considering an individual’s personal information or something that is commercially sensitive, will we meet in private.

EAPs have been set up to look at a range of issues and topics across the council. They are not decision making meetings. Instead they are advisory meetings led by a Portfolio Holder on a specific issue. The panels are made up of councillors with particular skills, knowledge or interest in a subject area and they are supported by officers with the relevant knowledge and by anyone else that the Cabinet member believes may be able to contribute to the work of that EAP.

The use of EAPs to explore and develop policy ideas on a ‘task and finish’ basis is standard practice in local government and is used primarily for councillors and officers to have free flowing discussions ahead of bringing any proposals to the more formal decision making structures of the council. They can make

recommendations which will then be taken to the appropriate committee, Cabinet or Full Council for discussion, debate and review, enjoying the same level of openness and transparency as any other decision made by the Council.

We have to be realistic about how we go about developing policy and bringing about real change in areas as complex as climate change or any of the other areas for which we have established Executive Advisory Panels. A formal full Council meeting of 82 people in this chamber or a meeting of the Cabinet with its very wide remit are not the right places to consider from scratch the detail of the impacts of alternative policy proposals and to hear detailed evidence and opinion.

Executive Advisory Panels are not about blocking discussions or debate. Quite the opposite. The Climate Change Executive Advisory Panel that I chair, has already invited outside organisations to speak directly to us at meetings. As soon as purdah ends we will be launching an extensive call for evidence from members of the public so they can contribute to our work. We have recently published information on the panel in our Dorset Council News magazine, which is posted to over 200,000 Dorset households.

We have published information after each Climate Change EAP meeting to keep everyone up to date with our work and we have uploaded supporting documents on our Climate Emergency webpages online. And I know that I speak for everyone on the panel when I say we are always more than happy to discuss our work with members of the public.

These are not the actions of a group that is operating in a “covert” manner.

Councillors working on Executive Advisory Panels need to be able to concentrate on hearing and considering the evidence so that we can develop proposals for change. A public meeting with large numbers of individuals and different groups all clamouring to bring forward their own proposals is not the right forum to do that. I therefore do not support opening up the meetings to public attendance.

The Climate Change Executive Advisory Panel is simply doing what we are expected to do in our capacity as Dorset councillors and officers. We will continue to keep Dorset residents up to date with our work and when we bring forward our proposals individuals and groups will be able to engage with the outcome of our work just as they would with any other aspect of the Council’s decision-making process.”

Question -5 Submitted by Amy Smith

“267 Councils in the UK have declared a climate emergency; of these 74% have stated a target date to reach zero carbon emissions, 26% are currently undecided including Dorset. The majority, 62% have stated a target of 2030 or sooner. Will the Leader of the Climate Emergency Executive Advisory Panel Councillor Ray Bryan inform the Council and Dorset residents the target date that is being set by Dorset Council? Will he please confirm that Dorset will join the 62% rather than setting our goals to only achieve the lowest-level performance, thus reflecting his confidence in Dorset’s ability to “change the way we deliver services, and take action decisively and with real impact”?

Response by Cllr Ray Bryan

“I understand the benefits of setting targets in providing urgency and impetus to seek solutions that will enable us to meet a carbon zero position. However, I am keen to ensure that any targets that are set are realistic, where possible taking into account the evolving technology which will be necessary to meet our aim and considering the investment which will be necessary from the Council and Central Government. Council Officers are currently working on themed areas of work and will be developing action plans to be presented as part of a climate change strategy next April. At this stage we will have a clearer idea of a sensible target date for meeting our zero-carbon goal. “