

Full Council – 21 November 2019
Questions from Councillors

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr Les Fry (to be asked by Cllr Bill Pipe)

“Safeguarding our vulnerable people is a key priority for all of us here in Dorset. Working in partnership is always more efficient and cost effective to achieve this outcome. Working in close collaboration, sharing information with the ability to be dynamic with responses to protect people has to be the way forward, especially given that County Lines is a significant threat, risk and harm here in Dorset.

Dorset currently has pan Dorset Strategies for Child Sexual Exploitation, Slavery and Vulnerability issues, as well as a pan Dorset MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub).

The two Unitaries have announced that they are in process of creating two separate unitary solutions for safe guarding. Indeed Dorset Council has already withdrawn its staff from the MASH

I understand that this decision was around CAROL (Children at risk of/or linked to Exploitation)

This extremely disappointing decision taken without the knowledge of members has caused a Fragmentation of the system, creating staffing and communication challenges for all public services involved in Safe Guarding. For example the Police now have to find more officers for two units instead of one.

Safe guarding is paramount for all our people here in Dorset, especially our children, the elderly and the vulnerable and to have two different policies in Dorset is completely unacceptable and unworkable.

1. How did this change come about?
2. When will the business case and costings for these single Safe Guarding units (that will have submitted to the portfolio holder) be coming to full council for ratification? “

Response by Cllr Andrew Parry:

To be circulated.

Question 2 – submitted by Cllr Brian Heatley

“The Review of Polling Arrangements proposes that the approximately 1400 non-postal voters of part of Weymouth West, ROD3, should have to go to a polling station outside that Polling District. This contravenes the excellent principle set out in the paper before Council tonight that where possible polling stations are allocated centrally to residential areas to keep travel to a minimum.

It is suggested in the review that because turnout from the polling district was relatively high in the May 2019 election when there was no polling station in the ward, voters are prepared to travel further. Turnout did hold up, but an alternative explanation is that this is a ward where there has been a very lively political contest in most recent years.

Please could you reconsider this decision and undertake to make a serious effort to find a new polling station in a large polling district which on the face of it contains a number of alternative possibilities.”

Response by Cllr Spencer Flower, Leader of Council

“Electors in the ROD3 polling district previously voted at St Nicholas Church Hall in Buxton Road. When this venue became unavailable, the Electoral Services Team made arrangements for the polling station to move to The Old Castle Inn. However, having set this up and made all the necessary arrangements, they were advised not long before the poll in May that The Old Castle Inn had closed. The decision was made that due to the short notice to make other arrangements, the polling station would be moved to the Weymouth South Scout HQ on Rylands Lane, just outside of the polling district.

During the public consultation period for the Polling Place Review, 2 comments were received from Dorset Council members in respect of the distance the electorate had to travel to be able to vote. Two alternative locations were suggested. One of these was The Old Castle Inn which the Team had previously tried to utilise, and the other was a school. However, as turnout was actually higher at the May elections than in previous polls during the last few years, and no complaints had been received from electors in respect of this polling station, no changes were proposed.

I have asked the Electoral Services Team to review the arrangements for this polling district in the New Year to ascertain whether there is a suitable alternative venue with appropriate facilities for the staff working at the station and that is accessible for local electors.”

Question 3 – submitted by Cllr Louie O’Leary

“Weymouth has either the highest or one of the highest car park fees in the county it costs for 4 hours £4 and that goes to £5 in the Summer and while in Dorchester it is £4 all day or 2.60 for up to 3 hours. With Weymouth’s high street suffering and with such high levels of deprivation in Weymouth how is it meant to compete with other towns? Now we are one council one authority surely Weymouth deserves a better deal and a standard balanced rate county wide.”

Response by Cllr Ray Bryan

“It is recognised that following the inception of the Unitary Authority on 1st April there are a number of anomalies relating to both the cost of parking and hours of charging across the Dorset Council Area.

There is a working group already actively looking at **three** particular strands relating to this subject with a view to simplifying and harmonising cost of parking, charging hours, special permit including resident permits.

We are also looking at whether there is a need for a differential between Coastal Towns and Villages and Market Towns and Villages.

As we are now a single Council we will be looking at the potential for a Monthly and Yearly permit that allows residents and visitors the potential to park in any area of this council.

In addition we will be looking at the provision of electric car charging spaces in the majority of our car parks this is a result from our

The working group is meeting twice-weekly at this stage to facilitate the process and enter into dialogue with key stakeholders.

It is hoped that users of car parks will benefit from a much simpler and consistent pricing structure across all of the Dorset Car Parks once the project is completed.

I thank Cllr O’Leary for his question and his passion for representing his constituents and I hope that my response will show that all of Dorset Councils area is considered special and will be treated as such.”

Question 4 – submitted by Cllr Bill Trite

“In view of this Council's recognition of the importance of village halls to local communities - including the role village halls play in improving social cohesion and combating rural isolation - can the Leader confirm that there are no plans to remove or reduce the present level or levels of discretionary rate relief for charity-based village halls in Dorset?”

Response by Cllr Spencer Flower, Leader of Council

“Members approved a Discretionary Rate Relief policy for Dorset Council at its meeting of Cabinet on 3rd September 2019. The policy takes into account the various policies that had previously existed across the predecessor billing authority areas, government guidance and key stakeholder feedback, having regard to developing a consistent approach moving forward.

Members raised questions regarding any negative impact on the organisations already in receipt of support and were advised that the policy looked to target support to those organisation which make a maximum contribution towards the community. It was anticipated that the majority of existing recipients would continue to receive Discretionary Rate Relief.

With regard specifically to village halls, a number currently receive 20% discretionary rate relief in addition to any mandatory rate relief awarded. It is recognised that well maintained village halls have enormous benefits to rural communities and it was agreed to continue to award 20% discretionary rate relief as a top up to the mandatory relief to those halls that are managed by registered charities with open access policies.

Revenues & Benefits have recently invited applications from all current recipients of Discretionary Rate Relief, as all awards currently end on 31st March 2020. As long as the village halls make an application for the relief for the 2020/21 financial year and continue to meet the criteria, there will be no detriment.

The adopted policy, however, is due for review during 2020 in accordance with the portfolio holder's suggestion to ensure that the new policy is fit for purpose.”