

Full Council – 18 February 2020
Questions from Councillors

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr John Worth

“In the light of the on-going pressures on the council budget, would it not be more prudent, that rather than continuing with the sale of assets inherited from the legacy councils, Dorset Council, where appropriate and possible, forms its own development company in order to maximise profits and create an ongoing revenue stream?

After all you can only sell an asset once whilst a prudent investment can keep giving”.

Question 2 – submitted by Cllr Maria Roe

“Wimborne Town Football Club was founded in 1878 and has a long and proud history of achievements. The Magpies are in the Southern League Premier Division South. It is a committed community club that runs teams for 250 boys and girls, a ladies team, and it has two teams for people with disabilities. The club has several paid employees and runs a successful clubhouse with functions throughout the year.

The Football Club is located in an area known as Cuthbury which is to be developed into a housing estate. The club is due to move to a new football ground off the Leigh Road at Parmiter. The original S.106 agreement made in 2018 imposed a number of obligations on the developer which had to be complied with before development started on the new site. One requirement was that the new football ground at Parmiter had to be completed before the development of the site began at Cuthbury to ensure a smooth transition for the club.

A member of the public contacted me in late November to say that the situation had changed significantly. I discovered in December 2019 that a Deed of Variation had been made which enabled the developer to start work on the existing site before completing the new football ground in Parmiter leaving the club potentially homeless. This means that there is now a very high risk that the football club may have nowhere to play; for a semi-professional team, and also the local community, the consequences of this are catastrophic.

The Deed of Variation was carried out through delegated powers without any scrutiny or consultation. The football club was not informed, the ward members were not informed, town council and parish councils were not informed, and this is simply not acceptable.

My question to the portfolio holder is simply this: what will Dorset Council do to put this situation right?”

Question 3 – submitted by Cllr Nick Ireland

Agenda item 13 (Pay Policy Statement) highlights the fact that Dorset Council as an employer pays a lowest salary of £17,364 per annum, which equates to an hourly rate of £9.02 at the council's 37 hours working week.

By contrast, according to the Living Wage Foundation, the real, minimum living wage is currently £9.30/hour (outside of London).

Other unitary authorities, Cornwall being a prime example, have not only moved to pay all their staff a minimum of the foundation real living wage but have gone much further in insisting their contractors and suppliers do the same as contracts come up for renewal. This encourages staff retention and loyalty and brings benefits the local economy.

Given the regular appearance of various localities of Dorset Council's demesne in indices of child poverty, social deprivation and low-wages, and considering the much repeated aspiration for Dorset Council to be 'an employer of choice', will the Leader as a minimum commit to ensuring all Dorset Council employees are paid at least the real living wage as established by the Living Wage Foundation and that this is revised appropriately on a yearly basis?

Question 4 – Mike Parkes

Ferndown Town Centre – Regeneration Strategy

In 2016 the former East Dorset District Council, working with Ferndown Town Council and Dorset County Council, commissioned consultants to investigate the feasibility of regenerating Ferndown Town Centre which involved extensive surveying of the buildings, open spaces, businesses, traffic flows and analysis of pedestrian footfall. The research culminated with a series of consultation sessions with key stakeholder groups and members of the public.

Following completion of the report, the Ferndown Town Centre Regeneration Strategy was approved by the sponsoring Councils in April 2017.

The strategy document identified seven projects which contribute towards a first phase of implementation with a second phase to be developed subsequently.

The advent of LGR meant that the only one of the seven projects was feasible for implementation prior to the council changes and money was ring-fenced from the former East Dorset District Council to make improvements to the Barrington Centre. The work on the Barrington Centre is shortly about to commence, however at the time it was recognised by the representatives from each of the councils that this was one of the lower priorities but at the time was the most likely to be delivered.

Notwithstanding this all were expectant and assured that the plan would move across the new Dorset Council.

Ferndown, like many other town centres across the country, has an economy that continues to decline and is unappealing to residents and visitors. The town struggles to retain existing businesses and is unlikely to attract new business without urgent investment that is needed to revitalise a dated town centre that has had little or no attention since the early 1980's.

Can I please have an assurance that there is still a commitment to implement the Ferndown Town Centre Strategy and how the priorities contained within it will be overseen by Dorset Council, with an indication of what funds will be made available and the timescales for implementation of the various stages?

Question 5 submitted by Cllr Ryan Hope

Question - Crematorium and the high levels of Nitride Oxide being produced

Weymouth Crematorium is located within my ward Westham, an area described statistically as an area of deprivation. The Crematorium is a very built up area and is close to four schools, three being primary schools, and Budmouth Academy.

There was recently a press release in the Dorset Echo regarding Weymouth Crematorium and the high levels of Nitride Oxide being produced.

Around 95 per cent of coffins used in cremations are made from chipboard/MDF and funerals using these types of coffins produce the same amount of NOx gas as a car driving 2,280 miles or 3,650 cars driving past the crematorium during the course of a cremation.

People exposed to nitrogen oxides over a long period may experience respiratory issues and reduced lung function that can limit an active lifestyle. As well as the health implication this council declared a climate emergency July 2019 and oxide is a greenhouse gas.

Please can you tell me:

- 1) What plans do DC have for installing NOx filters into the Weymouth Crematorium and others in Dorset to reduce the levels of Nitride Oxide currently being exposed to our communities in Dorset?
- 2) What information is being given to bereaved families to equip them with the information they need to make more environmentally friendly, informed choices when saying goodbye to their loved one?

Question 6 submitted by Cllr Andrew Kerby

Dear Chair,

We are incredibly lucky in the new Dorset Council to have elected members that genuinely care about our younger people. I know that many of the fresh – and not so fresh faces are actively involved in providing a youth service for our young adults, teenagers and children. Whether that be directly through youth work, running a charity or in many cases, both.

I'm fortunate enough to volunteer with my young people, a role I take incredibly seriously. We have some excellent youth centres – many are far more successful now than they ever were under the former Dorset County Council (DCC) and I very much recognise the hard-work and dedication that paid staff and volunteers contribute to ensuring our young people have a safe space to learn and grow.

This success of our community youth provision is made even more remarkable considering that many of the youth charities and groups, still, after all these years, have serious unresolved issues as a direct result of what I believe was a badly planned and implemented transfer. Officers responsible for executing the dissolution of Dorset County Council's former youth service currently view the transfer programme as a success, including the transfers where through no fault of the community groups or children, youth centres sat empty for years. Other youth charities have been left to pay thousands in fees, to rectify legal situations following botched transfers – taking money that should have been spent on providing frontline services.

Can we as Dorset Council acknowledge that there **are** and have been serious issues in the transfer of the youth service provision by the former Dorset County Council to the community, and that these problems are causing difficulties to community groups and are consequently damaging to our younger people.

Does Dorset Council agree to launch a full (no stone left unturned) review into the former DCC youth service transfer, not with an aim to reverse a decision, but to ensure learning takes place and is embedded into the new Council? Where the review encounters issues caused by the youth service transfer, I ask that steps are taken to rectify the problem and if necessary, funding from Dorset Council is sought to remedy the situation, so that no young person should mis-out or be made vulnerable as a result of poor administration and execution of policy by this council or previous councils.

In discussions with the Leader & Executive Director for Children, we recognise the benefits in the setting up a cross-council Executive Advisory Panel (EAP), tasked with examining the predecessor Council's youth offer. On the advice of the Monitoring Officer, the findings from this EAP, should be reported through the Peoples Scrutiny Committee and onto cabinet.

I will be formalising these arrangements with the scrutiny committees Chairman Cllr Somper, this week. I hope Cllr Kerby and other Councillors with a keen interest in Dorset Council's commitment to children & young people, will wish to participate, so that, going forward we can all have renewed confidence in our Youth Offer.