

Full Council – 18 February 2020

Questions and Statements submitted for Public Participation Period

Question - submitted by Paul N Tomlinson, Chairman of the former Dorset, Poole & Bournemouth Local Access Forum

Local access forums

“Section 94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires each local highway authority to establish an independent advisory body, known as the Local Access Forum. Once appointed by the authority the Forum’s primary function is to advise the authority and other public bodies as to the improvement of public access to land in its area for the purpose of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area.

The legislation provides for the establishment of joint Local Access Forums to serve adjacent authorities and in the early 2000s Dorset County Council and Bournemouth and Poole Borough Councils set up the Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole Joint Local Access Forum. Forum members represent a range of local interests concerned with improving public access to the countryside, including both users of local rights of way or access land - such as walkers, horse-riders and cyclists and also owners and occupiers of access land or land used by local rights of way.

When the three local authorities became two this created a need to revise the membership and administrative arrangements for the LAF. What concerns the members of the earlier Forum is that we have been unable to get any information at all from the two Unitary Authorities as to their plans to reconstitute the LAF, so that its members can continue to address their statutory role. The information on Dorset Council’s website about the Local Access Forum is some years out of date, and since it last met in November 2018 none of the members of the earlier LAF have received any communication about how the Forum will be reconstituted. Dorset Council officers may need to have to undertake discussions with their counterparts in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council about whether they wish to continue with a joint forum, but existing Forum members cannot understand why this has taken so long, and why they have not been kept informed of progress. This is despite members of the Forum (and organisations with an interest in its work) having repeatedly asking officers and members of both councils for information.

Leaving aside the fact that the Council has a statutory duty to maintain a Local Access Forum, the advice that a functioning Forum would be able to provide would directly support the priorities set out in the draft Dorset Council Plan. The sections concerning the “unique environment” and “strong healthy communities” both fit well with the LAF’s role. For example access to rights of way, country parks and countryside are specifically mentioned under “strong healthy communities”. It is also puzzling that despite its statutory role the LAF is not mentioned in the Plan as a body with which Dorset Council will work.

Question:

Members of the LAF, as it existed at the end of 2018, ask the Council for a timetable for the re-establishment of the LAF, either a discrete LAF for Dorset Council or a joint LAF with BCP Council.

Thank you.

Statement by David Redgewell (South West Transport Network)
To be read out by John Collingwood

“We are unhappy with proposed cuts to the Crewkerne - Beaminster - Bridport hospital bus services from May 2020.

First Wessex have withdrawn operations on their portion of service 6 but First South West have still maintained their part of the route. Buses of Somerset are maintaining Yeovil bus services.

Will Dorset County Council work with Somerset County Council, Bridport Town Council, Beaminster Town Council and Crewkerne Town Council to maintain and improve services between Bridport - Dorchester South - Lyme Regis - Axminster and Yeovil as well as ensure that buses services are provided on Sunday's and weekday evenings.

Currently, it seems as though there will be no Sunday services until the 1st May 2020.

We would like to see progress on disabled access to Dorchester South and Dorchester West stations, also at stations on the Bristol - Weymouth line rail partnership as well as a lift at Wareham station.

The £299000 subsidy allocation from the DFT is most welcome and we would like it to be used on improvements to local bus services.

We would also like to see through ticketing on the service 30 between Taunton and Axminster”.

Question submitted by Prof Tony Walter

Dorset’s 2020-2033 Waste Plan embraces the **waste hierarchy** – the priority is waste reduction, then re-use and recycling, then recovery of materials or energy, and only then disposal. The plan accepts **incineration** as a means of **energy recovery** from residual waste *so long as it does not mean burning waste that otherwise would or could be managed further up the waste hierarchy* (Policy 6.b, p. 76).

I have two concerns about this:

1) Evidence from across the UK has shown incineration can reduce recycling rates. In her recent report *A Burning Problem: How Incineration is Stopping Recycling*, Baroness Jenny Jones writes: 'There is a logic to generating energy from the waste that we cannot recycle, or reuse, but it is meant to be the last resort. What we have created instead is a market driven system of incinerators which constantly need to be fed. Many councils have signed long term contracts with incinerators and these have some of the worst recycling rates in the country. In fact, many of these councils have gone backwards and recycle proportionately less than they did six years ago.'

2) The Waste Plan (3.13) aims to 'contribute towards a **zero waste** economy' - a **circular economy** (3.17) in which waste is designed out of production and consumption, so resources can be used for as long as possible – but currently impeded by lack of national policy. Prof Ian Boyd, DEFRA's chief scientific adviser, is concerned that building new incinerators that last 30-40 years could– by destroying resources - undermine a circular economy once national policy and new technology enable this. *

I therefore ask:

- How would DC ensure that the proposed Portland incinerator would not undermine a) Dorset's good record of recycling and b) its long term aspiration for a circular economy?

* <http://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/9c6b4590-5882-4464-a945-29783d4af339>
(from 15:17:12)

Question submitted by Kira Robinson

On May 16th 2019 the Dorset Council recognised a state of Climate Emergency stating

"We have an opportunity and an obligation to demonstrate leadership – thinking globally about the implications of climate change and acting locally to help address it in our communities.

In December Dorset Council took the initiative to make a request for ideas from the public to help tackle the task ahead. Around this same time South Western Energy Ltd (SWEL) submitted plans to drill a single vertical oil well near the village of Puddletown.

This proposal is obviously inconsistent with the Council's efforts to move towards a more sustainable future for Dorset. It also contradicts the wishes of the Puddletown Parish council, who have rejected the plan stating it "will have an adverse effect on the natural environment, biodiversity and rich wildlife." And expressing concerns that

the “track” used as access for up to 8 tankers is in fact a public bridleway, already congested from vehicular use.

The local community have also rejected the idea of drilling for dirty oil on their doorsteps. To date, the planning application has directly received over 100 objections on the councils website. An online petition has collected more than 800 signatures with paper petitions adding over 100 more.

The Governments own wildlife adviser, Natural England, Dorset Wildlife Trust and the environment agency have all criticised the applications flawed ecological assessments especially regarding the threat of pollution to potable water supplies, nearby river Piddle and to the areas sensitive chalk stream, Devils Brooke.

The Dorset councils draft 4 year plan sites “It is clear that the climate and ecological emergency must inform the council's decisions and actions for the foreseeable future”.

To that end I ask;

Will Dorset Council demonstrate leadership and influence and say no to South Western Energy and say no to new fossil fuel extraction in Dorset?

Statement by Prof Marfleet

All Dorset councillors will now be aware of the pressing question of income poverty in the county – and especially in South Dorset. You may not, however, be aware of all the implications:

- persistent low wages have a cumulative impact on households, and especially on children. This explains why in some areas of the county child poverty now exceeds 40 per cent;
- there's a close correlation between poverty wages and ill-health, including problems of mental health. Did you know that suicides increased by almost 40 per cent in Dorset last year, the highest level since records began ... and that suicides are concentrated in the areas of greatest deprivation in the county? Here's food for thought ... while suicides in Dorset increased at an alarming rate, the number of suicides in the BCP area **fell** significantly!
- chronically low wages are driving away our young people. Many of those who can leave - especially if they have appropriate qualifications - do leave, and don't return. Among those who remain, job opportunities are depressed by employers who take advantage of the low-wage economy by violating the law on pay, contracts and in-work benefits. This is becoming a systemic problem, especially in South Dorset – and especially in leisure, hospitality, retail and the care sectors, which dominate the local economy;

- out-migration is a key factor driving Dorset's impending demographic crisis. Do you know that in a few years the ratio of those employed in the county to those who are not economically active (mainly those retired) will be 1:1? This is the dependency ratio – and at 1:1 it is not sustainable – it will leave the county in deep trouble;
- chronically low wages have their impact on local businesses – less to spend, less commercial income and more business failures. This is part of the syndrome which leads to a collapse in new business starts. Weymouth & Portland dominates the Dorset Council area demographically ... but here, where wages are lowest, the number of new companies is a fraction of those established elsewhere in the county and in BCP.

Other councils in our region have recognised similar problems and have intervened, using their local powers. The key issue is the **minimum wage**. We need to put a floor under wages. **Cornwall** shares many economic and social problems with Dorset – and there the council has become a Living Wage employer, guaranteeing the Real Living Wage (that's £9.30 an hour) to all its employees and all those on contracts issued by the council. **The City of Bristol** is also an accredited Real Living Wage employer ... and has showed real leadership by contacting hundreds of local businesses and asking them to do the same 180 have so far followed this lead (in contrast, in the whole of south and west Dorset there are just 12 Living Wage employers).

Next door to us in **Devon**, East Devon District Council is discussing a poverty strategy that addresses issues of incomes, rent, rural isolation, debt and general well-being. So if you live in Honiton or Axminster the council is actively engaged in addressing your problems. If you live over the border in Lyme or Beaminster – or if you're in Sherborne or Wyke or Swanage or Ferndown ... bad luck!

Months ago our community campaigns made policy proposals to the Executive Advisory Panel. They involve three sorts of measures:

- For the Council to declare **publicly** its commitment to meet legal requirements on the National Minimum wage, Equal Pay for women, and terms and conditions of employment – and its expectation that all employers with contracts serving the Council will do the same. This sends out an important message.
- The Council to prepare to introduce the Real Living Wage – as in Cornwall, Bristol and elsewhere – and take the lead in encouraging others to follow suit.
- The Council to take the lead in educating our young people about rights at work - providing our schools and colleges with sessions on wages, contracts and entitlements – and backing these up with local workshops and advice.

I hope the response from the Cabinet is not: “we can’t afford it – we’re not going there”. Please do not tell your constituents that what’s good enough in Avonmouth or Truro or Sidmouth can’t be done in Weymouth or Portland or Sturminster Newton.

Our current prime minister has said he’s intent on “levelling up” economic and social circumstances in the UK. Setting aside my scepticism about his agenda, I note the words – “levelling **up**”. This means starting at the base – and it’s essential that this Council takes on the challenge ... if you won’t, Councillors, it’s grim message for your constituents ... who are after all the people who elect you and judge you on your record.

Question submitted by Prof Marfleet

In July 2019 I asked the Council to address as a matter of extreme urgency the crisis of poverty incomes and collapsing social mobility in South Dorset. There is no tangible evidence of progress: most important, there is no sign of policy proposals from the Executive Advisory Panel charged to report on these issues. Other local authorities are intervening directly to tackle wage poverty and social deprivation.

Why is Dorset Council apparently unable to take the initiative?

Statement by Jenny Lennon-Wood

Councillors, I am asking you to take a few moments to consider the daily lives of people whose pay is so low that they don’t earn enough to live on, or whose jobs are so insecure that they can’t be sure from day-to-day whether they will have work and be able to fund their living costs. Many people in our county work in low-waged, seasonal jobs like catering, leisure and retail. Many more work in the care sector where employers are notorious for refusing to treat travel between service-users as paid working time. Others, living in rural areas are unable to travel to low-paid jobs because public transport has either been cut or is prohibitively expensive. For these workers, daily life is a struggle: will income cover necessities like a home, food, heating and clothing? Unforeseen costs like medicines or housing repairs can tip the balance. Parents frequently go without food so that their children can eat. Even so, children often go to school hungry and, during school holidays, food banks do their best to make up for the loss of the main daily meal. Hungry children can’t get the best out of their education and impoverished parents can’t afford extras like school trips. So the one-third of Dorset’s children who live in poverty are doubly disadvantaged in the education system. Dorset Council’s Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2019 asserts that “reducing inequalities remains a priority for the Health and Wellbeing Board. This is because many of the patterns of ill-health and early deaths that we see are linked with inequality in Dorset.” So taking a lead to end the inequalities that stem from poverty pay and poor quality jobs has to be a Council priority. Another inequality that needs to be addressed is Dorset’s increasing gender

pay gap, which currently stands at 29%, in shocking comparison with the 8.9% national average. Undoubtedly this reflects the fact that women are among the worst affected by poverty pay. I note, from Dorset Council's submission to the House of Lords Report on the Future of Seaside Towns, that "There is a drive to increase the productivity, skills and wage levels across the County and in particular in some of the coastal towns (e.g. Weymouth & Portland) which have the lowest wage levels." There seems little evidence of this "drive" in the parts of the county where low pay, insecure jobs and zero-hours contracts are rife. Here, low paying employers are being subsidised by taxpayers through the benefits that their employees are forced to claim to survive. This grim situation serves only to bring down the economy of the county as a whole. I urge Dorset Council to ensure that the Economic Development Executive Advisory Panel considers WeyPAW's proposals without further delay so that policy to tackle poverty pay and the associated unjust inequalities can be implemented urgently.

Question submitted by Jenny Lennon-Wood

The Full Council meeting on 18 July 2019 considered a motion requiring the Council to provide effective leadership to improve social mobility in Dorset. This motion was referred to the Economic Development Executive Advisory Panel. Subsequently, in September, Phil Marfleet gave a presentation to the panel on behalf of Weymouth and Portland Action on Wages (WeyPAW) and provided panel members with some proposals to address the problems of poverty pay and insecure jobs in our county. For thousands of people living in poverty and struggling to make ends meet, this is a matter of great urgency. So my question is: how soon can we expect a report from the EAP?