

Questions from Councillors for Cabinet 30 June 2020

Question from Cllr J Orrell

COVID-19: How well has Dorset Council responded to meeting the needs of vulnerable groups during 'lockdown'?

The prompt action of all councils across England in providing hotel accommodation for the street homeless under government mandate within 48 hours saved lives at the peak of the pandemic. One notes that the availability at the offered prices came from parts of Weymouth with the highest deprivation. The majority have accepted help and some have been rehoused. A small minority however are concentrated in a narrow area and have caused much anti social behaviour. Now the peak is passed and other providers are opening it is time for urgent action. Those with no local connection need to go back to their towns where they have support services, mental health teams , addictions workers and housing options.

1) Can I have a firm date in July by which time only persons with a genuine link to Weymouth will remain in Richmoor/Mon Ami/Riviera hotels?

(optional extra question if first one does not give firm date)

2) Can the council immediately use it's existing estate and identify buildings that can be rapidly converted into hostel use, with the same speed and rigour as shown by those who build the Nightingale Hospitals, so they are ready by August ?

Question from Cllr G Taylor

Would the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety agree that the COVID pandemic has shone a light on the homeless problems in Dorset. It is a disgrace that in the 21 century we have over 300 individuals and families who are in temporary accommodation and I'm sure this is still an under-estimate. COVID however has given us the opportunity to change this and to have a positive outcome but it needs this council to take and own the issue. These are all our residents, they are not imported from elsewhere, they are all individuals and they all have stories that have led to them being in this situation, they should be treated with respect.

Would the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety:

- Propose positive steps in a timely manner to increase our temporary housing provision, and also the support required to enable tenants to retain tenancies. Can I have assurances that this council is investing in increasing the amount of temporary housing and are actively seeking grant funding from Government to help us take these residents

permanently off the street. In addition to this, in the review of the Housing Allocation Policy, can he consider how social housing can be used to provide more accommodation for homeless people although in this, I am mindful of the need to still provide housing for those who are not adequately housed.

This virus shines a light on how many additional properties we need, just to house our residents. I hear time and time again from residents that we don't need any more houses in Dorset; that we have enough. This is appalling, unacceptable and is from residents who have a roof over their heads. Would the Portfolio Holder for Planning

- Ensure that the planning authority listens to the needs and gives due weight to the silent minority – those who do not have a roof over their heads. These residents do not attend our planning meetings or bombard councillors with emails but they are still our residents and are equal to all other residents. We need to build our way out of this mess and planners and the planning committees need to take note of the needs of all our residents.

Question from Cllr B Heatley

The table below shows in summary form the impact of Covid on the finances and the consequential proposed action for Dorset Council and two neighbouring comparable unitaries, BCP and Wiltshire.

Council and source	Additional spending £m A	Received from central government £m B	Funding gap £m C = A - B	D Free reserves year start £m	Multiple reserves would be spent C/D	Proposed Action
BCP Cabinet paper 24 June pp 145-186	52 based on 24 weeks	22	30	15	2.0	Proposals for a budget mitigation strategy for full Council in July
Wiltshire Cabinet Paper 9 June pp	80 based on 6 months	30	50	15	3.3	Potential Sn 114 unbalanced budget situation.

27-34 + Draft minutes						In year mitigating action will be required.
Dorset Cabinet paper 30 June, pp 40- 41	60 based on 4 months, £15m a month	21	39	28	1.4 but 2.5 if 6 months and spend is 90	?

While our funding gap is a smaller multiple of free reserves than the other two councils, it is still significant and our estimates are based on a four month additional spending period and their's on six months. Should not we too be facing up more explicitly to a situation where our budget has become unbalanced?