

Public Questions for Cabinet 30 June 2020

Question from Nigel Shearing

Given the Coronavirus restrictions and impacts on the town centre's economy, can the committee give an assurance to a local action group, RESPECT WEYMOUTH, looking after the interests of residents living behind the North Harbourside and up, that emerging support for invigorating licensing and hospitality will be lawful, balanced and respectful without adverse impacts on people's right to enjoyment of their private space and home. Particularly given this is a Cumulative Impact Area. There are serious concerns that the balance is not going to be achieved. Licensees are attempting to permanently introduce things on the back of the restriction for the worse. And residents have been suffering considerable impacts for too long already.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Customer, Community and Regulatory Services

Can I thank Mr Shearing for his timely question.

We all wish to see our economy in Dorset make a good recovery including the hospitality sector which is key to the lives of our town centres. I know that officers are working with partners including Dorset Police; business groups and operators to help manage the implications of the easing of restrictions and the re-opening of our high streets and licenced premises.

You may be aware that the Government are temporarily relaxing restrictions on the use of public space around such premises and highways officers have been working to ensure that public safety is not compromised by implementing additional traffic management measures in our high streets. We will also take account of the need to protect residents from disturbance.

In conjunction with our partners, we will monitor and assess the situation and take action to address any significant issues that arise.

I would also refer Mr Shearing to the item on our agenda today about the launch of a public consultation on Dorset Councils draft Statement of Licensing Policy.

This is an opportunity to help shape local controls around the sale and consumption of alcohol and to help achieve a balance between the enjoyment of licenced premises; safeguarding public health and the protection of resident's rights.

Question from Penny Quilter, Fiona Marlow and Anne Cucinella (Weymouth)

On 23rd May 2020, Secretary of State for Transport Grant Shapps, made a statement via foreword to the Traffic Management Act 2004: network management in response to COVID-19. "The coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis has had a terrible impact on the lives and health of many UK citizens, as well as severe economic consequences. But it has also resulted in cleaner air and quieter streets, transforming the environment in many of our towns and cities"

"Active travel is affordable, delivers significant health benefits, has been shown to improve wellbeing, mitigates congestion, improves air quality and has no carbon emissions at the point of use. Towns and cities based around active travel will have happier and healthier citizens as well as lasting local economic benefits."

"The government therefore expects local authorities to make significant changes to their road layouts to give more space to cyclists and pedestrians. Such changes will help embed altered behaviours and demonstrate the positive effects of active travel."

On 4th June 2020 Dorset Council announced that they had been awarded £577k of the £225m emergency active travel fund. With £115k for the short-term immediate measures and £462k for medium-term or permanent measures.

Question

Given the urgent need to change travel habits before the restart takes full effect, the Government has called for measures to be taken as swiftly as possible, and in any event within weeks. That was already over 5 weeks ago (as at 30th June) since when the restart has commenced, and levels of road traffic have rapidly risen. Dorset Council has called for public suggestions, but set an end date for that consultation of 31st July by which time it will be 10 weeks since the Government called for swift action. Given that the urgent measures called for are not new but rather interventions that are a standard part of the traffic management toolkit, **what measures have DC already put in place in response to the Government's call for action, and by when do they anticipate having spent the money made available by the Government ?**

References

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reallocating-road-space-in-response-to-covid-19-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities/traffic-management-act-2004-network-management-in-response-to-covid-19>

<https://news.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/2020/06/04/pop-up-walking-and-cycling-routes-coming-to-dorset/>

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and the Environment

The announcement on the 4th of June confirmed an indicative allocation of £115,000 for the short term and an additional £462,000 for medium-term or permanent measures. This was not a formal allocation and Dorset Council has been working hard to both deliver on some essential schemes and prepare bid documents for the government to secure a formal allocation of money to deliver them. The first stage was intended for relatively small scale, quick wins, and a submission was made to government on 4th June for this money. The formal allocation of this phase one money was only given on 25th June and it has not yet been received. Thanks to the hard work of our officers the final allocation for phase 1 is £128,000 and in excess of the indicative £115,000. Despite this money not having been formally secured until 25th June, Dorset Council has been delivering necessary schemes, effectively at risk, throughout June. These include;

- **High Street / East Street, Wimborne** - footway widening;
- **High Street, Shaftesbury** - part-time closure (0900-1600) for social distancing and public realm improvement;
- **West Bay bridge, Bridport** - footway widening and bus stop move for space for queueing at food kiosks;
- **Salisbury Street, Blandford** – footway widening into carriageway;
- **Market Cross, Sturminster Newton** – parking removed for sitting out space;
- **The Esplanade, Weymouth** - footway widening using Kings Statue bus stop at pinchpoint.

Other schemes are in the process of planning or delivery in Beaminster, Dorchester, Gillingham, Lyme Regis, Sherborne, Swanage and Wareham. Other steps are being examined in detail in Weymouth. In addition, stencil kits to support social distancing have been sent to all town councils, and are being used by Dorset Council teams in key locations, including bus stops and high priority locations.

Dorset Council will have 8 weeks to spend the phase 1 allocation from the date of receipt.

The government are asking for submissions for the phase 2 element of funding although we have not yet been given details for this submission by the DfT. It is intended that these schemes are larger semi-permanent or permanent schemes and the bid may have to be accompanied by business case and cost benefit analysis depending on the scheme. Tranche 2 is focussed towards a 'green reset' and providing additional schemes for promoting increased walking and cycling. This funding is also prioritised in areas where there were previously high levels of public transport use which in Dorset includes Weymouth, Dorchester and areas of South East Dorset, although we are also investigating schemes elsewhere. The additional scale, complexity and cost of these schemes as well as the need for local consultation means that the delivery timescales will be longer. While we have an indicative allowance for tranche 2 we do not yet know when the Department for Transport will formally request submissions or when the subsequent allocation these funds will be.

Dorset Council would encourage residents who have specific social distancing or active travel proposals to add them to the Dorset Safe Streets webpage in order that they can be considered alongside other proposals.

Question from John Calvert

As an interested resident of the Dorset Council Area I waited until the Agenda for the Cabinet meeting of June 30th appeared on mod.gov on Tuesday 23rd June then looked for details. There were no papers on Tuesday 23rd June but they

appeared on mod.gov on Wednesday 24th June i.e. today. I was astonished to see that questions had to be submitted by 8.30 on Thursday 25th June.

Can the leader of the Council explain how constructive questions can be raised by the public with less than 24 hours to scan a document with over 250 pages? Surely the process can be better planned to give members of the public more time to read at least those areas which interest them.

Response from the Leader of the Council

Cabinet agendas are published online eight calendar days before the day of the meeting. We also publish a forward plan of the Cabinet's intended business a month in advance so that people know ahead of time what issues we will be deciding at our meetings. I am sorry that the questioner could not find the agenda for today's meeting. The agenda was published and it was available online on Monday 22 June and not Wednesday 24 June and I notice that we have five questions or statements to the Cabinet today.

Question from Averil Simmons

Is it possible to fine offenders at least for the cost of the call outs where firefighters and police are called out to extinguish barbecues and camp fires?

If people are from out of the area then can their details be verified through their vehicle number plates?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

I thank Averil Simmons for her question. We were all very distressed by the recent scenes from Wareham Forest and by similar events in other areas of Dorset. These incidents appear to be becoming more frequent and the Council must do what it can to prevent them. Our thanks go to the emergency services, landowners, council staff and members of the public who responded to limit the damage to our environment and risk to life and property.

There is a report on our agenda today outlining our early thoughts on what more the council can do in conjunction with our partners. I fully support this work and will ensure that your suggestions are considered and that a detailed report with recommendations is brought back here as soon as possible.

Statement from Annabale Gardner

I am in favour of the Prohibition of Disposable BBQs, but there needs to be some serious fines – to deter people from using them in public spaces, especially high fire risk areas!

Not only do carelessly discarded disposable barbecues cause fires, callously-disposed ones (e.g buried under the sand) cause horrific injuries – usually sustained by a child (see attached photo).

I am also in favour of asking all retailers to become responsible – withdraw sales of disposable barbecues. This approach has been started through the Nationwide campaign – Leave the BBQ at home. The aim of this campaign is to encourage and persuade retailers, local and national, to voluntarily remove these items from sale.

Whilst I appreciate that this approach may be drawn out over a long period – e.g the supermarkets putting profit the environment – we need to persevere with putting pressure on retailers until these disposable barbecues are withdrawn from sale.

In the meantime, another option could be for the retailers to increase the price of disposable barbecues with a significant percentage going towards the Fire and Rescue Service and the landowner's cost for restoration.