

## **Questions from Councillors for Cabinet 28 July 2020**

### **Question from Cllr J Andrews**

In Sherborne we have an up and coming problem in early years education with the possible loss of 16 jobs and the displacement of 72 nursery places. This will have an impact on not only the children but the ability of the parents to go to work. The knock on of which could be enormous for the local economy. Only somebody with an extremely large crystal ball could of seen this coming up in the lift and as a member of the EAP on Economy I know as a group we didn't see it coming.

What impact on growth in Dorset does the cabinet see with possible closures estimated to be 25-30% in Early years(0-5) Provisions? Also can we Lobby the government education department for additional funding nationwide for Early years provision as this is one of the keys to regenerating our economy during this Covid 19 crisis?

### **Question from Cllr P Kimber**

The Dorset Echo put on the front page regarding a bypass around Wyke Regis to assist Portland Port, on last Saturday's edition.

Does the Dorset Council have plans to build this, or is this part of any future plans this will be developed?

### **Question from Cllr N Ireland**

It is noted that the Council does have reserves, some of which can be used as a short-term measure to balance the budget, but longer-term use of reserves is not sustainable. It is also noted that unless additional Government funding becomes available, the Council will have to manage this forecast overspend using its reserves, which consist of the General Fund reserve of £28m combined with other previously earmarked reserves, and that they are sufficient to enable the Council to continue to operate throughout 2020/21. Finally, it appears the overspend in 19/20 was met by from the general fund but some reserves have been rationalised and repurposed to put that back to £28m.

My concern is that not all reserves are designed to provide insurance or a required indemnity against shortfalls. Some are there for specific purposes to support policies and aspirations of this council and once spent elsewhere may be lost forever. Also, given the current projected deficit of £43.1m and a general reserve of £28m, it implies an additional raid on our reserves to the tune of at

least £15m, assuming we are actually permitted to wipe out our general reserve completely.

The questions are therefore which specific reserves were taken to support 19/20 and the same for those we intend to use to support the projected overspend in 20/21, given that these must be known already from the assertion that they will enable us to be solvent for the rest of the financial year.

### **Question from Councillor B Heatley**

#### Climate Change, Ecology and Economic Growth

Cabinet has before it today two papers

one on Economic Growth Strategy (Item 10), and  
a Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy (Item 15).

We need to initiate the difficult conversation between them, rather than simply assert as the Growth paper does that they complement each other.

We have two aims, one which I will call preserving the planet so that it can continue to support human life and civilisation, the other economic growth, that is that the parts of our activities that fall within the definition of GDP should grow. Are they compatible?

Some say we can preserve the planet and continue to grow the economy as a whole. Others, including many environmentalists, say that we can only preserve the planet if the economy stops growing or even gets smaller.

As you'd expect, I'm amongst the Greens, I'm very sceptical that we can both preserve the planet and have overall economic growth, largely because the bigger the economy the bigger are the flows of material through it, and it is this physical flow of material which is threatening the ability of the planet to support us.

But I don't know this for sure, and equally it's impossible to know for sure that continued economic growth and preserving the planet is possible. Therefore I suggest we don't have to have this argument. We can agree instead that we can grow those parts of the economy that are sustainable and reduce those parts that are not. Much of the detail of the Economic Strategy presented here takes that approach. We can be agnostic about whether the overall economy grows or not. Are those of you attached to overall economic growth really arguing that we should *increase* the parts of the economy that damage the planet?

If we adopt as a compromise the agnostic approach, we would as a consequence simply banish the idea of overall economic growth from our

economic policy. We can still aim to have an economic strategy, we simply don't commit ourselves to an economic *growth* strategy. And have a Cabinet member for the Economy and Skills.

Now Cllr Suttle is recommending you accept the Economic Growth Strategy today, while Cllr Bryan is recommending the Climate Change and Ecology Strategy should go out to public consultation. The Economic Growth Strategy paper makes no reference to there having been public consultation, although I accept some business groups have been consulted. So I get to my question, why not repair the omission of public consultation on the Economic Growth Strategy and put both out for consultation together, and ask this question about our attitude to overall growth, in favour, against or agnostic, in that joint consultation?