

Questions from Councillors for Cabinet 8 September 2020

1. Question from Cllr M Roe

The climate crisis inevitably affects everyone. However, there is a widespread awareness that the impacts of climate change are not distributed equally, and the consequences are likely to be far worse for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable. So, there must be a process in place to identify communities that are at highest risk to the consequences of climate change. One would also expect community engagement to gain a greater understanding of actions needed to mitigate or in terms of adaptation to climate change.

How does the council identify those who are most at risk from the impacts of climate change, and what is being done to assist the most vulnerable?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, travel and Environment

In order to fully understand the impact of Climate Change in the Dorset area a scoping exercise will be carried out as part of the Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan. The scoping exercise will be aimed at investigating the geophysical impacts such as sea level rise and additional flood risk and also the socio-economic implications with particular regard for the disadvantage and vulnerable, for example increased extremes in temperature differences. The results of the scoping exercise will allow the impacts to be fully understood and appropriate actions to be undertaken.

The forthcoming Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy community consultation exercise will be informed by an Equality Impact Assessment to ensure that disadvantaged and vulnerable groups within our communities are fully included in the consultation exercise. The results of this work will be included in the objectives of the Action Plan.

There are currently various initiatives delivered locally and nationally aimed at disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, examples being the Healthy Homes Dorset program which offers assistance with home efficiency improvements for those on low incomes and the emerging Government Green Homes funds.

2. Question from Cllr Paul Kimber

Future of the High Angle Battery

Many Portlanders were appalled at the vandalising and have requested me to ask what plans Dorset Council has regarding the future of the site.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

We share concern about the graffiti and other acts of vandalism that continue to damage this site which is protected as a Scheduled Monument. And we agree about the site's importance – it is one of Portland's hidden gems and especially when considered with other sites along on the south coast it has much to tell us about Victorian military history. The site deserves to be appreciated by a wider audience.

Dorset Council officers have already inspected the damage as part of a wider discussion about the site's present and future management, ahead of a wider-ranging meeting that is planned for later this month with representatives of Historic England, Natural England and the police to discuss these issues. We are aware that any graffiti removal, if appropriate, needs to be undertaken in a sensitive manner to ensure no additional damage is caused to the Monument, and will be considering how further vandalism can be discouraged.

3. Question from Cllr B Heatley

The Draft Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy issued on 15 July 2020 refers to Dorset Council 'securing a certified 'green' renewable energy tariff for electricity supply from September 2020' (pg 02).

Could we have some more detail about this very welcome development, such as:

- with what supplier or suppliers this arrangement has been made
- what proportion of Dorset Council's total electricity procurement is involved
- how long the arrangement will initially last
- who has certified the tariff as 'green',
- whether the Council is satisfied that this arrangement creates genuine additionality in the generation of green energy,
- how many tonnes per annum of CO2 emissions this arrangement is estimated to save, and
- an estimate of any price premium that this arrangement has cost?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

- The green tariff is provided by Npower as part of our Energy Procurement Framework with LASER.
- All of Dorset Council's electricity consumption for the period 1st October 2020 to 30th September 2021 will be covered by this tariff (with the option to extend on an annual basis if required).
- There is a 0.065p / kWh price premium associated with this tariff.

- There is currently no standard definition of a “green tariff”. This Green Tariff works in the same way, however, as other Green Tariffs on the market, as regulated by OFGEM, whereby energy supplied to the consumer is backed by Renewable Electricity Guarantee of Origin (REGO) certificates:
 - Npower secure Renewable Electricity Guarantee of Origin (REGO) certificates for the equivalent electricity volume that we consume.
 - These certificates are issued for every megawatt-hour of renewable generation fed into the grid.
 - They will match an equivalent number of REGO certificates that are valid within a Fuel Mix Disclosure (FMD) period to our consumption that also falls within the same period
- In claiming CO₂ emissions savings, we must consider what the reporting guidelines which we must adhere to will actually allow us to report as zero carbon. Whilst other authorities using such green tariffs have made statements about CO₂ savings, Defra UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions reporting guidelines do not allow green tariffs to reduce an organisation’s reported carbon emissions. Instead we must use the UK national average grid emissions which take account of all renewables feeding into the grid.
- It is only through Power Purchase Agreements and/or direct investment in renewable installations that truly additional carbon savings can be generated. The LASER frameworks critically allow flexibility for such an approach, which is something that we are currently investigating. In the short term, signing up to a REGO backed green tariff whilst pursuing more effective longer term solutions, sends a signal of the demand for renewable energy and the need for reform of the regulation of “green energy” and carbon reporting. There has certainly been a surge in demand for REGO backed tariffs following on from recently declared climate emergencies, across the public sector. The following recent article by REGEN SW highlights some of the failings of REGO backed tariffs, how we got here, and how they might yet play a role in achieving net carbon Zero.

<https://www.regen.co.uk/price-transparency-is-welcome-but-can-regos-play-a-material-role-to-achieve-net-zero-carbon/>

4. Question from Cllr N Ireland

The paper detailing the new Corporate Procurement Strategy quite rightly recognises that we, as an organisation with a substantial budget, can make a real impact to our local economy by maximising the 'Dorset Pound' through prioritising spend with local employers and businesses rather than further afield. The impact that this can have in addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergency is also highlighted, although worryingly only amounts to half a page. Phrases such as "procurement is so much more than purchasing of goods, services or works" and "not about minimising upfront prices" give some confidence that this council will take into account many other factors than just the headline cost. The "social value" derived from spending locally cannot be underestimated in our Dorset economy dominated by below-average wages, high rates of temporary and seasonal employment, and above average house prices; therefore it is a concern that the report highlights the difficulty in evaluating or measuring that as part of the procurement process. One criteria to apply would be to recognise the low levels of pay that persists throughout our area – 20% of jobs are paid less than the Real Living Wage - and address this by giving weighting and preference to employers accredited with the Living Wage Foundation.

Will this council recognise the need for all employees to be paid at least the Real Living Wage by ensuring that any business or employer we enter into a contract with guarantee all their employees receive as a minimum the Real Living Wage as defined by the Living Wage Foundation?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy

I thank Cllr Ireland for this question.

I can confirm that the Council requires all suppliers to comply with legislation and pay the National Living Wage to their employees. However, to be clear, the procurement strategy does not seek to impose further limitations on Suppliers by imposing the 'real living wage'.

Whilst I am new to the Finance and Commercial portfolio, I know from my own experience in business that the imposition of additional costs on small suppliers can make them uncompetitive. Given the fragility of the local economy I do not think we should seek to jeopardise suppliers further. These are uncertain times for local businesses, and with the ending of the furlough scheme job security is already of concern. Universal imposition of the real living wage on all of our suppliers, however well intentioned, could be counterproductive.

I'm grateful that Cllr Ireland is supportive of the emphasis the strategy puts on Social Value, and can assure him that the Council will seek the best value for

Dorset from every pound we spend. How we do that will depend very much on the individual nature of the goods and services we buy, and the Social Value criteria for each procurement will be set on a case by case basis.