

Full Council – 3 September 2020
Questions from the Public

Question 1 – submitted by Tony Walter

Getting to zero carbon: lobbying national government

On 15 July, Dorset Council published its long-awaited Draft Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) Strategy, now passed for public consultation by Place Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. One of the most striking things about this strategy from a council controlled by the same party as the UK government is its highlighting of *national* policies and regulations, a *national* lack of direction and low *national* standards, hampering local authorities from moving to zero carbon, including several policies/regulations/standards introduced in the last decade (p.17). Reforming this national framework is essential if the UK is to achieve the government's de-carbonisation commitments.

The Strategy (pp.27,30,48,49,55) promises to lobby government on the national policies, regulations and standards that undermine its climate & ecological ambitions in 5 of the Strategy's 8 areas for action:

Renewable energy (p.26)

- Uncertainty at national level re strategy & direction
- National grid limits deployment of renewable energy at scale
- Current policy framework does not support the move to low carbon
- The planning system does not actively encourage renewable energy

Buildings and assets (p.29)

- Lack of national strategy for heating
- Current & potential *Future Homes* standards for new builds not high enough to deliver national carbon-reduction targets
- Lack of legal requirement to retrofit buildings

The economy (p.35)

- Low carbon & renewable energy economy growing only slowly & adversely affected by recent changes in legislation and incentives
- Government introduced Additional Business Rates Levy penalising businesses that install renewable energy on their premises
- Circular economy heavily influenced by national policy & regulation

Water (p.41)

- Government limits councils' power to enforce water conservation in new developments

Transport (p.47)

- Lack of national direction and policy

Question: How does Dorset Council propose to lobby government effectively?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

Thank you very much for your question, this is a really important issue which has been highlighted in our Climate Emergency Action plan and Strategy. Many of the actions required in Dorset are heavily reliant on an effective national policy framework and support to achieve our aspirations.

We will therefore be lobbying government in a number of ways to include:-

1. Cllr Ray Bryan, the chair of our climate change EAP and portfolio holder is a member of the Westminster Policy Group on Climate Change called the Conservative Environment Network working with policy makers which includes 80 Parliamentarians.
2. Lobbying national government through Dorset Council's membership of the Local Government Association and attending LGA Seminars. Meeting with Ministers with responsibility for achieving carbon neutral by 2050
3. Direct lobbying through our local Members of Parliament and National Political contacts across the UK.
4. Lobbying ministers for funding to support our plans and strategy.

Question 2 – submitted by Joe Burlington

Greta Thunberg(1) said “I’ve met many of the most powerful people in the world. And even among them, **pretty much everyone lacks even some of the most basic knowledge**” and, in *The Guardian*, Rebecca Willis (2) wrote “(One MP) said that **just a few of her 600 or so fellow parliamentarians took climate seriously** as an issue: ‘You might not get into double figures’.” The Council has acknowledged that there is ‘a climate emergency and an ecological crisis’ but its current policies will not deliver a sustainable future and it is clear that many politicians (and most voters) are unaware of dire threats to the future of our children.

Question:

What actions will Councillors take to educate themselves and the public about these matters?

To this end, I am willing to support councillors in person or by Zoom (or similar). I am a former physics teacher. I have been studying these matters intensively for 16 years.

(1) *Summer with Greta* (Chapter 8) "(P)eople understand much less about the climate crisis than you'd think ... **the level of knowledge and awareness is close to nonexistent.**" July

2020 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000kwcc>

(2) Rebecca Willis: 'In return for anonymity, MPs agreed to speak candidly with me about climate change. ... ' 21 May 2020

www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/21/i-dont-want-to-be-seen-as-a-zealot-what-mps-really-think-about-the-climate-crisis?utm_campaign=Carbon%20Brief%20Daily%20Briefing&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Revue%20newsletter

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

Thank you very much for your question. We have identified awareness raising and behaviour change as essential to achieving the aims of our Climate Emergency Strategy.

We will be developing a comprehensive communications strategy for our approach to the climate and ecological emergency. This strategy will draw upon a variety of media and approaches to deliver key messages. This will include:-

RAISING AWARENESS - through a range of channels, upgrading our climate change website, developing an online information hub for sharing information, and best practice, and providing information to residents through Council literature.

We will improve the awareness, engagement, and knowledge of our staff and service providers through staff awareness campaigns, organising targeted briefings and training sessions for officers, members, and decision makers and including information in staff induction training. We will also establish an internal climate change champion's programme.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY ACTION

We will support & work closely with Town and Parish Councils and other organisations to signpost and communicate shared messages.

ENGAGEMENT WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

We will build support from stakeholders and the wider public by informing and educating on the benefits and opportunities of acting on climate change.

Question 3 – Submitted by Professor Philip Marfleet (on behalf of Dorset Says – Low Pay, No Way - Convenor, Weymouth and Portland Action on Wages (WeyPAW), and Jenny Lennon-Wood - Secretary, Dorset Trades Union Council

Real Living Wage for employees of Dorset Council

Question:

Dorset Council (DC) proposes increased payments to Council members and new paid roles for members of the majority party. Our Council appears to have ignored repeated recommendations to introduce the Real Living Wage for its employees and those working for its contractors. Dorset is a low-wage county: we need urgent action to address a crisis of poverty wages and declining social mobility. Why is DC directing funds to its senior members while thousands of Council workers and others struggle to make ends meet?

Statement:

Over a year ago, local organisations urged DC to tackle poverty incomes and declining social mobility:

- Declare its public commitment to meet legal requirements on the National Minimum Wage, Equal Pay for women, and terms and conditions of employment - and expect this of its contractors.
- Prepare to introduce the Real Living Wage (£9.30 an hour) and encourage others to follow suit.
- Take the lead in educating our young people about rights at work.

Our proposals were referred to the Executive Advisory Panel on Economic Growth, to which we gave a presentation in September 2019. Having heard nothing from the Panel, we raised questions at the Council's meeting in February 2020 and were informed that the issues would be considered during development of the Council's *Economic Growth Strategy (EGS)*. The Cabinet has apparently approved this Strategy without the benefit of democratic debate by Full Council. There are no proposals to introduce the Real Living Wage; meanwhile, senior Council members are to be appointed to new paid positions, increasing the annual cost of councillors' fees by over £100,000.

DC has undertaken a preliminary assessment of the implications of introducing the Real Living Wage - yet the *EGS* contains no evidence of practical measures to address the injustice of low pay. Almost a third of jobs in the Council's area pay less than the Real Living Wage: in Weymouth and Portland this rises to 48%, the second-worst record in the country (government figures).

Many of Dorset's low-paid jobs are in tourism and retail - among the sectors hardest hit by the COVID crisis. Termination of the government's Job Retention Scheme could have a devastating impact. HMRC recorded claims to furlough a

third of all eligible jobs in Dorset by the end of July - around 51,600 potential redundancies. Dorset is likely to be one of the areas worst affected by the COVID crisis – its low wages making many families vulnerable.

Cornwall shares many economic problems with Dorset. Its Council introduced the Real Living Wage for all employees in 2015. Why can't DC do the same?

DC should abandon plans to increase payments to councillors. Instead, let's work together to make Dorset a Living Wage County.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development and Change

The Government sets the National Minimum Wage for employees up to the age of 24 and the National Living Wage for those who are 25 and older. The National Living Wages for 2020 is £8.72.

The majority of Dorset Council employees are on Green Book terms and conditions. The Green Book pay spine is subject to annual increases which are negotiated at a national level between the Local Government Association and trade unions. The lowest point on our current Green Book pay spine, effective from 1 April 2020 is £9.25.

The setting of Members Allowances is a different and separate matter. On our agenda this evening is the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel. The Council is required in law to establish a Panel and have regard to its recommendations.