

Full Council – 3 September 2020
Questions from Councillors

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr Alex Brenton

A question for Cabinet member for Children's Services and Planning. 3.9.2020
The plans to build a new Children's Home at 45 Dorchester Road Weymouth is good news for the looked after children of Dorset.

I hope it is also good news for Dorset to prove it is fully committed to a Low Carbon future. The plans for 45 Dorchester Road we assume will include modern green building techniques. Such as using low carbon concrete, Ground source heat pump (GSHP) or air source heat pumps (GSHP) solar panels, rainwater storage and grey water usage system and all the other eco-friendly adaptations built in.

If we care about the future of our children Dorset Council should prove a leader in building for the future and be an example to the County developers that good modern design should last lifetimes.

Can the cabinet member confirm that low carbon building techniques will be used on all public buildings from now on?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning

Dorset Council's statutory responsibility as the Local Planning Authority is separate from any role it has as a developer and it is important to maintain a distinction. The Local Planning Authority must consider all applications as submitted and on their merits, including those by or on behalf of Dorset Council, having regard to the local plan and any other material considerations.

Response from Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

The detail design and specification will be undertaken in line with aspirations contained within the Council's, Climate Emergency strategy, subject to existing budget constraints. The new build part of the project will use 'modern methods of construction' (MMC) – in effect a modular build using advanced sustainable principles and off-site construction reducing embedded carbon. We do intend to use a 'heat pump' and 'photovoltaic panels – indeed incorporating as much 'sustainable technology' as we can achieve within the budget and the procurement process before the project goes to contract.

All reasonable steps will be taken to reduce the carbon impact of future public buildings, however, this will need to be supported by Council policies and resources as we drive our estate towards zero carbon. Our Climate Emergency Strategy sets out our intention to develop these new zero carbon policies over the next year for further consideration by Cabinet.

Question 2 – submitted by Cllr Maria Roe

Tetra Pak is a food packaging used for dairy, beverages, soups, ice cream and other prepared food. One of the biggest benefits of Tetra Pak is that it is completely recyclable. Most Councils accept Tetra Pak with their kerbside collection. Aluminium foil and foil trays are also collected at the kerbside by 86% of councils according to Aluminium Insider (31/12/2015).

In Dorset this waste is either sent to landfill or people have to drive to a recycling centre or recycle bank to dispose of it which if you live in a village can be some distance. Why can't Dorset Council include this waste in its kerbside collection?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Customer & Community Services

Cartons are comprised of layers of different materials bonded together (plastic, card and in some cases foil). The process of separating the materials requires a specially designed process so they cannot be reprocessed with other paper and card. Foil is another material which required special sorting.

The council's contracted materials recycling facility is unable to separate cartons and foil from other materials for recycling, though technologies in sorting facilities are being developed.

Meanwhile the council maintains banks for cartons and foil in car parks and at the network of Household Recycling Centres.

Question 3 – submitted by Cllr Nick Ireland

Back on the 1st October 2019, I asked a question of Cabinet concerning the drastic reduction of service levels relating to bin collections and particularly recycling collections experienced by my constituents in the Crossways Ward and also in neighbouring areas. This stemmed from a shortage of serviceable vehicles combined with a chronic lack of qualified drivers.

Cllr Alford responded that *“There have been a number of vehicle breakdowns and issues with driver recruitment ... Upon investigation, we have concluded that Dorset Council currently pays the DWP's LGV drivers less than neighbouring authorities and comparable companies. Therefore, we are reviewing Dorset Council's pay rates for DWP drivers. Officers are working closely with HR colleagues to explore all options on pay and grading, including the option of a market supplement being applied to DWP driver posts.”*

I have followed this up numerous times since and the service hasn't improved; if anything it has got worse and I'm hearing the same from fellow members whose wards are served by the Wareham Depot.

I see no evidence that the vehicle situation has been resolved and have yet to be informed that we are now competitive in our offer to LGV drivers.

Seemingly nothing has been achieved since the issue was raised; why hasn't this been sorted and who's taking responsibility to ensure it is?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Customer & Community Services

The review of the drivers pay across Dorset Council waste services has now been completed and local market increments have been applied to all driver roles, so drivers are now being actively recruited. Now that the depot refurbishment has been completed at Wareham, in the short term an additional vehicle has been hired to assist. Mike Moon Head of Waste Operations will continue to work closely with the Area Operations Manager and the Service Manager for Fleet in this area.

Question 4 from Cllr Nick Ireland

The proposed development of Dorset County Hospital is extremely important not just to those patients local to Dorchester but also to patients further afield who choose our local hospital to meet their health needs. With the likely merger of the Poole and Royal Bournemouth & Christchurch Trusts, combined with the changes proposed under the Clinical Services Review, we are seeing a migration of services away from Poole to the more distant Bournemouth campus and a likely increase in the demands on DCH as the treatment centre of choice.

The planning application was submitted back in October 2019 and has since been deferred three times from the Northern Area Planning Committee by Dorset Council.

The £65m funding allocated for these improvements has to be applied for and there is a real danger that further delays in considering the planning application could impact upon the central government set deadline of December for the submission of the business case and the subsequent loss of some or potentially all of the funding.

Can the portfolio holder explain in detail the reasons for the delays in considering DCH's planning application and give assurance that it will be considered before the December deadline?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning

This is a current application and so the following response is given without prejudice to any decision which the Local Planning Authority may make.

Officers are aware of the masterplan for DCH and the hospital's position on the importance of the current application. There have been ongoing negotiations between applicant and the planning authority to resolve matters outstanding between the parties which the applicant was made aware of in pre-application advice, and the case officer has been liaising closely with the applicant over timescales. Most recently, the application was intended for presentation to the Northern Area Committee at its scheduled meeting of 18th August, a meeting that was subsequently cancelled.

The officer's report is being finalised and the application will be considered at the next available committee meeting, which is scheduled to take place on 15th September.

Question 5 from Cllr Robin Legg

It looks inevitable that a sum of nearly £21.8M will need to be returned to the Treasury as the unallocated portion of funding made available by Government for Small Business Grants and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants during the Covid Crisis. Whilst acknowledging the efforts made by many authorities and MPs to get 5% of the original funds useable on a discretionary and more flexible basis it is now clear that 5% was not enough. What work is this authority presently doing to engage with Dorset's Members of Parliament so that they can lobby on our behalf for a large part of that £21.8M to be used where it is desperately needed to support local business?

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

My thanks to Cllr Legg for the question.

The sum in question is based on the receipt from govt of £134m however dorset council calculated that in fact we had a requirement for £120m as yet govt has not quantified why the additional money was sent over. As yet govt have not given us the method to calculate the final position. I would also like to stress that this is a national scheme and whilst we have been in a positive position there are councils that have found themselves in a negative position, it may be that the final reckoning allows any surplus in one area to fund the shortfall in others. It was always going to be the case that an underspend would occur as some larger organisations, restricted by state aid rules, tend to claim in the areas where their head offices are based.

Thanks to council leaders and MP's and national lobbying a discretionary grant scheme was allowed and calculated as 5% of the actual total grant funding for the area, therefore the 5% was as a calculation of the £120m and not the £134m in our case it amounted to just in excess of £6m.

The council has provided numerous reminders via a variety of means to those who did not claim the original small business grant or the retail hospitality and leisure grant, but we are not in a position of forcing people to accept the money and there are those who decided not to take up the funding and we must respect their views.

Cllr Legg makes a statement that additional funding is required due to a desperate need by local business and if that is the case we need to see the evidence that will assist us to lobby for additional support. During the early days of covid and the grant system, I was dealing with up to 45 phone calls a day and numerous emails from those who were as he describes desperate to obtain funding. In the last month or so this has dwindled to the odd email and call, certainly no more than 1 or 2 a week and I am able to direct them to suitable assistance where possible.

Any new scheme or assistance will need to be a national scheme as I am sure you are aware the cost of covid to Dorset has left us unable to consider any scheme that would give further stress on the budget other than that funded by central govt.

May I ask Cllr Legg to let me have the evidence that he has and i give him my assurance that I will follow it up.

Question 6 from Cllr Robin Legg

The appendix to the Independent Remuneration Panel report sets out a long list of things which the six new Lead Members might be called upon to do in support of Cabinet colleagues. At the present time, with so many suffering financial hardship as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, there is an even greater need to justify these posts and their associated costs. What therefore will be done to monitor the performance of those appointed so that at the end of twelve months a clear, transparent and public account is given of their work in relation to each of those elements in the appendix?

Response from the Leader of the Council

At Full Council on the 18 February members voted in favour of the recommendation from the Cross-Party Task and Finish Group to support the Governance Review, which included the appointment of up to six Lead Members

by the Leader of Council. So, the principle and purpose of Lead Members has the broad support of Members.

As previously mentioned at the Members Briefing on the proposed Governance Review at the end of January; the involvement of Lead Members is well proven and exists in many councils across the country, who operation an executive governance [Cabinet] arrangement. Can I refer you to the Constitution which sets out the detail the role of a Lead Member.

Later on the agenda I will announce who the Lead Members are and importantly their individual roles in support of some of the portfolio holders.

Also, on the agenda members will be asked to support the Independent Remuneration Panel recommendation, which included a Special Responsibility Allowance for Lead Members. The role of a Lead Member will be time consuming and like any role with additional responsibilities will be scrutinised on a routine basis to ensure the performance of the council does not undermine the delivery of the Council Plan or the Annual Revenue and Capital Budgets.

The Council does face massive challenges for the remainder of the term. Having the additional member capacity, in support of the Cabinet will be vital if we are to bring about the transformation necessary to maintain balanced budgets without the loss of services and to achieve the maximum benefits from unitary local government.

The importance of transparency in the way we as members carry out the business of this council cannot be overstated. However, this will of course apply to all aspects of the council rather than just one centring on Lead Members in particular, as has been suggested by Cllr Legg.

Question 7 from Cllr Beryl Ezzard

Issues with Dorset Waste Partnership Recyclates Collections. On behalf of my ward community, I wish to complain of the woeful lack of service, over a 6-week period (3 collections), when no collections were made, during the hottest spell of the summer. Having been in close contact with the Wareham Depot and defended the DWP Service many times stating to folk of the exemplary service that DWP staff have done throughout the Covid-19 lockdown, I was being told in July/August of Staff absences; sickness and holidays, plus truck breakdowns, in circumstances with no spare capacity or backup plan!. Why?

It is painfully obvious that the DWP Service is lacking in maintenance and adequately trained staff; with common knowledge that we lose HGV Drivers to neighbouring Councils as the Wages are better than DC's. This is and will cause continuing problems with keeping staff and particularly HGV Drivers? When, I ask, will this be addressed?

Also, when we encourage our communities to access the DC website, local folk find it unhelpful, not updated or gives inaccurate information, causing more issues. Usually then calling the local Members with complaint after complaint. Can we have an update on this too please?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Customer & Community Services

The review of the drivers pay across Dorset Council's waste services has now been completed and local market increments have been applied to all driver roles. There are currently two driver roles actively being recruited to in the Wareham depot to fill vacant posts, along with other driver roles across all depots. Now that the depot refurbishment has been completed, and the application to increase the numbers of LGV vehicles located at the Wareham depot being accepted, an additional hire vehicle has been located there to assist.

The waste pages on the Council's website are regularly reviewed and updated where necessary. Recent improvements to the online missed bin reporting form now provides residents with details of service disruptions that have affected their collections, along with details on when we will return to rectify the problem. In addition, Dorset Council's waste services are currently investing in in-cab technology that will allow for live collection information to be shared with residents through our online forms in the near future. For those residents who do not have access to the internet, particularly the elderly, there is always assistance on the Dorsetforyou helpline where operators will be able to access all the website information, report missed bins, and provide details of service disruptions.

Question 8 from Cllr Beryl Ezzard

Electricity Charging Points for Vehicles. Where and when is DC going to show the way by putting in Electric Charging Points on Car Parks? I know there has been some work done in encouraging buying electric vehicles, but we have to follow-on to make it easy for folk to re-charge their vehicles, within the Dorset Council area; there are very few at the present time.

When will DC be lobbying the Motor Manufacturers & Government? We need to bring them together to enable a universal charging system as now, most makes of vehicles have their own charging machines. This does make it difficult to decide if it is viable to choose a system that may go out of date within a few years! However, we must not be daunted by the fact that if we don't, we will be unable to achieve our Carbon Footprint and air pollution reduction significantly.

We are all conscious of our Climate Change & Ecological Emergency commitment, we need some action now! When, where and how many are Dorset Council prepared to install Electric Charging Points in the next year? Please give it this

some resource, as we need to demonstrate we have an action plan for the community to change to cleaner and greener electric vehicles.

I and other Members would willingly give up our £500.00 (5% increase in our allowance) to achieve this in the next year.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

I'd like to reassure all members that I share Cllr Ezzard's sense of urgency on this matter and have been working closely with officers to ensure that we are able to meet national and local expectations about electric vehicle charge point provision as soon as we can. We intend to place an order with a private sector company called JoJu very shortly to install 53 fast charge point sockets in 23 new car parks (including in Wareham*) and replace the 5 rapid chargers we already have, which have regrettably not been as reliable as we'd have liked in recent years. I've recently signed an Executive Decision Notice to that effect. We plan to start installing them this autumn – I'd like to be more specific, but the final details are still being worked out. The good news is that this company is willing to invest in Dorset, and is installing the charge points at no cost to the Council.

With regard to ensuring that systems are universal, Cllr Ezzard is right to raise that point. There are two things that we are doing. Firstly, we have partnered with a number of local authorities in the Central Southern Framework which covers most of the South of England with a single charging network. All of our new charge points I mentioned will have the most commonly used connection types. Secondly we are working with partners in the Subnational Transport Body to make this point to Government. It's not a problem that is unique to Dorset but one we take very seriously, and I'm sure you appreciate that there is only so much we can do at a local level, hence the need to work closely with other local authorities on this matter.

*Rempstone Centre car park, Church Street, Wareham, BH20 4NX