

Cabinet 19 January 2021

Public Questions

1. Question from Cllr Lucy Hamilton (Weymouth Town Council)

Local Government Finance Reform

Can Cabinet confirm that Dorset Council is pushing for reform of local government funding?

The Local Government Association is calling for a multi-year core local government funding settlement. The LGA calls for reform and review of local taxation, which is currently based on 1991 property prices. The LGA calls for a complete review of business rates, where currently multipliers are controlled by central government. To improve the build-out rates of homes with planning permission, the LGA proposes that **councils should be able to charge developers full council tax for every unbuilt development from the point that the original planning permission expires.**

Central government funding for local services is at an historic low. Government funding to councils has fallen by 60% since 2010. As a result, funding for essential services in Dorset falls on the shoulders of council tax payers more so than in many other counties.

Residents and businesses need Dorset Council to speak up for fair funding for local services. The burden shouldn't fall on the shoulders of those who can least afford to pay it.

2. Question from Cllr Lucy Hamilton (Weymouth Town Council)

St Mary's School Shaftesbury

My question relates to Agenda items 7 Budget Strategy Report and 9 Children's Provision.

On 7 January, Dorset Council confirmed that it aims to buy St Mary's School near Shaftesbury. This is to improve services for children and adults. How will this purchase be financed?

St Mary's School near Shaftesbury is an enormous rambling Victorian building set in 55 acres of grounds. The school lies just over the border, in Wiltshire. I assume Dorset council tax payers will contribute to its purchase, maintenance and running costs.

I welcome investment in the future of our children and vulnerable adults. I would rather this investment stayed within Dorset. At sustainable locations, close to our big towns. Close to our families.

As part of local government reorganisation, there was a fire sale of Dorset County Council properties across the county. Well-used local centres, in our communities and on a human scale, were put up for grabs. Last year, Dorset Council pledged to divest itself of properties.

Government rightly requires local authorities to care for children and vulnerable adults. Government should pay for these essential services.

3. Question from John Calvert

As someone who lives off Weymouth Avenue in Dorchester, I support the proposal to spend some of the Community Infrastructure Levy Funding on the stretch of pavement outside the market on Weymouth Avenue. I myself in recent years have tripped over and gone headlong due to uneven paving and I have known a neighbour who sustained facial injuries due to a similar fall. This is also where the coaches drop off visitors and where people walk down to town from Fairfield carpark so it is well overdue for both residents and visitors.

My question is this. Do we have to wait for similar funding before other places where visitors arrive in Dorchester are improved or moved?

For example, there is the cramped space where buses drop people off in Trinity Street and there is the continual problems of access to both the railway stations.