

## **Councillor Questions for Cabinet 5 October 2021**

### **Questions from Cllr Paul Kimber**

#### **Question 1**

From the national news many communities will be welcoming Afghans refugees, can you tell me how many refugees Dorset Council will be welcoming to our county.

Also, the need for support for the Afghan community is the Dorset council actively reaching out to community Groups that can assist.

#### **Question 2**

[Timetable consultation - South Western Railway December 2022.](#)

In partnership with Network Rail and the Department for Transport, there is a stakeholder consultation on proposals for December 2022 timetable.

This is a strategic review of future service levels affecting our local services.

As many of you will know rail Passengers in Dorset and the wider Southwest communities are unhappy about the cuts in train time frequency.

- With recent concerns about overcrowding and a need for a return to the twice hourly service to and from Weymouth to Waterloo service.
- The need to attract people back to the railways and relieve overcrowding for the public on our rail service.

[SWR timetable consultation From Dorset Council.](#)

**Could I see Dorset council written response to the consultation.**

#### **Question 3**

I wish to ask at the next Cabinet meeting a question regarding two prominent buildings on Portland. The first building is the modern Dorset Council owned Fortuneswell Primary School, which has been empty for years and is a constant unexplained talking point on Portland. The second building is derelict and ugly Hardy Block, owned by Comer Homes, which is very prominent and visible to everyone arriving on Portland; first impressions of any place are crucial.

As we know, the Government has established a high priority Levelling Up Agenda. In the last week, this policy shift has been given added prominence by the appointment of Rt Hon Michael Gove as Secretary of State for the new Department of 'Levelling Up, Housing and Communities'. Interestingly local government has been replaced by

communities in the departmental branding. As a result, local government may have to prove its community credentials.

Regarding the new government focus on Communities, it is often forgotten that Weymouth and Portland reside at the lowest levels of Government Indices for wages and social mobility. To place this in context Portland and Weymouth were hit badly by the Royal Navy Closure in 1995, with a long-term community impact equivalent to the closure of FOUR pits.

I have put forward an outline strategy for using the empty Fortuneswell Primary School as an easy in easy out business start-up centre. The location, classroom, and hall space layout would suit this and fit well with the levelling-up and communities' agenda. Location-wise, Portland has the largest blue-collar demographic in Dorset, many of whom support independent living for many of the sub-regions elderly and retired. Without this support, responsibility would fall onto the Dorset Council Social Services budget.

The Hardy Block has a variety of conversion options. The one that would support Portland's young, blue-collar demographic would be conversion to affordable rental housing. The wing that doesn't face the sea could easily be converted into an easy in easy out business start-up centre as expansion space from a successful Fortuneswell Primary School conversion or as a replacement if other long term uses are identified for the school.

The above is a reminder that Dorset Council needs to find a way or retaining young people and families in the County. There is self-interest in focusing training and start-up business support in vocational skills that will support independent living for Dorset's disproportionate aged resident population. The wake-up call may well come with the initial Census results that are likely to show a continuing trend of young people and families leaving Dorset.

**My question is - When will we see the community supporting proposals on the Hardy Block supplying new homes for rent and the new empty Fortuneswell Primary School being used for medium-term vocational business start-ups that will support Dorset's ageing population?**

#### **Question 4 from Cllr Brian Heatley**

At item 8 on the Agenda Cabinet are asked to make the climate and ecology a priority in the Dorset Plan (p.89). I welcome this as will a wide range of people and groups in Dorset who suggested this during the consultation on the Plan.

At item 6 on the Agenda the paper notes the priorities in the Dorset Council Plan as it was on adoption in February 2020 as part of its framework for the budget process for the 2022-23 Budget and Medium-Term Plan. These priorities did not of course then include the climate and ecology.

Could we have an assurance please that if Cabinet agrees the proposal in item 8 to make climate and ecology a Corporate Plan Priority, it will be treated as priority along with the others in the 2022-23 Budget process?