

Full Council
15 February 2022

Questions submitted for the Public Participation Period

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr David Harris (Weymouth Town Council)

The advice given for the establishment of parish wards focuses on putting communities together and having a reasonable balance in numbers of residents per councillor. There is no national guidance suggesting that these should reflect the Dorset Council Wards which ignored communities when they were set up three years ago and in some parts of Weymouth cover over 11000 people, larger than some towns in the County.

If an independent councillor wished to stand in that ward that person would have to call on 11000 residents to get elected for the Town council.

If a resident living in the Littlesea estate wishes to organise a street party to celebrate the Queens Jubilee they are not linked to other members of that community by the same councillor

Littlemoor is one of the most deprived parts of Dorset and Preston is one of the wealthiest yet these two totally different communities have the same four councillors to represent them in these proposals.

Can you please explain why the DC ward boundaries are seemingly more important than the town's community boundaries and so lead to the anomalies in the statements described above?

Question 2 & 3 – submitted by Cllr David Northam (Weymouth Town Council)

I am astounded that Dorset Council have ignored the suggestions from Weymouth Town Council which were reached after consideration of alternatives, an extensive debate, and a significant majority vote of councillors. I disagree with all that has been proposed by Dorset Council but would like to focus on two issues; the number of councillors that are proposed for Weymouth Town Council, and the move away from wards with 2, or at most 3 councillors to wards with 4 and 6 councillors.

The last significant change to the boundary for Weymouth came in 1933, under the Dorsetshire Review Order, when the size of the borough was Increased from 1,317 acres to 5,690 acres and the population, thereby, increased from 22,193 to 29,534. As a consequence of the increase in size and population the warding structure was changed in 1933 from 6 councillors per ward, to 10 wards each with 3 councillors making 30 councillors to achieve a 'more equal representation to the electors'.

In 1974 Weymouth and Portland were combined. The wards were reviewed by the Boundary Commission and in 1977 Weymouth had 11 wards (5 with 2 councillors, 6 with 3 councillors) with 28 councillors.

In 2017, prior to the 2019 Local Government Review, Weymouth & Portland Borough Council had considered and consulted on how Weymouth council should be constituted after

the LGR. This resulted in a proposal to Full Council for 12 wards and 29 councillors (7 wards with 2 councillors and 5 wards with 3 councillors).

Weymouth is not homogenous, there are many distinct neighbourhoods and communities which is why WTC proposed 14 wards (12 wards with 2 councillors and 2 with 3 councillors) each with local identities and interests reflecting the diverse and frequently geographically segregated communities across Weymouth. More wards with smaller numbers of electors provide more opportunity for diverse communities to be represented. It has not been the history of local government in Weymouth, since before 1933, to have large wards with large numbers of councillors as this blurs councillor focus on distinct communities and their specific interests.

The argument that basing the town council wards on Dorset Council wards will make this more convenient governance of the area for Dorset Council may be true from a Dorset Council perspective but does not reflect the local identities and interests of the Weymouth community.

- 1. With the Increase in population (and electors) of Weymouth by 2026 Weymouth Town Council proposed 30 councillors. Why have Dorset Council chosen to decrease the number of councillors representing Weymouth, from 29 to 24, with the consequence that each councillor will represent 1,878 electors each, when in the rest of Dorset Town councillors typically represent far fewer electors e.g. Dorchester's 20 councillors will on average represent only 912 electors each?**
- 2. Will Dorset Council reconsider the decision to ignore the Weymouth Town Council recommendations, and instead propose 14 or 15 wards with 2 or 3 councillors, to reflect Weymouth's history, distinct local identities and interests?**

Question 4 – submitted by Cllr Lucy Hamilton (Weymouth Town Council)

Agenda Item 11. Community Governance Review

I write in protest at the Community Governance Review proposals for Weymouth. Firstly, the proposed pattern of wards does not respect natural communities or simple geography. For example, under the proposed scheme, Lanehouse Estate is part of Wyke Regis and Rodwell ward. Lanehouse is divided from Wyke and Rodwell by the steep hill of Lanehouse Rocks Road. Lanehouse belongs with Westham West and Littlesea. Secondly, there are huge differences between the sizes of the proposed wards and the number of councillors per ward. Wyke Regis and Rodwell would be a mega town council ward of 10974 electors. Meanwhile, Nottington would have just 177 electors. I urge Dorset Council to reconsider the well thought through proposals made by Weymouth Town Council, divided in 2- and 3-councillor wards. “It is not in the interests of effective and convenient local government either for voters or councillors, to have significant difference in levels of representation between different parish wards.”

Response to Questions 1 – 4 by the Leader of Council – Cllr Spencer Flower

Thank you for your questions, which I will take together given the common theme expressing a number of concerns about the Community Governance Review. I will deal with this matter more fully under agenda item 11, therefore my response to the various questions will focus on setting out the principle legal requirements used when carrying out such a Review. I

Firstly, a Community Governance Review is a legal process whereby the Council will consult with those living in the area, and other interested parties, on the most suitable ways of representing the people in the area identified in the review, in this instance all parishes within the Dorset Council area.

The Review will consider electoral equality, ensuring that each councillor represents approximately the same number of electors. In some areas electoral equality may no longer be achieved resulting from development that has taken place within a parish. The Review will also seek to change councillor numbers or review any warding arrangements to make this more equitable.

The Review will also consider whether any amendments to parish boundaries are considered appropriate, or whether to group or de-group parishes, to improve community governance. However, when considering these changes, the Council must take into account government guidance which says that, so far as is reasonably practicable, no unwarded parish or parish ward should be split by a Principle Council ward boundary, as this is seen as creating voter confusion whereby one resident may vote with his neighbour for a parish election but may for example vote for a different Dorset Councillor. The Review has been carried out in compliance with government guidance and kept parish boundaries within a Dorset Council ward boundary.

Most of the questions relate to points of detail in a particular area. Can I therefore strongly urge that such questions are submitted for consideration during the 12-week public consultation, which will commence shortly, subject to member support for the recommendation to consult on the draft proposals later this evening.

Question 5 – submitted by Cllr Lucy Hamilton (Weymouth Town Council)

The all-party Local Government Association has responded to Westminster's package to ease cost of living with the following statement.

"This year will be tougher than most, particularly for those on lower incomes, with many households feeling the impact of the pandemic on their earnings, alongside the removal of the £20 Universal Credit uplift and rising costs of energy.

"We are pleased the Government is stepping in to provide financial support to help ease these pressures. Extra discretionary funding for councils will also help them continue to provide much needed crisis support to households who are struggling to afford food, fuel and other essentials.

"We want to work quickly with government to clarify the details of this funding. To ensure it can be distributed as quickly as possible, we would urge it to be added to existing discretionary council schemes.

"Many households are likely to be economically vulnerable for some time to come. Going forward, councils want to work with government on an effective long-term solution to preventing poverty and disadvantage that moves away from providing crisis support towards improving life chances and building resilience. This is vital to levelling up and tackling the stark inequalities exposed by the pandemic."

My question to you: how many Band A-D households in Weymouth, as compared with wider Dorset, are projected to benefit from the £150 council tax rebate?

Response by Cllr Gary Suttle

The Dorset Council area, as a whole, as at the 30 November 2021 Tax base had 129,561 properties in band A-D. I can advise that as at the same date 22,886 of the total number of band A-D properties are in Weymouth. At the time of providing this reply, Government are yet to issue their full guidance to Local Authorities regarding the administration of the £150 assistance, further detail which will assist in the correct administration is expected. Whilst this new assistance is referred to as a Council Tax Energy Rebate, please may I just confirm that this is not a rebate against your Council Tax liability. Government have asked Local Authorities to utilise the Council Tax lists and banding structure to help identify households they wish to help support with this financial assistance for an energy rebate.

Question 6 – submitted by Len Herbert

Councillor Flower - in your statement of 26 January on the Local Plan you affirmed the commitment of the Council to its Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy. This asserts that urgent action is required, not least because use of fossil fuels is driving greenhouse gas emissions, with profound impacts on ecosystems and consequently our lives. The strategy sets out the intention of the Council to transition away from fossil fuels.

Since Dorset Council published its report in July last year it has become clear that the climate and ecological emergency is intensifying. The head of the United Nations describes the latest report by the UN's climate agency as "code red for humanity".

Antonio Guterres says: "The alarm bells are deafening and the evidence is irrefutable: greenhouse gas emissions from fossil-fuel burning and deforestation are choking our planet and putting billions of people at immediate risk. Global heating is affecting every region on Earth, with many of the changes becoming irreversible. This report must sound a death knell for coal and fossil fuels, before they destroy our planet."

Councillor Flower

Does the Council intend to play its part in national and global efforts to address the climate and ecological crisis by prohibiting any new attempts to exploit underground fossil-fuel resources in Dorset?

Response by Cllr Ray Bryan

The Council certainly intends to play its part in national and global efforts to address the climate and ecological crisis, and we have set out how we are doing this in our published Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy. But we are required to assess any developments requiring planning permission, taking account of national and local policy including the environmental implications. Government has not revoked any of the petroleum exploration licences issued in Dorset or elsewhere, and National Planning Policy does not indicate that Mineral Planning Authorities should stop planning for oil and gas

extraction. This means that we cannot simply prohibit all fossil fuel exploitation in the area but must consider each proposal on its merits.