

## **Councillor Questions for Cabinet 1 March 2022**

### **Question 1 from Cllr Kate Wheller**

Traffic management and parking: On the final day of Dorset County Council I attended a meeting with Cllr Darryl Turner, then the cabinet member, to discuss a petition from residents to reduce the 60 mph section of the Portland Beach Road to match the rest of the road. On balance Cllr Turner and officers agreed that this was a sensible suggestion and that work would be undertaken for a report to go to the new Cabinet and new Full Council. This has been lost without trace. Could this please be looked in to. Early in 2019 I submitted a petition requesting officers to look into the possibility of providing residents parking for Ebor Road in Wyke Regis. Officer stated that since there were only 7 names on the petition they would not pursue the issue – they were informed that there are only 7 houses in Ebor Road and all residents had signed the petition. Officers told me they would look again at the scheme; this too seems to have been lost. Cllr Bryan suggested recently that he was in favour of residents parking could this also be looked at again please.

### **Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment**

A petition was received in early 2018 for reducing the speed limit on A354 Portland Beach Road, leading to a Petition Panel on 21 February 2018. The Panel agreed that a reduction of the speed limit to 50mph from national speed limit (60mph) should be taken forward pending support from Dorset Police and Weymouth and Portland Borough Council. A counter petition was then received, and a decision was made to not take this forward. The Road Safety Team would be able to work with and review any new request from the Town Council in Weymouth

In relation to the residents parking scheme for Ebor Road, Wyke Regis. The first stage for residents is to ensure that town or parish councils support has been given to a residents' scheme, Dorset Council can start a review after support has been achieved. Currently, there are a number of locations across Dorset that we are looking at the potential for residential schemes which will be reviewed as part of the next phase of Parking transformation.

### **Question 2 from Cllr Kate Wheller**

I note that so called 'ghost' ponds are being restored in many areas of the country. Can you tell me whether any investigation has taken place on the existence of such ponds on Dorset Council's Farms or other land and if they do whether we could reinstate them? It would seem to be a great way of improving biodiversity and possibly improving drainage and possibly therefore flooding.

## **Response from the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Assets and Property**

Colleagues from the Natural Environment Team (NET) and Assets & Property work together to identify and progress projects to improve biodiversity on the council's rural estate. Two successful Farming in Protected Landscapes grants from Dorset and Cranborne Chase AONBs, match funded using compensation funds, will enable 'ecological baseline and potential habitat creation/restoration surveys' including a desk top studies identifying opportunities for pond creation and restoration (stage 1.) Stage 2 and habitat delivery/changes in management will include potential to improve drainage and flooding.

In addition, a number of opportunities to create new ponds and in some cases restore 'ghost' ponds have been identified across the council's rural estate and progressing to assist Dorset Council's Great Crested Newt (GCN) Licensing Scheme (managed by NET) in the Margaret Marsh.

Other examples include on council farms, New House and Joliffe's. In the case of Joliffe's a new pond was created in an area where a pond had previously been present.

GCN compensation funds have also been received from a highways scheme in Gillingham, and progress is being made to deliver ponds and farm advice on the wider Dorset Council farms working with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) in the headwaters of the Stour Catchment. "

### **Question 3 From Cllr Nick Ireland**

Dorset Council recently announced two contract awards related to the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS), one related to Training, Support & Development, and the other Communication & Networking.

There is a focus, particularly in the first contract, on the most deprived areas of Dorset Council's area, specifically numerous Wards of urban Weymouth & Portland plus Bridport with a few additional urban Wards elsewhere.

The remainder of our markets towns and predominant rural communities will only be required to receive "*base level coverage*".

The areas outside of the contract's focus contain "*hundreds of community organisations such as local charities, community groups, village hall committees, social enterprises and parish councils*", many of whom have barely survived the pandemic, and did so by relying heavily on the existing support structure which already has a good understanding of the Dorset Council area landscape and communities.

How will Dorset Council be supporting these organisations when this support is removed shortly?

## **Response from the Portfolio Holder for Community and Customer Services**

The voluntary and community sector in Dorset provides a huge amount of support to Dorset residents. Dorset Council is committed to supporting the wide range of organisations that provide support to our local residents. The recent contracts are just two examples of the support that the Council provides to the sector. Laura Cornette's team also provide a wide range of support including financial grants directly from the council and support for applying for funding from other bodies

### **Question 4 from Cllr Nick Ireland**

At the last Dorset Full Council, it was disappointing to note that yet again the presented Pay Policy Statement highlighted the fact that Dorset Council is still not a Real Living Wage Employer.

(We pay circa £1500 per annum less than the Real Living Wage threshold – source [livingwage.org.uk](http://livingwage.org.uk))

It was equally disappointing to hear the portfolio holder repeating the incorrect mantra that it isn't possible for local authorities to make this happen and dumbfounding to hear the Leader boast that we pay the National Minimum & Living Wages when it is a legal requirement that we do so!

Given that numerous local authorities, including our near neighbours Cornwall to whom our leader is providing peer support, are accredited Real Living Wage employers, with some even taking the socially conscious decision to go further and insist their suppliers are of the same status, when will this Cabinet take the issue seriously and commission a paper on the subject for discussion in this forum and subsequent debate at Full Council?

### **Response of the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development and Transformation**

The national local government pay award for 2021/22 will be agreed very shortly/has just been agreed and means an increase of 2.75% on our lowest pay point. This brings it to £9.50 per hour. The National Living Wage, which of course we are legally required to pay, will also be £9.50 from April 1<sup>st</sup>.

There is of course still the national pay award for 2022/23 to resolve and which will be effective from this April. Assuming at least the same increase again, this will take our lowest rate to over £9.75 per hour. The Real Living Wage is currently £9.90. An annual difference of £288, not £1,500.

The national local government employers are seeking to increase the lowest pay point, over a period, to achieve the Real Living Wage. As the Council is committed to national bargaining then it is right that we support the national employers in their endeavours.

Moving unilaterally to the Real Living wage not only has practical implications on pay differentials but also see us paying outside of the nationally agreed rates.

Comparisons with other councils are easy to make but of course only ever tell part of the story. We know that for example some who pay the Real Living Wage are also making large numbers of redundancies in order to balance their budgets. We are not. What would Cllr Ireland prefer?

### **Question 5 from Cllr Bill Trite**

The Swanage locality Rapid Response Vehicle, usually referred to as the Ambulance Car or Paramedic Car, has a record of preventing many deaths in Swanage and nearby villages by administering life-saving support well before a conventional ambulance reaches such emergency cases. This service is vital in Swanage owing to (among other things) the town's relative remoteness from A&E facilities, its higher than Dorset average of elderly and vulnerable residents, the exceptional holiday-time road traffic congestion which extends ambulance journey times both to collect patients and to transport them to A&E, and the doubling or trebling of the number of people in the town in the summer months. Moreover the Ambulance car can be 'tethered' to the immediate area whereas an ambulance cannot. Yet notwithstanding the even greater local concern that the Ambulance Car may soon be withdrawn, a recent Freedom of Information response by the Ambulance Trust revealed that the Car was staffed for only 42% of the time throughout 2021, representing a swingeing *de facto* reduction of this service without any due consultation process. To meet and address these grave concerns and shortcomings, the Council has promised to convene a Task & Finish Group comprising appropriate persons. Could we please have an update on when the first meeting of such a duly constituted Task & Finish Group will be taking place?

### **Response from the Chairman of People & Health Overview Committee**

At the Cabinet meeting on 5 October 2021 the Portfolio holder for Adult Social Care and Health announced that a working group would be set up to respond to the Clinical Commissioning Group's consultation as soon as the consultation is announced.

The Leader has agreed terms of reference for the Task and Finish Group and I have been asked to Chair the Group. It is still the case that the first meeting will take place as soon as the consultation has begun, at which point we will know what it is we are being consulted about.

It is unsatisfactory that communities have been left for so long with uncertainty about the future of the Ambulance Car. I have written to the CCG asking either:

1. that they confirm that the Ambulance Car is to be retained fully staffed, (in which case there will be no need for the Task and Finish Group to meet); or,
2. that the CCG bring forward specific proposals for consultation to which the Council and communities can respond.

I will let Cllr Trite know as soon as I have heard from the CCG.

### **Question 6 from Cllr B Trite**

Dorset Council has, I understand, a statutory role in representing the needs of residents who will or could be adversely affected by changes to health services. Since Swanage and nearby villages will be the area worst affected by loss of the Swanage-based Ambulance Car, can local residents rely on the Cabinet ensuring that at least one of the local Dorset Council members be appointed to the Task & Finish Group mentioned in the last question?

### **Response from the Chairman of People & Health Overview Committee**

Local ward members will not be appointed to the Task and Finish Group. However, reflecting the importance of local knowledge and their community leadership role Swanage ward members will be invited to meetings of the Task and Finish Group to provide evidence and their views to the Group. Evidence gathering for the Task & Finish Group will commence in the first week of April.

### **Question 7 from Cllr Jon Orrell**

Will the council support hotels and guest houses in Weymouth, as they recover from the impact of the pandemic, by replacing the loss of scratch card permits with an electronic equivalent or similar cost access to Pavilion, Lodmoor, Swannery car parks?

### **Response of the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment**

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment referred Cllr Orrell to his response given to the public questions 4,5,6.

### **Question 8 from Cllr Jon Orrell**

How many people a year are being placed by agencies outside Dorset ( Housing associations, treatment agencies, other councils or probation) , away from their families and support networks to central Weymouth hotels and hostels?

### **Response from the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety**

The question is too broad to provide a specific or annual figure, generally referring to 'agencies outside Dorset', so I will follow this question up with Cllr Orrell to explore his particular area of concern. Agencies outside of Dorset use relatively small amounts of this type of accommodation in Central Weymouth to provide housing for people they are supporting, along with local agencies and the Council. Dorset Council's Housing team are part of a well-established network of organisations to make sure this is managed well, with information shared where necessary. For example, we collaborate well with Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council to make sure we share information when they find it necessary to use a Weymouth property for people from their area and to make sure that the person is able to live successfully in that location.

