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CABINET

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 1 MARCH 2022

Present: Cllrs Spencer Flower (Chairman), Peter Wharf (Vice-Chairman), Graham Carr-Jones, Ray Bryan, Tony Ferrari, Laura Miller, Gary Suttle and Jill Haynes

Apologies: Cllrs Andrew Parry and David Walsh

Also present: Matt Prosser, Cllr Cherry Brooks, Cllr Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Cllr Byron Quayle, Cllr Jane Somper, Cllr Tony Alford, Cllr Shane Bartlett, Cllr Derek Beer, Cllr Andy Canning, Cllr Simon Christopher, Cllr Les Fry, Cllr David Gray, Cllr Nick Ireland, Cllr Jon Orrell, Cllr Mike Parkes, Cllr Bill Trite and Cllr Kate Wheller

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Jonathan Mair (Corporate Director - Legal & Democratic Service Monitoring Officer), John Sellgren (Executive Director, Place), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic Services Officer), George Dare (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Vivienne Broadhurst (Interim Executive Director - People Adults), Theresa Leavy (Executive Director of People - Children), Graham Duggan (Head of Community & Public Protection), Rebecca Forrester (Business Intelligence & Performance), John Newcombe (Service Manager, Licensing & Community Safety), Paul Rutter (Service Manager for Leisure Services), Steve Veevers (Corporate Director Operations, Adult Care) and Andrew Billany (Corporate Director of Housing, Dorset Council)

53. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Graham Carr-Jones expressed a personal interest in respect of minute 61. "Proposed Blue Badge Car Park Charging Policy" as a Blue Badge user. However, having sought advice from the Monitoring Officer, he indicated that he would speak and vote on the item.

54. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 6 April, 29 April, 18 May, 22 June, 27 July, 7 September, 5 October, 8 November, 7 December 2021 and 18 January 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

55. Public Participation

There were 7 questions/statements from the public. Some of these questions were read out by Matt Prosser, Chief Executive and Jonathan Mair (Corporate Director, Legal and Democratic Services). Dawn Rondeau and Joy Sangster attended and read their questions in person. All questions were responded to by the appropriate Portfolio Holder.

A copy of the full questions and the detailed responses are set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

56. Questions from Councillors

There were 8 questions from Councillors K Wheller, N Ireland, W Trite and J Orrell; these along with the responses are set out in Appendix 2 to these minutes.

As a supplementary to his first question, Cllr N Ireland asked “With the national ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) member no longer being supported by Dorset Council, how will this council be ensuring that VCSE organisations are getting up to date accurate policy and legislation information, as provided by DCA during the coronavirus pandemic?”

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services would provide a full written response to the question.

57. Forward Plan

The draft Cabinet Forward Plan for April to July 2022 was received and noted.

58. Purbeck Gateway

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety set out a report that was originally considered by Dorset Council in October 2019. The fresh recommendations before members took into account the considerable amount of work to bring the scope up to date following the changes to the housing market since the pandemic

Members were advised that the project was now recommending a mix of affordable extra care housing, supported living and general needs housing on the former middle school site in Wareham. The Portfolio Holder proposed the recommendation set out in the report.

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health confirmed that this had been the subject of discussion for some time, by seconding the motion, he indicated his support for the recommendations.

Decision

- (a) That the revised scope of the Purbeck Gateway Project be approved, with specific reference to taking the Middle School site in Wareham forward to procure the development of Housing.
- (b) Third-party public procurement be approved, as the preferred Delivery mechanism, and that the project team commence design of procurement approach in consultation with Legal Advisors and Procurement officers. The final approval of the procurement model be delegated to and authorised by the Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial.

- (c) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director for People (Adults) and the Executive Director for Corporate Development to make the decisions regarding the selection of potential preferred bidders and the final award of the Contract to the preferred bidder, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety, and the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care & Health.
- (d) That the terms of the final land deal with Developers be agreed; and be subject to the advice of the Council's solicitor and external legal advisers and shall be approved by the Executive Director for Place, and the Executive Director for Corporate Development.

Reason for the decision

The scope of the project has changed since the original Cabinet approval in 2019. This has taken account of changes in the need for housing with support and care in this area and strengthened the emphasis on providing extra-care housing. It has been important to refresh the Business Case, be certain that what had been proposed was still relevant to local need and make changes where necessary. The continuing need for these parts of the project have been evidenced and are financially and commercially viable

59. **School Admissions Arrangements and Coordinated Scheme 2023-2024**

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Education, Children, Skills and Early Help, the Executive Director for People – Children set out the report.

It was a requirement of the Department for Education that admission authorities consult on their admission arrangements annually. This had now been carried out and members were asked to adopt the policies as set out in the recommendation.

The Chairman highlighted a minor typo in the recommendation on the report stating that the recommendation should read “from September 2023” and not 2021.

It was proposed by Cllr L Miller and seconded by Cllr R Bryan

Decision

That the following policies that make up Dorset Council's School Admissions Arrangements and Coordinated Scheme for school place allocations from September 2023 be adopted:

1. Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme Timetable 2023-2024
2. Primary Co-ordinated Scheme 2023-2024
3. Secondary Co-ordinated Scheme 2023-2024
4. In Year Co-ordinated Scheme 2023-2024
5. Admissions Arrangements for Community & Voluntary Controlled Schools 2023-2024.
6. Admissions to Maintained Nursery Units Policy 2023-2024
7. Sixth Form Admissions Policy 2023-2024

8. Guidance on Placement Outside of Normal/Chronological Age Group 2023-2024
9. Armed Forces Policy 2023-2024.

Reason for the decision

To determine admissions arrangements in accordance with statutory requirements including the Schools Admissions Code September 2021.

To ensure compliance with the latest legislation and any subsequent regulation/statutory guidance

60. **Charmouth Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2021-2035**

The Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services presented the report on behalf of the Portfolio Holder for Planning. The purpose of the report was to formally make the plan part of the development plan for use in planning decisions in the area that it covered. Cabinet unanimously supported the recommendation.

Decision

- (a) That the Council makes the Charmouth Neighbourhood Plan 2021 - 2035 (as set out in Appendix A to the report) part of the statutory development plan for the Charmouth Neighbourhood Area.
- (b) That the Council offers its congratulations to the Parish Council and members of the Neighbourhood Plan Group in producing a successful neighbourhood plan.

Reason for the decision

To formally make the Charmouth Neighbourhood Plan 2021 - 2035 part of the statutory development plan for the Charmouth Neighbourhood Area. In addition, to recognise the significant amount of work undertaken by the Parish Council and members of the Neighbourhood Plan Group in preparing the plan and to congratulate the Council and Group on their success.

61. **Proposed Blue Badge Car Park Charging Policy**

Cabinet considered a report presented by the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment. He highlighted that the aim of the report was to harmonise and align former council policies into one policy to bring consistency and fairness to Blue Badge holders who use Dorset Council car parks.

As its Vice-Chairman, Cllr L Fry indicated that the Place and Resources Overview Committee had considered the policy at its meeting on 10 February 2022. They fully supported the recommendation before Cabinet.

Cabinet members unanimously supported the recommendations.

Decision

That the new pan-Dorset Blue Badge Car Park Charging Policy be approved.

Reason for the decision

To align the former council policies to one to bring consistency and fairness to Blue Badge holders who park in Dorset Council car parks.

62. **Bus Service Improvement Plan - Dorset's Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme**

In proposing the recommendations, the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment set out the report regarding the bus service improvement plan. The aim of the report and its recommendation was to ensure delivery of the improvement plan through a formal agreement which must be in place between the council and all local bus service operators.

The recommendations were seconded by Cllr G Suttle.

Cllr D Beer welcomed the report that was an opportunity to provide joined up public transport services.

Decision

- (a) That the Dorset Enhanced Partnership be approved; and that the Plan and Scheme be 'made' to commence the Enhanced Partnership on the 1st April 2022.
- (b) That authority be delegated to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment to approve the decisions of the Enhanced Partnership Board.

Reason for the decision

In order to deliver the Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan a formal agreement must be in place between the council and with all local bus service operators. Through engagement with local bus operators, the council has prepared a draft Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme to deliver the BSIP in accordance with requirements set out by the Department for Transport and in line with the Transport Act 2000 and any subsequent amendments.

63. **Review of the Highways Asset Management Plan**

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment presented the report. The Highways Asset Management Policy and Strategy document sets out how the council had aligned its approach to support Dorset Council priorities and how the council would manage its highway assets.

Place and Resources Overview Committee considered the report at its meeting on 10 February 2022 and the Executive Director for Place recommended the proposal

to Cabinet following that Place and Resources Overview members comments and support.

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment proposed the recommendation, and this was seconded by Cllr P Wharf.

As the Vice-Chairman for Place and Resources Overview Committee, Cllr L Fry confirmed that the committee supported the recommendations set out in the report.

Decision

That the Highways Asset Management Policy and Strategy be approved.
This is a summary document of the revised Highways Asset Management Plan (HAMP).

Reason for the decision

The Highways Asset Management Policy and Strategy document sets out how we have aligned our approach to support Dorset Council priorities and how the authority will manage its highway assets. The Department for Transport criteria states that we must have a current asset management policy, and strategic document, reviewed in the last two years, which must be signed off by senior decision makers, or we lose up to £2million of DfT incentivised funding.

64. Extension of ASB - Related Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO's)

Cabinet members considered a report set out by the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services. Members were advised that the ASB-related Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) for West Dorset was due to expire on 22 April 2022. She was seeking a 4-month extension of the order to enable appropriate consideration of the consultation responses received during the review of PSPO's covering the whole of the Dorset Area.

The Portfolio Holder proposed the recommendation as set out in the report and this was seconded by Cllr G Carr-Jones.

Decision

That the extension of the West Dorset ASB-Related Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) to 19 August 2022, be approved.

Reason for the decision

To comply with legislative requirements.
To ensure openness and transparency in the council's decision making, and
To ensure that those persons affected by ASB continue to be afforded the protection provided by the Orders.

65. Leisure Services Review

The Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services presented a report on the Leisure Services Review in Dorset. The aim of a leisure strategy was to set out how the council aimed to deliver its leisure service in the future and identify ways to improve community health through physical activity. The strategy would help shape how leisure facilities could be accessible, affordable, and sustainable in the future.

The recommendations set out in the report were proposed by Cllr L Miller and seconded by Cllr J Haynes.

In a response to a question, the Portfolio Holder advised that all members will be able to engage in the review, which would be an open and transparent piece of work. Responding to a further question, members were advised that the review did also include premises that were being operated by third party providers.

Decision

Cabinet approved

- (a) That a leisure strategy be developed to enable Dorset Council to consider and adopt a more strategic and informed approach to the way it operates its leisure facilities and service.
- (b) That the strategy be reviewed by the People and Health Overview Committee in the Autumn and then be brought to Cabinet for consideration and adoption.
- (c) That officers be instructed to agree contract extensions for Ferndown Leisure Centre, Blandford Leisure Centre, and Dorchester Sports Centre until 31.03.2024 on the existing contractual terms.

A leisure strategy will set out how the council aims to deliver its leisure service in the future and identify ways to improve community health through physical activity. The strategy will help shape how leisure facilities can be accessible, affordable, and sustainable in the future.

The Ferndown Leisure Centre and Blandford Leisure Centre contracts expire on 31.3.22, with the Dorchester Sports Centre expiring on 21.10.22. An extension to 31.3.24 would align all the existing leisure contracts and would allow time for the council to develop a leisure strategy which sets out the future delivery of its leisure sites and provision.

66. **Procurement Forward Plan Report - over £500K (2022-23)**

In presenting the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital proposed its recommendations. This was seconded by Cllr T Ferrari.

Decision

- (a) That Cabinet agrees to begin each of the procurement processes listed in Appendix 1 to the report.

- (b) That in each instance the further step of making any contract award be delegated to the relevant Cabinet portfolio holder, after consultation with the relevant Executive Director.

Reason for the decision

Cabinet is required to approve all key decisions with financial consequences of £500k or more. It is also good governance to provide Cabinet with a summary of all proposed procurements prior to them formally commencing.

Planning procurements effectively ensures:
effective stakeholder management
efficient commissioning and sourcing
compliance with regulations and contract procedure rules
best value for money is clearly defined

67. **QE Leisure Centre Future Management**

The Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services set out the report seeking support to give a 2-year notice to withdraw from managing the leisure centre. In setting out the proposal the Portfolio Holder advised that there was a good level of alternative provision within the locality and a decision to withdraw would enable the Council to make a revenue saving of around £550,000 per annum.

This matter was considered by Place and Resources Overview Committee on 10 February 2022 and although the committee recognised that this would be a difficult decision, they supported the proposed approach for the future of QE Leisure Centre.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services proposed the recommendations, and this was seconded by Cllr J Haynes.

In response to questions the Portfolio Holder advised: -

- This was an opportunity for QE Leisure Centre to improve its provision for the locality.
- There are several SANG facilities in the area.
- Highlighted the need for leisure services to be equitable.
- The Leisure Review would be an opportunity for all councillors to be involved in the review process and this would include QE Leisure Centre.
- The Council had a commitment to support the school into developing the leisure for the future.

Members recognised that equitable provision needed to be provided across the Dorset Council area and that the council would do what it could to support the school during the transitional period.

Decision

- (a) That the Executive Director of Place be instructed to write to Queen Elizabeth School Foundation Trustees to give formal notice to withdraw from the dual use management agreement on the 31.3.24.
- (b) That officers continue to engage with the school during this transitional period and work with them to approach the Education and Skills Funding Agency to apply for exceptional circumstances funding in recognition of the change in contractual arrangements.
- (c) That officers work alongside Queen Elizabeth School in identifying ways to maximise the availability of leisure facilities for school and community use and provide advice to any displaced users who may need assistance in identifying opportunities to maintain their activity levels.
- (d) That a bid for one off capital funding (up to a max of £150,000) be included in Dorset Councils 2023/24 capital budget process. If successful, this funding would be Dorset Council's contribution towards the replacement of the All-Weather Pitch.

Reasons for the decision

The existing dual use agreement permits the Council to give Queen Elizabeth School Foundation Trustees a 2-year notice to withdraw from managing the leisure centre.

There is a good level of alternative provision within the locality with seven public leisure facilities within a 20 min drive time of Queen Elizabeth Leisure Centre (QELC), three of which are owned by Dorset Council. Similarly, there are several large private and budget leisure clubs within a 10-mile radius.

A decision to withdraw would enable the Council to make a revenue saving of around £550,000 per annum.

The leisure centre is owned by the Foundation Trustees and any decisions around the future operation of the site would be for them as the land and property owner. The Council would be keen to support them during this transitional period with applications for exceptional factor funding as well as identifying ways to maximise school and community use of the facilities.

The all-weather pitch is a vital facility and one-off funding (up to £150k) could enable this to be replaced during 2023/24, benefitting both Queen Elizabeth School (QES) and the community. This would also allow QES to generate enough income to create a sinking fund for any future replacement.

68. **Cabinet member update on policy development matter referred to an Overview Committee(s) for consideration**

There were no referrals to report.

69. **Climate & Ecological Emergency Executive Advisory Panel Update**

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment reported on some of the actions that had been taken since the Council had declared a climate and ecological emergency: -

- Formed an Executive Advisory Panel, held several meetings including inquiry days involving public engagement.
- Workshops
- Sought views from employees
- Councillor webinars
- Created a strategy and action plan
- Sought government funding – 19million was achieved to decarbonise council buildings
- Distributed funding via Low Carbon Dorset
- Continue to reduce the Council's carbon footprint
- Created the position of Corporate Director for Climate and Ecological Emergency. Steven Ford will shortly be joining the council.
- Installed over 50 EV charging points, more to follow.
- Improvements and development of cycleways
- AONB working with local farmers
- Created a draft fleet strategy

70. Urgent items

There were no urgent items considered at the meeting.

71. Exempt Business

It was proposed by Cllr P Wharf and seconded by Cllr T Ferrari

Decision

That the press and the public be excluded for the following 2 item(s) in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the meaning of paragraph 4 of schedule 12 A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

72. Review of Redundancy Pay

Members considered a report on the Review of Redundancy Pay.

Decision

That the recommendations set out within the exempt report be approved.

73. Adult Social Care - Future Services

The committee considered an exempt report and its recommendations on Adult Social Care – Future Services.

Decision

That the recommendations set out within the exempt report be approved.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 12.25 pm

Chairman

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Question to Cabinet 1 March 2022

Question 1 from Cllr Kelly Webb, Chairman & Town Mayor, Wimborne Minster Town Council

WMTC has written to DC with a number of specific questions, firstly on 5th November last year. Some were answered, but some were not. Many answers – as in this report - simply state that the final outcomes will only be known when QE School decide how they will operate once the agreement ends in 2 years' time. It is disappointing that although EDDC worked with a local school for the benefit of the wider community by supporting a shared facility, DC appears to only be considering the financial savings involved in changing the arrangement.

The Risk Assessments in the report give no consideration as to what could happen to the facility after DC's involvement ends and this is disappointing. QE School could decide to reduce access to the public or remove it altogether, they may need to close some parts of the building to both the public and students as they are unable to meet the cost of operating or maintaining them. The report before you today seeks to disassociate DC with anything that may or may not happen regarding the QELC facilities and buildings after such time as the agreement ends. This feels morally wrong.

Can you confirm the total annual operating costs for the QELC broken down into component parts as to which organisation contributes what amounts? The Trust has advised that the 40% of operating costs that they are liable for, are covered by the £280k of the 'Exceptional Funding Factor' award (making 100% approximately £700k). It therefore does not make sense that DC are estimating 550k pa savings (where the contribution has been advised as 60%) – as that figure would represent approximately 80% of the operating costs if £280k is indeed 40%. The reason for asking is that the recommendation to withdraw from the agreement may not be 'sound' if the projected savings are incorrect.

Response of the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services

Thank you for your question. If the Council chose to withdraw from the management agreement, then it will be for the School's Foundation Trustees, as the building and landowner, to decide how the facilities are managed in the future. We have however made it clear in the report that the school are committed to retaining leisure facilities for school and community use and we would continue to support them through any transitional period.

The £280k Exceptional Factor Funding contribution covers revenue costs attributable to the schools use of the leisure centre and a 40% contribution towards ongoing capital costs. The school does not contribute 40% of the total costs as much of this relates to community usage. The figure of £550k is the budgeted cost to Dorset Councils Leisure Services.

Question 2 from Cllr Kelly Webb, Chairman & Town Mayor, Wimborne Minster Town Council

In the context of this questions, WMTC maintains all its own playparks within its boundary and its recreation grounds. There are current moves to transfer additional assets of open spaces to WMTC ownership which will increase the maintenance burden. WMTC has no significant income-generating assets and has a relatively low tax base with which to support a market town serving a much wider area than its own population.

My second question;

Whilst much of the proposal to withdraw from the agreement is based around savings and other similar recreational facilities in the area, what consideration has been given to the fair distribution of DC's spend on all types of recreational facilities throughout Dorset - and the Town & Parish Councils' ability to afford to invest in such facilities themselves? There appears to be a huge disparity in the Unitary Authority's investment in recreation across Dorset and also the ability of T&P Councils to generate income. For example, some have access to car park income and others rely solely on their precepts. It may well be that DC are investing more heavily in QELC than other similar leisure facilities, but comparisons need to be made at a higher level i.e. DC's spend on all recreational facilities across Dorset, including open spaces, playparks and beaches to ensure a fair spread of funding and that comparisons are made with income generation abilities at a local level.

Response of the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services

Thank you again for your question. The report details the high number of other leisure centres close to QE Leisure Centre, 3 of which are Dorset Council facilities. We have also highlighted the wonderful country parks that Dorset Council operates close by and the high levels of investment in the East Dorset area. I would also point out that there will be further very positive recreational improvements to the area with two 3G artificial pitches and additional play parks and suitable alternative natural greenspace related to local housing development.

A Strategic Leisure Review is underway that will focus on all aspects of leisure provision, and not just the built facilities. Moving forward, this will enable us to work towards a more equitable provision of facilities to support sport, leisure and recreational activities across the whole Dorset Council area and provide opportunities for all residents to be active.

Question 3 from Ross Bowell

Following the meeting of the Council's Place and Resources Overview Committee on 10 February, with deep regret we see that it is very likely that at the meeting of 1 March Cabinet will approve a proposal for the Council to withdraw from the dual use agreement at Queen Elizabeth's Leisure Centre.

Much was made in the meeting of the Council's offer of support in putting the centre on a sustainable footing going forward, but there was very little detail as to how the

Council (which is currently running the centre at a significant financial loss) will be able to meaningfully provide such support.

Is the Council prepared to commission their specialist leisure consultant to work with the school in developing a costed options appraisal for a future operating model?

Will the Council agree to Cabinet receiving this report before the end of 2022 to enable it to consider any additional transitional capital or revenue funding requirements identified?

Response of the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services

Thank you for your question. I am confident that we have the expertise across our leisure, property, education, and finance services to provide a good level of support to the school as it considers its future approach to operating the leisure centre.

Our Leisure Review and the development of a leisure strategy will help to provide a strategic overview of leisure provision across the Dorset Council area. This will help to ensure that sports and leisure provision will be sustainable and have a positive impact on improving community health. The strategy is likely to focus on the need for leisure facilities to be accessible, affordable, and sustainable, with equity of provision and areas of health inequalities given priority. Any future funding considerations will be aligned to this strategy.

Question 4 from Dawn Rondeau on behalf of “We are Weymouth”

We Are Weymouth is Weymouth’s Business Improvement District. We represent over 560 businesses within the town, with 67 of these being accommodation providers.

In the past few weeks, concerns have been raised by guest house owners, the Weymouth Hoteliers Association, holiday let owners and management agents regarding the removal of parking provisions for their guests, in particular:

- That holiday let owners will no longer be eligible to apply for yearly permits for guest use
- That the hotel/guest house parking scratch card system is being withdrawn

These permits and discounted scratch cards are vital not only for businesses, but for visitors to the town, who may already be discouraged by Weymouth’s lack of parking or park and ride infrastructure, providing them with an option for affordable parking within the town during their visit, which for a seven-day stay, could equate to £70 – a significant and deterring sum. Most B&Bs and Guest Houses market and publish the fact that these vouchers are in operation and available as an incentive to book their stay in Weymouth, as parking is such a concern for most customers.

It is our belief that removal of yearly permits and scratch cards will be detrimental to Weymouth’s visitor economy, with potential visitors to the town opting to choose another coastal resort, where parking is more readily available at a reduced or no cost.

We have written to Cllr Ray Bryan, Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Environment, and Cllr Jon Orrell in his role as Dorset Councillor for Melcombe Regis, and have been informed by Elizabeth Murray, Strategic Parking Project Manager that Dorset Council do not intend to change its position.

We are very disappointed with Dorset Council's response as the consultation lacked any detail on the breadth and implications of these changes, and we understand that Dorset Council have made changes to the strategy for Corfe Castle, which does not fall in-line with your statement about consistency.

We therefore ask the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Environment:

- Will Dorset Council re-consider its position, acknowledging the value that tourism and visitors bring to Weymouth, and that the removal of these permits and scratch cards will be detrimental to the town and businesses?
- What does Dorset Council propose to resolve these issues and support the visitor economy?

Question 5 from Claire Wall

As the chair of the hotel/guesthouse association and a guest house owner myself, I would like to raise a question on behalf of myself/members who run businesses in Weymouth town to Councillor Ray Bryan.

A member of ours recently made a call to Dorset parking to purchase more discounted scratch cards for the car parks as we have been doing for many years, it was made known during that call we could no longer purchase them as of January 2022.

Once this was confirmed and the news passed on to all members, you cannot imagine the scale of stress and anxiety this has caused.

As a popular tourist town our members now feel undervalued with this unfair handicap on our businesses. We do not understand why there were no discussions undertaken on the impact this would cause if these scratch cards were removed.

Guests who stay for long periods and return year after year appreciate the parking difficulties in finding a space on the road close to the beach. This has previously been made easier by the choice of a reasonably priced scratch card for the car parks nearby.

We all feel without this offer we would see less footfall in our town and businesses who also rely on tourism like ourselves will also see decline. These also include restaurants, cafes, theatres, shops even to boat trips, buses, taxis and daytrip excursions.

All these rely on tourism, tourism is the main revenue in Weymouth and has to be looked at favourably.

Most of the guest houses/ hotels in Weymouth especially along the seafront are lease holders, our rents are payable to our landlord Dorset Council. As well as being

businesses we are residents, workers, tenants and tourism operators adding that all up, it is an incredible amount of revenue paid back into the local economy.

If guests visiting our town are only having a choice of a limited amount of street permits to park, our roads are going to be heavily congested and will just create chaos, also no good for the environment, this could be avoided if it had been thought through along with consultation aimed at the correct parties. One guest house alone spent £280 for 4 on-street permits along with £6.000 on scratch cards from May 2021 to September 2021, this proves the discount scratch cards were the guests overall preferred choice, imagine the revenue and benefits to Dorset Council if this service became available for ALL guest houses/ accommodation providers without onsite parking to purchase.

We are asking if the scratch cards can be reinstated? This would remove the chaos, fear and anxiety felt by all our members for the coming year, guests more often than not waive the offer of a free on road permit and opt for the discount scratch card as they find Weymouth as difficult as residents to find spaces to park on the streets during high season.

Tourism has been hit hard during the pandemic and needs support, understanding and consideration from Dorset Council to help build our businesses back up to pre-covid levels.

We would be happy to work with Dorset Council to produce a fair outcome that works for both sides, not only for parking but further projects that would increase the success of our town.

Thank you for your time and listening to our views on this issue.

Question 6 from Joy Sangste

We are disappointed to hear very recently that all provision for holiday cottage guests to use parking permits in Weymouth both on street as well as council owned car parks is being removed with immediate effect. Parking permits have been purchased by owners of holiday cottages for decades for the use of guests and payment contributes to the council. We have been informed that there will be absolutely no provision for owners to obtain council car parking permits at any enhanced cost, or for guests to pre-pay for parking. However, there is current provision for both of these aspects: platform and payment gateway for guests to pay in advance for car parking and for owners to pay for council car park permits – all hosted on the website:

<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/parking/permits/weymouth-and-portland-area/weymouth-portland-weekly-parking-permit>.

Will the cabinet look at best practice around the country, where councils have successfully attracted tourists to park and pay online via a website or parking apps for car parks, offering a specialist tourist permit, whilst charging an appropriate rate.

Examples are: <https://www.northdevon.gov.uk/parking/parking-permits/visitor-and-tourist-permits/4-and-7-day-permits/>

And

<https://eastdevon.gov.uk/parking/car-park-permits/car-park-permits-we-offer/parking-permits/> .

Our guests alone may spend around £1 million in the Dorset area once they arrive, are the cabinet keen to facilitate the continued success of tourism aided by appropriate parking provision, which supports so many

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment for questions 4, 5 and 6

Over the last year much research has been done, including engagement with the public, Town & Parish council, BIDS, Chambers and other organisations, to work out a charging strategy that works for residents, businesses, workers and also works for Dorset Council. Through this period, all stakeholders had the opportunity to respond to the proposals, including the withdrawal of permits and Scratch Cards, with the expectation that organisations would respond on behalf of the community that they represent. Having completed a benchmarking exercise against other similar visitor destinations in the South of England, it was decided that all discounted parking for visitors and tourists to Dorset should be removed so that affordable permits could be introduced to support people who live and work in Dorset.

Following the feedback received in the last month from holiday accommodation businesses in Weymouth, a meeting was held between Dorset Council Officers and Councillors, including Cllr Ray Bryan (Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment) to look at solutions. A number of proposals were put forward including the suggestions you have made. After much deliberation, it was decided that the decision to remove permits and Scratch Cards for visitors to Dorset needed to remain. The reasons for this were to ensure consistency with other holiday destinations in the Dorset Council area and to retain funds for the new permits for residents, businesses and workers.

The impact of this decision will be monitored, and changes made if necessary. This year, the use of the Weymouth Park & Ride will be investigated to see if there is a more affordable parking option for visitors to Weymouth.

Question 7 from Linda Stevenson

How can local groups like Dog Friendly Weymouth and Portland, and Paws on Weymouth Beaches and Open Spaces-Dog Walkers clearing the way, reach the residents who are concerned with dog fouling regarding the role they have played in changing attitudes to responsible dog ownership and how they can help everyone understand dog owners are equally concerned, but are finding it increasingly difficult to walk dogs in the community they live in for fear of abuse?

Can the Council assure people of the role of the dog wardens and council employees who can issue fines for dog fouling, and when this will be implemented?

We have been told it is not often possible because dog fouling happens during the hours of darkness which, as dog owners know, dogs are walked at all times of the day. This is evident when we walk our dogs and report dog fouling to the Dog Warden Department via email or telephone. We have been assured all reports of dog fouling will be investigated sadly something that, up until recently, was not happening.”

We would also like answers to the ongoing discrimination against families with assistance dogs or mobility issue in gaining access to public spaces on Dorset Beaches.

Without an individual Equality Impact Assessment where each public space is assessed and permanent adjustments made this is seen as indirect discrimination by disabled people who live, visit or holiday in Dorset.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services

Thank you for your question. The council recognises the important role of groups that promote responsible dog ownership. We will work with all members of the community to help improve understanding of the law and the welfare of dogs and the benefits of responsible dog ownership. No-one should live in fear of abuse and incidents need to be reported to the authorities.

There are six Dorset Council Animal Welfare and Dog Control Officers carrying out a range of duties in a large geographical area. They undertake patrols in hotspot areas where there are known problems but with such a large area to focus on, it is difficult to be in the right place at the right time to witness an offence. To help with enforcement we have a further twenty Town and Parish Council authorised officers. All reports of fouling are investigated but the evidence supplied often doesn't reach the standard required to take enforcement action. We encourage complainants to provide as much detail as possible so that we can carry out patrols in the daylight hours that will coincide with the occurrence of likely offences.

People using an assistance dog do not have to comply with the exclusion restrictions or the requirement to dispose of dog faeces. An Equalities Impact Assessment was done for the PSPO and is updated as necessary. The Council needs to achieve a balance between access to exercise areas for dog owners and the protection of public health. Specific concerns are being looked at by officers as part of a review of the Dog-related Public Spaces Protection Order.

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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)

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 1st.

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.

