

Councillor Questions for Cabinet 1 March 2022

Question 1 from Cllr Jon Orrell

Weymouth town centre has a conservation zone designation. Lately it has been at risk and 4 years ago a conservation officer achieved major renovation of town centre properties by various grades of enforcement action. This campaign ended and a recent inspection found various shop buildings would benefit from redecoration. Can a conservation officer be assigned to replicate the success of recent years?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning

The conservation enforcement work undertaken in Weymouth was funded by a specific budget and ended in October 2020. The specific role was time limited and funded prior to Dorset Council being formed.

Since then, the service has been restructured around the geography of the new Council area. The team covers a complex array of work across the whole of Dorset Council, and the demands on the team means that it is not feasible to have a dedicated officer covering Weymouth town centre alone. However, one of the Conservation Officers covers the area in and around Weymouth and Portland and part of the role includes assessing the expediency of enforcement action affecting heritage assets.

Question 2 from Cllr Jon Orrell

Weymouth town centre has adverse crime statistics. The causes and cures lie beyond pure policing and link public health, housing, education and employment. The former Melcombe board brought together senior staff at a strategic level to coordinate action. This was lost after the formation of Dorset Council. The need to work together remains strong and the local police with the Business Improvement District "We are Weymouth" plus the town council are looking to rebuild this strategic approach. Can the council commit housing and public health input to this; the most hard pressed part of Dorset that needs levelling up?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health

Firstly, it is important to emphasise the Dorset Council is strongly committed to achieving the best possible outcomes for Weymouth and its residents. This includes the promotion of what works well in Weymouth, as well as addressing (and levelling up) where there is deprivation, crime, poor health, poor educational achievement or poor housing. Strategic leadership has been broadened and developed since the closure of the Melcombe Regis Board, and the focus on all areas of Weymouth is the right way forward, moving on from the emphasis on one Ward.

As one example of many, the Joint Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy has a priority focus on improving outcomes in disadvantaged and deprived communities, and targets much of its attention on Weymouth and Portland. LiveWell Dorset, for example, has higher uptake of its health improvement services in the most deprived areas, including Weymouth and Portland, and we work to remove barriers to people accessing support to improve their health. As a partnership across Public Health, Housing, Social Care and Voluntary Sectors we have also brought in significant new investment in drug and alcohol services in the last year, bringing benefits to people's health and well-being, and also reducing crime, anti-social behaviour and street homelessness. A further example is our Community Response pilot; this is a partnership between Social Care and Age UK supporting people to access resources in the Weymouth and Portland area enabling them to remain at home.

Operational delivery is important, and we work hard to make sure that this strategic leadership focuses on what matters to local residents and through effective local services. We commit to continue to be a vital part of the partnership approach described in the question, linking in with the Town Council, Business Improvement District and a range of agencies such as Dorset Police. This includes housing and public health, but is across all of our areas of influence, with a great deal of input from our People and Place directorates and portfolios into strategies such as our Stronger Neighbourhoods approach. As part of our collaborative approach, initiatives and ideas that are coming forward from the agencies mentioned in the question are always embraced, and we continue to work together to develop the best way forward for Weymouth.