

**Full Council
20 October 2022**

Questions and Statements submitted for the Public Participation Period

Question 1 – submitted by Miranda Tunnicliffe

Maintenance of drains and gullies in the Park District, Weymouth.

At a public meeting on 7th October 2022, attended by Wessex Water, Dorset Highways, Local Councillors, BRIC, Dorset Council Flood Risk Managers and local residents, it was established there is a problem with the maintenance of drains and gullies in the Park District in Weymouth.

The gullies are the metal grates that cross the pavement and taking water from the household drainpipes into the road. The drains clear surface water from the road and alleyways.

The current maintenance procedure relies on a six monthly or annual inspection carried out by Dorset Highways.

An examination conducted by residents has concluded this is ineffective. Many drains are still blocked.

Due to the ineffective maintenance programme, residents are required to report each blocked drain to Dorset Highways on the DC website.

Highways then come out to clear the drain catch pits. If a vehicle is obstructing the drain this will get recorded. Highways will return to the obstructed site three times to see if it is accessible. If still obstructed, the job is abandoned.

As there is very limited parking in the area, it is rare that the operation is successful if the drain happens to be in a parking space. This explains the high number of blocked drains in the area. This current practice is totally inefficient and a waste of money.

Local residents are prepared to assist with clearing the cars, if we had prior notice. It would be easier if this work could be done on a street-by-street basis in the future to allow for effective and efficient maintenance of the drains. Which as you can agree is essential in this flood risk area.

Historically, there was a method of parking in the district in the 1950's which involved parking on one side of the street one day and the other the next. It was called 'odds and evens parking'. A version of this could help to make sure cars are cleared without inconveniencing drivers too much.

There also seems to be no schedule of works to clear the gullies throughout Weymouth. The majority of them are clogged with weeds, which is not a good look for the town.

Question:

Will Dorset Highways work with local residents to deal with the current blocked drains, start a programme for cleaning the gullies and review the clearly ineffective policy of returning to jobs in parking spaces three times without alerting the residents that they need access?

Question 2 – submitted by Julie-Ann Booker on behalf of Dorset Action on Pensions**Government consultation on Local Government Pension Schemes in respect of reporting and accounting for climate change risks**

These questions were prepared for submission to the Pension Committee on 21 September which was postponed. It has yet to be rescheduled. The next set date for the committee is 29 November which is past the closing date for the Government consultation on local government pensions. For this reason it is being submitted to Full Council for a response.

On 1 September 2022 the Government published an Open Consultation on Local Government Pension Schemes governance and reporting of climate change risks (1). The consultation runs until 24 November 2022.

This consultation seeks views on proposals to require Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) administering authorities in England and Wales to assess, manage and report on climate-related risks, in line with the recommendations of the Taskforce on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD).

The proposals set out in the consultation are broadly similar to the current requirements for private pension schemes, and encompass the same four areas of governance, strategy, risk management and metrics and targets. However, a key difference is that the proposed requirements will apply to all Local Government Pension Fund administering authorities from 2023/24, regardless of fund size.

The TCFD published a set of recommendations in 2017 with the aims of improving assessment, management, and disclosure of climate-related financial risks.

To achieve these aims in the LGPS, reporting will need to be clear, comprehensive and consistent, as well as timely, verifiable and comparable across the sector, in line with the TCFD's principles for effective disclosure.

The consultation sets out Government proposals to ensure that reporting both at administering authority and at scheme level meets these standards, and delivers proper accountability to members, locally and across the scheme.

High quality reporting on climate risks is central to the TCFD's recommendations. The aim is to enable stakeholders to understand as fully as possible their climate exposures and the administering authorities approach to addressing those risks, in the short, medium and long term.

Questions: The consultation proposals include improved transparency requirements in the future, open and accessible for all stakeholders and pension

members. In the spirit of this, and on the assumption that Dorset Council will submit a response to the consultation, what arrangements are Dorset Council making to consult with Dorset pension fund members on the council's submission, and what is being done to make pension fund members aware of the Government's consultation and their right to make individual submissions?

- (1) <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-government-pension-scheme-england-and-wales-governance-and-reporting-of-climate-change-risks/local-government-pension-scheme-england-and-wales-governance-and-reporting-of-climate-change-risks>

Question 3 - submitted by Helen Sumbler

In response to a question I raised at Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee in 25 March 2021 about the lack of Implementation Plan 4 to cover 2020-23, the response was that "Instead of writing an Implementation Plan for an old Local Transport Plan written by predecessor councils (Dorset County Council and Bournemouth & Poole Borough Councils which no longer exist), Dorset Council with BCP Council has begun work on 1 new joint Local Transport Plan for 2022-2038 to align with the 2 new Local Plans for Dorset and BCP."

However, in the new Delivery Plan for 2022 to 2024, reference is made to the old Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset Local Transport Plan 2011 to 2026, despite the lack of a current implementation plan in support of this LTP.

As the adoption of the Dorset Council Local Plan has been delayed to 2026, what are the milestones for the preparation, consultation and publication of the joint Local Transport Plan for 2022-2038 that aligns with this new Local Plan?

Question 4 – submitted by Helen Sumbler and as the Co-ordinator of the Dorset CAN Transport Team

In the absence of a current implementation plan, how is Dorset Council going to publicise and inform members of the public about expenditure on the transport network, and about projects and their priorities, until the new Local Transport Plan and its accompanying Implementation Plan are published?

Question 5 - submitted by Peter Robertson

Given that all three of Dorset Council's proposed Investment Zones are each adjacent to nationally and internationally protected sites for nature, will the Council follow the lead set by Solent Freeport and only accept Investment Zone status for any of these sites on the basis that the full suite of current environmental protections are maintained with no dilution to the planning process?

Question 6 – submitted by Peter Robertson

Will you also commit to consulting with Natural England, Environment Agency, the RSPB (who manage Radipole Lake nature reserve), Dorset Wildlife Trust (who manage Winfrith and Tadnoll Nature Reserve) and Portland Bird Observatory (who manage land on Portland) on the development of proposals for these three Investment Zones at the earliest opportunity?

Question 7 – submitted by Caz Dennett

Is it time for Dorset Council to invest for good?

In May this year I publicly withdrew my services as a Senior Safety Consultant at Shell. I could no longer tolerate their unwillingness to address the harms they know their operations are doing to our environment.

Continued dangerous plans to expand and extract new oil and gas reserves, which the International Energy Agency say must stay in the ground to halt greenhouse gas emissions, is already enough reason to end relations.

However, their operations are also inherently unsafe and irresponsible, failing on Environment, Social and Governance expectations. Their disregard for the health, safety and well-being of their operational environments is immoral, and according to some court action outcomes, illegal.

Operations in the Niger Delta, Nigeria, sees millions of litres of oil spilled, making the area completely unsafe as a human and wildlife habitat, extensive water and land contamination mean people cannot farm or fish, or access clean drinking water. Local ecology is devastated, the UN have ordered these companies to repair the damage and restore the environment, which they ignore.

Last month the BBC published their investigative documentary Under Poisoned Skies, an expose of excessive and undeclared gas flaring in the Basra oil fields in Iraq. Unnecessary and preventable flaring causes deathly air pollution, unliveable communities and is directly related to high cases of childhood leukaemia and cancers. The oil companies flare gas (a by-product of oil extraction), because it is more profitable to burn it than to capture, store and use it for energy.

The people who live in the communities that are now surrounded by oil production facilities say they are merely sacrifice zones.

How comfortable are Councillors and the Council, knowing that investments the Council has in oil & gas is funding childhood leukaemia and cancers, unliveable environments and sacrificed communities?

Now is the time to use our council tax money to fund something for good, such as a sustainable liveable future, therefore will Dorset Council set a plan to move all its finances i.e. pension investments, bank accounts, insurance policies, etc to sustainable accounts and financial products?

References:

Under Poisoned Skies BBC Documentary

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0d34rtt>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-62917498>

Niger Delta spills: In total (all operators) between 2015 and 2021 there were almost 5,000 spills = 235,000 barrels / 37 million litres of oil (Source: National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) / www.nosdra.oilspillmonitor.ng)

Question 8 – submitted by Jenny Lennon-Wood Secretary of Dorset Trades Union Council

Question

Weymouth and Portland's economy has been in decline since the 1990s, leaving a deprived community dependent on low-paid, insecure jobs. Dorset Council has repeatedly dismissed proposals by Dorset Trades Union Council (DTUC) and Weymouth and Portland Action on Wages (WeyPAW) to address the resultant poverty and deprivation. Can you provide substantiated evidence of any Dorset Council actions that have created, or enabled the creation of, well-paid, good quality jobs in Weymouth and Portland (W&P) or succeeded in persuading local employers to improve the pay and conditions of existing jobs?

Statement from Jenny Lennon-Wood

In 2019, DTUC and WeyPAW sought Dorset Council's leadership on social mobility. We presented proposals for the Council to assess and tackle poverty incomes and job insecurity in W&P. We were told that our proposals would be considered during the development of the Economic Growth Strategy. When published, this strategy acknowledged concerns about deprivation in W&P but offered no specific remedial measures and ignored our proposals. As the Council had shown no interest in investigating poverty in W&P and seeking solutions, we undertook the research ourselves. Our report, *Forgotten Towns – Weymouth, Portland and the coastal economy*, traces the economic decline from major job losses following the 1990s closure of Navy and MoD sites, through government and local authority decisions that left the community dependent on tourism, to the current deprivation and lack of opportunities. We identify areas requiring more research: the experiences of those affected by the economic decline; the continuing efforts of local people to mitigate its effects; and the community's desire for genuine involvement in decision-making.

Question 9 – submitted by Professor Philip Marfleet

Question

A new report, *Forgotten Towns – Weymouth, Portland and the coastal economy*, provides detailed, compelling evidence of economic decline and increased social deprivation in South Dorset. Will Dorset Council finally accept responsibility for its negligence in addressing these issues and undertake to join, without delay, a task force to focus actively upon remedial policies?

Statement

Dorset Council has on several occasions declined to recognise the acute economic and social problems in Weymouth & Portland. It seems that councillors of the majority group wish to avert their eyes from the reality. We are providing an opportunity for the Council to take a different approach.

Our new report sets out in detail the record of decline in South Dorset over several decades starting with the loss of 6,500 jobs at defence sites and in many private businesses in the 1990s. The report presents compelling evidence of the predicament of local communities, and particularly of young people who face a “cul-de-sac” effect in which low wages and thin job prospects prompt them to leave – often, they never return.

The implications for Dorset are alarming. We have an aging population and a workforce in which the young are voting with their feet. Years ago, planners in Dorset talked about a “demographic timebomb” ... and the timebomb is ticking relentlessly.

In February 2019 Councillor Gary Suttle told this meeting in a personal statement that for decades the Council and its predecessor had failed to provide policies that could address economic decline and social deprivation, and that inadequate infrastructure held back development. Almost three years later there's been no progress. Weymouth & Portland is still among the coldest of “cold spots” in the UK for social mobility, with levels of family poverty that shame us all.

Economic policies based upon neoliberal principles have since the 1990s played the key role in determining the fate of Weymouth & Portland, asserting that “the market” will provide growth and prosperity. It's against this background that local authorities and development agencies have abstained from constructive engagement, producing in South Dorset a record of headlong economic decline and multiple deprivation.

Nationally, it's clear that discredited neoliberal policies lie behind the paralysis and near-collapse of the present Government - with profound implications for many members of this Council. We can learn from these failures – nationally and locally. Our report proposes a series of sustained interventions to provide critical infrastructure and support for the most disadvantaged in a low-wage, seasonal economy. An “investment zone” won't do the job – the last thing we need in Weymouth & Portland is a bonfire of planning regulations and more ill-paid, highly exploitative employment.

Dorset's Local Enterprise Partnership – the LEP – has agreed to join a task force to look urgently at the crisis in Weymouth & Portland. Will this Council accept the findings of our report and do the same?

Finally - even since our report was written, the cost-of-living crisis has intensified alarmingly. Hardest-hit are the most vulnerable families. Councillors - doing nothing or implementing piecemeal measures - is not an option.

Question 10 – submitted by Tracee Cossey

Along with the RSPB, the Wildlife Link and the National Trust, DorsetCAN has serious misgivings about the introduction of 'investment zones' as a way forward for **sustainable** growth within Dorset.

The fact that Dorset Council is delaying their own Local Plan by two and a half years exposes Dorset communities, our wildlife and our environment to unwanted speculative developers taking advantage of out-of-date policies and capitalising on difficulties in demonstrating a 5-year land supply. On top of this, investment zone legislation proposes the removal of cumbersome planning regulations.

DorsetCAN/I supports an agenda of sustainable growth so that we can meet our county target of net zero by 2050. In the light of the objections nationwide as well as the precariousness of our own situation, can we have a commitment from Dorset Council that you will not allow any environmental standards to be relaxed in the name of 'investment'?

Question 11 – submitted by Tracee Cossey

We know that Council has been committed to a **Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy** since 2021. I feel that the fact that this is an Emergency is being forgotten by us. Can the **Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy** please be included in the 'Strategies that support all 5 themes' column, of the Dorset Council Delivery Plan, rather than at the top of the (renamed) 'Protecting our natural environment, wildlife and ecology column' so that we can be sure that all the priorities within the Council Plan need to consider their impact on our commitment to Net Zero by 2050 for the whole county?

Question 12 – submitted by from Vicki Elcoate

The Government has made a recent policy statement (September 23rd 2022) which relaxes the approach to planning for onshore wind energy developments. Dorset Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy says that: "deployment of onshore renewable energy [has] stagnated since 2016 due to planning restrictions imposed & removal of all subsidies". The Government's current Growth Statement says: "The government will unlock the potential of onshore wind by bringing consenting in line with other infrastructure". Will Dorset Council now adopt a more proactive approach to the development of onshore wind developments, where appropriate, and help deliver clean, cheap and renewable energy for Dorset more rapidly?

Question 11 – submitted by from Vicki Elcoate

The planned closure of one of Bridport's long standing and popular businesses has shone a light on inflexible policies about renewables and energy conservation in old buildings. Leaker's Bakery in Bridport said in a statement: "Sadly the current climate of escalating costs puts us in a position of uncertainty. In tandem with rising costs of raw ingredients, our energy costs particularly are unsustainable – our plans for solar

panels were not allowed (conservation) and any heat reclamation has been ruled out in our old building". In Dorset Climate Action Network's response to the new Local Plan we argued for a more flexible approach in Dorset Council's policies on renewables and energy conservation in Conservation Areas and on historic buildings. Will Dorset Council now adopt a more flexible approach and make it easier to install renewable energy – such as solar - on older buildings?

Question 13 – submitted by Jane Ashdown

Earlier this month (October 4th), Cabinet members approved a recommendation from Councillor Walsh to adopt a revised timetable for the production of the Dorset Council Local Plan. This revised timetable pushes the prepublication submission date to the last quarter of 2024. The statement by Councillor Walsh to Cabinet makes no commitment to any form of public consultation during the two years that the new Plan will be in preparation, but only that, "it **may** (my emphasis) be necessary to add additional consultation stages" (1.14). Public consultation should be at the heart of this next phase of Plan development in order to achieve what Councillor Flower has called "the best possible Local Plan that reflects the needs and aspirations of Dorset's residents." What is the Council's plan for public engagement and consultation over the period of Plan preparation?

Question 14 – submitted by Michael Allen

It is now 18 months since Dorset Council received over 9,000 responses to the public consultation on the draft Local Plan. The Council has acknowledged that many of those responses were highly critical of the Local Plan and of the Development Strategy that lies at its heart; and has stated that the Local Plan should change to reflect this strong expression of public opinion. But the Council has not published an overview of the public critique, nor a clear statement of what changes will be needed in the Plan, in the way that was done with the separate and earlier document the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy. The effect of this silence by the Council is that the citizens, organisations, local authorities, landowners and potential developers are all kept in ignorance of the thinking which will affect both the future Plan and the well-being of the County. The new Local Development Scheme timetable, approved by the recent Cabinet Meeting, implies yet further delay and uncertainty. When does DC intend to publish its summary of the consultation and tell the public in more detail how it intends to respond to the comments?

Question 15 – submitted by Linda Williams from CPRE on behalf of Peter Bowyer

Has the Dorset Council obtained government permission to extend the period for the Dorset Local Plan?

Question 16 – submitted by Linda Williams from CPRE on behalf of Peter Bowyer

When will the full Council be discussing the proposed delay to the Dorset Local Plan?

Question 17 – submitted by Giles Watts

The Council has announced a delay to the Local Plan of two-and-a-half years. The Dorset Deserves Better (DDB) Alliance remains concerned about the length of the delay and how this may lead to unwanted, speculative development. Nevertheless, we are pleased that the Council will now have the time to respond fully to the public consultation, to the additional evidence that has been gathered, and to the changes in planning guidance and national legislation which are planned by the Government. Taken together, these factors appear to be so radical as to justify a complete re-think of the Local Plan, and therefore a fresh round of public consultation. Will the Council publish a detailed timetable for what it intends to do between now and December 2024 and what further public consultation will take place?