

**Full Council  
20 October 2022**

**Questions submitted by Councillors**

**Question 1 – submitted by Cllr Maria Roe**

UK homes leak the most heat in Europe primarily because of lack of insulation. This costs people even more money and the cost of heating a home has almost doubled even with the recent government support.

People are having to make the choice between heating or eating. Health issues amongst the vulnerable and elderly will increase because of lack of heating this winter. In Dorset the most badly affected areas are West Dorset with 28% and North Dorset with 23% of homes insulated.

Upgrading homes with insulation is the cheapest way to solve these problems.

The performance report for Healthy Homes in Dorset over a 15-month period from March 2021 to June 2022 is as follows:

In Dorset 20 homes have had cavity wall insulation installed. 107 homes have had loft insulation, and 24 homes have had both cavity wall insulation and loft insulation.

Enquiries to Healthy Homes Dorset from the public have rapidly increased but more money is urgently needed from government. This is an emergency.

What is Dorset Council doing to lobby government so that the people of Dorset are supported to insulate their homes?

**Response from Cllr Ray Bryan**

Dorset Council is committed to influencing government on this issue. It influences government not only directly through responding to public consultations and contributing when invited to comment on policy and funding mechanisms, but also indirectly through its membership of the Association of Local Energy Officers (ALEO) and National Energy Action (NEA), the national fuel poverty charity.

**Question 2 submitted by Cllr Jon Andrews & Cllr Matt Hall**

On behalf of your two Sherborne Town Dorset council members would like collaboratively to ask the following questions.

On February the 10<sup>th</sup> 2022 a section of a house wall was damaged on one of the narrowest parts of the 274-mile long A30 that runs through Sherborne. This caused a safety issue that needed to be fixed ASAP. The road safety team did an excellent job were onsite on the 11<sup>th</sup> and made the decision to shut the A30 and consequently the narrow Cornhill. The road was closed for approximately 2.5 months until the site was surveyed, and possible solutions were sought and scaffolding repositioned. The road

is now partially open but after eight months the issue has not been resolved and temporary three-way traffic lights control the traffic causing huge delays on the A30. Unfortunately, this wall is part of a private residence and due to current legislation around confidentiality the details of any negotiation or repair has to be kept confidential.

This matter has caused extreme disruption to the people and businesses of Sherborne as it one of only two routes from west to east through the town and being an ancient market town and one of the most historic and beautiful towns in Dorset with narrow streets, has seen large numbers of cars and commercial vehicles clogging up the streets as some of you might have experienced when attending the recent civic service in honour of the late Queen Elizabeth.

The public naturally are exasperated as to why this issue has taken so long to fix as we are now into the ninth month. I know the local MP has been asking questions and I would ask that Dorset Council firstly explain to the public all the negotiation with the property owner that have gone on. Also, why the Temporary Traffic regulation order (TTRO) has been extended until September 2023 and most importantly when work will start on the Kitt Hill issue?

### **Response by Cllr Ray Bryan**

I recognise how disruptive the closure and traffic light control has been for people wanting to use the A30 through Sherborne. After the wall forming part of the main building for 52 Acreman Street was hit on 10 February 2022, we have sought to keep everyone using the road safe while we work with the landowner to provide a permanent solution. Once the wall had been temporarily stabilised, we removed the diversion and setup traffic lights to reduce the disruption. Rebuilding the wall is a complex and technical task, for which there are only a limited number of specialist contractors with the right experience to carry out the work.

I can confirm that officers and myself have been in continual dialogue with the owners of property since the unfortunate accident that damaged the wall. Both Highways and Building Control have provided continued guidance so that the highway is kept safe and that the owners of the property can arrange for the necessary repairs. We are continuing our dialogue over this matter I can assure colleagues and the community of Sherborne that we are seeking a resolution as quickly as possible.

I would also like to clarify that the 18 month traffic notice that runs until September 2023 is the same as it's always been (it hasn't been extended) and has never been an indication of how long we expect the disruption to last.

### **Question 3 submitted by Cllr Jon Andrews & Cllr Matt Hall**

Due to the ongoing problems on the adjacent Kitt Hill and the traffic control that was already in place it was decided that the major junction improvement work on the Newell in Sherborne would be brought forward which was a sensible suggestion. I have to say I am very impressed with the Dorset highways team for the effort and work they have put into this project so far. However, it seems that the anticipated

finish date of mid to the end of October will come and go. This is not only frustrating the highways team but also local residents. I understand that during the initial stage of the work in August of this year, whilst excavating the site that an 11000-volt cable was discovered and luckily was not broken during excavation. This could have resulted in extreme injury or even fatality. This I am informed s because the electricity companies plans were not correct. I am now being informed that the electricity company cannot complete the movement of this cable until mid-November. Can the portfolio holder for highways update council as to when the movement of this cable will commence, and the workforce can get back to the excellent job they are already doing?

### **Response by Cllr Ray Bryan**

It is extremely frustrating that the electric company's plans were inaccurate. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2022, a high voltage electricity cable was discovered on site at the Marston Road Junction Improvement Scheme. This cable was not on the plans provided by the electricity company (SSEN).

Unfortunately the cable position meant that it would need to be moved to allow certain sections of the works to proceed, and prompt action was taken to notify SSEN. Works on site continued on the areas not affected by the uncharted cable.

SSEN officers have visited the site and passed the work to their contractor. The timescales involved for the mobilisation of SSEN means that the junction works will now most likely not be complete by 14<sup>th</sup> November. We are pushing SSEN to progress this work as quickly as possible. Once we have the SSEN date, we will then be able to programme the remaining works and provide an updated programme.

### **Question 4 & 5 submitted by Clare Sutton**

On 21<sup>st</sup> September the Dorset Echo reported on Dorset schools' exclusion rates. The four with the highest rates were all in Weymouth and Portland, that is, ALL our secondary schools. Of these, the exclusion rates of the 'top two', one of which is in my ward, were 5 times the England average.

Whilst I completely understand that exclusions are sometimes necessary for the benefit of other pupils and the school as a whole, and that Dorset Council has limited influence in relation to Academy schools, there is clearly a pattern here. For all the talk of 'Levelling Up', I think we're all aware that Social Mobility scores for Weymouth and Portland are among the very worst in the country, and those who have read the Forgotten Towns report by Philip Marfleet and Jenny Lennon-Wood will have a better understanding of why.

In this context, my questions are:

1. What support does Dorset Council provide to excluded young people and their parents/carers to enable them to have a successful school life when they return to education?

2. What more can Dorset Council do to ensure that the disparity of opportunity between young people from Weymouth and Portland and their counterparts elsewhere in Dorset is reduced?

### **Response by Cllr Andrew Parry**

Dorset Children's Services are delivered locally by a multi-agency team, including family workers, Educational Psychologists, Specialist Teachers, Inclusion Leads and Youth Workers, who are able to wrap around schools, children and families. Each school has a link family worker, Inclusion Lead, EP and Specialist Teacher. Joint planning meetings are held in each school termly and follow the graduated approach.

The Dorset Education Board (DEB) is a system leadership board for education in Dorset, independently chaired by the former Education Minister, Stephen Twigg. The Board has a number of foci, particularly to promote multi-agency and close peer working to raise standards, to close the disadvantaged attainment gap and to ensure all our children and young people thrive in their education. Board members include representation from Chesil.

We have developed strong and trusting relationships with all of our academy trusts, including the ones in Chesil. This has led to good collaboration, support and challenge. The academies in Chesil work closely with their Education Challenge Lead and other locality staff. An example of this is the excellent reading project which was trialled across Chesil schools and due to its success is growing further this year.

Local Inclusion Partnership meetings take place monthly in each locality. The one in Chesil is attended by the Chesil schools and locality staff. They focus on children who are at risk of being permanently excluded, those with a high number of suspensions and those who are at risk of missing education. The locality suspension and exclusion data is shared with the schools at this meeting, and decisions are made in relation to individual children who need additional support to ensure they have a successful school life. In addition, each school has regular Inclusion meetings and Inclusion Panels attended by their link Inclusion Lead.

We hold fortnightly inclusion oversight board meetings which are multi-agency and prioritise vulnerable groups. The board focuses on ensuring that rapid action is taken where a child is not in full time education. We also have weekly Inclusion Team Manager briefings where there is strong focus on children with a social worker who are not in full-time education.

These processes have led to improvements in several areas, for example in our work with children missing education (CME). In August of last academic year, 97% of CME were no longer missing education. This is an increase of 10% on the previous academic year.

Permanent exclusions from Dorset schools reduced to 31 in the academic year 2021/22, with zero primary age permanent exclusions. This is a significant improvement on previous years, brought about through a whole system focus on

good inclusive practice and building the skill and capacity of school staff to meet the needs of the children in their schools. This has included therapeutic thinking training, a relational practice forum and a Dorset-wide Inclusion Conference. Permanent exclusions in Chesil have decreased by two thirds since 2018 /19.

Suspensions in Dorset, including in the Weymouth and Portland area, have been increasing, as they are nationally following the disruption of the pandemic. The work that locality teams are doing with all our partners, including schools and academies to improve inclusive practice continues to be a focus. We are collecting live attendance and suspension data from our schools, which allows us to have a more robust focus on children with repeated suspensions.

### **Question 6 – submitted by Cllr Kelvin Clayton**

There has been much talk about growth recently. In January 2021, the Royal Town Planning Institute published a research paper *Net Zero Transport*. For a county like Dorset it provides a vision of the near future that has “net zero transport at the heart of its growth, while protecting and enhancing the rural character of its villages...and surrounding countryside.” Based on the idea of ‘15-minute communities’, “areas of growth are planned to achieve high levels of self-containment and facilitate local living.” “Car ownership is discouraged through the design of the public realm”, through the development of “integrated, frequent and affordable public transport on strategic mobility corridors” and through the repurposing of secondary country roads into car-free ‘living lanes’ that “enable residents of smaller towns and villages to access essential services, facilities and mobility hubs by bike without fear of fast moving traffic”.

Has Dorset Council considered placing such a vision at the heart of its growth strategy?

Doing so would, of course, require the total integration of its Local Plan, its Local Transport Plan, and its Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy. Is such an integration something this Council would consider?

### **Response by Cllr Ray Bryan**

Thank you for your question.

Taking action to address the Climate and Ecological Emergency and deliver economic growth requires a joined-up approach across the council and with wider partners.

There are important synergies between the Dorset's Economic Growth Strategy which recognises the role that transport plays in creating healthier lifestyles, better access to jobs, combating climate change and improving air quality; the council's Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy which commits to helping Dorset become a carbon-neutral County by 2050; the emerging Dorset Local Plan which plays a key role managing the location of development and promoting the provision of active travel and the use of public transport; and the Local Transport Plan which considers improvements to all major forms of transport to support the economic,

social, and environmental improvement of the Dorset area. The council is awaiting new Local Transport Plan guidance from the Department for Transport before starting work on producing a new LTP. Following delays in publishing this guidance it is now expected in Spring 2023.

Further integration of these strategies will be explored during their preparation and review. However full implementation of many interventions within these strategies would be dependent on securing significant funding.

### **Questions 7 & 8 – submitted by Cllr Belinda Bawden**

1. Volunteers in Lyme Regis and Charmouth have been working with the West Country Rivers Trust to monitor water quality and liaising with water companies, the Environment Agency and local councils to investigate and mitigate the effects of excess sewage discharges. Since the 'Citizen Science' work of the River Lim monitoring group and the Lower Char Community Project got underway this year, unacceptable numbers of sewage discharges have been identified in the rivers and the sea and frightening levels of e-coli and intestinal enterococci have been reported in the sea.  
In this context, my questions are:

Could Dorset Council help us locally by engaging with the water companies, Environment Agency and river monitoring groups to ensure the best water quality monitoring processes are put in place, that any problems are swiftly investigated and that the mechanisms already requested (by a fellow river monitor to the Head of Planning on 12<sup>th</sup> October – see attached) in the planning system to ensure all natural and man-made mitigations and improvements to environmental health are undertaken to be put in place **before** applications are approved?

2. Would Dorset Council write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to urge the government not to scrap environmental and health protections but instead strengthen them to ensure we protect and enhance our natural freshwater and marine resources to boost the opportunities for nature-based solutions to the climate and ecological crises and for the natural environment of Dorset, upon which the economy and health and well-being of our residents depends?

### **Response from Cllr David Walsh - Q1**

Dorset Council, in its role as the local planning authority, engages with water companies, the Environment Agency, the local flood risk authority and a host of other stakeholders when preparing statutory development plans to ensure that effective planning policies are in place for managing planned future growth. We also consult such organisations on certain planning applications which have implications for the water environment. In reaching decisions, the local planning authority will consider the expert advice of specialist consultees and, where it is deemed necessary, can refuse applications if they are likely to lead to unacceptable harm. We may also require mitigation to be put in place prior to development commencing if this is needed to ensure the development is acceptable, as long as it is capable of coming

forward in a timely manner. This is not always justified and in such situations we would not be in a position to withhold planning consents. There are also occasions where the longer term delivery of key infrastructure is funded through the Community Infrastructure Levy whereby each development contributes a proportionate cost towards its future delivery, and we can secure this through a legal agreement. We therefore need to consider each case on its merits. However, the local planning authority should not duplicate the statutory responsibilities of other bodies or organisations and we will take advice from expert consultees if there is any doubt about where responsibilities lie.

## **Response from Cllr Ray Bryan - Q2**

Working closely with organisations such as the Environment Agency that has a key role in maintaining and improving water quality, Dorset Council is committed to delivering on the ambitions contained within its climate and ecological emergency strategy. There are a number of legislative frameworks within which we can operate and we also continue to liaise with government on how existing environmental protections can be enhanced. Under the Environment Act 2021, there is a mandate for a Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Dorset Council also responded to the government's recent 'Nature Recovery Green Paper: Protected Sites and Species' consultation in May 2022. This included future options for wildlife designated sites. In the consultation response we supported options which provided even greater protection to the most important wildlife sites emphasising the need for protected sites to be given the same level of protection that is currently given to European sites. Dorset Council places great value upon the protection and stewardship of our unique environment, reflected in commitments expressed in our policies, including statutory local plans and our Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy.