

## Cabinet 7 November 2023

### Public Questions

#### 1. Question from Councillor J Andrews

Over the past few years residents have been asking for various improvements to highways and in particular people parking in an irresponsible manner even though there are no parking restrictions. I have explained the unusually long and bureaucratic TRO system required to put parking restrictions in place and I know that not only myself but officers and other members get frustrated by it. Also the cost to put TRO's through the system. For instance to put an additional 20 metres of Double yellow lines in place would require a TRO at a cost of between £5-6K and possibly 12-18 months.

Has Dorset council raised this issue with the DoT and could a fast track TRO for small improvements be implemented in the example above?

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

The Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) process is a statutory process as per the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. This restricts the ability to change or deviate from the current process and, therefore wouldn't allow for a fast-track TRO process to be created as the time taken to implement a TRO can vary significantly depending on its nature and the level of objections received.

To ensure that the impact from the available budget is maximised we prioritise community requests based on safety and improved network management needs. A TRO is required to be used as a last option when considering traffic management issues on the road network and any issues should be passed through to the Community Highways Team for consideration and impact scoring. The cost of a TRO is case by case however is mostly made up of the advert costs (which is part of the statutory process) and the site-specific requirements for the restriction being proposed. This can range from a minimum of £2 - £10k. The DfT is currently developing a digital approach to TRO's (recently referenced in the DfT's Plan for Drivers release Oct 23) which will help reduce some of the current time frame restrictions of the process, however, does not go as far as to remove the need for advertising in the local newspaper, therefore will always remain somewhat timebound to ensure proper process is followed.

#### 2. Question from Councillor G Taylor

My questions relate to the placement of our SEND children and Dorset Councils relationship to Coombe House School. I these questions of the Leader of the Council and was asked to put them onto this Cabinet agenda for answers.

I am clear and understand that we need to keep a distance from Coombe House School, as it is an independent school, while accepting that we do own the site and have invested in it. We also have a responsibility to ensure that we are placing children in a SEND facility that meets their needs.

I therefore seek:

- Assurances that if an establishment does not meet the needs of a child / children, that child/ children will be withdrawn and placed elsewhere or will not be recommended to the specific establishment regardless of the financial implications to that establishment. In effect that the financial viability of a SEND establishment is not a factor in the recommendation of the placing of a child but that the quality of support for the child is the over-riding factor.
- Assurances that all SEND establishments in Dorset in the independent sector are treated the same as Coombe House and supported in the same way as and if required.
- Assurance that any support we have been giving to Coombe House has been at no cost to Dorset Council and that the Dorset Council staff time that has been used in support of Coombe House has been invoiced accordingly. I appreciate that some of our support will be as a result of our responsibilities as the owner of the site however I am referring to any support that we have given the to enable the school to function with the exception of those services included in the contract when the school was set up.

### **Response from the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education, Skills and Early Help**

Thank you for your question. We are ambitious for all our children in Dorset and work with a variety of providers to ensure they all have a good school place . Where a child has an Education, Health and Care plan we are governed by the SEND Code of Practice for admission. All admissions to Coombe House school follow their published and Ofsted approved admissions policy and are undertaken in consultation with families and their understanding of whether or not the school can meet the needs of the child, as set out in their Education, Health and Care plan.

The financial viability of the establishment is not a factor in this. As with any other school, if there are concerns about whether they can meet the needs, then discussions would take place to understand what is required to be put in place to minimise disruption to that child's education and in exceptional circumstances to search for another education placement. When we have concerns about any Independent School in our county, we use our contractual arrangements to identify the most appropriate response. This includes requesting and supporting improvement plans based on what is required. All support offered to Coombe House is in line with the service contract, which in this case was to enter into a period of enhanced cooperation.

As described at the last Shareholder committee Coombe House School continues to make strong progress in all areas. Ofsted visited to undertake a three-day

unannounced joint inspection, combining the first standard inspection with a monitoring inspection. Inspectors were complimentary about the progress that had been made. since their last visit and gave positive feedback to the leadership and governance teams the school was assessed as meeting the Independent School Standards the board also heard about excellent community engagement and feedback.

### 3. Question from Councillor B Bawden

I'd like to thank the members of the People and Health Overview Committee who listened to the Mayor of Lyme Regis and me when we explained the concerns we had about dogs being allowed to run loose on our front beaches.

I'm very grateful too to the Environmental Health officers who walked round Lyme with me so I could show them our other beaches offered plenty of space, especially at low tide, for dogs to run off lead without compromising the safety and enjoyment of our beach goers.

I'd also like to challenge the assertion made in discussions that the survey had not been influenced by an organised campaign in favour of having no restrictions on dogs in the winter. I have sent several pages of one of the pro-dog campaigns conversations on social media, clearly showing:

- A) The celebrations and claims of success that the campaigning originally achieved a 54% majority overall in the public consultation
- B) The influencing of people to lobby the Cabinet against the Place and Resources Overview Committee recommendation.

Since the publication of the survey results, many people have assumed that dogs can be left to run loose on our town beaches and sadly, some dog owners are abusive to our Enforcement Officers when they are asked to put their dogs on leads. Since the officer recommendation was changed at the Place and Resources Overview Committee, the town council's notices saying 'Dogs on Leads' along the seafront have been removed or vandalised in attempts to take them down. The hostility meted out to me and to town councillors on social media is based on misleading information and is abusive, unacceptable and upsetting. Worst of all, several people have emailed in to thank me for standing up for the 'Silent Majority' but asked to remain anonymous, since they feel so intimidated by the 'Doggy Lobby'.

I'm very disappointed, therefore, that Dorset Council did not publish the local residents' survey responses, otherwise the 54% in favour of the 'on leads' restriction to remain would have been in the public domain.

Another town councillor and I raised the point one of the PRO Committee members also made that in a survey where 62% of respondents were dog-owners, the results should have been adjusted to reflect the national average of dog-ownership, in order for the statistics to be representative.

Does Dorset Council really think it is fair and equitable to the residents of Lyme Regis and those visitors preferring dogs to be kept under control on our beaches in winter, to allow a well-organised campaign to influence the decision when nearly two-thirds of respondents were dog-owners and nearly three quarters voting against restrictions in Lyme do not live locally?

## **Response from the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Communities**

The legislation and guidance allow for responses from those living, working and visiting the area. The opinion of visitors is important in terms of the benefits for local businesses. To be fair and balanced and provide confidence in the consultation process, we must represent everyone who responds. Strong opinions were received both for and against a winter restriction, whether or not a dog owner.