

Annual Meeting of Council

16th May 2024

Public Participation – Questions from Members of the Public

Question 1: - Submitted by Martine Sommers

How can the MAF consider itself fit for purpose when it supplies a one sided almost utopian view of the barge, without considering the balanced and grown-up concerns of the people of Portland whose views are not met or being ignored. Example being costs of coaches and safety of personnel - i.e. CCTV. We are not interested in almost puerile and childish reports of 'hello's' whilst litter picking, which is a case in point.

Question 2: - Submitted by Kate Robson

Portland Port's & the Home Offices covert, non-consultive, under the table business transition to moor the Bibby Stockholm at Portland Port has probably been the most divisive decision ever made within Weymouth & Portland.

It serves no purpose and has failed to hit any of its objectives. It is NOT more cost effective nor is it a deterrent.

So disgusted with the lack of consultation, imposition and escalating costs. I have submitted my own FOIs to the HO.

- End Date of initial contract.
- Numbers on board
- Cost to date.

I was provided with the following information on the 7th May.

The contract is due to end on the 8th Jan 25'.

As of the end of January were 321 migrants on board.

The running cost paid to only CTM on 3rd April came to an extraordinary 12,900,000. This does not include grants for ancillary / authority service, police, voluntary grant or costs of HO staff.

The CTM contractual value alone equates to over £40K per migrant. Further insight into despicable rising costs is noted in the NAO investigation published 30/3 which determines; at a maximum capacity of 430 over 18 months cost to tax payer is 34.8M. Broken down this is near on 4.5K per month per head. Enough to go on an all-inclusive month-long cruise or rent a flat in Chelsea, or 3 bed house each in Sandbanks.

Hence and with relevance, my questions are around the motion put forward last year on the at DC full meeting on 13th July 'that the barge must be removed at 'the earliest opportunity' as every commentator agrees. I also request that allocation of spend of grants received by Dorset Council from the HO be made public.

1. On the 30th April within the last MAF update, it is stated that:
No decision has yet been made on the future use of the Bibby Stockholm. The Home Office will continue to engage and work collaboratively with Dorset Council, Portland Port and Dorset Police to look at options for lease extension after January 2025'
Please provide insight into these engagements and collaborations. And explain that if no decision has been made on the future use of Bibby Stockholm - why is DC currently recruiting for two full time social workers signposted to work primarily with asylum seekers located on Portland for the next 18 months? In addition, how can a possible extension be substantiated given the cost and failures?

Response to Questions 1 & 2 by Cllr Nick Ireland

The use of the Bibby Stockholm barge to accommodate asylum seekers is not something that was sought or agreed to by the Council.

I have been newly elected as Leader this evening and I am not in a position to answer in any detail questions about how the Council and other agencies are responding together to the new burdens imposed by the Home Office decision.

At its meeting on 13 July 2023 the last Council agreed:

“That the mooring of the barge in Portland Port is an entirely inappropriate location and should be removed at the earliest opportunity”

and

“That Dorset Council, while not the decision makers, will work with agencies to mitigate the impact this will have on Dorset.”

That is still this Council's position.

ANY FUTURE DECISION ABOUT THE USE OF THE BIIBY STOCKHOM IS ONE FOR THE HOME OFFICE AND NOT FOR DORSET COUNCIL. The ultimate solution, and key to the removal of the barge from Portland, is for Government to invest in the Home Office's Asylum process to remove the backlog and enable those who are successful in their application to contribute positively to UK society.

Question 3 – submitted by Edward Lock

In view of the considerable time and resources invested in the last Draft Local Plan by both the Council and the public, will the new Council consider resurrecting that Draft Plan, possibly omitting any of the controversial strategic allocations.

Response to Question 3 by Cllr Nick Ireland

Dorset Council's Local Development Scheme was adopted in March 2024 and this confirms that the Dorset Local Plan will be a new-style local plan prepared under the proposed reforms to the plan-making system. The key stages and likely timescales indicate that a project initiation document will be submitted towards the end of 2024, with consultation and engagement on the visioning and strategy envisaged to follow in May 2025. Whilst it will be a new-style local plan, the preparatory work done to-date will be used to inform the new-style local plan, but at this point in time the Council has not made any decisions about the form or content of the emerging plan.

Whilst the delay to the Local Plan is regrettable, it does give us the opportunity to ensure it includes all the sustainability, climate, environment, carbon neutral and many other policies that we don't have in the current inherited Local Plans.

Question 4 – submitted by Pat Rider

What's DCC thoughts on this way of animal slaughter... I didn't realise that such thing is happening in the UK until recently... Is Dorset halal slaughter free? .. have the people of Dorset been asked about their thoughts on this? Or is this decision made for the people of Dorset without asking?

Question 5 – submitted by Mr & Mrs Caroll

Can members of the New Dorset Council reassure us, the Taxpaying residents of Dorset that, permission will never be granted here for a HALAL SLAUGHTER house within the UNITARY area.

It is believed that some exist, although breaking the Law, in the North of England. This barbaric NON-STUN Islamic method of throat slitting whilst the animal is fully conscious simply cannot and will not be tolerated here in the farming areas of Dorset.

Response to questions 4 & 5 by Cllr Shane Bartlett

In October 2015 the Government published guidance on how to legally carry out slaughter without stunning an animal, where this is necessary in accordance with religious rites. The guidance was updated in June 2023 in line with improvements to the welfare of animals.

The guidance is clear that all animals must be stunned before slaughter unless an animal is being slaughtered in accordance with religious rites.

Dorset Council in its capacity as the Local Planning Authority must consider all planning applications on their individual merits at the time of the application. Any decision needs to be based upon relevant material planning considerations irrespective of whoever the applicant is or what they are proposing.