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CABINET

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 10 SEPTEMBER 2024

Present: Cllrs Nick Ireland (Chair), Richard Biggs (Vice-Chair), Jon Andrews, Shane Bartlett, Simon Clifford, Ryan Holloway, Ryan Hope, Steve Robinson, Clare Sutton and Gill Taylor

Present remotely: Cllrs

Apologies: Cllrs

Also present: Cllr Matt Bell, Cllr Peter Dickenson, Cllr Beryl Ezzard, Cllr Alex Fuhrmann, Cllr Hannah Hobbs-Chell, Cllr Rob Hughes, Cllr Craig Monks, Cllr David Northam, Cllr Louie O'Leary, Cllr Mike Parkes, Cllr Jane Somper and Cllr Kate Wheller

Also present remotely: Cllr Mike Baker, Cllr Laura Beddow, Cllr Bridget Bolwell, Cllr Dave Bolwell, Cllr Ray Bryan, Cllr Toni Coombs, Cllr Spencer Flower, Cllr Les Fry, Cllr Barry Goringe, Cllr Sherry Jespersen, Cllr Carole Jones, Cllr Stella Jones, Cllr Paul Kimber, Cllr Cathy Lugg, Cllr David Morgan, Cllr Steve Murcer, Cllr Emma Parker, Cllr Andy Todd and Cllr Val Potheary

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

Jan Britton (Executive Lead for the Place Directorate), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Anna Eastgate (Corporate Director - Place Services), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children), Chris Harrod (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), Jonathan Price (Executive Director of People - Adults and Housing), Matt Prosser (Chief Executive), Lisa Reid (Corporate Director for Quality Assurance & Safeguarding Families), Paul Rutter (Service Manager for Leisure, Arts and Cultural Services) and Mark Tyson (Corporate Director for Adult Commissioning & Improvement)

Officers present remotely (for all or part of the meeting):

Andrew Billany (Corporate Director for Housing), Sean Cremer (Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial), Jennifer Lewis (Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement), James Palfreman-Kay (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Officer) and Andy Frost (Service Manager for Community Safety)

31. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

32. Declarations of Interest

Cllr S Bartlett declared an interest in respect of min 36 as his wife worked for Initio. He advised Cabinet that he would leave the room whilst the item was discussed, and he would take no part in the decision.

Cllr S Clifford declared an interest in respect of min 41 as he owned a property on the Harbourside, Poole. He advised that he would leave the room whilst the item was considered and he would take no part in the decision.

Cllr G Taylor declared an interest in respect of min 45 as her husband was in receipt of adult social care. She indicated that she would leave the room for the item and would take no part in the decision.

Cllr H Hobbs-Chell (non-executive member) left the meeting for item 45 as she was a non executive director for Ferndown Community Support CIC (who rented part of the Ferndown Day Centre building). She was also not present for the exempt business.

33. Public Participation

There was 1 question and 1 statement from the public. A copy of the question and the detailed response was set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

34. Questions from Councillors

There were 3 questions from Councillors M Parkes, L O'Leary and C Monks; these along with the responses are set out in Appendix 2 to these minutes.

In response to a supplementary question from Cllr Parkes regarding local councillor engagement, the Leader of the Council confirmed that he valued local engagement, but this time something had gone wrong. He apologised for the error that had occurred on this occasion.

In response to a supplementary question from Cllr O'Leary regarding governance arrangements. The Leader of the Council confirmed that in accordance with the council's constitution, Cabinet could not have more than 10 members sitting on it and until devolution discussions had been completed, no further investigations about a change of governance model would take place.

35. Forward Plan

The draft Cabinet Forward Plan for October was received and noted.

At this juncture Cllr S Bartlett left the meeting for the consideration of the following item.

36. Queen Elizabeth Leisure Centre

The Cabinet Member for Place Services set out the report which was responding to a petition submitted to Full Council on 18 July 2024. As part of his presentation,

he reminded members of the circumstances that led to the decision to withdraw from the dual use management agreement at the Queen Elizabeth Leisure Centre on 31 March 2024.

Cllr J Andrews proposed the recommendations as set out in the report and these were seconded by Cllr R Holloway.

The Leader of the Council indicated that he appreciated that the report's recommendations would be disappointing to those who had signed the petition, and he proposed the following additional recommendations

- (e) Agree that in the event that the trust brings the swimming pool back into operation, to use reasonable endeavours to work with the trust and community groups to identify ways in which the pool can be made available for school and community group usage.
- (f) Recognising that realistic, affordable solutions are available to facilitate public use of the leisure centre, commit to providing reasonable officer support to the trust to assist them in achieving that outcome.

This amendment, along with the original recommendation was seconded by Cllr J Andrews. Cabinet supported these additions and non-executive members were given an opportunity to ask questions.

In accordance with the procedure rules, the lead petitioner was also given the opportunity of "a right of reply" and this detailed statement can be found in Appendix 3 to these minutes.

Decision

- (a) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (b) That, Cabinet notes that the Council already contributed £276,160 towards condition works prior to 31 March 2024 and a further £604,407 had been provided to the Trust as part of the exit arrangements, to be spent by March 2025
- (c) That, Cabinet notes that as the Council had no legal interest in the leisure centre, the future use of the facility was a matter for the Trust to determine.
- (d) That, Cabinet agreed to progress and accelerate the Leisure Strategy to ensure there was a strategic and informed approach to leisure provision which would deliver the Council priorities of building stronger and healthier communities
- (e) Cabinet agreed that, in the event that the trust brings the swimming pool back into operation, to use reasonable endeavours to work with the trust and community groups to identify ways in which the pool can be made available for school and community group usage.

- (f) Recognising that realistic, affordable solutions were available to facilitate public use of the leisure centre, Cabinet committed to providing reasonable officer support to the trust to assist them in achieving that outcome.

Reason for the decision

The council was in the process of developing a new leisure strategy that would enable it to consider and adopt a more strategic and informed approach to the way it operated its leisure facilities and services.

The council did not own the Queen Elizabeth Leisure Centre, and its leisure spend across the East Dorset area was considerably higher than other areas of Dorset Council. A key aim of the leisure strategy would be to address this issue.

Feedback from local swim groups had highlighted the value of the swimming pool at QELC and the importance of being able to access it. This included Wimborne Wagtails Swimming Club for the Disabled, who for 30 years had provided swimming sessions to a diverse group of disabled swimmers of all ages with physical, learning and hidden disabilities.

Dorset Council had contributed funds to enable improvements to the swimming pool air handling system, pool plant, pool hall roof and wet side changing areas. The trust had stated that the pool air handling and roof works were being looked at and being worked towards. They already had experience of operating a local school swimming pool with school and community group use and had suggested a similar model for QELC. This could complement the other sports facilities which were currently being made available for school and community club use. Dorset Council would be fully supportive of this proposal.

Cllr S Bartlett returned to the meeting.

37. Aspire Adoption Service

The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Skills presented the Aspire Adoption Annual report for approval. The proposal was seconded by Cllr R Biggs.

Decision

That the Aspire Adoption Annual Report and Statement of Purpose be approved.

Reason for the Decision

Cabinet was satisfied that the Aspire Statement of Purpose accurately described the activities that the agency discharged on behalf of Dorset Council and the Annual Report satisfied the report that these activities were discharged to a high standard in the last year.

**38. Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report April 2023
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The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Skills presented the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children’s Partnership (PDSCP) Annual Report for April 2023 – 2024. Members were reminded that in June 2024, Cabinet had agreed a separation from the PDSCP to create a Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership, but this report predated that change, and provided reflections of the partnership work during 2023/24.

Mr Vaughan, the Independent Chair of the PDSCP set out an overview of the report and answered questions in relation to the detailed plans for the new Independent Chair and future scrutiny arrangements. Going forward the Dorset Safeguarding Children’s Partnership would customise strategies and operations to improve safeguarding outcomes within the Dorset area.

It was proposed by Cllr C Sutton and seconded by Cllr S Robinson

Decision

That the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children’s Partnership Annual Report April 2023-24 be approved.

Reason for the decision

Work had already commenced and would continue under the new Dorset Safeguarding Partnership which came into effect on 1 August 2024.

39. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (EDI)

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Development and Transformation presented the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy and Action Plan for approval. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer explained that the council had a statutory duty for EDI and the action plan would be used for ensuring services were accessible for all and celebrating the diversity of Dorset. Members were further advised that the People and Health Overview Committee had considered the EDI Strategy and action plan, and their recommendations were included in the document before members.

It was proposed by Cllr Holloway and seconded by Cllr S Bartlett.

Decision

- (a) That Cabinet supports the adoption and supporting definitions for the 7 local protected characteristics.
- (b) That Cabinet approve the EDI Strategy and Action Plan 2024 – 2027
- (c) That Cabinet approve the supporting detailed EDI Action plan which covered the period 2024 – 2027.

Reasons for the decision

To ensure that Dorset Council's workplace and services were meeting the need of everyone, the Council had the responsibility to listen and respond better. As one of the county's largest employers, Dorset Council also had the responsibility to lead by example.

40. **Dorset Community Safety Plan and Pan-Dorset Reducing Reoffending Strategy- Recommendation of the People and Health Overview Committee**

In setting out the recommendation to Full Council, the Cabinet Member for Health and Housing advised that the Council had a legal duty to work with partners through Dorset Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to identify and tackle community safety issues. The CSP were required to produce three-year community safety plans, and these were refreshed annually.

In response to a question regarding the government's announcement to release some offenders before their sentence had been completed, the Cabinet Member advised, that to free up space in prisons, some offenders would be released early on licence. The number released in Dorset was very low and those individuals would receive support from Housing and Probation Services.

In response to a question regarding fly tipping, the Cabinet Member agreed to take the question away and respond to the councillor direct outside of the meeting. Responding to further questions, the Service Manager for Community Safety confirmed that the strategies did consider current trends.

It was proposed by Cllr G Taylor and seconded by Cllr S Robinson

Recommendation to Full Council

That the Community Safety Plan 2023-2026 (2024-25 refresh), pan-Dorset Reducing Reoffending Strategy 2024-2027 and Serious Violence Strategy 2024-25 be adopted.

Reason for the decision

To ensure Dorset Council meets its duties as set out in relevant legislation.

At this juncture Cllr S Clifford left the meeting for the consideration of the following item.

41. **Nitrogen Reduction in Poole Harbour Supplementary Planning Document withdrawal**

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning presented the report and set out the recommendation to withdraw from the Nitrogen Reduction in Poole Harbour Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

He advised that since Natural England updated their advice on nutrient neutrality in March 2022, the Nitrogen Reduction in Poole Harbour SPD was no longer considered to offer a robust mechanism for delivering nitrogen mitigation in the Poole Harbour catchment.

Cllr J Andrews seconded the recommendation.

In response to a question relating to Lyscombe Farm, the Executive Lead for Place advised that this information was added to the report as background information around the reasons to withdraw the supplementary planning document. However, he indicated that he would be happy to discuss the matter further with the councillors concerned outside of the meeting.

Decision

That the Nitrogen Reduction in Poole Harbour Supplementary Planning Document be withdrawn.

Reason for the decision

Since Natural England updated their advice on nutrient neutrality in March 2022, the Nitrogen Reduction in Poole Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) was no longer considered to offer a robust mechanism for delivering nitrogen mitigation in the Poole Harbour catchment. The SPD therefore needed to be formally withdrawn to enable an alternative approach for delivering nitrogen mitigation within the Poole Harbour catchment.

Cllr S Clifford returned to the meeting.

42. Consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning presented a report along with its recommendations, detailing the ministerial statement that announced a consultation on proposed changes to the planning system, including revisions to the national planning policy framework (NPPF).

The proposed changes aimed to increase house building across the country. Targets would be mandatory rather than advisory and where they could not be met due to constraints, then the potential for neighbouring councils to meet them would be examined.

Members agreed that the proposed changes could support the council's strategic priorities to drive economic prosperity and create sustainable development and housing. However, the significant increase in housing targets was likely to conflict with the aim of protecting the natural environment, due to the environmental constraints of Dorset. There were also concerns that introducing the new targets so quickly would result in much development taking place because of the "presumption in favour of sustainable development" rather than through the more strategic plan-led approach.

Members were asked to support the proposed response to the consultation. The recommendation was seconded by Cllr R Holloway.

Whilst the report acknowledged concerns around these proposed changes, a few non-executive members questioned if the council's response was sufficiently

robust, especially considering the proposed doubling of housing targets in the Dorset area.

In reply, the Executive Lead for Place confirmed that the response made it clear that the targets were not realistic, partly because of the environmental constraints, but also because it was unlikely that the market would build at that level.

However, the council would need to explore all options as part of developing the local plan, but acknowledging that the scale of these targets was unrealistic and likely to be unachievable. It was further advised that this was the formal council response, but local councillors could also make their concerns known as part of the consultation process.

Further concerns were raised about the planning system, particularly regarding developers fulfilling their obligations once planning permission was granted. In response, the Executive Lead for Place stated that comments not directly related to the consultation questions could be included in a covering letter as part of the consultation response.

Decision

That the response to the consultation questions, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report to Cabinet – 10 September 2024, be submitted to Government by the 24 September deadline. *The suggested responses included support for many of the proposals, but concern about the effects of the increased housing targets for Dorset.*

Reason for the decision

The proposed changes could support the council's strategic priorities of driving economic prosperity and creating sustainable development and housing, but the significant increase in housing targets was likely to conflict with the aim of protecting the natural environment, climate and ecology, due to the environmental constraints of Dorset.

Introducing new targets so quickly would result in much development taking place as a result of the "presumption in favour of sustainable development" rather than through the more strategic plan-led approach.

43. July 2024 (Period 4) financial management report 2024/25

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Strategy presented the council's forecast financial performance for the full 2024/25 financial year. The forecasts were based on data as of 31 July 2024.

The Cabinet Member highlighted that the council's finances were under extreme pressure and the report outlined the pressures within the revenue budget which, in the absence of mitigation would be required to be funded from reserves. It was noted that reserves had reduced from 2023/24 to 2024/25 and would reduce further if required to meet the revenue overspend.

In response to a question regarding transformation, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Development and Transformation advised that PwC (an advisory partner) were putting together a robust plan to improve efficiencies whilst continuing to deliver the best customer experience. He was awaiting the results of that work. The Executive Director for Corporate Development advised that a further report on transformation would be presented to a future meeting of Cabinet.

In response to a question, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Strategy indicated that achieving the 8.6 million in transformation savings for the 2025/26 budget was unlikely. It was possible that a portion of these savings may be funded but it was highly likely that the remainder would need to be covered by reserves.

The recommendation was proposed by Cllr S Clifford and seconded by Cllr N Ireland.

Decision

- (i) That the SLT forecast of the full year's outturn for the Council, made at the end of July 2024 including progress of the transformational and efficiency savings incorporated into the budget, be noted.
- (ii) That the capital programme be noted.

Reason for the decision

The Council provided a mix of statutory and discretionary services to communities across Dorset and was legally required to set a balanced budget every year, and so must deliver services within the resources made available.

44. Additional Procurement Forward Plan Report - £500k (2024 - 2025) and Modern Slavery Transparency Statement 2023- 2024

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Strategy set out the report and proposed the recommendation. The recommendation was seconded by Cllr N Ireland.

Decision

- (i) Cabinet agreed, to begin each procurement processes listed in Appendix 1 to this report, and
- (ii) That in each instance the further step of making a contract award be delegation to the relevant Cabinet Member, in consultation with the relevant Executive Director.
- (iii) Cabinet agreed, to publish the proposed Modern Slavery Transparency Statement for 2023-2024.

Reason for the decision

Cabinet was required to approve all key decisions with financial consequences of £500k or more. It was good governance to provide Cabinet with a summary of all proposed procurements prior to them formally commencing. It was a requirement for the Council to publish a Modern Slavery Transparency Statement on an annual basis.

Cllr G Taylor left the meeting.

45. Towards a new model of day opportunities in Dorset

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care presented the report setting out proposals for reshaping the provision of day opportunities for people in Dorset, in line with the ambitions set out in the “Commissioning for A Better Life for Adults in Dorset”, the Council’s adult social care commissioning strategy.

The report set out a new model for commissioning these services, and a way forward for implementing the model, including working with Care Dorset and other independent sector providers.

The report also had been considered in detail by People & Health Overview Committee in July 2024, they supported the proposals and recommended that the model be adopted.

It was proposed by Cllr S Robinson seconded by Cllr S Clifford that the recommendations set out in the report be approved and in the absence of any disagreement the recommendations were approved.

Cabinet received a request to ask a question regarding the exempt appendix. Members voted to proceed with the exempt business (see min 47-48) to address these questions.

Decision

- (i) That the recommendation from People and Health Overview Committee of 23 July 2024, for the proposed model for the future commissioning and reshaping of day opportunities provision in Dorset, be agreed.
- (ii) That the model described and the approach to implementation and consultation, be adopted.

Reason for the decision

Day services were a vitally important part of the Dorset support offer for several hundred local residents, providing meaningful activities during the day for those who need support. Our research had shown that people were increasingly wanting flexibility, variety and social connection, which points to a need to modernise the offer around day opportunities. Our commissioning strategies had previously

committed the council to this direction of travel, and the additional insight gained from consultation in 2023 had now confirmed and firmed up the next steps.

46. Urgent items

There were no urgent items considered at the meeting.

47. Exempt Business

It was proposed by Cllr J Andrews and seconded by Cllr R Biggs

Decision

That the press and the public be excluded for the following item in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the meaning of paragraph 3 of schedule 12 A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

Reason for taking the item in private

Paragraph 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

The live streaming was concluded at this juncture.

48. Exempt Appendix 3 Towards a new model of day opportunities in Dorset

Cabinet considered and addressed questions in relation to the exempt appendix. See minute 45 for the decision on the "Towards a new model of day opportunities in Dorset".

Appendix 1 - Public Question

Appendix 2 - Councillor Questions

Appendix 3 - QELC Right of Reply Statement

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 9.27 pm

Chairman

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Public Questions for Cabinet – 10 September 2024

Question from Martin Saberton

Preamble: Prior to its closure, QE leisure centre offered the only roped indoor climbing in the local area. Unless I'm mistaken, the only other publicly accessible roped climbing facility in the entirety of Dorset is in Bridport, and the next nearest roped climbing is Parthian in Southampton.

The relevance and value of the wall stretches far beyond the local Wimborne area as, prior to QE's closure, people travelled from across the county to use the facility.

Roped climbing should not be confused with bouldering, which is available at a great facility in Poole. The lack of a rope in bouldering changes the risk profile and is a very different experience which I would be happy to explain in more detail.

For those that may not be aware, climbing is a very popular sport in Dorset, with outdoor climbing (in the warmer months) available from Swanage all the way to Portland (people travel from all over the world to climb here). When the weather turns, climbers head indoors, and with the loss of QE, many local climbers will be lost for somewhere to climb or face a long drive to Bridport or Hampshire.

Indoor climbing also suits new climbers, those less able or in rehabilitation, and, critically, kids clubs who not only need to learn the basics before heading outdoors, but have lots of fun and learn new found confidence and bravery through the sport. This is in addition to the numerous mental and physical health benefits presented in a way not found with other sports.

The climbing wall at QE has been enjoyed by kids clubs and adult climbers for many years, is a unique asset that is currently lost and the prospect for the winter months is bleak.

These points were all raised in individual responses to the original public consultation on the closure of QE and again more recently with local councillors. I have had some limited engagement from Initio learning trust about possibilities and am pursuing those, but I haven't had any commitment from Dorset council to look at what is possible at QE or elsewhere.

Climbing is a rapidly growing sport, and the Team GB gold medal at the Olympics shows that it is now in the mainstream. I'm confident that there is commercial viability for a well-run roped climbing facility, and as I see it this isn't a QE specific issue. It is a question of maintaining provision of roped climbing in the local area.

Q: With this in mind, is the council open to engaging on the matter of ensuring public and club access to roped climbing for the local area is not lost for good?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Place Services

Thank you for your question and for making the case for maintaining the provision of roped climbing across the Dorset Council area. I am pleased to hear that you are engaging with Initio around the opportunity to utilise their excellent climbing facilities; hopefully, these conversations will progress positively. Although the Council are unable to make any commitments at this stage, we are open to engaging on this matter and exploring future options for climbing across Dorset. I will be happy to ask Officers to make contact with you to move the conversation forward.

Cabinet 10 September 2024 Questions from Councillors

Questions from Cllr Mike Parkes

1. With the imminent sale of the former East Dorset District Council offices at Furzehill can it be confirmed that the money from the sale will be spent on capital projects within the East Dorset area, more specifically can a sizable proportion of this money allocated to facilitate the regeneration of Ferndown Town centre?
2. As the 2017 Ferndown regeneration plan was reviewed within the past 12 months please can we have confirmation that the reviewed elements identified under the previous administration will be implemented rather than going to the expense of a further regeneration plan – especially as the town council at the time were part of the plan. May we also have a commitment that the elected members of Ferndown North who have been excluded from recent discussions regarding the Regeneration are included fully in all discussions moving forward.

Response from the Leader of the Council

1. It's not normal for the income (capital receipts in officer lingo) from the sale of Dorset Council's assets (such as the redundant former council offices at Furzehill) to be earmarked specifically another project or a particular geographic area. Instead, it goes into the pot we use for the Council's capital programme to fund existing and future investment projects. With limited funds available, these projects are of course prioritised and reviewed frequently, and as an example the funding of a new and improved leisure provision for Dorset Council's residents will be considered when the external consultant reports back soon.
2. Following an invitation from Ferndown Town Council to meet with them, the Interim Executive Lead for Place and I recently had a very constructive meeting with councillors and officers of the town council. I understand the invitation wasn't extended to Dorset Council Ward members and that is a matter for them to take up with Ferndown TC; there is no sense in which Dorset Ward Councillors were improperly excluded from that meeting. A clear outcome from our conversation was that the Town Council would like to work with Dorset Council on new plans for the regeneration of the town centre and we understand that the Town Council are planning to consult Ferndown residents on their thoughts and priorities. The recent refresh of the plan does not appear to have sufficiently engaged enough people or the Town Council to provide the basis we need to move forward.

Question from Cllr Craig Monks

I wanted to follow up on my previous question to Council concerning water quality in Dorset. I welcomed your response of the Council's intention to invite water company bosses and other relevant stakeholders to the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee. However, I have since learned that this committee has suggested that the matter be debated at Overview Committee, given that it would involve the creation of a new policy.

Could you please provide an update on the progress of this work including a date that this matter has been scheduled for discussion at a future Overview Committee meeting?

Response from the Leader of the Council

Thank you for your question on this important matter.

Place and Resources Overview Committee will be agreeing their forward plan at their meeting on Thursday. This will include the timetable for this work, and I will ensure that you are appraised of the relevant dates.

Question from Cllr Louie O'Leary

"Does this committee still intend to abolish itself as per their promises and actions of the last several years indicated?"

Response from the Leader of the Council

I would like to thank Cllr O'Leary for the opportunity to both remind those councillors who remain from the first term of Dorset Council of, and illuminate those new to Dorset Council to, the current governance arrangements. I'm fairly sure the previous Cabinet never stated an intention to abolish themselves, so I assume the question is about why Dorset Council currently runs under an Executive model.

The order of parliament that established Dorset Council stipulated the leadership model it had to adopt i.e. a cabinet system. Back on the 15th July 2021, a motion was passed at Dorset Council to setup in 2023 a cross-party working group of councillors to examine alternative models of governance. This was duly constituted and met three times in 2023. The first two were on the 20th January and 13th March.

At Council on 12th October 2023, then then Leader asked for permission to engage in conversations with our neighbouring authorities to investigate a devolution deal and this was given.

At the third, and so far final, working group meeting on the 24th November 2023, the members were informed that any devolution deal would require as a governance model a cabinet system and therefore it was agreed to propose a recommendation to Full Council that a decision on the future of governance arrangements of Dorset Council be deferred until such time as a decision on a devolution deal had been made. This was duly passed at Council on the 14th December 2023.

Devolution conversations are continuing and until these are finally resolved, no further investigations into a change of governance model will take place.

Appendix

The 1987 Dual Use Agreement established formal sharing by public and the school of Wimborne Swimming Pool and new facilities on the QE site. Government approval of the arrangement secured a significant annual grant.

The Agreement provided that shared leisure centre costs be borne 60% by the public and 40% the school. However, determination of which costs were shared was agreed separately between the Treasurers of the local district council (for public) and Dorset County Council (for school). For some reason, these were defined very narrowly, so by 2013/14 the public bore 90% of total operational charges.

Superb negotiating by Dorset County Council Treasurer! But fast forward to 2021. Initio Learning Trust has become responsible for school access, while Dorset Council has switched roles inheriting the public access responsibilities of the District Council, including the lion's share of operational charges!

The interim had seen huge redundancies halving the leisure centre wage bill, and adoption of an austerity-grade maintenance regime. But these could never compensate for the uneconomic position gifted to the school and drove down revenue.

Did this contribute to rumoured disharmony, given the Trust was stumping up less than the amount of the grant?

Council resentment would be understandable if uninformed. However, any dispute lay with the Trust, not the community of Wimborne for whose leisure facility it had become responsible. Nevertheless, it pursued an unseemly divorce, entirely neglecting its residents.

Our group has requested that both yourselves and the Trust engage with the users. We have written to you, Council leader, urging such dialogue.

No consultation occurred, instead we've had to proceed on a trickle of whispers and rumours.

You organised the Big Conversation in Wimborne Square on August 16. It would have been enormous with voices from some of the 7,000. But you weren't there.

We now come to Dorchester to hear or make representations about local issues and today, I have had to travel to Weymouth, to address you in person, about Wimborne.

Local councillors in the group you lead supported our campaign and with our new MP joined the 7,000 in signing our petition.

Dorset Council and Initio Learning Trust are two institutions charged with the stewardship of facilities that you should administer for public benefit. This is a mess created by the Council and it is past time you sorted it.

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