

Public Document Pack



DORSET COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 10 OCTOBER 2024

Present: Cllrs Stella Jones (Chair), Les Fry (Vice-Chair), Jindy Atwal, Mike Baker, Shane Bartlett, Belinda Bawden, Laura Beddow, Matt Bell, Richard Biggs, Bridget Bolwell, Dave Bolwell, Louise Bown, Alex Brenton, Piers Brown, Ray Bryan, Andy Canning, Will Chakawhata, Simon Christopher, Simon Clifford, Toni Coombs, Barrie Cooper, Richard Crabb, Peter Dickenson, Neil Eysenck, Scott Florek, Spencer Flower, Alex Fuhrmann, Simon Gibson, Barry Goringe, Hannah Hobbs-Chell, Sally Holland, Ryan Holloway, Ryan Hope, Rob Hughes, Nick Ireland, Jack Jeanes, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones, Paul Kimber, Chris Kippax, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Robin Legg, Rory Major, Craig Monks, David Morgan, Steve Murcer, David Northam, Louie O'Leary, Jon Orrell, Mike Parkes, Andrew Parry, Val Potheary, Byron Quayle, Belinda Ridout, Julie Robinson, Steve Robinson, Pete Roper, David Shortell, Andy Skeats, Jane Somper, Duncan Sowry-House, Andrew Starr, Clare Sutton, David Taylor, Gill Taylor, Andy Todd, David Tooke, Bill Trite, James Vitali, Sarah Williams, Ben Wilson and Carl Woode

Present remotely: Cllrs Emma Parker and Kate Wheller

Apologies: Cllrs Jon Andrews, Derek Beer, Beryl Ezzard, Jill Haynes, Cathy Lugg, Gary Suttle, Roland Tarr and Claudia Webb

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

Jacqui Andrews (Service Manager for Democratic and Electoral Services), Jan Britton (Executive Lead for the Place Directorate), Hayley Caves (Councillor Development and Support Officer), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Susan Dallison (Democratic Services Team Leader), George Dare (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Jennifer Lewis (Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer) and Matt Prosser (Chief Executive)

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

Jonathan Price (Executive Director of People - Adults and Housing) and Mark Tyson (Corporate Director for Adult Commissioning & Improvement)

35. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

36. Declarations of Interest

The Director for Legal & Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer advised Council that all councillors had been granted a dispensation in relation to item 10

on the agenda “Notice of Motion relating to the Winter Fuel Allowance”. There was no need for any individual councillor to make any disclosures in respect of the item or leave the meeting whilst the item was considered.

There were no other declarations of interest made.

37. Chair's Announcements

The Chair reported the recent death of David Durley, former member of East Dorset District Council. The Chair invited Cllr A Skeats to say a few words in tribute.

38. Public Participation - questions

There were 3 questions from the public and a copy of the Q&A's was set out at Appendix 1 to these minutes.

39. Public participation - petitions and deputations

There were no petitions and deputations received.

40. Announcements and Reports from the Leader of Council and Cabinet Members

The Leader of the Council made the following announcements:

- That the responsibility for Leisure Services would now sit with the Cabinet Member for Customer, Culture and Community Engagement.
- An all-member webinar would be held shortly on the “Dorset Council Plan”.
- The budget setting process had begun, and the Leader invited all members to attend.
- Updated members on the Council's preference for a devolution deal with Somerset and Wiltshire Councils on a new “Heart of Wessex” region. The aim of the deal would be to unlock access to additional funding streams from Central Government and that the Council could work collaboratively with Somerset and Wiltshire on new initiatives.
- Reported on an offer to visit town councils to listen to their concerns and issues.
- Reported the retirement of Elaine Tibble, Senior Democratic Services Officer and thanked her for her service.

In response to a question regarding the devolution deal, the Leader of the Council confirmed that any final decision will be made by Full Council. In response to an invite to attend the meetings of Parish Councils, the Leader of the Council responded that he would take councillor suggestions under advisement.

41. Questions from Councillors

There were 9 questions from councillors and a copy of these can be found at Appendix 2.

In response to a supplementary question from Cllr S Flower, the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning agreed that viability was a significant issue for the Council and indeed nationally. The Council had written to Central Government separately in relation to the NPPF consultation around the matter of viability and that this needed to change in statutory planning law. He assured members that this lobbying would continue.

Responding to a supplementary question from Cllr J Vitali, the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning indicated that it was intended that a new CIL schedule would be developed to cover the whole of the Dorset Council area as part of the Local Plan work.

In response to a question from Cllr B Quayle, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills advised that in terms of this academic year, the data was not yet available, however it would be shared as soon as possible once received. She also agreed to meet with Cllr Quayle outside of the meeting to discuss this matter further. Responding to a further question from Cllr Quayle regarding projects identified for educational purposes, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills confirmed that she would seek that information and advise the councillor accordingly.

In response to a supplementary question from Cllr S Gibson, the Leader of the Council acknowledged the need for a suitable household recycling centre in the east of the County and the Waste Strategy aimed to address some of those issues of concern.

42. Dorset Community Safety Plan 2023-26, Pan Dorset Reducing Offending Strategy 2024-27 and Serious Violence Strategy 2024-25.

The Cabinet Member for Health & Housing presented the recommendation to adopt the Community Safety Plan and the Pan-Dorset Reducing Reoffending Strategy. The Cabinet Member advised Council that Community Safety Partnerships (CSP) were required to produce three-year community safety plans, which were refreshed annually, and strategies to reduce reoffending. These needed to be adopted by Full Council.

In response to a question regarding levels of hate crime, the Cabinet Member confirmed that the level of hate crime in the Dorset Council area was low, and members of the public could be assured that Dorset was relatively safe. However, this matter would continue to be monitored by the CSP. In response to further questions, the Cabinet Member advised that the strategy would be considered by Scrutiny Committee on a date in the future as part of annual reporting.

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

Decision

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

43. **Notice of Motion - Winter Fuel Allowance**

Full Council received the following Notice of Motion proposed by Cllr C Jones seconded by Cllr S Flower and supported by Cllrs A Parry, L O'Leary, J Somper, P Dickenson, J Robinson, B Trite, V Potheary, C Lugg, C Monks, B Quayle, B Goringe, S Murcer and A Skeats.

Motion Narrative and Action Required

The recent Government's decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Allowance to those pensioners receiving Pension Credit, despite having a fully costed plan, would mean at least 2 million pensioners across the UK, who were fractionally over the £218.15 weekly limit, would have to make difficult choices this winter, often choosing between heating and eating. Analysis showed that energy bills this winter would be the highest on record for elderly people, particularly with a near 10% increase in the cap expected in the autumn.

The demographics in Dorset with 30% over the age of 65, compared with the national average of 19%, would mean that the loss of the Winter Fuel Allowance would have a disproportionate impact on thousands of elderly and vulnerable pensioners across Dorset, in turn placing a huge additional burden on the already overstretched NHS and Adult Social Care budgets. Those who are just above the cut-off for pension credit would suffer the most and it's not fair.

To move that:

1. Dorset Council encourages those not on Pension Credit, who could be eligible to apply, to do so, offering help to complete of necessary forms, which for many could be a barrier. through a pro-active publicity campaign
2. Dorset Council sign up to the '*Save Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners*', petition being run nationally by Age UK.
3. Dorset Council work with those local charities, which support the most vulnerable in our communities, offering guidance to gain access to the resources they need, particularly in support of those who qualify to benefit from the Cost-of-Living Support Fund, to help cope effectively with their heating needs during the cold Winter months.
4. Dorset Council again writes to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim pension credit, are protected from fuel poverty with an assurance that energy companies will treat the vulnerable with a degree of leniency in respect to energy debt. Additionally, ask

Government to provide data of those who are eligible in the Dorset Council Area.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 14.3 (a) the Notice of Motion, upon being proposed and seconded, was debated by Full Council. Cllr P Kimber proposed an amendment and additional wording to the motion; however, this was not seconded. Members were generally supportive of the original motion and upon being put to the vote the motion was approved.

Decision

- (a) That Dorset Council encourages those not on Pension Credit, who could be eligible to apply, to do so, offering help to complete of necessary forms, which for many could be a barrier. through a pro-active publicity campaign
- (b) That Dorset Council sign up to the ‘*Save Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners*’, petition being run nationally by Age UK.
- (c) That Dorset Council works with those local charities, which support the most vulnerable in our communities, offering guidance to gain access to the resources they need, particularly in support of those who qualify to benefit from the Cost-of-Living Support Fund, to help cope effectively with their heating needs during the cold Winter months.
- (d) That Dorset Council again writes to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim pension credit, are protected from fuel poverty with an assurance that energy companies will treat the vulnerable with a degree of leniency in respect to energy debt. Additionally, ask Government to provide data of those who are eligible in the Dorset Council Area.

44. **Notice of Motion - Pets as Prizes**

Full Council received the following Notice of Motion proposed by Cllr T Coombs seconded by Cllr R Bryan and supported by Cllrs S Bartlett, P Brown, S Christopher, N Lacey-Clarke, S Florek. S Gibson, J Haynes, S Jespersen, D Morgan, E Parker, D Shortell, D Sowry-House, G Suttle and K Wheller.

Motion Narrative and Action Required

The number of cases reported to the RSPCA each year, regarding pets given as prizes via fairgrounds, social media, and other channels is a matter of concern. It is unethical for animals to be given as prizes.

Local authorities implementing local bans can help eliminate the giving of pets as prizes on council owned land.

This council has considered a similar motion in the past but did not implement a formal ban and press government for appropriate legislation, therefore we ask you to support the following motion:

1. That Dorset Council recognises that many cases of pets being as prizes may go unreported each year and supports a move to ban the giving of live animals as prizes, in any form.
2. That this Council agrees to:
 - a. Ban outright the giving of live animals as prizes, in any form, on Dorset Council land.
 - b. Write to the UK Government, urging an outright ban on the giving of live animals as prizes on both public and private land.

The majority of Council Members were supportive of this motion and upon being put to the vote the motion was carried.

Decision

- (a) That Dorset Council recognises that many cases of pets being as prizes may go unreported each year and supports a move to ban the giving of live animals as prizes, in any form.
- (b) That this Council agrees to:
 - (i) Ban outright the giving of live animals as prizes, in any form, on Dorset Council land.
 - (c) Write to the UK Government, urging an outright ban on the giving of live animals as prizes on both public and private land.

45. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items to report.

46. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business to report.

Appendix 1 - Questions and statements from members of the public Appendix 2 - Councillor Questions and Responses

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 8.31 pm

Chairman

.....

Full Council – 10 October 2024

Public Participation

Question 1 – submitted by Richard Thomas Chair, Sustainable Shaftesbury Advisory Committee

It's a truism that in present-day Britain it's not just the NHS that needs reform or it will die; government and local government, and even our system of democracy itself, is in that same perilous state. It was therefore heartening to see the attempt made recently by this Council to engage better with the people of Dorset through the 'A Big Conversation' roadshow process. But it was much less heartening when the actual process involved what I would define as the 'motherhood and apple pie' approach; choices being put to the public that no one in their right mind could possibly disagree with and hence produce a pre-determined result. Also at fault was the almost complete focus on the coastal strip communities as if nothing much mattered in Dorset north of Blandford and the absence of any cabinet members at the drop-ins. We now learn that town and parish councils are to be consulted on the Council's 5-year Plan priorities from 16 October with responses needed by 8 November. This is again too little too late. So while it's heartening to see the new administration start to improve on public engagement with the residents of Dorset over the Council's Plan for the next five years, it would be even more encouraging if the wider public could be told more precisely what is being proposed and when and to what eventual end so that they, too, can feel consulted and feed into their local councils. So my question is: Can the leader of the Council please tell us what the precise purpose of the 'Big Conversation' travelling show was if it is not now, as it appears, to involve the wider voting and taxpaying community of Dorset and when will they have their chance to comment on whatever it is Cabinet finally presents to Council on 5 December, and how? Given climate change and the degradation of nature is becoming ever more urgent with the catastrophic collapse of many ecosystems already taking place - so that we no longer have the luxury of 'business as usual' - will he now assure the people of Dorset that his leadership will ensure that climate and the nature crisis is at the top of this Council's agenda - and will he visit north Dorset shortly, including Shaftesbury, to say this to us in person?

Response from Cllr Ryan Hope

The purpose of the Big Conversation public engagement was to share our proposed strategic priorities for Dorset Council to deliver over the next 5 years and seek feedback on these.

To be clear, this was public engagement, and not a statutory consultation.

The Big Conversation ran from 24 July to 15 September and involved 12 in-person events, 2 of which were held in North Dorset (Shaftesbury and Blandford), plus we ran engagement activity in all our libraries, online engagement and made arrangements for residents who are digitally excluded to take part.

We received a really positive and constructive response from residents across Dorset, and from many town and parish councils. There is a very high level of public support for our 4 proposed strategic priorities of Housing, Climate and Nature, Economic growth, and Communities for all. Residents' feedback is enabling us to shape the detail of our new Council Plan, and we will share more details of this publicly over coming weeks.

In addition to the main Big Conversation activity, and in response to requests from town and parish councils for further detail, we are sharing a draft of the new Council Plan with councils for 3 and a half weeks, prior to approval through Cabinet and Full Council. This means town and parish councils will have had two extensive opportunities to have their say on our plan.

I absolutely refute your claim that our focus is only on coastal communities. The issues of housing, economic growth, climate and nature, and communities affect all residents in all areas of Dorset, and we were able to engage with a broad cross-section of residents about this.

Question 2 – submitted by Rebecca Saville

Oil has been produced at Wytch Farm since 1979, originally by the government owned British Gas Corporation before BP took over in 1984 and subsequently sold to Perenco in 2011. Perenco is a company that specialises in operating ageing facilities, operating as cheaply as possible to ensure such sites are still profitable. It is not subject to the same amount of scrutiny and oversight as larger fossil fuel companies because Perenco is a family-owned business that is not subject to the reporting requirements of a public company.

In 2010 there was an oil leak from the Wytch Farm oil production unit which closed the plant down for several months. On the 26th of March 2023 a 'major incident' was declared when a large quantity of reservoir fluid was released into Poole Harbour. This was caused by a defective pipe at Ower Bay. This time there was sustained national media coverage about pollution in the protected area, thanks in part to campaigning by local environmental groups.

This area of Dorset is particularly reliant on income from tourism; a more serious pollution incident could have a significant detrimental effect on the local economy. According to an impact assessment commissioned by Dorset Council*, the March 2023 incident cost local businesses £570k. Perenco are planning to continue operating in Poole Harbour until their licence expires in 2037 and have provided reassurances that safety improvements have been implemented following the March 2023 incident.

What legal powers, responsibilities and influence does Dorset Council have regarding Wytch Farm and any associated works and what measures are Dorset Council taking to safeguard local residents and businesses to ensure that there is not another, potentially more serious, oil spill in Poole Harbour?

* [Wytch Farm Impact Assessment \(phc.co.uk\)](http://phc.co.uk)

Response from Cllr Shane Bartlett

There are a number of regulators who have different responsibilities and powers for regulating Wytch Farm and these include the Council, the Environment Agency, the Health and Safety Executive and the North Sea Transition Authority (formerly the Oil and Gas Authority).

As the Minerals Planning Authority, the Council has granted planning permission for Wytch Farm which have conditions and obligations governing the operation and decommissioning of the oilfield. The Council also undertakes monitoring visits to check compliance with these conditions and obligations.

The conditions require any significant uncontrolled hydrocarbon or fluid release to be reported to the Council and for Perenco to take immediate steps to prevent further releases, minimise risks to the environment, clean up the pollution and take steps to prevent a further polluting release.

Legislation also requires the Council to develop and test offsite emergency response plans in respect of incidents relating to the Gathering Station site and the main pipeline that transports crude oil from the Gathering Station to Hampshire. These Regulations are however about preventing and mitigating the effects of incidents on people and the environment, rather than preventing the incidents themselves.

The Poole Harbour oil spill incident in March 2023 fell outside of these regulations, but Dorset Council responded alongside other partner organisations as a Category One responder under the Civil Contingencies legislation, and costs incurred were successfully recovered from Perenco.

As the operator, Perenco is required to maintain a number of plans and policies, ensuring that it has taken all measures necessary to prevent major accidents from happening. These are subject to examination and compliance by external regulators.

Question 3 – submitted by Maxine Fox

Increasingly mainstream media is reporting on the unsustainably high environmental footprint of technologies such as 5G and AI.

The hypocrisy of the government who, while demanding carbon reduction are also ruthlessly rolling out these energy and water hungry technologies is becoming ever clearer.

Today every sector of society - state, business and residential is busy generating trillions of pieces of data, all of which has to be stored electronically and in

perpetuity. There will never be enough windfarms, solar parks and freshwater to meet this massively increasing need.

The industry tells us their technology will solve any problems. These platitudes echo what the chemical industry told farmers and what the plastic industry told consumers.

In truth, this harvesting and selling of this data is just another global industry, backed by government, both obsessed with short term profits and determined to ignore the increasing evidence of harm.

Companies investing in AI have seen their carbon footprints increase by as much as 50%. A web search using AI uses 4-5 times the energy of a conventional search.

More urgent is this technology's consumption of fresh water. By 2027 scientists predict that the equivalent of half the UK's total freshwater supply will be needed simply to cool data centres.

Lithium for batteries requires 500 000 gallons of freshwater to produce each cubic tonne. Globally the mining of rare metals is accelerating the process of desertification as well as soil and water pollution.

5G is 1000 times more powerful than 4G. It drains batteries very quickly, meaning more energy used to re-charge, shorter life spans and more resources to replace. Figures from Australia show less than 2% of lithium batteries are recycled, left instead to leach toxins into soil and water and causing fires where stored.

Data generation is an unsustainable madness and an environmental catastrophe. It is neither clean nor green. We must think about data creation the same way we think of carbon emissions and drastically reduce our use of wireless technologies and A.I.

Given this council's pledge, and duty, to reduce carbon emissions, mitigate climate change and protect nature, will this council be challenging the government on the incompatibility of data generating technologies and carbon reduction and instead advocate for the implementation of alternative, energy efficient, safe, future proofed technologies that protect life and our planet?

Response from Cllr Nick Ireland

Balancing the benefits of technology with the undoubted environmental impacts is a global challenge.

Technology is a critical component of our world today. From communication and time management to manufacturing, shopping and healthcare, digital tools have an enormous impact on our lives. Adopting advanced technology will be key to modernising Dorset's economy, attracting high-value jobs and retaining skills within our economy

Let's look at the benefits of technology in one small aspect of society . . . education. Through technology, educators can better meet the learning needs of students, making education more accessible, inclusive and engaging. According to a local university, the benefits include:

- Flexibility in the way we study
- Personalised learning
- Choice in how we learn
- Instant access to resources and expertise
- Collaborative learning opportunities
- A global perspective

Dorset Council embraces and promotes the huge part technology and digital data plays in running essential services and providing economic and social opportunities to all. We are at the forefront of showing how tech can improve lives in environmentally responsible ways while driving the move away from the dirty and inefficient processes of the past.

Here are a few examples:

- Great digital connectivity is the foundation to digitising and modernising our public services.
- Our recent agri-tech trials showed how connected robots could weed wheat without polluting diesel tractors or harmful herbicides.
- Small, connected devices are helping keep vulnerable people safe in their own homes and helping them feel less isolated.
- We are leading a national project to radically reduce power consumption by the telecoms sector.

Data Centres are not going away but we do need to run them sustainably, by using green energy and cooling them in innovative ways, such as putting them in leisure centres where they can be used to heat the swimming pool. The Green Economy has the potential to transform the economy of Dorset over the next twenty years. Just one example is the proposed Celtic Sea offshore floating wind farms that will generate 4.5GW by 2035, rising to 16.5GW by 2045, and providing up to 26,000 well-paid jobs in the process across the South West.

A final observation. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, it was technology and digital data that allowed councils and other public services across the UK to continue running the essential public services that we all depend on. It was technology that allowed people to maintain contact with their families and loved ones.

As a Council we have also benefitted from digital technological advancement

This page is intentionally left blank

Full Council – 10 October 2024

Questions submitted by Councillors

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr Hannah Hobbs-Chell

I am grateful to the new cabinet for the commitment to Ferndown and to Ferndown Town Council to assist with a regeneration plan, and resolving the ongoing Barrington Centre lease situation, and appreciate that you are currently working from the previous administration's budgetary constraints and directions until the next financial year, especially for any capital works. I would however like to ask where the new leisure strategy is in progress? Along with a town centre that has been neglected over the past decade, Ferndown Leisure centre is also at the end of its life, and requires considerable consideration not just for Ferndown residents but for residents in the east of the county especially given changes in the leisure facilities in East Dorset. The land surrounding the leisure centre is under charitable ownership via the Town Council, and leased to Dorset Council, and I would like to ask if the cabinet could commit to investing in leisure in the east to support the huge health and wellbeing benefits of leisure. There is a very exciting collaborative opportunity to significantly enhance and invest in the health and wellbeing of the east of Dorset.

Response from Cllr Ryan Hope

The Council is excited to be developing a new leisure strategy aimed at enhancing the operation of leisure facilities across all of Dorset. This strategy will ensure that these facilities are accessible, affordable, and sustainable, with a strong focus on equity and addressing health inequalities. In September, the Cabinet approved the acceleration of this initiative, and consultants are being appointed to advance the project. This comprehensive approach will strengthen and support healthier communities throughout the region

Question 2 – submitted by Cllr Matt Bell

Prior to becoming one of the Dorset Council Members for Radipole I began a campaign to highlight issues at Radipole Lake. This was in the form of a petition which remains open but already has roughly 2500 signatures including those online and on paper. The issue has also been highlighted on several occasions in the local media since the petition began. I thank the members of the public who took the time to sign the petition and shared their concerns and knowledge about the lake. The petition calls for all stakeholders to prioritise silt removal from the lake and river to increase flood water capacity and to reduce flooding in surrounding areas such as Radipole Park and Gardens where outfalls are believed to be hampered by the high silt level. The petition also calls for the creation of a consistent and effective management programme to be followed moving forward.

The lake is a prominent feature of both Radipole and Weymouth as a whole. Unfortunately, Radipole Lake has been neglected for many years and is no longer the prized asset it once was. The petition and media coverage prompted the involvement of key stakeholders including Dorset Council and initial discussions

added significantly to the list of concerns I originally highlighted. There are concerns regarding potential risks to the SSSI status held by the nature reserve, flooding of the adjacent road, park, gardens and businesses, algae growth as well as the loss of a high-quality and treasured angling venue. The recently rejuvenated amenities at Radipole Park and Gardens spent much of the last autumn and winter flooded.

I was delighted when meetings were arranged involving all key stakeholders and some early progress was made, including improvements at Westham Bridge. However, things have not progressed in a timely fashion on other aspects. Previous meeting notes about the lake from May stated that Wessex Water would clear outfalls along Radipole Park Drive, which are crucial to drain the park and gardens, by the end of August 2024 but this has not happened. This is due to issues accessing and inspecting some of the outfalls due to vegetation growth. There are also investigations ongoing into potential grants for silt removal and habitat restoration and I hope these can be expedited working closely with our colleagues at Natural England and RSPB. Every element of decision making and action at the lake seems to involve multiple organisations, it is crucial that Dorset Council drives this forward effectively. However, the planned September meeting regarding the lake was cancelled due to other officer commitments. What assurances can the Cabinet Member for Place Services give me that Radipole Park and Gardens will not spend another winter submerged and that the maintenance of a prized Weymouth asset will be prioritised in the future?

Response from Cllr Nick Ireland

The issues surrounding the management of the Radipole lake water levels spans many years. The Water Level Management Plan was completed by consultants in December 2009 on behalf of Weymouth and Portland Borough Council. Around the same period, an application by the RSPB under an EU initiative to protect Bittern habitat was being considered. The proposal was to remove 54,000 cubic metres of silt and reposition at higher levels forming a bund (noise barrier) at higher, more critical (floodplain) levels in the floodplain. The works, involving extensive relocation of dredged silts within the lake were submitted to the Environment Agency who objected to this specific proposal. The relocation of dredged silts off site were also considered at the time but discounted on cost / practicality grounds.

A Water Level Management Plan working group was established in February 2024 to review the issues and develop a sustainable approach going forward. Several key partners are involved, including Natural England, RSPB, Dorset Council and the Environment Agency. Partner organisations are of the view that local interventions on their own are not sustainable or cost effective. A more strategic approach is required considering impacts from the wider river catchment, and management of reed growth. Actions developed to date include:

The Environment Agency is proposing to look at the main River Wey catchment upstream to determine if farming practises can be modified to reduce siltation and chemical loading within the catchment (including Radipole Lake) into the future.

A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) condition assessment is currently ongoing for the lake to meet HM Government target of 31st Jan 2028. In tandem, Natural England and the RSPB via the Water Level Management Group are progressing a habitat restoration bid for Countryside Stewardship funding. The current stage of the bid is a feasibility study that will inform the grant required for capital works.

As an interim measure, Wessex Water have been requested to arrange inspection of the public surface water outfalls into the lake to ensure they are blockage free. This has been delayed due to access issues, but they are looking to meet in early October to review their programme of works. They were chased on this earlier this week and have yet to respond. We

The Water Level Management Plan working group will continue to meet regularly to take this agenda forward.

Unfortunately, the risk of flooding to the low-lying areas adjacent to the lake (including Radipole Lake Drive and Gardens) are likely to increase because of climate change impacts. The area is already at risk of main River Wey flooding (1 in 100 year return period floodplain envelope) as identified by the EA and this will increase in future years. However, we will do what we can to manage flood risk proportionately by adopting sustainable interventions which offset the effects of climate change, and the partnership approach we are taking will be beneficial in this regard.

Question 3 – submitted by Cllr Spencer Flower

Unrealistic housing targets set by the new Government

The Government has announced intentions to build 1.5m new dwellings during the next five years. This will require a near doubling of the build rate threatening our green belt, AONB and other undeveloped land. This will hit Dorset particularly hard as we have little in the way of so-called brown field sites.

Legacy Local Plans and the emerging Dorset Local Plan includes policy which seeks a proportion of affordable housing when development schemes reach a certain size.

The new Liberal Democrat administration has indicated that it wishes to build more affordable housing for local people, which is a commendable ambition given the local demand, but this will be a serious challenge to achieve. The biggest barrier to achieving this aim will be the retention of viability as a material planning consideration.

There are several examples where permission has been granted and the developer has subsequently come back to the Council, claiming for whatever reason, that the

schemes are no longer viable. This has resulted in a loss of the affordable housing allocations.

Can members be reassured that every effort is being made by the administration to lobby Government for the removal of viability as a material planning consideration or seek a reform of the current guidance, such that a fair proportion of new housing development in the Dorset Council area is affordable housing for rent or shared equity.

So my question is, what action is being taken by the Liberal Democrat administration to safeguard the provision of vitally important affordable housing in the Dorset Council area in the context of the emerging Dorset Local Plan and the anticipated amended standard methodology?

Response from Cllr Shane Bartlett

The Council's response to the Government consultation was agreed by Cabinet on 10 September and submitted in time for the 24 September deadline.

In that response, we have objected to the proposed housing numbers on the grounds that they are unrealistic and unachievable.

We have supported the changes that allow local councils to give greater priority to social rented housing in their planning policies, but have said in our response that this would require additional funding because of the greater cost.

We have also, separately, written to Government to stress a number of points including the need for action to ensure that developers build out their sites, and the need for a stronger stance on viability negotiations in order to enable affordable housing to be provided.

In preparing the local plan, we will be ensuring that we have robust evidence to support our affordable housing policies, and taking the costs of development into account. While we are objecting to the scale of increased numbers suggested in the consultation, if we can deliver a greater level of housing in total, this will enable greater provision of affordable housing.

Question 4 – submitted by Cllr James Vitali

Since 2011, some 2771 new homes have been delivered in the North Dorset area. According to the latest Annual Position Statement published this month, there will be additional housing demand for over 2500 households in the North up to the year 2034.

We know there is a national shortage of homes, and North Dorset is more than playing its part to address that shortage. But for development to be legitimate in the eyes of local residents, they must believe that it will add to their communities, not take away from them or tarnish them. An important part of this is ensuring that

developers contribute meaningfully to investment in local services and community facilities.

For some time, however, the North has been an outlier in Dorset, because it hasn't operated the Community Infrastructure Levy, and has relied solely on Section 106 contributions. Speaking to my parish and town councils, they worry that they are not seeing their fair share of Section 106 monies, and believe that CIL would help ensure our communities meaningfully gain from new housing.

I understand that CIL was going to be introduced in the North as part of the new Local Plan, but delays to its drafting and adoption have set that process back, and I am concerned that our residents are losing out as a result.

To this end, how does the Council intend to ensure that local residents in the North receive the investment they need in infrastructure and services to support new housing supply? Could I receive in writing a report on the status of Section 106 funding in the North? And would the Council now consider bringing the North into line with the rest of Dorset by introducing CIL in our area?

Response from Cllr Shane Bartlett

The approach to securing developer contributions in North Dorset is through the use of section 106 legal agreements for major development, i.e. development involving 10 or more dwellings. Evidence supporting the North Dorset Adopted Local Plan is used in a case-by-case basis to secure infrastructure necessary to help make development acceptable in planning terms. Officers work with town and parish councils to establish their needs and apply this evidence when planning applications are being considered. This process has resulted in monies being secured for a wide range of community infrastructure.

Dorset Council report on the performance of developer contributions through an Annual Monitoring Statement which is published online.

Government regulations around the use of developer contributions does allow section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy to be secured together in situations where CIL applies, though ultimately, there will be a limit to what development can viably contribute toward these mechanisms. While the introduction of CIL in North Dorset would generate a neighbourhood contribution which would be passed automatically to town and parish councils where development takes place, it should be noted that this in turn would most likely reduce the extent of s106 obligations secured, which in the absence of CIL is currently the main mechanism for supporting local measures such as community halls, playing pitches and play areas.

Dorset Council will continue to review the position with Community Infrastructure Levy and the Local Plan.

Question 5 submitted by Cllr Byron Quayle

At the most recent Schools Forum meeting, senior education leaders from Dorset suggested that BCP Council are actively seeking families to request their child's needs are met in a Dorset Council area educational setting.

Can the portfolio holder confirm how many children with an Education Health and Care Plan from other areas including BCP, have been enrolled at Educational settings in Dorset this academic year and how has this impacted on children in the Dorset Council area accessing these educational settings?

Response from Cllr Clare Sutton

As we know there is pressure on appropriate educational provision for children with an EHCP nationally, and therefore some movement of children across borders. Our team has a comprehensive plan, working with partners and schools, and our overarching strategy is that, wherever possible, children's needs are met locally so they can attend along with their neighbours and friends.

Our Corporate Director for Education chairs the regional Education and Inclusion group and Dorset hosts the regional lead for SEND, Dr Vikki Jervis. This enables us to ensure that regional education leaders proactively discuss pupil intake across borders and work towards equity.

There is also an element of parental choice when a child has special educational needs.

The most reliable data source is school census data, collated in May each year.

According to census data, between May 21 and May 24 we saw a 5% drop in BCP children being educated in Dorset but, consistent with the local and national picture, the proportion of those that are EHCP has risen slightly, from 4.1% to 4.4%.

In May 24 a total of 225 children from other local authorities with an EHCP were being educated in Dorset, of which 120 were from BCP. Pupil Census data will be collated again in May and will give us the most accurate picture of numbers of pupils this academic year, but we do not anticipate a significant increase in this number.

We currently fund 675 Dorset children with an EHCP in other LAs, including 339 in BCP settings.

As there is movement of children in both directions, we do not feel there is a particularly adverse impact on Dorset children, but as per our strategy we continue to work towards keeping more of our children close to home.

Question 6 submitted by Cllr Byron Quayle

Following a Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated October 16, 2023, Dorset Council confirmed that approximately £22.8 million had been paid by developers for educational purposes since 2019, but had not yet been allocated to specific projects.

Could the portfolio holder provide an update on how much of the £22.8 million has been allocated to educational projects since the FOI request in October 2023? Additionally, has a Dorset-wide policy been implemented to ensure that projects are identified promptly and funds are allocated efficiently, preventing developer contributions from remaining unused in Dorset Council accounts instead of being spent on educational needs?

Response from Cllr Clare Sutton

In respect of s.106 of the Town and Country Planning Act secured funding we must bear in mind issues which include:

- Many of the contributions are linked to specific schemes and cannot be transferred
- The contributions are linked to the timing of the delivery of houses, which is out of our control, and
- Some contributions cannot be spent until the need is there, for example, in terms of admissions to local schools.

I don't think the previous administration managed this well, but S.106 is not a 'magic bullet' to improving the education landscape, and we have to ensure we invest in relation to likely developments in the longer term. Neither is the allocation "unused" - it is responsibly held to ensure that longer term projects to support our sufficiency duties in education can be realised.

We can report on education spend that has been committed or is profiled. £29k has been allocated to Pimperne school to support an increase in admissions, £47k is in the pipeline for Hazelbury Bryan for the same reason, and £540k for the Leigh Road School site project to secure the land.

As things stand the £22m is held against 57 specific developments across the county with the terms and conditions being applied.

In relation to the second part of the question, from a Children's Services point of view we've made significant progress. Our Corporate Director for Education brought the Best Education For All Board into the cross-Council programme delivered by Assets and Regeneration in July 2024, to ensure robust oversight, and we have initiated a mainstream school estate review through BEFA . This enables responsible and timely spend within the terms and the conditions applied to this funding stream.

Question 7 submitted by Cllr Bill Trite

I'm pleased to be able to point to:

1. Much co-operative, joint working between Dorset Council and Swanage Town Council in recent years, all to the public good and particularly in respect of cliff stability, beach recharge, flood defence and options for seafront traffic management. Another example of this constructive relationship is the Town Council's routine cutting of a large area of Dorset Council grassland at one entrance to the town, without charge to Dorset Council, as well as supplementing weed clearance work.
2. Long-time acknowledgment by the former Purbeck District Council and Dorset Council (as emergency planning authority, highway authority and coastal defence authority) that certain roads and drains near Swanage seafront are prone to widespread coverage by shingle and other debris as a result of wave overtopping during stormy conditions, and that the resultant hazard will be cleared by the authority in a timely manner with public rights of way reopened. (Where it could, the Town Council has always assisted this process in terms of supplying manual labour and co-ordinating clear-up operations - and is happy to continue to do so.)
3. Assurances by the new administration at County Hall that Dorset people are not about to experience any deterioration in service standards.

Why, therefore, with the present overspill of debris from the sea into the Lower High Street, has the Town Council now been informed that the Unitary authority has unilaterally decided no longer to accept any obligation to undertake this vital clearance and reopening work, unless Dorset Council is paid to do so by Swanage Town Council?

Response from Cllr Nick Ireland

Dorset Council manages more than 2,400 miles of roads and 2,800 miles of countryside rights of way, along with all associated infrastructure, including bridges, cycleways, footways, drainage, street lighting, road signs and markings, traffic signals, car parks, trees, and verges.

As the local highway authority, the Council has a statutory obligation to maintain the safety and accessibility of highways. To fulfil this duty, it may require adjacent landowners to undertake necessary measures to prevent soil and debris from encroaching onto the roadway. This includes areas of land owned and managed by Town and Parish Councils.

Historically, Dorset Council (and DCC before it) has collaborated closely and successfully with Swanage Town Council across various service areas and projects. This partnership will be further enhanced by a forthcoming transformative programme, Hedge to Hedge. This initiative aims to facilitate integrated service delivery between Dorset Council and Town and Parish Councils, enabling them to work together as service delivery partners. Through this collaboration, it is intended that Town and Parish Councils will be able to benefit from increased levels of service

over and above those provided just by Dorset Council. You have my assurance that Officers will be in touch with the clerk of Swanage to discuss this specific issue.

Question 8 submitted by Cllr Simon Gibson

There is widespread concern following recent proposals from Hampshire County Council to close a number of Household Recycling Centres, including Somerley, which serves many Dorset residents including residents in Verwood, Alderholt, St Leonards & St Ives & West Moors. It has been long understood that Dorset Council does not have adequate provision in the East of our County and the partnership working with Hampshire County Council has enabled our residents to maintain good and fair access. The Universal Services Select Committee of HCC has asked Cabinet to reconsider these proposals at their Cabinet meeting next week.

Q: Will the Portfolio Holder and officers seek an urgent meeting with Hampshire County Council ahead of their Cabinet meeting to encourage them to keep Somerley HRC open and to restate Dorset Council's commitment to working together to ensure that residents in the East have fair access to a suitable HRC?

Response from Cllr Nick Ireland

Yes, we will seek a meeting with Hampshire County Council to discuss their position regarding the Somerley household waste and recycling centre. As we pay a substantial sum for our residents to be able to access the site (we make up 45% of the usage), you can be assured that HCC understand the impact of a closure on Dorset Council, but naturally they also have other considerations in reaching their final decision. If we are notified that the site will close (our contract requires six months' notice), then we will of course consider all available options.

Question 9 – submitted by Cllr Craig Monks

Madam Chairman,

Could the Council please provide some clarity in the recent position concerning funding for clearing the Councils ditches and Gullys that provide drainage?

I was made aware that funding had been removed for this vital service so asked the question of my local community highways officers. The reply I received was "At present we have no budget allocated to this function as it has been removed. The Service Manager Neil Turner and the newly appointed Asset Manager Ian Newport are currently in discussion on this issue"

So my question is, Can the Council please confirm that the funding been cut in relation to clearing ditches and gully's.

Response from Nick Ireland

The highways drainage budget has not been cut. During the summer, the Highway Service reassessed the upcoming ditching and drainage work to ensure it could be delivered within the available budget. The work can be delivered within the existing budget and will be carried out during this financial year. As mentioned earlier tonight, we are looking at a transformative programme, Hedge to Hedge, which will have a positive impact on how we carry out such work in the future.