

# Public Document Pack



## DORSET COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 5 DECEMBER 2024

**Present:** Cllrs Stella Jones (Chair), Les Fry (Vice-Chair), Jon Andrews, Jindy Atwal, Mike Baker, Shane Bartlett, Laura Beddow, Derek Beer, 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, Beryl Ezzard, Scott Florek, Spencer Flower, Alex Fuhrmann, Simon Gibson, Barry Goringe, Jill Haynes, Hannah Hobbs-Chell, Sally Holland, Ryan Holloway, Ryan Hope, Nick Ireland, Jack Jeanes, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones, Paul Kimber, Chris Kippax, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Robin Legg, Cathy Lugg, Rory Major, Craig Monks, David Morgan, Steve Murcer, David Northam, Louie O'Leary, Jon Orrell, Emma Parker, 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, Gary Suttle, Clare Sutton, Roland Tarr, David Taylor, Andy Todd, Bill Trite, James Vitali, Kate Wheller, Sarah Williams, Ben Wilson and Carl Woode

**Apologies:** Cllrs Belinda Bawden, Rob Hughes, Mike Parkes, Gill Taylor, David Tooke and Claudia Webb

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

Jacqui Andrews (Service Manager for Democratic and Electoral Services), Jan Britton (Executive Director for Places Services), Hayley Caves (Councillor Development and Support 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), Matt Prosser (Chief Executive), Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Paul Beecroft (Communications Business Partner), Julia Ingram (Corporate Director for Adult Social Care Operations), Megan Rochester (Democratic Services Officer), Lisa Cotton (Corporate Director for Customer and Cultural Services) and Steven Ford (Corporate Director for Strategy, Performance and Sustainability)

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

Bridget Betts (Environmental Advice Manager)

51. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**52. Declarations of Interest**

G Suttle declared a pecuniary interest in respect of agenda item 11, 'Purbeck Pleasure Boat Byelaw Amendment', as he had clients that would be affected by the decision.

**53. Chair's Announcements**

The Chair reported the recent death of Phillip Gausson, former Dorset County Council councillor. The Chair invited A Skeats to say a few words in tribute.

The Chair thanked councillors for their support to White Ribbon Day 2024.

**54. Public Participation - questions**

There were 3 questions from the public and a copy of the questions and responses are set out at Appendix 1 to these minutes.

**55. Public participation - petitions and deputations**

There were no petitions or deputations received.

**56. Announcements and Reports from the Leader of Council and Cabinet Members**

The Leader of Council made the following announcements:

- The Government White Paper on devolution was awaited and a briefing for councillors would be provided once this had been received. Reports to Cabinet and Full Council would be considered at the appropriate time. It was noted that Dorset Council would continue to exist
- Congratulations were offered to the Chief Executive, Matt Prosser who would be taking up a new role as Chief Executive of Wellington City Council in New Zealand in the spring of 2025. In response to a question regarding the appointment process for a new Chief Executive, the Leader confirmed that there would be cross-party involvement in the appointment.

**57. Questions from Councillors**

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

Further to the response provided, S Flower indicated that he would welcome a further discussion with the Cabinet member for Planning and Emergency Planning around the planning process referred to.

Responding to a supplementary question from B Goringe, the Cabinet member for Place Services indicated that he would meet with the ward councillors once clarification had been received on how the funding could be used.

In response to a supplementary question from L O’Leary, the Cabinet member for Place Services noted that he would visit the junction and discuss this further with the councillor.

Responding to a supplementary question from J Somper, the Cabinet member for Place Services noted that funding was not currently available for cyclic maintenance.

In response to a supplementary question from P Brown, The Cabinet member for Property & Assets and Economic Growth noted that decisions relating to any county farm would need to be considered on its own merits.

In response to a supplementary question from V Potheary, the Cabinet member for Place Services noted that it had been agreed that, along with R Bryan, he would be meeting with the Chair of the government select committee to discuss the current issues with funding in this area.

Responding to a supplementary question from B Quayle, the Cabinet member for Place Services noted that requests for signage would be at the request of the local town or parish council and there may be a requirement for that council to pay for any signage.

Further to a supplementary question from B Quayle, the Cabinet member for Finance and Capital Strategy indicated that he would provide further information to the councillor following the meeting.

Responding to a supplementary question from B Trite, the Cabinet member for Place Services confirmed that the public inquiry would include an evening session in Wareham.

**58. Council Plan 2024-2029**

The Leader of Council presented and proposed the recommendation to adopt the Council Plan 2024-29. This was seconded by S Robinson. The Council Plan was the key strategic business plan for the council and set out the council’s vision, values and strategic priorities for the current council term and beyond.

Some concerns were raised about the focus of issues included in the Council Plan and how the comments of residents were being addressed through the document and as an amendment, it was proposed by S Gibson seconded by L Beddow that a 5<sup>th</sup> strategic priority be added to the Council Plan as follows:

**Providing high quality universal services**

Dorset Council has a proud record of getting the basics right. Our approach to road maintenance and pothole management is proactive and has ensured that Dorset has some of the best maintained rural roads. Dorset Council also has an excellent track record on waste & recycling. Residents tell us that road maintenance and waste collection are the top priority areas within the services delivered by Dorset Council.

## **Targets**

- Maintain the Councils position as the top performing Unitary Authority for recycling rates
- To maintain and improve our residents' satisfaction with our waste and recycling services which is currently 87.5%
- To continue our positive trajectory and improve on the 60% of our waste already recycled
- Continue to reduce the amount of waste that goes into landfill – currently 2%
- Consistently achieve a pothole repair target of 90%
- Ensure that the target of Principal roads requiring urgent attention is met – currently 2%
- Maintain Dorset Councils position in the top 10 and top quartile of peer reviewed highway authorities under our Value for Money assessment.

## **Key Actions to deliver this priority**

- Deliver the new HRC facility in Blandford
- Develop plans for a new HRC facility in the East of the County
- Continue to support cross border HRC arrangements including Somerley
- Deliver 'Hedge to Hedge' to better coordinate the work of the Highways Team, the Greenspace Team and the Waste Team to ensure roads are well maintained.
- Invest in proactive maintenance units and our Community Highways Team
- Deliver a new Local Transport Plan (LTP4)
- Making roads safer by working with communities and Town & Parish Councils to roll out 20mph where there is strong community consent

## **Leadership and Partnership**

- We will work proactively with the Western Gateway STB to deliver the much needed M4 to the South Coast route to provide a better route for HGV traffic and reduce pressure on other local roads
- We will continue to work in partnership with Dorset Police and other key stakeholders to improve road safety via the Road Safety Partnership
- Work with Government and Industry to deliver better recycling rates and more sustainable waste management
- Support Town & Parish Councils and community led groups to improve our recycling rates.

## **Stand up for Dorset**

- Lobby Government for improved highway funding. Much of Dorset Councils highway budget comes from the Department for Transport. However Dorset receives lower funding than many local Councils in rural areas.

- Lobby Government to reduce reliance on the use of incinerators and to support the Council in opposition to new incinerators in Dorset Council areas.

Councillors spoke both in favour and against the amendment. Those speaking against the amendment noted that the Council Plan was a strategic document, with many of the issues raised being covered by other plans that sat underneath the Council Plan. There was recognition that not everything could be included within the Council Plan. Those speaking in favour of the amendment noted that the issues raised in the amendment should be embedded in the Council Plan as they reflected the issues raised by residents. It was felt that delivering high quality services should be included in the vision for the council.

Upon being put to the vote the Amendment was LOST.

Councillors considered the Council Plan and comments were made both in support of and against the plan. Particular comments were made around provision of housing including affordable housing, actions around climate change, road safety issues and how the plan had been put together.

Upon being put to the vote, the motion was CARRIED.

### **Decision**

That the Council Plan 2024-29 be adopted.

Reason for the decision

Incorporation of some of the recommendations of Joint Overview Committee ensures cross-party input into the Council Plan. The Council Plan sets out what the council aims to deliver between 2024-29. It informs the resources required for delivery, the outputs and outcomes that are anticipated and other contributory factors (such as actions by partner organisations, risks, resource assumptions etc). The Council Plan sets out the headline target measures by which performance will be monitored and reported on.

### **59. Street Trading Controls Adoption of Schedule 4 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982**

Councillors received the recommendation from the Licensing Committee with regard to Street Trading Controls – Adoption of Schedule 4 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982.

It was proposed by N Ireland seconded by J Andrews

### **Decision**

- i) That Schedule 4 to the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 (as amended) be adopted and shall apply throughout the Dorset Council administrative area with effect from 6 December 2024, or such later date as is agreed by Council.

- ii) That all existing street trading delegations and designated streets remain in place subject to any future amendments.

Reason for the decision

Adoption of Schedule 4 of the Act, for the whole of the Dorset Council area would enable a new Street Trading Policy to be implemented which would be fair, consistent and equitable across the Dorset Council area. This would give the Council, as Licensing Authority greater control over street trading and would ensure that all traders are subject to the same application, enforcement and licence conditions regardless of where they trade.

There are currently existing designations for Street Trading in the former Weymouth & Portland, West Dorset, Purbeck and East Dorset Council administrative areas.

Each of the former District and Borough Council's had their own policies and procedures for Street Trading and Officers intend to introduce a new Street Trading Policy covering the whole of the Dorset Council administrative area.

G Suttle, having declared a pecuniary interest in the following item, left the meeting at this point.

**60. Purbeck Pleasure Boat Byelaw Amendment**

Councillors considered a report of the Environment, Policy and Partnership Team Manager with regard to a proposed amendment to the Purbeck Pleasure Boat Byelaw 2013.

It was proposed by J Andrews seconded by N Ireland

**Decision**

That officers be authorised to proceed with work to amend the Purbeck Pleasure Boat Byelaw 2013 and to carry out engagement with user groups through a formal public consultation and bring back to Full Council before going to the Secretary of State.

Reason for the decision

To protect people's safety at Swanage and Studland in line with our byelaw and to help protect the seagrass beds within the voluntary marine no anchor zone at Studland.

G Suttle returned to the meeting.

**61. Appointment of Vice-chair of the People & Health Scrutiny Committee**

It was proposed by A Parry seconded by L O'Leary that J Somper be appointed as Vice-chair of the People and Health Scrutiny Committee.

As Chair of the People and Health Scrutiny Committee, T Coombs thanked L O’Leary for his support on the committee and paid tribute to J Somper for her support to the committee to date.

**Decision**

That J Somper be appointed as Vice-chair of the People and Health Scrutiny Committee.

62. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items.

63. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

**Appendix 1 - Public Participation**  
**Appendix 2 - Questions from Councillors**

**Duration of meeting:** 6.30 - 8.34 pm

**Chairman**

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## Full Council

5<sup>th</sup> December 2024

## Public Participation

### Question 1 – submitted by Nicola Harper

#### Background:

- In the last 20 years it has been recognised the importance that trees play for biodiversity and for mitigation, adaption and resilience regarding the Climate Emergency.
- Further the importance of trees in these roles is of equal, if different, in the urban realm as well as the countryside.
- It is now widely recognised that trees play an important role in people’s health and wellbeing at all ages, this is reflected in house prices with greener areas fetching a higher house price than their equivalent in less leafy areas.
- The Council has also generously put in place a grant scheme to facilitate tree planting by communities.
- Yet for all this there seems to be a reluctance to plant in existing urban areas, particularly on streets. There is very little evidence of new tree planting on streets and roads.
- Tree planting and management relies in Dorset on 2 policies.
  - *Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy 2023*- this document has links which seem to encourage tree planting. But does not contain a policy or strategy for trees in the urban realm.
  - *A Tree Maintenance Policy Document* – which pertains purely to maintenance but promises to replace 2 trees for every tree removed.

However, there is no Tree Strategy or a section pertaining to trees within a *Green Infrastructure Strategy: Investing in Green People*, despite many other authorities having such a document and their being ample guidance of how to create a strategy.

Communities are being encouraged to find places and plant trees this can be difficult especially when most of the land where people live is owned by Dorset Council. Communities, Parish and Town Councils are operating within a vacuum.

Without policy I suggest that trees will continue to be seen as a maintenance problem in the urban setting. Decisions on whether trees can be planted will be taken with the dis-

benefits of trees dominating their far more important and numerous benefits. I believe that like other authorities a strategy is urgently required which gives weight to the Biodiversity, Climate Change and the needs of the people living in Dorset.

Question

1. Should Dorset Council not be prioritising the development of a Tree Strategy to ensure good tree canopy cover in its towns and villages, its routes between centres, as well as its rural areas.

### **Response by Cllr J Andrews**

Dorset Council Greenspace and National Landscape team planted over 8,000 trees across Dorset last year.

We now have 20 volunteer tree wardens across Dorset and 5 community projects are underway using the Dorset Community tree fund.

Plus, we have a Dorset Council tree policy and the Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy 2023 which promote the planting of trees.

Therefore, there are numerous examples of excellent work already being done.

I will be asking relevant officers to investigate how an overarching “Dorset tree strategy” could bring all of this good work together.

### **Question 2 – submitted by Giles Watts on behalf of Dorset Climate Action Network**

To Dorset Council’s credit, it has consistently been against the proposed PowerFuel Incinerator on Portland Island. We thank the former Dorset Council administration that refused planning permission and the new administration for having written to the deputy prime minister making it clear their opposition to this dreadful scheme. The Portland Incinerator has been dressed up as a low-carbon, job-creating asset when in fact this highly polluting, high-carbon blight on the landscape will impact the health of our citizens, increase our carbon footprint, threaten our tourist industry and could lose the world-class status of our Jurassic coastline. It is a disgrace that the Secretary of State’s representative approved the planning permission without properly considering the counter arguments or the truthfulness of Power Fuel’s case.

In addition to fighting this ruling, we need to undermine the economic case for an incinerator on Portland. Certainly, the economics would definitely fail if Carbon Capture and Storage had been required as a compulsory condition to the planning consent under the principle that the polluter should pay.

Refuse from a variety of sources will be required to make it work. Ironically, the most cost-effective source of fuel for the incinerator comes from the very people who want it least – the people of Dorset. So, will Dorset Council state openly that, if built, they will never send any of Dorset’s future refuse to the Portland Incinerator either directly or via their subcontractors? Even better, will Dorset Council commit to phasing out incineration as quickly as possible to concentrate on anaerobic digestion of food waste and better recycling of non-food waste? If so, you would have the full support of many people in Dorset.

### **Response by Cllr N Ireland**

Dorset Council follows the waste hierarchy to reduce, reuse and recycle as much waste as possible, because this is how we will successfully tackle the climate implications of waste and reduce the amount of money we spend on waste disposal. I’m proud to say we are the best performing unitary council in England, so our strategy is working; however, we know there’s still more we can do.

Energy from Waste is a waste treatment option that’s arguably better than landfilling given that it does produce some power from what is a fairly low calorific ‘fuel’, but it is also now consequently the UK’s dirtiest form of energy production as recently highlighted by the BBC. Giving planning permission and environmental permitting to new incineration plants without requiring carbon capture is contrary to every environmental policy and climate commitment this new Labour government has, and in my opinion is a tantamount to crime against humanity. Dorset Council’s efforts to stop the Portland incinerator being built are still ongoing.

Consumption is at the heart of the significant issue of the 66 million tonnes of waste produced in the UK, as well as the climate emergency. Reducing our consumption, and moving to a circular economy, where resources are designed to be re-used and recycled will eliminate waste and the need for waste disposal facilities and their emissions. Upcoming national policy and legislation such as Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for packaging and Simpler Recycling will help towards this goal.

Notwithstanding, whilst residents continue to produce waste, we have a legal obligation to dispose of that waste, and there are few alternative options available to us. Our black bag (i.e. non-food) waste currently goes to a mechanical biological treatment plant in Canford where it produces refuse derived fuel that is burnt in incinerators. We will absolutely continue to work with our residents to reduce the amount of waste we collect to minimise the impact of incinerating waste in the future.

However, while there is an ongoing need to dispose of black bag waste, we wouldn’t want to limit ourselves in disposal treatment options going forward. Furthermore, from a carbon perspective, the proximity principal should be considered in further tendering exercises, where local facilities will have a lesser impact on our service.

In relation to food waste, we have a very successful weekly food waste collection across the council's area and that goes to anaerobic digestion facilities. Unfortunately, not all councils collect food waste; I was in Manchester two weeks ago staying at my daughter's and she has no food waste collection – it goes into the black bag.

Dorset Council has already committed to reducing waste and increasing recycling rates further through our waste strategy. We fully support residents in reducing, reusing and recycling their waste, and work closely with communities to try and deliver this.

If all residents in Dorset simply put the right stuff in the right bins, then we could save over £1m in disposal costs alone, not to mention the benefit this would have to the environment.

### **Question 3 submitted by Giles Watts on behalf of Dorset Deserves Better**

The Labour government's new housing target requires Dorset to build 3,230 new houses per year – up from the prior target of 1,788 which was already an unrealistically high number. With the reinstatement of the duty to cooperate this could add a further 800 houses pushing the annual target to about 4,000 per year. Over the 15-year period of the Local Plan this means Dorset Council will have to find space to build 60,000 houses. There is no evidence that the Dorset Council area needs anything close to this level of housing development. The real housing crisis is the lack of genuinely affordable and low-cost social housing and this new target would do little to address that.

None of this is of the Council's making, but if implemented, such high numbers of new housing could be deeply damaging to Dorset's unique environment and countryside, put further pressure on our constrained infrastructure and services, and, ultimately, degrade Dorset's economy which is largely based on agriculture and tourism.

Such high numbers are completely unrealistic. Developers have never built more than 1350 homes per year – barely a third of the required new target. Failing to meet the target would mean defaulting on the five-year housing supply, handing back planning control to the developers who would pick and choose those greenfield developments with the highest profit.

Of course there are ways in which such high housing numbers could, theoretically be met. We could add to the endless urban sprawl around our larger towns with horrible consequences for services and infrastructure; we could force every village to double their size and clog up our rural road system, we could even develop some new towns, but where would they be located, who would buy the houses, where are the jobs and what about the investment required?

Instead, we urge Dorset Council to submit a local plan that puts the people of Dorset first and insist that the 10,000 building plots with existing planning permission are

actually built, prioritises the use of brownfield sites along with Dorset Council's own land, and sets local targets for affordable and low-cost social housing.

Such a plan would not meet the government's new housing target but it would address the core housing issues in Dorset, be environmentally sustainable and preserve what makes this county so special. It would also prevent resistance from almost every environmental and social organisation and almost every community, town and parish council.

So, the question for Cllr Shane Bartlett is: are you prepared to put Dorset first and push back against the Government's damaging, unnecessary and downright absurd housing targets ?

### **Response by Cllr S Bartlett**

The Government's revised housing targets were published as part of a wide-ranging planning consultation this year and Cabinet agreed this council's response in September. We objected to the proposed housing targets, which would increase the Dorset target to 3,230 homes a year, on the grounds that they were undeliverable and would cause harm to Dorset's environment. The consultation period has now closed and we await the Government's conclusions.

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## Full Council

5<sup>th</sup> December 2024

### Questions submitted by Councillors

#### Question 1 – submitted by Cllr S Flower

##### **Cabinet Update 10 October Full Council We have fixed the five -year land supply position**

The Planning Inspectorate has apparently reviewed the Dorset Council position and concluded that we could just about demonstrate a 5-year land supply again against our needs target, which is welcomed as it gives weight to our Local Plan Policies enabling us to determine where development goes and so protect our green belt and other undeveloped land against inappropriate development.

However, a note of caution. With a 5.02-year supply, this position is extremely precarious. There are concerns across both the private and corporate sectors regarding the extended times being taken to deal with even the most basic planning applications for new homes.

Service delivery performance was high on the agenda during the first five years of this council, and we are now seeing the rewards of that. However, anecdotal evidence since May 24 seems to suggest that unnecessary burdensome and overly bureaucratic processes are being applied, in serial fashion, when dealing with planning applications for new homes. For example, the burden of validation requirements is way above national requirements slowing down the submission of applications and straining small house builders and businesses trying to expand, impacting on the viability of local and national house builders on the delivery of vital housing and boosting the local economy.

Whilst the statistics regarding overall performance from Development Management may appear that targets are being met, do they disguise the length of time taken to grant each planning application that involves new homes? Of the 30% or so, of applications that are not determined within their statutory timeframe, how many of those are for new homes?

From the long list of requirements in the Validation Checklist, through to the change in the scheme of delegation pushing more applications through the Planning Committee process, these factors must surely have a negative impact on our knife edge housing land supply.

We surely need more granular performance statistics to make sure the service is running at full steam across all planning application types, especially for new homes, and across all geographical areas. Having a breakdown of performance will highlight areas for improvement rather than just saying we are 'exceeding expectations' across a broad range of planning application types and areas.

There have also been concerns from applicants about a notable increasing number of requested for extensions of time. This is of concern due to the inevitable increase in process costs in determining planning applications and the inevitable impact on the delivery of much needed additional housing in the increasingly difficult market conditions.

I should add that my question is linked specifically to the process and not the performance of officers working in this service. It would seem, it's the process and application of policy guidance that's the issue, not the work ethic of our officers, which is in urgent need of reform.

Given the pressure on finances, it poses the question about the current average cost of processing planning applications for new homes which have been determined under delegated powers and those referred to planning committees for decision? I ask this question given the increased number of planning applications being referred to committee by the Chairmen of Area Planning Committees with limited justification, following policy changes introduced by the Liberal Democrat administration after the May Local Elections.

So, my question is. What action is being taken by the Liberal Democrat administration to maximise the on-time determination of planning applications, whilst the council has the benefit of a 5-year housing land supply. Noting of course the risk of not doing so will cause Dorset to see planning decisions by appeal with inappropriate housing development in our green belt and other undeveloped land ahead of Dorset Council publishing its first Dorset-Wide Local Plan.

Thank you, madam chairman

### **Response by Cllr S Bartlett**

As set out in the member's question, the Planning Inspectorate confirmed in September this year that Dorset Council can demonstrate a Housing Land Supply of 5.02 years. The Inspector's Report states that the Council is entitled to rely on this position until 31 October 2025, in accordance with national planning policy and guidance, and the statement is a material consideration in the determination of applications and appeals.

However, it is also correct that the supply is only just over five years. If the nationally proposed increases to housing targets come into effect, then at the end of the fixed period (after 31 October 2025), the Council will have a very much reduced housing land supply, until the adoption of the new local plan. As such, we need to consider the benefits of providing housing alongside other benefits of a scheme, and any adverse impacts, in making decisions on applications for housing and may consider that some developments should be approved despite being contrary to policies in the current local plans.

As members will be aware, the planning service has worked to significantly improve the proportion of non-major applications which are determined within 8 weeks since the formation of Dorset Council in 2019.



Whilst the Council does seek to minimise the use of extensions of time in general, there are cases where these can be mutually beneficial to the Council and applicants. For example extensions of time can be used to allow for submission of amended plans which may overcome potential reasons for refusal, and which may improve the overall quality of the development; and to allow completion of section 106 agreements to secure financial contributions and other obligations which are required to make the development acceptable in planning terms. The Council has very clear guidance on our approach to negotiation on amended plans to minimise unnecessary delays to applications.

In some cases, extensions of time are also used to allow time for referral to the planning committee where this is required following the scheme of delegation. The Council updated the scheme of delegation in July this year, but it remains the case that most applications are determined by officers under delegated powers. 97% of applications were determined under delegated powers in Quarter 2 this year, which is broadly comparable with the quarterly figures over the past 2 years (between 96% and 98% of applications determined under delegated powers).

The Council is taking a number of steps to support timely decision-making and facilitate housing delivery:

- The validation checklist sets out the information required to be submitted with a planning application. The current validation checklist was adopted on 1 October 2022 and has been regularly updated since then to reflect changes in national legislation and local requirements. The checklist is now due a further, comprehensive, review, and officers will be undertaking this review in the coming months. The aim of the review will be to identify any opportunities to streamline the information requirements, whilst still ensuring that sufficient information is submitted at the outset to enable proper consideration and assessment of each planning application, and to avoid delays at the decision-making stage due to missing information.
- The Council offers a comprehensive pre-application advice service, which can help identify issues at an early stage, which can then be addressed before an application is submitted, hence facilitating prompt decision-making at the application stage. Officers promoted the benefits of using the pre-application advice service at a recent virtual agents forum, attended by around 200 planning agents who operate across Dorset.
- The Council has submitted six sites through the New Homes Accelerator Call for Sites, seeking expertise, assistance and resources from Government to help overcome barriers to delivery of homes.
- The Council is using funding secured through the Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund to deliver nutrient mitigation credits in the Poole Harbour catchment, helping to bolster the supply of credits in this catchment and therefore enabling planning

consents to be issued with pre-commencement conditions to ensure nutrient mitigation is provided before development starts on site. Officers are currently working towards the release of the first Dorset Council nutrient mitigation credits early in 2025.

- Officers will also be reviewing sites currently included within the 5-year housing land supply to identify any barriers to delivery of housing on these sites, and any actions the Council may be able to take to help facilitate successful delivery.

### **Question 2 – submitted by Cllr B Goringe**

My ward, St Leonards & St Ives, has a population of 7600 residents, a higher population than towns such as Wareham, Beaminster, and Sturminster Newton. It also has the highest age range of residents over 66 years which at 39%, higher than the Dorset Average of 29%.

Our only bus service, No. 38 More bus, which runs from Ringwood to Ferndown, is crucial for an ageing population who don't have cars or driving licences. We also don't have an active Doctor's surgery in the ward.

Currently the last bus leaves Ferndown at 13:10 and Ringwood at 13:50 than the bus goes on to be used as the school run.

My residents who need to visit Poole or Bournemouth hospitals or their doctor's surgeries in either Ringwood or Ferndown and have afternoon appointments have no way of getting back home from Ferndown or Ringwood by bus. Their only option is a taxi at a cost of about £15 or to walk. The distance from Ferndown is nearly 4 miles or from Ringwood over 2 miles and at this time of the year this would be in the dark.

What are your plans to extend the No. 38 bus to say, 5pm, which will allow residents to get home safely.

I note that Dorset Council are about to receive or have received a government grant of 3.8 million for buses and travel. Can the Portfolio Holder for travel allocate some of these monies towards extending the No 38 bus service to 5pm Monday to Friday to allow my elderly residents to get home safely

### **Response by Cllr J Andrews**

Dorset Council welcomes the additional bus funding announced by central government. We are awaiting the offer letter to set out the conditions on how this money can be spent.

This funding will help us to deliver improved bus services and infrastructure aligned with our new council plan priorities and strategic bus priorities set out within the Bus Service Improvement Plan. However, the £1.3m revenue funding and £2m capital is only a small part of what we will require to transform the bus network across Dorset.

We are working closely with our local bus operators to make improvements. The 38 is a commercial bus service and any changes will need to be discussed and agreed with the bus company who operate this service.

I have set up a Public Transport EAP and this cross-party group will be reporting its recommendations to the Place and Resources Overview Committee in 2025, once it has completed its review work.

**Question 3 – submitted by Cllr L O’Leary**

In May the then fresh faced new cabinet member came down to Littlemoor to meet myself and Cllr Dickenson to discuss the issue of congestion along Littlemoor road. Now a badly placed island crossing has made the issue even worse. Can the cabinet member give me an update on plans to help solve this growing issue?"

**Response by Cllr J Andrews**

The pedestrian refuge island crossing installed as part of the Lovells development to the north of Littlemoor Road is well placed to promote sustainable transport from the development. The crossing is on the pedestrian and cyclists desire lines from the development to access the local services and beyond. The locations were assessed during the planning process and have received planning permission. The crossings are uncontrolled and located to maintain lane widths along Littlemoor Road. The only impact on vehicular traffic is when a driver chooses to slow or stop to allow a pedestrian or cyclist to cross the road.

The development also benefits from a Travel Plan to promote sustainable travel modes to the new residents.

**Question 4 – submitted by Cllr J Somper**

Following the recent storms and high rainfall across my ward, I saw homes being flooded, erosion of riverbanks, and significant disruption to residents and road users.

It is clear that changing weather patterns will exacerbate these issues in the future, underscoring the urgent need for expertise and robust flood defences. This is not merely a matter of responding to immediate crises but of proactively safeguarding our communities against further harm.

My question for the Cabinet is regarding the prioritisation of budget allocation. Can assurances be given, not only to the residents I represent but also to those across the county who have faced similar challenges, that sufficient funding will be allocated to support communities severely affected by flooding? Additionally, I urge consideration of significant investment in long-term flood mitigation measures to protect villages such as Shroton and Fontmell Magna from the increasingly frequent and severe flooding events we are witnessing.

### **Response by Cllr J Andrews**

The primary source of capital funding for reducing the risk of internal flooding to residential properties is via individual bids to Defra. Some named storms may attract central government funding via Flood Recovery Grants, but this also tends to be focused on more urban areas which have higher numbers of properties affected.

A viable and sustainable flood scheme needs to be identified, which is a challenge for the more rural communities which have relatively small numbers of dispersed affected properties with complex multiple flooding sources. Homeowners can look to protect their own properties by installing property flood resilience measures such as doorway flood boards, water resistant doors, vent covers and fixed pumps.

Our Flood Risk Management Team has a role in investigating flooding incidents and identifying sustainable flood risk reduction measures to support long term community resilience. Flooding in rural areas can be complex and needs careful assessment by working with other organisations. Sources can range from groundwater, surface water, blocked watercourses, or a combination thereof.

In relation to highways, the majority of funding for improvements to highway infrastructure comes from central government through the Department for Transport. Full details of Dorset's Highway funding allocation are expected following the government's Spring statement. We anticipate an increase in funding levels, with climate resilience being a factor in that additional funding.

### **Question 5 – submitted by Cllr P Brown**

Can the portfolio holder reassure me, the Council and, most importantly, our rural communities that not a single inch of Dorset Council's County Farms will be sold off?

### **Response by Cllr R Biggs**

Thank you for the question this council recognises the very important role that the County Farm Estate has provided over 100 years in giving generations of new Dorset farmers a pathway to farming opportunities that may have been unavailable through conventional routes. I would also add that it is clear to me that the estate has been underinvested in leading to a backlog of maintenance issues hence the requirement for a detailed holistic review.

This asset class review of the council's farm estate in line with the approach set out in the newly adopted strategic asset management plan (approved by cabinet in October 2024) and is currently being undertaken. This will enable the consideration of current and alternative uses for all assets within the farm estate, ensuring the council is making best use of its farm estate and seizing opportunities to maximise financial and social return. The asset review process examines the cost and condition of the asset, with a key focus on the council's key priorities – providing high quality housing, growing our economy, communities for all, and responding to the climate and nature crisis.

A wide range of data is collated and analysed, including premises costs, tenure review, valuation, energy efficiency and carbon data, development potential and condition of the asset. Where the condition of an asset is poor and requires significant investment to ensure it is fit for purpose, it may be pragmatic to dispose of the asset and invest the capital into the remaining farm estate.

The asset review will result in a farms strategy for consideration by cabinet. The strategy will guide future decision making in relation to the farm estate. The Cabinet will take due regard to observations from the panel members of the reformed County Farms Advisory Panel who will meet in January to look at initial findings.

### **Question 6 – submitted by Cllr V Potheary**

We have been made aware that the Government Transport Secretary has allocated £83 million in funding into 2026 for the South West Councils.

The investment is said to ensure better bus services across the South West, for enhancing popular routes, protecting rural services and increasing bus use for shopping, socialising and commuting. It was also said that every region in England will

benefit from the funding, but those areas which have been historically underserved are being particularly prioritised.

The South West allocation has been divided up as follows:

BCP	£ 6,016,436
Cornwall	£ 10,589,782
Devon	£ 11,615,699
Dorset	£ 3,815,959

To say that I was incredibly disappointed to read that Dorset Council has only been allocated £3.8million from the scheme is an understatement.

We all know that it costs far more to deliver any service in the rural areas and I wonder if anyone from our council has challenged the paltry sum that we will receive, in comparison to Devon's £11,616,699, a County very similar to ours in its rurality.

In Gillingham we are extremely fortunate to be on a main line railway station from London to Exeter. But, having arrived in the town, you are faced with very limited onward travel options. There is no service at all to Shaftesbury on Saturday or Sunday – to the jewel of tourism in the North of the county!

On weekdays you can travel to Shaftesbury and from there take the bus to Salisbury or Blandford Forum. From Blandford you can change bus and travel to the County town – although it's worth saying that it's almost impossible to do the return journey in the same day!

Occasionally we have buses arrive in Gillingham from Wiltshire – looking after their residents, who live over the border.

Most villages in the far north never see a bus – only school buses. There are no buses for work, or buses for further education.

Question

I would like to know the bidding criteria by which the money was allocated between the counties and how we only received such a miserly sum of £3.8 million – out of a total of £83 million? Furthermore, please could I receive assurances that this funding will see a real and tangible benefit to Gillingham, and the eight villages that I, and others, represent?

Lastly, In light of our devolution proposal I would like reassurance that this sort of situation will not/cannot happen in the future!

**Response by Cllr J Andrews**

The allocation of £3.8 million has not been received as a result of a bidding process, but has been allocated to authorities according to a national needs based formula. The details of the formula have not been provided to us. As with other formula-based allocations, Dorset fares badly in relation to other neighbouring authorities. This issue has been raised repeatedly through elected members and senior officers with Government including during a session with the Transport Select Committee on 25th January 2023 where Cllr. Ray Bryan gave evidence. We will make a commitment to continue to raise the issue of fair funding for Dorset.

The consultant reviewing authorities' Bus Service Improvement Plans recently praised Dorset's revised plan. However, the content of the BSIP does not currently influence the amount of grant received through the formula process. The BSIP sets out our ambitions for improved bus services and infrastructure across Dorset. The £3.8 million will be used to improve the bus network using the priorities identified in the BSIP. We are engaging operators as part of our Enhanced Partnership to deliver the elements of the BSIP that will provide most benefit to residents in the long term.

#### **Question 7 – submitted by Cllr B Quayle**

In 2021, following an alarming amount of local wildlife fatalities, I was approached by a local wildlife organisation regarding warning signs being installed to raise awareness. Unfortunately, I was advised that permission was needed by Central Government before Dorset Council would be able to facilitate such a policy.

Dorset Council received authorisation giving the council regulatory permission to use the small wild animals' signs from the Secretary of State for Transport on the 22nd of December 2023. Given that Dorset Council has declared a Nature Emergency, and considering that several local animal welfare organisations have offered to cover the installation costs, can the Cabinet Member for Highways clarify why a policy has not yet been established to allow the installation of hedgehog signs on the highway?

#### **Response by Cllr J Andrews**

Thank you for the question and the opportunity to reinforce my commitment to the Council's Nature Emergency declaration.

On December 22, 2023, Dorset Council received regulatory permission from the Secretary of State for Transport to use 'small wild animals' signs under sections 63 and 65 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

This authorisation permits the Council to erect these signs with the primary objective of improving road safety and contributing to wildlife preservation by alerting drivers to the presence of small wild animals, such as hedgehogs, in certain areas.

As the Council has a prescriptive power to use these signs, a distinct policy is not required. However, we do need to adopt a strategic approach to implementation involving Town and Parish Council's and local animal welfare organisations. We must ensure that there is adequate balance and control to enable the correct sites to be identified and prioritised, and to comply with the aspirations of the Council's Rural Roads Protocol. When considering any sign, we need to conserve the outstanding quality of Dorset's landscape and settlements, while delivering a safe and convenient highway network.

A trial of the new hedgehog signage has been undertaken, with signs erected in Lyme Regis. Following on from the trial, the criteria for wider implementation of small animal signage is being prepared, ready for more signs to go up in the new year.

### **Question 8 – submitted by Cllr B Quayle**

The Royal British Legion estimates that over 10,000 local benefit awards per year involve military compensation, with four out of five councils treating this compensation as income.

Could the responsible cabinet member confirm if Dorset Council delivers any local benefits or grants that consider military service compensation when determining eligibility? If so, which local benefits or grants, and is there any intention to revisit these policies?

### **Response by Cllr S Clifford**

The question from Cllr Quayle asks if Dorset Council considers military service compensation when determining eligibility for local benefits or grants, and if there are plans to revisit these policies.

#### **I can confirm that:**

- **Council Tax Support:** we fully disregard War Pensioner Income/compensation under this scheme, which is reviewed annually.
- **Housing benefit** is administered by our revenue and benefits teams on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), with assessment criteria set at a national level, not locally.
- **Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP):** Funding is limited and provided largely by the DWP. Applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis, considering all household income, including military compensation, measured against household expenditure. Discretion is applied by our assessment teams and policy reviewed on a regular basis.
- **Disabled Facilities Grants:** The statutory criteria is also set at a national level which means that means testing includes some military compensation benefits.



However, the Council has discretion and plans to exclude Military Compensation Awards from future assessments./.

- **Housing Allocations Policy:** Excludes lump sum payments received by Armed Forces members as compensation for injury or disability from the financial resource limit.

### **Question 9 – submitted by Cllr B Trite**

Since

(1) the high demand to attend the public inquiry into the Sandbanks Ferry Company's increased charges application has been given as the reason for the inquiry being re-located away from Studland Village Hall; and

(2) the new venue selected for the revised date is in Poole rather than in Purbeck; while

(3) the people who will clearly be most disadvantaged if the application is successful are mainly resident in Purbeck;

will Dorset Council apply its best efforts to having the public inquiry moved back into Purbeck, where there are at least four venues of a suitable size and quality to facilitate the inquiry, even in the unlikely event that a further postponement of the inquiry's commencement were necessary?

### **Response by Cllr J Andrews**

Officers are working closely with Swanage Town Council, BCP and local Parish Councils responding to the Sandbanks Ferry Inquiry. Representations have been made to the Inspector regarding the location of the public inquiry. The Inspector requested that the applicant find a suitable venue and explore several of the venues proposed by the local community, including the Mowlem Theatre, Baptist Church and Springfield Hotel. For operational reasons these have been deemed unsuitable for an inquiry of this size and nature.

The public notice has now been issued and confirms that the inquiry will commence at 10am on Tuesday 21st January 2025 at the Poole Harbour Commissioners Terminal North Lounge. An evening session is being held on Wednesday 22nd January 2025 commencing at 6.30pm in the Springfield Country Hotel in Wareham. I'm also advised that all Inquiry sessions will be live streamed, and recordings will be available for subsequent viewing.

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