

Public Questions for Cabinet – 28 January 2025

Question from Giles Watts

Dorset Climate Action Network (DCAN) would like to commend Cllr Nick Ireland for his public support for the Climate and Nature Bill that receives its second reading in Parliament on Friday 24th Jan. DCAN fully supports the aims and intentions of the Climate and Nature Bill to address systemic problems with the UK's journey towards Net Zero and nature restoration; and to provide a leadership position for other countries to follow.

We also commend Cllr Nick Ireland for drawing attention to the fact that this bill was born out of cross-party collaboration and that issues of Climate Change and protection for the environment are too important to become mired in party politics.

By the time of the cabinet meeting, we will know whether the bill has received sufficient support from MPs to carry it through to the next stage of the parliamentary process. Assuming it does, we note the strange anomaly that Dorset Council itself is not recorded as a supporter of the bill despite the support from 380 councils other across the UK. So, would Dorset Council, be prepared to publicly endorse this bill ?

Question from UNISON

UNISON is one of 3 recognised unions representing the voice of our workforce. We were disappointed yet again not to have received the Cabinet paper as agreed. We only had access to the Cabinet report once it became a public document. This is in direct contradiction to paragraph 9.4 which states that management are working with the unions. We highlighted this as a concern in our last question to the Joint Overview Committee on the 9th January 2025.

Staff reduction figures (callously called benefits) were only known at the last minute which puts into question the validity of the report. We were advised that officers had not had sight of the detail until the Friday before and that the final report was not completed until Monday 20th January. It also calls into question the role of PwC; this information should have been provided in good time.

UNISON is concerned that the proposals of OFC are based around a survey that was completed by staff in August 2024. This had an overall response rate of 40%, some directorates were significantly less. This puts into doubt the accuracy of the findings and whether the proposals can achieve the savings that have been highlighted.

There is not enough information contained within the high level EQIA. There needs to be an understanding of the potential impacts of OFC before it is agreed. These cuts are focussing on roles that are mainly undertaken by women in low paid positions. There is also a potential impact on customers through automation, especially for older people and those digitally excluded.

Scenario 4 shows a £10million investment in external capacity, but UNISON wants to see additional investment in our staff. Upskilling staff in AI in Year 1 would reduce

the need for external capacity in years 2 & 3, reduce the overall redundancy payouts, and develop a more resilient workforce.

The overall cost of OFC is £48million with a potential saving of £77million. UNISON believes rather than just looking at reducing staff costs, investment could have been made in economic growth bringing in more business rates and in turn increasing revenue for the Council.

Automation underpins everything OFC is hoping to deliver, yet there is no detail on how this will be achieved. We have not been provided with any evidence that AI will be able to replace roles currently undertaking by DC's greatest asset, their staff. Given this, the lack of EQIA data and reports being rushed through, can Cabinet be assured that this programme is the right direction for Dorset Council and its communities?