

Full Council

11th February 2025

Public Participation

Question 1 – submitted by Mr R Thomas, Chair, Sustainable Shaftesbury Advisory Committee to Shaftesbury Town Council, Member, Dorset Climate Action Network

A previous Dorset Council unanimously agreed to note the proposal for a Dorset National Park and the evidence for it, and to keep it under review, stating that: "The proposal for a National Park could potentially support Dorset Council's corporate outcomes in relation to a healthy and prosperous Dorset."

In recent years, the Dorset National Park team community interest company (CIC) has further developed a strong and well-evidenced case for an extended Dorset National & Marine Park (DNMP) which would be England's first to coordinate action across the joined-up ecosystems of land, coast and sea. The DNMP team has stated it would like to 'work in close partnership with Dorset Council and local communities to help address the climate and nature emergencies, care for and improve the environment, people's health and wellbeing, and benefit our communities, environment and economy throughout Dorset.'

Following the DNMP team's submission to Natural England and to the government-appointed Glover Review of Designated Landscapes, whose 2019 report recommended that Dorset be 'seriously considered' for National Park status, will the new administration confirm its commitment to supporting the creation of Dorset as Britain's first combined land and sea national park in the full knowledge that the proposal has the cross-party support of many town and parish councils throughout Dorset as well as Dorset CPRE, Dorset Wildlife Trust and most other environmental and nature conservation charities and organisations in Dorset, and will it also now press the new Government for an early decision on the creation of such an exciting and pioneering entity in Dorset?

Question 2 – submitted by Mr A Bailey

For the first time, the Dorset Council's budget will be hitting a record £416 million—nearly £1.2 million per day (1). I could dwell on the penny-pinching of new evening parking charges, despite election promises to reduce costs. Instead, let's focus on where our money is really going (2) from the pennies to the pounds, and then the big ticket item.

Monthly, Dorset Council spends tens of thousands on agency staff, yet smaller sums are just as eyebrow-raising. £3,000 was handed to **ACTIVIST GROUP LIMITED** in December 2024 for a Director's Office—reminiscent of a Boris-like Downing Street refurb, I wonder (3). In July,

£51,000 went to **CARE DORSET LIMITED** for fireworks, oddly categorised as "Health & Safety"—supposedly a lavish show at the taxpayers' expense. In April and August, **UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS DORSET** got £72,000 for "Smoking & Tobacco" with little explanation. One can only hope this isn't funding smoking breaks!

In June, the council forked out £400,000 (4) to **BERYL BIKES** who supplied 121 e-bikes, only for the firm to partly pull out this month (5). October saw £840,000 spent on snow management from **AEBI SCHMIDT UK LTD**; despite just a light dusting of January snow, gritters were out at 8:30 PM last Wednesday in 7-degree weather. Wouldn't expanding contracts with local farmers have been a more practical solution. Then, in September, **NEWTON CONSULTING LTD** bagged £400,000 for Adult Social Care consultancy, adding to the £14.5 million already spent yearly—nearly 3% of that budget!

There's much more to scrutinise. The big ticket item is **CARE DORSET LIMITED** (6), with six highly paid directors and costing £2.3 million per month, alongside agency staff spending. Wouldn't it be more cost-effective to contract private care homes per bed rather than run services in-house, avoiding costs like pensions, HR, administration, and the overheads of owning six properties. The Guardian (7) notes 84% of care home beds in England are privately owned, highlighting the sector's dominance.

To my question: Nearly £340,000 has been spent over nine months on internal audits with **SOUTH WEST AUDIT PARTNERSHIP LIMITED**. While internal audits serve a purpose, they are ultimately conducted by an organisation working closely with the council. **Will the Cabinet commit to commissioning an independent external financial audit to effectively address wasteful and unnecessary spending?**

Such an audit should be fully transparent to the public, going beyond a routine review of figures to scrutinise the **justification** behind spending decisions. It should ask *why* certain expenditures were made, whether they delivered genuine value for money, and how future financial decisions can be more accountable. A truly independent review would help rebuild public trust and ensure that every penny is spent wisely.

References

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4. <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/news/beryl-e-bike-share-launch-in-weymouth-on-20-august>

5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c9d5qgzl8l2o>
6. <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/13873953>

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