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## CABINET

### MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 28 JANUARY 2025

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

**Also present:** Cllr Peter Dickenson, Cllr Beryl Ezzard, Cllr Matt Bell, Cllr Jon Orrell, Cllr Piers Brown, Cllr Hannah Hobbs-Chell, Cllr Rob Hughes, Cllr Sherry Jespersen, Cllr Belinda Bawden, Cllr Craig Monks, Cllr Steve Murcer, Cllr David Northam, Cllr Louie O'Leary, Cllr Andrew Parry, Cllr Jane Somper and Cllr David Taylor

**Also present remotely:** Cllr Mike Baker, Cllr Laura Beddow, Cllr Derek Beer, Cllr Bridget Bolwell, Cllr Dave Bolwell, Cllr Louise Bown, Cllr Ray Bryan, Cllr Simon Christopher, Cllr Richard Crabb, Cllr Les Fry, Cllr Barry Goringe, Cllr Jill Haynes, Cllr Sally Holland, Cllr Jack Jeanes, Cllr Carole Jones, Cllr Stella Jones, Cllr Chris Kippax, Cllr Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Cllr Cathy Lugg, Cllr David Morgan, Cllr Val Pothecary, Cllr Andy Skeats, Cllr Andy Todd, Cllr David Tooke, Cllr Kate Wheller and Cllr Sarah Williams

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

Jan Britton (Executive Director for Places Services), Matt Prosser (Chief Executive), Sean Cremer (Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Jonathan Price (Executive Director of People - Adults and Housing), Alice Deacon (Corporate Director for Commissioning and Partnerships), Mark Tyson (Corporate Director for Adult Commissioning & Improvement), Andrew Billany (Corporate Director for Housing), Lisa Cotton (Corporate Director for Customer and Cultural Services), Amanda Davis (Corporate Director for Education and Learning), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children), Steven Ford (Corporate Director for Strategy, Performance and Sustainability), Julia Ingram (Corporate Director for Adult Social Care Operations), Chris Matthews (Head of Human Resources), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), Chris Best (Interim Managing Director), Jon Bird (Service Manager for Growth and Economic Regeneration), Gemma Clinton (Corporate Director for Waste, Recycling and Resource Recovery), Andrew Galpin (Infrastructure & Delivery Planning Manager) and Nina Coakley (Head of Change)

#### 102. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Chair advised that there was a small change in the agenda order, in that item 9 would be considered before item 7.

103. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest to report.

104. **Public Participation**

There were two questions from the public. A copy of the full questions and the detailed responses are set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

105. **Questions from Councillors**

There were 3 questions from Councillors Hobbs-Chell and Bawden; these along with the responses are set out in Appendix 2 to these minutes.

106. **Forward Plan**

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

107. **Our Future Council Business Case and Transformation Plan**

Cllr B Wilson, Cabinet Member for Corporate Development and Transformation introduced a report that set out accelerated efforts to develop a comprehensive business case for transformation. He highlighted that the business case aimed to deliver sustainable improvements in customer services, process management, and digital and technology requirements. This was to ensure the council operated efficiently and effectively despite the challenging financial forecast detailed in the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

In response to questions, the Cabinet Member, Cllr Wilson acknowledged that the pre-front door and an improved customer service model was essential so an additional workstream had been added to give specific attention to this area of work and to any decision made around communities and partnerships. The Corporate Director Transformation, Customer and Cultural Services confirmed that the first workshop had been held to develop the framework and progress how services would be co-produced with communities and the voluntary sector.

In respect of 3<sup>rd</sup> party spend, the Executive Director, Corporate Development welcomed the comments around contract management, procurement and potential work for scrutiny committee.

Responding to concerns regarding consultation with UNISON, the Chief Executive advised that there was good engagement with unions, but the process had been rapid. He further advised that senior management were holding several webinars to ensure that all employees were being fully informed of the process for transformation.

There were no additional comments from Cabinet Members.

It was proposed by Cllr B Wilson seconded by Cllr S Robinson

## Decision

- (a) Cabinet endorsed the overall vision and design of Our Future Council operating model and transformation programme as detailed in the business case at Appendix A of the report to 28 January 2025.
- (b) That the proposed costs, savings and implementation plans based on scenario 4 as set out in sections 4 and 5 of the report and in more detail in the business case at Appendix A, sections 4 and 5, be approved.
- (a) That Cabinet notes that this business case was based on the proposal to transform the organisation, implement a new operating model, and increase productivity through the greater use of technology. *The proposal identified an estimated potential investment of £48.33M over the period 2025-28, which would release cumulative staff savings of £77.4M over the period 2025-30.*
- (b) That Cabinet notes that the Our Future Council programme would continue to be refined as we moved into the implementation phase, but to fund the business case Cabinet agreed to:
  - (i) Earmark a further £13M in addition to the £12M already committed to the capital programme for the Enterprise Resource Planning system. *This would fund the potential investment in technology and process change – noting that individual funding decisions in excess of the key decision threshold would be subject to individual business cases to be brought before Cabinet for approval.*
  - (ii) That Cabinet approve the estimated redundancy costs of £9.5M over the programme, be initially funded from reserves, noting that the reserves would need to be replenished through budget savings over subsequent years.
  - (iii) That Cabinet approve the need for investment in internal and external additional capacity to implement the project, to be reviewed on an annual basis, with year one of the capacity to be funded through the approved transformation reserve of £3M and the flexible use of capital receipts.
  - (iv) That political oversight be provided by the Members transformation steering group.
  - (v) That the recommendations from the Joint Overview Committee, set out in section 6 of the report, be noted and the Dorset Council Transformation Plan 2025-29, be approved, as attached at Appendix B as the framework for supporting, governing and delivering change across the council.

## Reason for the decision

The proposals outlined in the “Our Future Council Business Case and Transformation Plan” report to Cabinet of 28 January 2025 lay the groundwork for a comprehensive programme of transformation and improvement, enabling Dorset Council to achieve its priorities within a sustainable medium-term financial

strategy. The ambition and commitment o improvement and delivery as part of “Our Future Council” initiative aligned with the Council Plan priorities and our new operating model section.

**108. December 2024 (Period 9) Financial Management Report 2024/25**

Cabinet received a report that set out the council’s forecast financial performance for the full 2024/25 financial year. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Strategy, Cllr S Clifford advised that the council’s finances continued to be under extreme pressure within the revenue budget which, in the absence of mitigation, would require to be funded from reserves.

There was further pressure on the council’s reserves from the cumulative deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which could in the future exceed available reserves if a long-term solution was not identified before the statutory override ended in March 2026.

Cllr Clifford read out a statement in relation to 10.47 of the report that described the health, safety and building compliance work which had been undertaken to ensure that council buildings met the required standards. This work had been undertaken at speed to recognise the health and safety requirements. But at the request of the Leader of the Council, the Monitoring Officer had commissioned Southwest Audit Partnership (SWAP) to investigate some of the procurement funding processes. As an independent body of the council, SWAP would present the outcome of their investigations to a future meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee and to the council’s external auditors.

In response to questions from Cllr A Parry regarding the national transfer scheme for unaccompanied children, the Executive Director for People (Children) advised that most of the pressure came from when asylum seeking children turned 18. The funding for these care leavers was significantly reduced, yet the council still had a responsibility to support them through this transition. Representations had been made to central government regarding this funding gap and Cabinet Members would continue to raise their concerns with local MP’s.

It was proposed by Cllr S Clifford seconded by Cllr R Biggs

Decision

- (a) That the Senior Leadership Team’s forecast of the full year’s outturn for the Council, made at the end of December 2024 including progress of the transformational and efficiency savings incorporated into the budget, be noted.
- (b) That the capital programme for 2024/25, be noted.
- (c) That the allocation of £7m from reserves to support the repairs and maintenance compliance work of the council’s property portfolio be approved.

Reason for the decision

The Council provided a mix of statutory and discretionary services to communities across Dorset and was legally required to set a balanced budget every year, and

so must deliver services within the resources made available through the revenue and capital budgets for 2024/25.

The report summarised the Council's forecast financial performance for the 2024/25 year as at the end of December 2024.

**109. Budget strategy and medium-term financial plan (MTFP)**

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Strategy presented the report setting out the proposals for Dorset Council's 2025/26 revenue and Capital budgets including a summary of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

The report also included the Capital Strategy and the Treasury Management Strategy for approval.

In setting the budget the Council was facing rising costs in service delivery of £85m, which had been met through identifying £44.6m of savings, efficiencies, grants and income and £40.5m of increased funding, mostly through changes in council tax. In summing up his presentation the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Strategy indicated that the council continued to experience significant financial pressures and cabinet members would continue to lobby for fair funding for Dorset.

Non-Cabinet members asked several questions around parking charges and the Cabinet Member for Place Services confirmed that a further car parking review would be taking place within the next 12 months. Responding to questions regarding council housing stock, the Cabinet Member for Health and Housing advised that Cllr O'Leary had received an open invitation to attend the Housing Working Group, and a detailed report on "New models of housing delivery" would be presented to Cabinet and Full Council in the Spring.

In respect of a question relating to core assumptions, the Executive Director, Corporate Development highlighted some of the key assumptions and best estimates made against current information, as set out in 11. 2 of the report and he confirmed that a contingency fund of £13m was set aside to take account of these variables. In respect of the general grant fund, members were informed that this was the first time there was a budget line for the "Cost of Living" aimed to support the voluntary sector's preventative work and a report on progress would come forward to a scrutiny committee in the near future.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Strategy proposed the recommendation as set out in the report, with the additional addendum of appendix 8(b) to replace the original appendix. This was seconded by Cllr N Ireland

**Recommendation to Full Council**

- (a) That the revenue budget summarised in Appendix 1, be agreed.

- (b) That the increase in general Council Tax of 2.9953% and 1.9969% in the Social Care Precept, providing a Band D Council Tax figure for Dorset Council of £2,101.05; an overall increase of 4.9921%, be agreed
- (c) That the Council Tax base of 160,793 Band D equivalents (186,917 households in total) agreed by the S151 Officer earlier in this budget setting process, be noted.
- (d) That the continuation of the unchanged scheme of Local Council Tax Support, and the revised income tables following the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) uplift of benefits by 1.7%, be noted.
- (e) That the Capital Strategy set out in Appendix 3 and the changes to the programme contained within the appendix, be approved.
- (f) That the Treasury Management Strategy set out in Appendix 4 be agreed.
- (g) That the assumptions used to develop the Budget Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), as set out throughout, the report be noted.
- (h) That the recommended balances on earmarked reserves and on general funds, including the minimum level of the general fund, be agreed.
- (i) That the responses to the recommendations and comments made as part of the budget scrutiny process, as set out in Appendix 6, be agreed.
- (j) That the recommendations 1 – 5 from 4 December 2024 Harbour Advisory Committee meeting regarding fees and charges, budget and asset management plans, as set out at Appendix 7, be agreed.
- (k) That a transfer of £5.1m reserves to a ring-fenced reserve to support the Dedicated Schools Grant Safety Value program as reported in section 13.42, be approved.

#### 110. **Planning Obligation Monitoring Fees**

Cabinet considered a report that recommended the introduction of s106 planning obligations monitoring fees for Dorset from 1 April 2025. The approach followed a review of best practice and the collection of agreement data with staff costs relevant to Dorset. The recommended method would apply a monitoring fee per planning obligation, and this would be reviewed to ensure the administration cost associated with the management of developer contributions was covered by the fee.

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

Decision

- (a) That Dorset Council applies a monitoring fee to support the cost of monitoring and reporting on planning obligations. *The fee would be based on the values and methodology outlined in the report and applied to all planning applications submitted from the 1 April 2025 which require a planning obligation.*
- (b) That following implementation, authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Place Services and anyone nominated by him in the scheme of nomination, to update the fee as necessary in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning.

Reason for the decision

To enable the implementation of charges to support the staffing resource in the monitoring and compliance of approved s106 Planning legal agreements.

### 111. **Local Authority Housing Fund 3**

Cabinet considered a report of the Cabinet Member for Health and Housing informing members that Dorset Council had been awarded £1,744,421 capital grant and £12,100 of revenue grant to acquire 10 properties by 31 March 2026 for the Afghan refugees as settled housing. Plus, three of those properties to be used for temporary accommodation for those who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. The proposal was to pass on the funding to a third party, i.e. housing association (HA) to meet the delivery target date. This would also mean that the HA would be able to use its own resources along side the grant to purchase the 10 properties.

The Housing Enabling and Delivery Team Leader addressed several detailed questions from Cllr J Somper, confirming that the funding for 7 settled housing units and 3 temporary housing units aligned with the government's funding formula. The Cabinet Member for Health and Housing also suggested that an all-member briefing could be arranged to provide further clarity on these questions, whilst reminding members that the current recommendation was simply to seek approval to transfer the funding to a third party.

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

Decision

- (a) That £1,744,421 be granted to a Housing Association (HA) after a competition process, who would act as the delivery vehicle and purchase the 10 properties using these funds and their own funds. *Completion of the purchase of the properties to be finalised 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026.*
- (b) That a lettings plan is put in place with the successful HA so Dorset Council can ensure the properties are allocated in accordance with the funding requirements.

Reason for the decision

Dorset Council now owned 30 properties that were purchased with the funding granted from the Government as part of LAHF1, 26 of the properties were purchased to house Ukraine refugees and 4 of the properties were purchased to house Afghan refugees in accordance with conditions attached to the grant payment. All of these properties at some future date and on becoming vacant could be used as temporary accommodation to house those who were homeless or potentially homeless. The project was very successful however had taken a lot of resource from the Council's Housing and Assets teams to carry out the work. Additionally, the Council was only able to grant non secure tenancies as the Council was not currently a stock holding authority. A requirement of the LAHF3 funding was that the Afghan refugees were offered secure tenancies.

To meet the short deadline, offer secure tenancies to the families from Afghanistan the properties should be provided, owned and managed by a registered provider.

## 112. **Dorset Shared Prosperity Fund Extension**

In proposing the recommendation, the Cabinet Member for Property & Assets and Economic Growth, Cllr R Biggs set out the report on the Shared Prosperity Fund funding for 2025-26 at a reduced rate - £1.4m to bridge the transition year while the government developed a longer-term proposal.

Members were advised that no new investment plan was required, and the fund administration process had been simplified.

The recommendation was seconded by Cllr R Hope.

Decision

- (a) That the Dorset Shared Property Fund Investment Plan Addendum, as attached in Appendix 1 of the report to Cabinet of 28 January 2025, be endorsed.
- (b) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Property, Assets and Economic Growth, to implement the Investment Plan Addendum.

Reason for the decision

To support delivery of the Council Plan priorities of

- Grow our economy
- Communities for all
- Respond to the climate and nature crisis

And to facilitate use of the funding allocated by government to benefit Dorset residents, communities and businesses.

## 113. **Care Dorset Holdings Ltd Annual Performance Report**



The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care presented the report that provided a review of the second year of Care Dorset's operation, covering 1 October 2023 to 20 September 2024.

It was proposed by Cllr S Robinson seconded by Cllr N Ireland

Decision

That the contents of the Care Dorset report be received and noted.

Reason for the decision

Care Dorset was a major delivery partner to Dorset Council for adult social care and support. Much remained to be done to drive improvements to Care Dorset's operation and to grow the organisation, both in volume and revenue. The report set out the work completed over the last 12 months to achieve Care Dorset and Dorset Council's shared ambitions.

#### 114. **Dorset Centre of Excellence Annual Performance Report**

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills presented the performance report for the Dorset Centre of Excellence.

It was proposed by Cllr C Sutton seconded by Cllr J Andrews

Decision

That the Dorset Centre of Excellence Performance report be received and noted.

Reason for the decision

To ensure Cabinet are fully informed of the current DCOE performance.

#### 115. **Development of Blandford Waste Management Centre**

The Cabinet Member for Place Services provided an update on the project for the new Blandford Waste Management Centre and sought authority to award the contract to build the essential infrastructure for waste services.

Cabinet members welcomed the recommendation and unanimously supported it. It was proposed by Cllr J Andrews seconded by Cllr R Biggs.

Decision

- (a) That the award of a contract to construct and develop a new waste management centre at Blandford, using Dorset Highways Works Term Service Contract within the approved capital funding, be approved.
- (b) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Services and the Section 151 Officer to agree the contract terms.

Reason for the decision

To deliver works to secure critical infrastructure in Blandford for the development of a strategic waste transfer facility in central Dorset which will provide the capacity to maximise the benefits of operational efficiency and resilience to provide business continuity.

**116. Urgent items**

There were no urgent items considered at the meeting.

**117. Exempt Business**

It was proposed by Cllr J Andrews and seconded by Cllr C Sutton

Decision

That the press and the public be excluded for the following item(s) in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the meaning of paragraphs 3 and 4 of schedule 12 A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

**Reason for taking the item in private**

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

Paragraph 4 - Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.

The live streaming was concluded at this juncture.

**118. Care Dorset: Acquisition of an Operating Care Home**

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care set out the exempt report and proposed an amendment to the report's recommendation (1). This was seconded by Cllr B Wilson. Members discussed the detail of the exempt report and agreed to the variation of the recommendation

Decision (unanimous)

That the recommendations, as amended at the meeting and as set out in the exempt report of 28 January 2025, be approved.

Reason for the decision  
As detailed in the exempt report.

**119. Development of Blandford Waste Management Centre**

The exempt appendix attached associated to the report “Development of Blandford Waste Management Centre” was not discussed. Therefore, the report was discussed in open business as set out in 115 of these minutes.

**Appendix 1 - Public Q&A's**  
**Appendix 2 - Councillor Q&A's**

**Duration of meeting:** 6.30 - 9.06 pm

**Chairman**

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## Public Questions for Cabinet – 28 January 2025

### Question from UNISON (Becky Brookman)

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 undertaken 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?

## **Response from Cllr B Wilson, Cabinet Member for Corporate Development and Transformation**

Thank you for your question regarding Our Future Council business case. We value our workforce's input and are committed to working with all Trade Unions.

We recognise the importance of communication and access to reports. Despite best efforts, final reports were completed on the day of publication. However, we remain committed to sharing, wherever possible, relevant documents in advance to support collaborative working. To this end, we have previously shared reports in advance of Cabinet on 19 November 2024 and Joint Overview Committee on 9 January 2025. We have also been meeting with union colleagues on a fortnightly basis over the past 12 months, ensuring that they are fully aware of how the business case was being shaped.

All data and analysis have been completed robustly with extensive workforce engagement. PwC has provided additional capacity, expert analysis, and significant experience, supporting informed discussions and preparation for next stages.

We continue to engage with our workforce through all employee communications, including opportunity to ask questions and participate in forums, experiencing impressive engagement levels. We are committed to ensuring all voices are heard in line with our principles agreed with Trade Unions.

We will conduct comprehensive equality impact assessments to understand potential impacts on all employees and vulnerable customer groups. These will be completed before any final decisions are made.

The £10 million investment allocated to additional capacity is a best estimate of potential capacity needed and will not be used exclusively for external support where internal skills and capacity exist.

We look forward to Trade Unions supporting our communications and change management principles, including supporting training and development in new skills and technology to build a resilient workforce.

The OFC programme aims to deliver better ways of working to achieve the outcomes and improved productivity clearly articulated in the business case. This is a long-term programme that aims to maintain the sustainability of council services against growing customer need. We are exploring all avenues to enhance revenue and reduce the need for employee reductions.

We are committed to a thorough and transparent process, ensuring all decisions are made responsibly, considerately and with a sustainable future for our employees, organisation and communities in mind.

We appreciate your engagement and hope by working together we can deliver the best outcomes for Dorset Council, its employees and the communities we serve.

### **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?

### **Response from Cllr Nick Ireland**

As many people will no doubt be aware, the government moved a motion to adjourn the second reading of the Climate and Nature bill, which means that it is now unlikely to progress in the current parliamentary session.

This is extremely disappointing, and is I hope not part of a growing trend to keep making the same mistakes that we have in the past, when the needs of nature and our climate are put on the backburner for short-term gain. Needless to say, we would have been supportive of the bill if it had progressed.

I wrote to all of our Dorset MPs to ask that they support the bill, and I am eminently grateful to Vikki Slade, Ed Morello and Simon Hoare for their support on the principles of the bill, again reflecting the cross-party nature of this critical issue.

We have made tackling the climate and nature emergencies one of our top priorities as a council, and how we lead on this issue is something that will resonate for years to come, both within Dorset and how we influence others. The government has stated that as part of the adjournment of the Climate and Action bill, it will make a statement on government progress towards international climate and nature targets within 6 months.

It is important that both this council and our partners hold them to account for this, as we must individually and collectively continue to represent and act as the custodians of our natural environment if we are to put in place the measures that will allow future generations to prosper, and not face the potentially catastrophic impacts of biodiversity loss and climate change.

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**Cabinet – 28 January 2025**

## **Questions from Councillors**

### **1. Question from Hannah Hobbs-Chell**

"With the recent highlight of the IICSA report, and previously the recent and devastating story of Sara Sharif, I would like to ensure that Dorset Council is doing everything in its power to ensure that we, as corporate parents, are protecting and safeguarding all children and young people in Dorset. I would like to see Dorset become one of the leading authorities in CSA and child abuse protection and prevention, and I recognise and appreciate that this good work has already begun with pathfinder and hub work. But there is always more we can do.

I am a victim and survivor, and gave evidence in the IICSA enquiry. I have been following the politics and news for many years, but this most recent highlight has again brought my experience, and that of thousands and thousands of others into the fore. I am also so very relieved that there is finally an announcement that the recommendation of mandatory reporting will become law. This, had it been in place when I was a child and teenager, would most probably have saved me from deeper harm at the hands of my abusers, and from myself. Instead however, multiple agencies that should have protected and then supported me to heal, failed me also over many years, and into adulthood, and have left me with lifelong consequences. They saved my life, but left me with the deepest scars. I would however like to pay credit to individuals within this who clearly cared, and did better, and it is thanks to them and those family and friends who loved and believed me, that I stand here today.

Whilst national implementation of recommendations is essential, and this first implementation is perhaps one of the most critical, there is also much that can be done locally and within local authorities. Indeed places such as Telford have seen very positive results where local initiatives have been implemented. In particular, establishing a victims and survivors panel, who liaise with, help to educate, and make recommendations to local authorities, the police, and NHS, has been praised by victims and local authority partners alike. I am sure that as a Council, we will ensure that we fully fulfil and go above and beyond in terms of implementing national guidance and law, but I would like to ask whether Dorset Council would work to establish a victims and survivors panel that also integrates with healthcare and police agencies, as a first step to ensuring we are one of the leading local authorities for protection and prevention of child abuse. Further, I'd like to ask that following the establishment of a victims and survivors panel, we look at other innovative solutions both as a result of listening to the panel, and to learning from innovation and research across the world, to ensuring that we support victims and survivors, as well as provide robust prevention work, above and beyond the national recommendations wherever possible."

## **Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's, Education and Skills**

The Dorset Safeguarding Children's Partnership have recently undertaken a multi-agency audit of children who had experienced intra familial child sexual abuse, and a workforce survey to provide assurance on our approaches to child sexual abuse, following the publication and recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse report. Work is currently on-going to collate the findings of this work and a final report with recommendations will be presented at the Multi Agency Quality, Practice and Action Group (MAQPAG) in February 2025.

Through the delivery of the Families First for Children Pathfinder, we have strengthened our child protection work through the development of our multi agency child protection teams. This has resulted in more integrated multi-agency working, true multi-agency decision making, and greater multi-agency oversight of performance and practice in child protection, including in relation to child sexual abuse.

Through our Extra Familial Harm Strategy, published in July 2024, we have continued to strengthen our practice around extra familial harm, including child sexual exploitation (sexual abuse). Through the Pathfinder we have invested in contextual safeguarding leads and enhanced our targeted youth work provision to promote relationship-based intervention for young people which responds to need, risk, and harm in their own spaces, including in the community, education provision, and at home. We take a contextual safeguarding approach, working with partners and communities to increase safety within spaces where children and young people spend their time and reduce risk on a community and group basis, not just for individuals. Our contextual safeguarding leads deliver training on the range of extra familial harms, including child sexual exploitation, to our own staff, partners, community groups, education providers, parents, and young people, to promote awareness of child sexual exploitation and other harms outside the home.

Dorset are leading the way with our development of community guardianship and safe spaces through the Pineapple Project, which is a co-produced project looking to respond to violence against women and girls – including sexual harm and exploitation.

We recognise that an increasing area of need is online child sexual exploitation, and we are working closely with partners through the Extra Familial Harm Strategic and Tactical Groups, the Community Safety Partnership and Dorset Police to increase awareness, and to identify and respond to this area of risk and harm.

We are currently working with the Family Rights Group to develop our own 'family advisory board' to work in partnership with children and families with lived experience of our services. Once we have established the family advisory board, we can consider how best to engage with and work in partnership with those with experience of child sexual abuse. This will need very careful consideration, informed by the expertise of our colleagues in Health and STARS (Sexual Trauma and Recovery Service), to ensure that we provide a safe space and to avoid re-traumatising survivors. We will link with other local authorities and review the

progress and impact of the initiative referred to in Telford, so any decisions on our part are fully informed by the learning from their experiences and to inform best practice developments here.

In Dorset, the Sexual Trauma and Recovery Service (STARS) is the primary support offer for children, young people and adults who have experienced child sexual abuse.

## **2. Question from Cllr Belinda Bawden**

I'd like to ask for an opportunity to let members and officers know of the sad death last week of Philip Sankey, who was the Lyme Regis expert on WATAG, the Western Area Transport Group. What Philip didn't know about the public transport service, present and past, wasn't worth knowing. He was always happy to reply instantly to emails or face to face questions with a staggering in-depth knowledge of the history and development of our bus and train services. He was so committed to serving his community and county over decades, that I fear we have lost not only a wonderful local volunteer but a huge fount of knowledge and expertise. So, it is in the spirit of the gentle, kind, deeply conscientious and caring Philip Sankey that I'd like to mark his passing with a question to the Portfolio Holder for Place Services:

### **Question 1**

How can the desires and aspirations of Dorset's residents for a well-connected public transport network which genuinely opens opportunities for work, education, social connection and leisure best be articulated in the design of the new bus franchising responsibilities and how can Dorset Council involve its locally elected representatives and resident experts, for example, WATAG and other area Transport Action Groups, in shaping the best possible public and community transport network that reduces social isolation and rural inequality?

### **Response from the Cabinet Member for Place**

A decision to pursue bus franchising has not been made at this time. Introducing bus franchising will be a very significant decision to take and would require a full understanding of the costs and benefits of implementing this approach. It is also the case that the option of franchising is something that is not currently available to Dorset Council. In the future, the proposed new Buses Bill will enable all Local Authorities to pursue this option if it is the right model for their area. The Bill is currently at the Committee stage in the House of Lords (23/01/2025) and we continue to track its progress with interest.

I am committed to improving the bus network by implementing the council's Bus Service Improvement Plan. With the bus grant recently announced by the Department for Transport for 2025/26, we can begin to deliver new and improved travel options across Dorset. It is through our established Enhanced Partnership that we will make these meaningful changes. I've recently chaired my first Board meeting

with local bus and community transport operators and was encouraged by their openness and the positive quick wins that we identified.

I have asked Cllr. Derek Beer, who has extensive knowledge of the transport network in Dorset, to Chair the Bus User and Stakeholder group which among many participating stakeholder groups includes the Transport Action Groups. We are setting up a BUS Group meeting which will give these groups the opportunity to propose improvements that fit in with the aims of the Dorset BSIP.

### **Question 2 from Cllr Belinda Bawden The Climate and Nature Bill**

Please could the Leader and Portfolio holder for the Environment and Climate Change undertake to ask Cabinet and/or Full Council to pledge Dorset Council's support for the cross-party Climate and Nature Bill?

The CAN Bill makes sure the UK aims to keep global heating down to 1.5°C, which gives us a chance to avoid the worst impacts of climate change; it commits to reversing the destruction of nature by 2030; and calls for a climate and nature assembly to help Government and Parliament develop an emergency strategy to turn policies into local action.

### **Response from the Leader of the Council**

As many people will no doubt be aware, the government moved a motion to adjourn the second reading of the Climate and Nature bill, which means that it is now unlikely to progress in the current parliamentary session.

This is extremely disappointing, and is I hope not part of a growing trend to keep making the same mistakes that we have in the past, when the needs of nature and our climate are put on the backburner for short-term gain. Needless to say, we would have been supportive of the bill if it had progressed.

I wrote to all of our Dorset MPs to ask that they support the bill, and I am eminently grateful to Vikki Slade, Ed Morello and Simon Hoare for their support on the principles of the bill, again reflecting the cross-party nature of this critical issue.

We have made tackling the climate and nature emergencies one of our top priorities as a council, and how we lead on this issue is something that will resonate for years to come, both within Dorset and how we influence others. The government has stated that as part of the adjournment of the Climate and Action bill, it will make a statement on government progress towards international climate and nature targets within 6 months.

It is important that both this council and our partners hold them to account for this, as we must individually and collectively continue to represent and act as the custodians of our natural environment if we are to put in place the measures that will allow future generations to prosper, and not face the potentially catastrophic impacts of biodiversity loss and climate change.