

PLACE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 26 JUNE 2025

Present: Cllrs Nocturin Lacey-Clarke (Chair), Ray Bryan (Vice-Chair), Alex Fuhrmann, Jack Jeanes and Barrie Cooper

Apologies: Cllrs Louie O'Leary, Craig Monks, Rory Major, David Tooke and Sarah Williams

Also present: Cllr Andrew Parry, Cllr Jane Somper, Cllr Alex Brenton, Cllr Belinda Bawden, Cllr Neil Eysenck, Cllr Steve Robinson, Cllr Shane Bartlett and Cllr Richard Biggs

Also present remotely: Cllr Jon Andrews

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

Jan Britton (Executive Director for Places Services), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), Jessica Maskrey (Interim Head of Asset Strategy and Development), Dugald Lockhart (Service Manager Digital Place) and Amy Thomas (Senior Technical Officer)

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

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting 24 April 2025 were updated with additional attendances and agreed as a correct record.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Public Participation

There was no public Participation.

4. Questions from Councillors

There were no questions from Councillors.

5. Empty Properties Update

The Cabinet Member for Property, Assets and Economic Growth introduced the item, explaining the background and current situation regarding empty properties.

The Head of Assets and Property then summarised the main points and findings from the report.

After the presentation, the committee discussed how different types of assets are defined and categorised, including which assets fall into which groups. It was clarified how these empty properties affect the Council's "Grow Our Economy" priority.

The Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee asked for a more detailed report to be brought to a future meeting. This report should include all properties owned by Dorset Council, including empty homes and land.

The committee also requested an update on the previous decision to adopt the Corporate Landlord Model, including progress made so far

6. Digital Connectivity in the Dorset Council Area

Service Manager for Digital Place introduced the item by highlighting the importance of reliable broadband and mobile connectivity across Dorset. He explained that while national policy focuses on overall connectivity figures, the Council is also concerned with the real-life local impact on communities. Although some progress has been made, current commercial and government subsidy investment levels remain below what is needed to meet local demand.

Following the presentation, councillors discussed a range of issues, including:

- The delivery and progress of the BDUK/Wessex Internet contract, and limitations inline with subsidy rules.
- Concerns about reliance on commercial build and the slow pace of deployment in less commercially viable areas.
- Discrepancies between Ofcom data and residents' experiences of mobile coverage, now supported by Streetwave data.
- The need for better coordination between infrastructure providers and planning authorities.
- Opportunities to use council-owned assets (e.g. streetlights, farms, church spires) to support small cell deployments.
- Concerns around lower level of government investment in Dorset compared to other regions.
- The importance of using local case studies and councillor engagement to influence national bodies and improve outcomes.

Recommendations

The Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee requested that the team focus on a case study already identified, to explore how barriers to connectivity were overcome. This should help create a framework that can be used to support improvements in other areas.

The committee requested that the Streetwave data report be split by MP constituency to better understand and address localised connectivity issues. More locally focussed reports can be created on request.

The committee requested progress updates to reflect connectivity improvements on a recurring basis.

7. **Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

The Committee reviewed the forward plan and upcoming items.

8. **Executive Arrangements Forward Plans**

The Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee reviewed the forward plans.

9. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items.

10. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 8.16 pm

Chairman

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