

Cabinet 29 January 2026

Public Participation

Questions

1. Question from James Gillet

PREAMBLE

I have reviewed Section 11.1e of the Transforming Public and Community Transport report, which sets an 'hourly' target for core routes. In the Dorchester and Weymouth areas, busy services like the 1, 2, and 10 already run every 12–15 minutes; reducing these would be a major downgrade for this vital public transport link. Furthermore, residents are frustrated by First's aging fleet of buses and the lack of reliable, frequent direct links to major regional hubs like Poole and Yeovil, which restricts local job opportunities. I also support cheaper fares for 16-25s and a unified ticketing system to modernise our network in line with the high-quality Morebus model seen elsewhere in Dorset.

QUESTION

To achieve the modern vision in Section 4.3, will the Council commit to maintaining 10–15 minute high-frequency targets for busy urban routes across both Dorchester and Weymouth and include requirements for newer vehicles, a restored frequent and direct link to Poole and Yeovil for commuters, and a unified ticketing system rather than applying the lower hourly standard to these vital services?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Place Services

Thank you for your question. The Cabinet report does not propose reducing the frequency of any bus routes including the 1, 2 and 10 in Weymouth. We are seeking to find solutions in rural areas, where services are not commercially viable. Our strategic approach aims to build a more reliable and modern network, including working with operators to protect well used frequent routes, introducing newer and more accessible vehicles, strengthening regional links, and developing simpler and more affordable fares. Community input will be central to shaping the detailed proposals through the Full Business Case and consultation later this year. The next stage will examine these improvements in detail to ensure Dorset's network meets local needs, including the concerns you have raised.

2. Question from Karen Tippens

Statement on Use of Council Tax Where Section 106 Funding Exists

The proposed 12% increase in Shaftesbury Town Council's precept is not being driven by unavoidable costs, but by the use of Council Tax to fund projects that already have allocated Section 106 developer contributions and which, under proper governance, should not be impacting residents' council tax at all.

1. First, the Mampitts Hub.

Dorset Council Cabinet agreed in October 2025 that this project would be subject to strict project cost control and that early drawdown of Section 106 funds would be available. Despite this, over £60,000 of Council Tax has already been used to fund Mampitts Hub costs, with only a partial Section 106 reimbursement claimed. There is no evidence of a ringfenced project account, no clear reconciliation between Council Tax and Section 106 expenditure, and no published cost-control framework, despite Cabinet direction.

2. Second, Wincombe Recreational Park.

Dorset Council Cabinet papers confirm that £200,000 of Section 106 funding has been agreed with Shaftesbury Town Council for this project. Despite this, the Town Council has added £164,000 of Council Tax to the precept for Wincombe, without published project plans, delivery dates, or cost breakdowns. This represents Council Tax being used in place of developer contributions, contrary to the purpose of Section 106.

3. Third, the Youth Club.

There is £128,000 of Section 106 funding allocated, yet the Town Council has added £5,000 of Council Tax for this project. Again, Council Tax is being used where ringfenced developer funding already exists.

In addition, the precept includes:

- £19,000 in 'Professional and Legal' Cost Centre for “Dorset Council devolution”, with no definition, scope, or supporting agreement published.
- £25,000 for High Street traffic management under Ear Marked Reserve, despite Dorset Highways previously indicating that surveys could be undertaken at no cost to the Town Council.

Taken together, these decisions show a pattern where Council Tax is being used as a substitute for Section 106 funding, rather than Section 106 being used to reduce pressure on residents' bills.

This matters because Section 106 contributions are intended to be spent as a priority in towns like Shaftesbury, which have experienced rapid housing development. When substantial Section 106 funding is allocated and available, Council Tax precepts should not be rising to fund the same infrastructure.

Question to Dorset Council Cabinet

Given the Cabinet decision of October 2025 requiring strict cost control on the Mampitts Hub, and given the confirmed allocation of Section 106 funding for Wincombe Recreation Park and the Youth Club, what action will Dorset Council now take to ensure that Section 106 funds are properly ringfenced, transparently accounted for, and used to reduce — rather than increase — Council Tax for Shaftesbury residents

Response from the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning

Thank you for your question. Dorset Council recognises the importance of good partnership working with town and parish councils and other organisations to deliver positive outcomes for Dorset's communities. Therefore, Section 106 funding can be accessed by town and parish councils and some third-party organisations to deliver infrastructure. A protocol exists to support the review of projects and the eligibility of

organisations. This process helps ensure that the transfer of contributions is transparent and fair to all.

Section 106 funding is a form of developer contribution which is secured through the planning process. In some cases, single contributions are insufficient to fund major transport, education, flood or community infrastructure, and new development will only be expected to pay for its fair and reasonable share. The use of s106 funds does not prevent the combined use of other sources of funding, as long as the s106 funding is spent on the infrastructure/purposes for which it was collected. When combined with other relevant contributions, government grants, regional funding or borrowing, s106 funds allow infrastructure to be delivered at scale that genuinely supports growth.

With regard the setting of local Town Council precepts, this decision lies with the Town Councillors so I can't comment on the basis for their decisions nor how they choose to allocate resources.