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DORSET COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 10 FEBRUARY 2026

Present: Cllrs Stella Jones (Chair), Les Fry (Vice-Chair), Jon Andrews, Jindy Atwal, Mike Baker, Shane Bartlett, Belinda Bawden, Laura Beddow, Derek Beer, Matt Bell, Richard Biggs, Louise Bown, Alex Brenton, Ray Bryan, Will Chakawhata, Simon Christopher, Simon Clifford, Richard Crabb, Peter Dickenson, Neil Eysenck, Beryl Ezzard, Scott Florek, Spencer Flower, Alex Fuhrmann, Barry Goringe, Jill Haynes, Sally Holland, Ryan Hope, Rob Hughes, Nick Ireland, Jack Jeanes, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones, Paul Kimber, Chris Kippax, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Robin Legg, Rory Major, Craig Monks, David Morgan, Steve Murcer, David Northam, Louie O'Leary, Jon Orrell, Emma Parker, Mike Parkes, Andrew Parry, Val Potheary, Byron Quayle, Belinda Ridout, Steve Robinson, Pete Roper, David Shortell, Andy Skeats, Jane Somper, Duncan Sowry-House, Andrew Starr, Gary Suttle, Clare Sutton, Roland Tarr, David Taylor, Gill Taylor, Andy Todd, Chris Tomes, David Tooke, James Vitali, Claudia Webb, Kate Wheller, Sarah Williams, Ben Wilson and Carl Woode

Apologies: Cllrs Bridget Bolwell, Dave Bolwell, Piers Brown, Andy Canning, Toni Coombs, Barrie Cooper, Simon Gibson, Hannah Hobbs-Chell, Ryan Holloway, Cathy Lugg and Julie Robinson

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

Jacqui Andrews (Service Manager for Democratic and Electoral Services), Sean Cremer (Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial), Sam Crowe (Director of Public Health), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic & Governance Services Officer), Susan Dallison (Democratic & Governance Services Team Leader), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children), Catherine Howe (Chief Executive), Jennifer Lewis (Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), Antony Nash (Senior Democratic & Governance Services Officer), Megan Rochester (Senior Democratic & Governance Services Officer) and Steven Ford (Corporate Director for Strategy, Performance and Sustainability)

55. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 4th December 2025 were confirmed and signed.

56. Declarations of Interest

Cllr E Parker declared a pecuniary interest in respect of agenda item 14. Cllr Parker did not take part in the debate or vote and left the room when the item was considered.

Cllr C Monks declared a pecuniary interest in respect of agenda item 14. Cllr Monks did not take part in the debate or vote and left the room when the item was considered.

Cllr P Kimber declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Portland foodbank.

Cllr L Beddow declared a pecuniary interest in respect of agenda item 14. Cllr Beddow did not take part in the debate or vote and left the room when the item was considered.

Cllr B Ezzard declared an interest in respect of agenda item 8, as a trustee of the Wareham Youth Club and took part in the debate and vote.

57. Chair's Announcements

The Chair of the Council reported the deaths of three former Councillors and paid tribute to their service. Peter Webb had served as a Member of North Dorset District Council and had been appointed Honorary Alderman in 2013. David Barrett had been a Member of West Dorset District Council from 1996 to 2015 and had served as Mayor of Dorchester in 2007. Ian Gardner had served as a Member of West Dorset District Council from 1991 to 2018 and had also been a Member of Dorset County Council. Members paid their respects and acknowledged the contributions each had made to local government and their communities.

Congratulations were offered on two national awards received by the Council. It was noted that Children's Services had won a national award in the category of Violence Against Women, in recognition of their pilot project delivered in partnership with local businesses and volunteers.

Councillor S Bartlett extended congratulations to the Council's Building Control Service Team, which had been named Best Building Control Team in the country. The judges had commented on the team's hard work and positive engagement. The award had been received shortly after the team had successfully passed a rigorous national assessment. The team was formally congratulated on its achievement.

58. Public Participation - questions

There were no questions from the public.

59. Public participation - petitions and deputations

There were no petitions and deputations received.

60. Announcements and Reports from the Leader of Council and Cabinet Members

The Leader of the Council discussed the recent severe weather and its impact on residents, acknowledging travel difficulties and the ongoing uncertainty, and recognised the community spirit shown. Cllr N Ireland thanked frontline teams and volunteers for supporting residents and vulnerable individuals. Discussions had taken place on flood mitigation, with a report due to be presented to Cabinet the following month. Cllr N Ireland commended the Climate Panel and noted progress on developing an independent climate strategy, with a full-time officer post under consideration. Commitment to strengthening flood management arrangements was highlighted.

The Leader emphasised the importance of working closely with town and parish councils to ensure local knowledge informed decision-making. Additional funding and revenue opportunities were being explored to assist with damage recovery and practical support for residents. Alongside immediate responses, longer-term measures would be pursued to strengthen communities and enhance resilience.

The Cabinet member for Place Commissioned Services noted the unprecedented rainfall on already saturated land and the resulting road closures. He commended the Greenspace Team for clearing debris, the Highways Team for their work, and Harbours staff for their response. He acknowledged that Waste Teams had initially been disrupted but were now operating as normal. He highlighted the proactive efforts of all teams involved.

Cllr S Bartlett, Cabinet member for Planning and Emergency Planning, referred to the Section 19 flood investigation, noting that officers had been asked to carry out a wider review to ensure accountability and actions were taken. He acknowledged shared flooding concerns and confirmed that the Manager of Emergency Planning had been working with town councils, supported by government grant funding, to understand local resilience. He also noted that site allocations covered broad areas and updates had been provided regularly. The Cabinet member highlighted that emergency planning had been central to the Council's response and joined the Chamber in thanking staff for their support and expertise.

Cllr S Clifford, Cabinet member for Finance advised that the Government had recently announced 90% grant funding subject to an approved submission. He noted that while this would reduce interest payments, the Council would still incur expenditure, with potential implications for local taxpayers, and that the Council was still waiting on further details regarding the scheme.

Members expressed hope the grant would be received and raised concerns about the potential cost to taxpayers if it was not. Councillor Clifford confirmed that a bid needed to be submitted to qualify, acknowledged that many councils faced similar situations, and stated that any contingency arrangements would be shared once known. He added that the Council was engaging with MPs and Government Ministers to lobby for the grant's approval.

Members of the council were given the opportunity to ask questions on any key points.

61. Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan Strategy Report

The Cabinet member for Finance and Capital Strategy presented the Budget Strategy and Medium-term Financial Plan (MTPF). Budget speech appended to these minutes.

The Chair invited the Group Leaders to present their replies to the budget proposals, Cllrs A Parry, C Sutton, L Fry, K Wheller. Budget speeches appended to these minutes.

Members debated the item, and the comments included:

- Budget noted as high risk due to reliance on business rates and national financial pressures
- Increased funding for adult social care and vulnerable people
- Dorset's funding considered low; support welcomed for flooding mitigation, housing, transport, and flood resilience initiatives
- Concerns raised that systemic issues, such as flooding, were not fully addressed
- Progress on adult services, transformation, and regeneration commended
- Recurring government-influenced issues and potential impacts on manufacturing highlighted
- Overall, Members acknowledged pressures, responsible allocation, and focus on supporting residents and strengthening Council resilience

Cllr N Ireland stated that the council was taking a different approach, investing in highways, reviewing parking charges and supporting clean green energy jobs. He noted investments in growth, flood management, and improvements to road networks. It was proposed by Cllr S Clifford and seconded by Cllr N Ireland.

In accordance with procedure rule 19.6 (recorded votes at budget meetings) a recorded vote was taken.

Those who voted in favour:

Cllrs J Andrews, J Atwal, M Baker, S Bartlett, B Bawden, D Beer, M Bell, R Biggs, L Bown, A Brenton, W Chakawhata, S Clifford, R Crabb, N Eysenck, B Ezzard, S Florek, L Fry, A Fuhrmann, S Holland, R Hope, R Hughes, N Ireland, J Jeanes, S Jones, p Kimber, C Kippax, R Legg, R Major, D Morgan, D Northam, J Orrell, S Robinson, P Roper, D Sowry-House, A Starr, C Sutton, R Tarr, D Taylor, G Taylor, A Todd, D Tooke, C Webb, K Wheller, S Williams, B Wilson and C Woode

Those who voted against:

Cllrs L Beddow, R Bryan, S Christopher, P Dickenson, B Gorringer, J Haynes, S Jespersen, C Jones, N Lacey-Clarke, C Monks, S Murcer, L O'Leary, E Parker, M Parkes, A Parry, V Potheary, B Quayle, B Rideout, D Shortell, A Skeats, J Somper, G Suttle, C Tomes and J Vitali

Those who abstained:

Cllr S Flower

Following the recorded vote of 46 for, 24 against and 1 abstention the motion was CARRIED.

Decision

- 1) That the revenue budget summarised in Appendix 1 of the report to Cabinet of 29 January 2026, be agreed.
- 2) That the increase in general Council Tax of 2.9985% and 1.9919% in the Social Care Precept, providing a Band D Council Tax figure for Dorset Council of £2,205.90; an overall increase of 4.9904%, be agreed and that the Council Tax resolution in Appendix 2 be agreed.
- 3) That the Council Tax base of 163,765.1 and Band D equivalents (188,374 households in total) agreed by the Section 151 Officer earlier in this budget setting process, be noted.
- 4) 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 3.8%, be noted.
- 5) That the Capital Strategy set out in Appendix 7, be agreed.
- 6) That the “standing items” included with the Capital Programme as set out in Appendix 3 to be report, be agreed.
- 7) That the introduction of three formal gateways for capital projects: (i) Business case approval, (ii) Budget allocation, and (iii) Procurement approval by Cabinet or delegated authority, set out in the capital section of the report to cabinet be agreed.
- 8) That the Treasury Management Strategy set out in Appendix 8 be agreed.
- 9) That the assumptions used to develop the Budget Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), as set out throughout the report to Cabinet, be noted.
- 10) That the recommended balances on earmarked reserves and on general funds, including the minimum level of the general fund, be agreed.
- 11) That the responses to the recommendations and comments made as part of the budget scrutiny process, as set out in Appendix 9, be agreed.
- 12) That the recommendations 2.1.1 and 2.2.2 from 3 December 2025 Harbour Advisory Committee meeting regarding fees and charges, budget and asset management plans, as set out at Appendix 6, be agreed.
- 13) That the fees and charges for 2026/27, as set out in Appendix 10, be agreed.

62. Electoral Review of Dorset Council - Council Size Submission

It was proposed by Cllr N Ireland seconded by Cllr L Fry

Decision

That the Council Size Submission, recommending a council size of 82 Members, to be forwarded to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England for consideration.

63. Shipton Gorge and Loders Community Governance Review - draft recommendations

It was proposed by Cllr N Ireland and seconded by Cllr S Holland.

Decision

That the draft recommendations regarding the parish boundaries for Shipton Gorge and Loders and publication for public consultation from 23 February 2026 to 27 March 2026 be approved. The results of the consultation to be reported to Full Council on 16 April 2026.

64. Statement of Licensing Policy 2026-2031

It was proposed by Cllr G Taylor and seconded by Cllr D Beer.

Decision

- a) That the draft Licensing Policy 2026-2031 be approved.
- b) That the Service Manager for Licensing & Community Safety, in consultation with the Chair of the Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee, be given delegated authority to amend any identified minor typographical errors as necessary.

65. Pay Policy Statement 2026/27

It was proposed by Cllr B Wilson and seconded by Cllr N Ireland.

Decision

- a) That the provisions of the Localism Act and content of the Pay Policy Statement for the 2026/27 financial year, be noted.
- b) That the Pay Policy Statement for 2026/27, be approved.

66. Calendar of Meetings 2026-2027

The Leader of Council presented the calendar of meetings for 2026/27 and proposed its formal adoption. The recommendation was seconded by R Biggs.

Decision

- a) That the calendar of meetings for the period May 2026 to May 2027 be approved.
- b) That, to ensure effective political management, authority be delegated to the Director of Legal and Democratic Services to make any necessary changes to the calendar, in consultation with the appropriate Chair and Vice-Chair

67. Motion on Notice - Social Housing

Cllrs S Flower, L Beddow, E Parker, C Monks and S Christopher left the room at 20:48.

Cllr L O'Leary presented the motion on notice which was seconded by Cllr C Tomes.

"We call on all registered providers of social housing operating in the Dorset Council area to review their disposal policies, with a renewed focus on regular,

long-term maintenance of properties to prevent them deteriorating to a level that leads to disposal.

The disposal of social housing in rural and semi-rural areas can be highly damaging to communities and force local people out of their home neighbourhoods.

Registered providers, when established, were given a duty to look after these properties on behalf of the people of this county.

We ask that they set out long-term plans to maintain their existing housing stock in Dorset's communities, through early intervention and sustained long-term investment".

Cllr G Taylor proposed the following amendment, and this was seconded by Cllr B Wilson.

"That:

This Council recognises that Registered Providers may, in some circumstances, need to dispose of housing stock. However, we will continue to rigorously scrutinise all proposed disposals to ensure they are genuinely necessary and in the best interest of Dorset's communities.

Where disposal is unavoidable, we call on Registered Providers to offer first refusal to local residents who intent to live in the property, rather than pursuing routes that may increase the number of second homes or holiday lets.

Furthermore, this council requires that any disposed housing stock is replaced with equivalent homes within the same community, ensuring that local housing capacity is maintained".

Members debated the amendment proposed.

Cllr G Taylor, Cabinet member for Health and Housing addressed the Council and responded to the comments before it was put to the vote. On being put to the vote the amendment was CARRIED.

In accordance with procedure rule 8.1, members of the council voted to continue the meeting beyond 3 hours until the business on the agenda was concluded.

The Chair of the Council invited Members to propose any further amendments. Cllr L O'Leary proposed a further amendment requesting that all registered providers review their policy on property disposals. Cllr K Wheller seconded the amendment.

The amendment was put to the vote and was CARRIED

The substantive motion was put to the vote

Decision

That:

This Council recognises that Registered Providers may, in some circumstances, need to dispose of housing stock. However, we will continue to rigorously scrutinise all proposed disposals to ensure they are genuinely necessary and in the best interest of Dorset's communities.

Where disposal is unavoidable, we call on Registered Providers to offer first refusal to local residents who intent to live in the property, rather than pursuing routes that may increase the number of second homes or holiday lets.

Furthermore, this council requires that any disposed housing stock is replaced with equivalent homes within the same community, ensuring that local housing capacity is maintained.

That we call on all Registered Providers of social housing in the Dorset Council area to review their disposal policies.

68. Questions from Councillors

There were 6 questions from councillors and a copy of these, along with the responses, are set out in Appendix one to these minutes.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor S Flower, the Cabinet Member for Planning advised that any substantive changes to the planning framework would require amendments to national legislation by the Government.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor R Bryan regarding response times, the Cabinet Member for Planning advised that he would meet with Cllr R Bryan outside of the meeting.

Cllr R Bryan raised a supplementary question, stating that the additional highways funding announced that evening was no more than expected. He noted that it did not resolve ongoing issues relating to road sweeping and suggested that consideration be given to how Waste Services could contribute to this work. He emphasised the importance of clearing gullies to prevent further damage.

Cllr J Andrews, Cabinet member for Place Services, responded that further discussions on the issue would take place.

Councillor Questions and Responses

69. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

70. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 10.01 pm

Chair

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Full Council – 10 February 2026

Questions submitted by Councillors

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr J Somper

Hate crimes continue to be reported across Dorset on multiple strands, including antisemitism, racism, disability-related hate, sexual orientation, and religion. In August 2025, antisemitic incidents were reported in neighbouring Bournemouth, including the ultimate alarming symbol, a swastika graffitied on to the walls of the home of a religious leader and an assault on a Jewish teenager with an air weapon, following which Dorset Police increased patrols and reassurance for Jewish communities.

There has been a deeply concerning escalation in antisemitic hate crimes in the UK and internationally, including the fatal attack in December at Bondi Beach in Australia and an attack at a synagogue in Manchester, occurring as Jewish people were travelling to worship or to celebrate. These events have understandably heightened anxiety within Jewish communities.

Members of Dorset Council were contacted by Dorset Police seeking information about any Jewish community events during Hanukah in December. This was done to provide reassurance and ensure appropriate safeguarding. While welcome, this highlights the ongoing and immediate nature of the risk faced by some communities at moments of religious and cultural significance.

Dorset Police data shows that hate crime continues to be recorded across the county, including racially motivated offences, disability-related incidents, and religion-based hate crime.

Given the urgency of these developments, will the Cabinet Member commit to asking the Dorset Community Safety Partnership to designate hate crime prevention as a specific priority within its Community Safety Plan, including improved reporting, victim support, community engagement, and visible reassurance for communities at increased risk?

Response by Cllr G Taylor

Thank you, Cllr Somper, for your question and for highlighting this important issue.

A hate crime is when any criminal offence, for example, an assault or harassment, is perceived to be motivated by hostility or prejudice. Reports of hate crime in the

Dorset Council area are low but when it does happen it has a devastating impact on victims and communities.

The Council and its partners are committed to supporting victims and preventing hate crime from happening in the first place. This includes raising awareness, helping people report issues and signposting victims to support services.

There is a commitment in the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy to put in place a strategy to strengthen community cohesion.

The Council also undertakes work to prevent violent extremism including assessing and responding to risks, raising awareness, providing training for officers and members and leading preventative work including in relation to individuals who are at risk of becoming radicalised.

The Dorset Community Safety Partnership brings together the Council and organisations including the Police, NHS Dorset, Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Authority and the Probation Service to work together to understand and tackle community safety issues in our area.

Each year, the Partnership must use information and data to complete an objective assessment of issues. This assessment must then be used to determine priority areas that are set out in a three-year community safety plan.

The Partnership is in the process of writing its next Community Safety Plan and I will discuss the inclusion of hate crime prevention with partners at our next meeting in March.

Question 2 – submitted by Cllr S Flower

Material Planning Development Management Considerations – Viability

One of the key material considerations currently is scheme viability. This council and predecessor councils have experienced post planning application approval, submissions by developers claiming that the approved housing development would no longer be viable if the obligation for social housing allocation for rent or shared equity is retained in the scheme.

With the support of a spreadsheet, it is possible for developers to 'prove' that the site is no longer viable. This results in the loss of much needed housing for local people, something I am aware has cross-party support in this chamber.

The imposition of yet another non-negotiable levy of £400 per dwelling to cater for the New Forest Recreational Mitigation Strategy adds another cost burden, which could well further impact on the viability of schemes, which are within the designated zone, whilst bringing no direct benefit to the people of Dorset.

When the New Forest Recreation Mitigation Strategy was brought to the 9 December Cabinet, I asked a question concerning the impact on scheme viability. The response was that any financial impact would be discounted from the land value. This is interesting in as much as another application came back to the 19 November Eastern Area Planning Committee [one of several cases in the past] with a spreadsheet claiming that the scheme was no longer viable. I do not recall that discounting of the land value was a factor in this case. The question was asked whether there was a difference between the land value when permission was originally granted and the figure quoted on the spreadsheet; unfortunately, this information was not available.

So, my question is in two parts:

1. Will officers commit to a piece of work to analyse the impact of developer contributions and deliverability of schemes, with a clear link to the provision of social housing in accordance with the aims and aspiration of this council's legacy Local Plans, the Dorset Local Plan once adopted and the Dorset Plan which has housing as a key feature.
2. In future can Area Planning Committees be made aware of the viability, of development schemes, which include a percentage of social housing, beyond just words. Planning Committee reports should include a detailed spreadsheet setting out the financial considerations, when planning applications are submitted in the first instance. This would ensure that scheme viability is established [with contingencies] prior to the granting of planning permission.

Thank you, Madam Chairman

Response by Cllr S Bartlett

Q1: Work on development viability to support the new Local Plan has already been commissioned. This will consider the impact of developer contributions and affordable housing provision, to inform policy decisions in the new plan and make sure that they are backed up by sound evidence.

Q2: Thank you for your question. While the National Planning Policy Framework expects financial viability to be tested at the plan-making stage, it recognises that there may be occasions where costs or material changes in circumstance occur. In Dorset, much of the Council area relies on local plans that were adopted prior to a series of known changes affecting viability, including global economic impacts, inflation, nutrient neutrality and biodiversity net gain costs. As such the Council cannot prevent the submission of viability evidence at the decision-making stage.

National policy guidance sets out a recommended approach for viability assessments, including the use of standardised inputs. These assessments are then independently reviewed on behalf of the Council (at the applicant's cost) and made publicly available. However, national policy guidance does not require or encourage full financial spreadsheets so we cannot insist on these. Nevertheless, reports to committee set out gross development value, costs, profit levels, and the justification for any deviation from policy expectations in accordance with national requirements. This approach ensures robust and transparent decision-making.

Question 3 – submitted by Cllr S Flower

Dorset Local Plan – Regs 19 draft plan preparation

I refer to a recent Parliamentary Question to the Planning Minister from a Dorset MP, which elicited, what could be taken as an important clarification of national planning policy. The Minister confirmed that Local Authorities should, and I quote: ***“make an assessment of the number of new homes that can be provided in their area... justified by evidence on land availability, constraints on development such as National Landscapes and areas at risk of flooding, and other relevant matters. Local Plans must be deliverable, based on proportionate evidence, and consistent with national policy, whilst taking the views of local people into account.”***

At face value, this response could be seen as giving encouragement for Dorset Council to push back on the rather simplistic aim of meeting the imposed massively increased housing targets set by Government. These arbitrary targets don't in any way relate to the needs and aspirations of the people of Dorset.

The major constraints in the Dorset Council area must surely be flooding risk, 400m habitats zones, green belt and National Landscapes, which is clearly why certain sites have to be excluded. As Members in this chamber will be aware there are huge community concerns regarding these matters, which surely have been expressed in responses to recent Regs 18 Land Allocations public consultation.

So, given the Minster's response, my question is whether this was simply a re-quote of the NPPF or is this cause for optimism. Does this Council still need to take account of the critical part of the sentence in para.62 of the NPPF, which includes reference to the local housing needs assessment quote '***should be conducted using the standard method for calculating housing numbers***'.

Can members in this chamber and the communities of Dorset be reassured that due weight will be applied, and consideration given, when taking account of local views and concerns during the sifting process, regarding which sites will be included or excluded during Dorset Council Draft Local Plan preparation.

Thank you, Madam Chairman

Response by Cllr S Bartlett

The Local Plan must take account of the National Planning Policy Framework, including the reference in paragraph 62 to using the standard method for calculating housing needs. If we are unable to meet the standard method numbers in our plan due to the constraints, then we would need to be able to demonstrate this with robust evidence, and would need to show that we had considered all other options including asking if adjoining councils were able to meet any of our need. Following the local plan consultation, we are assessing all the consultation responses and undertaking further work on the site options in order to inform these decisions. Any planning considerations raised by communities will be taken into account as will other issues, in preparing the plan. Once the plan is submitted, the plan will be examined at publicly accessible hearing sessions where the balance of planning considerations will be weighed up by an independently appointed inspector.

Question 4 – submitted by Cllr R Bryan

My question is for the Cabinet Member for planning

On the 14 January I attended the Eastern Planning Committee and had the opportunity to speak to the Corporate Director for Planning about a local planning issue.

I requested details of existing planning and any extant planning permissions on the site in question, which is causing significant issues for my residents; Having already sent emails requesting this information.

With the investment in a new planning system following the formation of the unitary council I am surprised just how long it has taken to even get an acknowledgement of my request.

As recently as Monday 2nd February I was told that I should receive an email with the details of planning permissions, both current and historic and if not received a written response I was to inform the writer as to the failure to deliver the details I had requested.

As from today the site in question is running yet another business that does not have planning permission.

My question is, what does the Cabinet Member feel is a reasonable time for an elected member to receive acknowledgement of their request for information, bearing in mind the officer member protocol.

Thank you, Madam Chairman,

Response by Cllr S Bartlett

Thank you for your question and I am sorry that you experienced a delay in your response. I understand that the Corporate Director has apologised to you separately for this, and that the information has since been provided to you. While it is unfortunate that there was a delay, I am informed that this arose from a miscommunication in relaying the request to officers. The request for information related to a site with a detailed planning history and officers will be happy to speak with you directly about any specific queries you have in relation to this.

Regarding any allegations of breaches of planning control, these can be reported directly using the online enforcement portal on the Council's website as this will ensure the case is logged, prioritised and investigated accordingly.

Question 5 – submitted by Cllr R Bryan

Can I ask the Cabinet Member for Place what plans are in place to clear the drains and gullies to allow for the dispersal of the huge amounts of ground water we have experienced during the last week.

I requested information as to how much we spend on road sweeping and drain clearance; I did receive that information within 36 hrs. This information worryingly demonstrated that we do not have separate budget for this important front-line service. It also revealed that staff employed to deal with drains and road sweeping are often transferred to waste collection when there is a short-term lack of drivers for the HGV waste collection vehicles.

During my time as Portfolio Holder for Highway put forward a suggestion for an Edge-to-Edge review, with the sole purpose of keeping roads and walkways clear of debris that blocks the drains, which would also have the benefit of reduce highway maintenance costs.

During the last few days, the weather has been exceptionable wet to say the least, but unless we keep drains and roadside gullies clear then flooding and the subsequent highway damage will always be an issue.

Under the previous Dorset County Council, the decision was made to reduce the budget on highways maintenance by circa £183 K by reducing the road sweeping and drains clearance. The outcome of this rather short-sighted decision was damage to highway surfaces. I am aware that this incurred a cost of over £1 million to remedy. Hence my request for a full review.

Without the budget to clear drains and gullies the situation will only get worse. In the 2026/27 budget I cannot identify any financial committed to clear the roads of the weeds and get the drains and gulleys clear, which would therefore avoiding costly highway repairs and ensure roads kept open for the motorist.

So, my question is, what plans are in place to deal with the issue I have outlined.

Thank you, Madam Chairman,

Response by Cllr J Andrews

Thank you Cllr Bryan. Keeping our roads clear of water is vitally important to maintain connectivity, support our communities and enable our economy to grow. Good drainage also helps our roads to last longer, reducing the amount of work we need to do fixing and replacing roads. In the budget that we have put forward, we have increased the amount we will be spending on highway maintenance. This will further increase our resilience when we see exceptional storms like Chandra.

The immediate response to the unprecedented conditions caused by the recent storms is ongoing. The storm water has washed sand and gravel into our drains and we're prioritising the worst affected areas, starting with the main road network. Our own gully emptiers are already working hard on this and we are increasing our resources by bringing in extra drainage crews from our local contractors.

In the longer term, we have already committed to increasing the proactive drainage clearance programme and we are procuring an additional gully emptier to strengthen our resilience to climate change. Furthermore, I would like to thank Cllr Bryan for his work helping to initiate the Hedge to Hedge review. Through this programme we are

introducing better digital management of our highway and greenspace assets as we move to the new Symology system. An integrated asset management plan is being developed encompassing all Hedge to Hedge assets, and a coordinating group has been setup ensuring that programmes of work covering verge cutting, litter clearing, street sweeping and road resurfacing are all interconnected.

Question 6 – submitted by Cllr J Vitali

To ask the Cabinet Member for Property and Assets how Dorset Council proposes to address persistent issues with Shepherd's Close County Farm in Marnhull, and:

- a) To set out what immediate actions are to be taken to reduce agricultural runoff and pollutants from running into neighbouring properties, and the timelines for those interventions;
- b) To set out the longer term plans for investment in the farm and support for the tenant;
- c) To explain why it has taken some two years to address issues raised by adjacent residents and the ward member;
- d) To explain why his department's communications with the ward member have been so inadequate.

Response by Cllr R Biggs

Thank you, Councillor Vitali.

Dorset Council recognises the ongoing concerns about Shepherd's Close County Farm, and we are now taking firm action to resolve them.

First, on the immediate issue of agricultural runoff: an order for the necessary drainage and containment works has been placed, contractors are due to start on site imminently, and the programme is expected to take around six weeks. These works are designed to stop pollutants leaving the farm boundary and provide a lasting solution for neighbouring properties.

Second, on longer-term investment, the holding is being reviewed as part of our wider County Farms Estate programme in line with the Council's Farms Estate Strategy approved by Cabinet in October 2025. A condition survey and planned preventative maintenance report for the asset are informing this review, which includes assessing building, drainage and land-management improvements, and ensuring the tenant has the support needed to operate the farm sustainably.

On the question of delay, the team accepts that the time taken has been too long. Resourcing pressures and competing priorities contributed to this, but residents and members should not have had to wait. Finally, the team also accepts that communication with the ward member has fallen short. This is linked to capacity

challenges within the service, and recruitment is under way to strengthen the team and improve responsiveness.

We are committed to resolving the issues at Shepherd's Close and improving the service moving forward.

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