

Full Council – 16 April 2026

Questions submitted by Councillors

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr L Fry

How did the Council get this so wrong??

Over the past couple of weeks roadworks have been taking place at the Queens Ave / Maud Road junction in Dorchester. The work undertaken is to bury the electric cables and gas pipes deeper into the ground, ahead of the road improvements due in the school summer holidays. Queens Ave is a historic tree lined road, with mature lime trees close to the roads edge and junctions.

The Councils Policy is that any ground works undertaken near the base of mature trees must be dug by hand to prevent any damage, especially root damage to the tree. This is what is insisted of all developers

This work caused all the roots to be damaged, severed from the tree trunk. This has resulted in the tree becoming unsafe and will need to be taken down. The loss of this mature tree was totally preventable, had the work been undertaken in accordance with the agreed procedure.

Questions

How taking into account the Councils Policy of ground works around mature trees, was the ground at the base of a mature lime tree not dug by hand to protect the roots?

What can be done to prevent this happening again?

Response by Cllr J Andrews

I have spoken to the Executive Director for Place and he says “We’re very sorry this work led to the loss of a mature lime tree. I have made clear to the Executive Director that should not have happened.

“The council is clear that work near established trees should be dug by hand to protect the roots. In this case, that did not happen as it should have. The right checks weren’t followed, and we got it wrong.

“The work was done during the Easter holidays to prepare for a new pedestrian crossing near The Thomas Hardy School. Electricity cables needed to be lowered, working with SSE. The planned route had to change to avoid a gas pipe, and during that work the tree’s roots were damaged.

“Expert advice has now confirmed the tree is unsafe and will need to be removed. It will be replaced.

To stop this happening again, a full review is already underway. We are reinforcing clear instructions with staff and contractors so agreed ways of working around trees are followed every time.

Dorset Council has made nature recovery a clear priority. Over the past two years, nearly 5,000 trees have been planted on Council owned land, as highlighted in our Biodiversity Report. In 2024, the Council declared a Nature Emergency and is now delivering on that commitment, including through the Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which sets out how we will protect and restore habitats while supporting communities and wellbeing across the county.

Question 2 – submitted by Cllr M Parkes & Cllr C Lugg

School crossing patrol

Whilst we are extremely pleased with the two new pedestrian crossings, we are very disappointed that the school crossing patrol will be withdrawn in Church Road, Ferndown at the end of the summer term.

The crossings remain extremely busy serving children from the first, middle and upper schools which is compounded by ongoing dangerous parking at the start and end of the school day.

Can the cabinet member explain the rationale for withdrawal of the crossing patrol and if it is a funding-based decision whether it would be possible to remain if funded by other sources such as the Town Council?

Response by Cllr J Andrews

We're pleased that the two new zebra crossings are being welcomed by the community. They're there to make it safer for children and pedestrians.

Where a zebra crossing is installed, a school crossing patrol does not operate at the same place. Drivers are already required by law to stop at a zebra crossing. Having a patrol there as well can confuse drivers and increase risk rather than reduce it.

For that reason, when a zebra crossing replaces a location previously covered by a patrol, the patrol is withdrawn from that point. This is not a funding decision.

The crossings in Ferndown provide a safe, permanent crossing at all times of day and throughout the year, not just at school times.

School crossing patrols are valued, and Dorset Council continues to fund them where they are still needed and meet our criteria. Communities can choose to fund a patrol at other locations, but not at a zebra crossing.

We also recognise concerns about parking at school drop-off and pick-up times. We continue to work with schools and families to encourage safer behaviour and reduce congestion around schools.

Question 3 – submitted by Cllr J Orrell

Does the Leader agree with me that the pension fund should make its investment decisions not just on money alone but also on moral, ethical and ecological grounds, investing positively in wind and solar and not choosing to invest in polluting fossil fuels and arms manufacturers that enable genocide in Gaza?

Response by Cllr N Ireland

Yes. I do agree that responsible investment requires consideration of ethical, environmental and social factors alongside financial ones, particularly where they present material long-term risks. Climate change and environmental degradation are recognised financial risks, and the Pension Fund already reflects this within its responsible investment approach.

Several LGPS funds in England have adopted formal exclusion or divestment policies, and legal advice provided to LGPS administering authorities confirms that ethical and sustainability considerations may be considered.

There are examples of Ethical, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) and fossil free funds that have delivered returns broadly in line with conventional funds over medium and long-term periods and tend to show equal or lower downside risk together with lower volatility, largely due to reduced exposure to high-risk sectors.

In short, the evidence does not necessarily show that ethical or fossil free investment underperforms. In fact, over the long term it performs broadly the same, often with lower downside risk. The idea that councils must choose between values and returns is no longer supported by the data.

The Pension Fund Committee will formally review its Investment Strategy later this year and will seek scheme members' views on the role of nonfinancial considerations within the framework of its fiduciary duties.

As of May, elected members of this council can join Dorset Council's pension scheme and therefore will be eligible to engage with said review.

Question 4 submitted by Cllr R Legg

An Osborne resident has been in dispute with the highway authority about the cause of flooding to his home since before the formation of Dorset Council in 2019. The dispute has twice been considered by the Ombudsman and three successive Members of Parliament have made representations on his behalf. The flooding episodes have increased his household insurance premiums and blighted his ability to sell his house. If the authority is determined to maintain its original position as notified to Edward Morello MP in the last few weeks will, it now make all the files and correspondence relating to the dispute open for inspection, including electronic communications, internal memos, and communications with the Ombudsman and MPs?

Response by Cllr J Andrews

Cllr Legg is correct that the dispute he refers to goes back many years and predates the existence of this Council.

Both the Council and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman believe this to be a legal disagreement. Having issued a final decision, the Ombudsman has decided not to respond to further correspondence from the resident.

Like anyone else the resident is entitled to make a freedom of information request and if they are dissatisfied with our response the resident can ask the Information Commissioners Office to carry out a review.

Question 5 submitted by Cllr R Legg

At a time when the Climate Emergency is increasing the occurrence of devastating heathland fires and flooding incidents in our county the proposed closure of four fire stations appears profoundly ill judged. Will the authority's Emergency Planning Team explore in what way community resilience to emergency situations can be supported by retaining the experience and enthusiasm of volunteer firefighters in those communities whose fire stations are threatened by closure?

Response by Cllr S Bartlett

The Dorset Local Resilience Forum has a Community Resilience Group, supported by multi agency partners. The Council's Emergency Management and Resilience Team will feed Councillor Legg's suggestion into that forum, alongside the wider work that is underway to enhance community resilience. Due to sensitivity around the present situation of the Fire Authority I am happy to meet Cllr Legg outside of this meeting with officers to discuss his concerns further should he wish to do so.

Question 6 submitted by Cllr C Monks

Will Dorset Council allocate dedicated funding to support Prout Bridge, recognising that it delivers many of the same preventative and family-support functions as Council Family Hubs, despite currently receiving no direct financial support?

Response by Cllr Sutton

Thank you for your question regarding whether Dorset Council will allocate dedicated funding to support the Prout Bridge Project.

Dorset Council recognises and highly values the significant preventative, wellbeing and family-support role played by voluntary and community sector organisations across the county, including the Prout Bridge Project. The work delivered by Prout Bridge reflects many of the principles we seek to promote across the wider system, including trusted relationships, accessibility, community-based provision and early intervention to support positive outcomes for children and young people.

However, it is important to be clear that funding provided to Dorset Council through the Best Start in Life and Family Hub programme is governed by national policy, strategy and service specifications, rather than local discretion. This funding is issued with clear conditions and is committed to delivering a nationally defined Family Hub model, including universal and targeted services focused on pregnancy, infancy and early childhood. A central objective of the programme is to improve early outcomes such children reaching a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, reflecting the critical importance of the earliest years in shaping long-term life chances.

While the Prout Bridge Project's work is highly valued, its core delivery is focused primarily on youth work and mental health support for older children and young people, including targeted youth clubs, mentoring and wellbeing interventions for those aged approximately 8 to 25. This important provision sits largely within the adolescent and youth support space, rather than the early-years remit that Best Start Family Hub funding is designed to address. As a result, Best Start Family Hub funding cannot be allocated on a discretionary basis to individual organisations delivering aligned but non-commissioned activity outside of the approved Family Hub network and national programme requirements.

That said, Dorset Council remains committed to supporting strong community-led prevention and early help through other appropriate local mechanisms. Local Alliance Groups (LAGs) provide a transparent, place-based route for voluntary and community organisations to apply for council funding on a project basis. LAG funding is specifically intended to support early help, prevention and community responses

that align with local need and complement the wider Best Start, Family Hub and Early Help system. The Prout Bridge Project is therefore eligible to apply for LAG funding for specific projects through this route.

Further information on Local Alliance Group funding and the application process is publicly available, and organisations are actively encouraged to bring forward proposals through this mechanism. Details can be found here: [Local Alliance Group funding for projects - Dorset Council](#)

Furthermore, Prout Bridge is also able to apply to the Dorset Youth Fund, which I am aware that you have successfully applied to previously. The £200k Youth Grant for 2026-27 opens for applications on 30th April, with a focus on supporting a range of positive activities for young people, including support for those whose needs might otherwise escalate. More information can be found on this [link](#)

Question 7 submitted by Cllr C Monks

Following the Council's recent announcement of additional funding for flood prevention, what future flood defence works are proposed for Beaminster ward, and what is the anticipated timeframe for their delivery?

Response by Cllr J Andrews

Dorset, including Beaminster, is already benefiting from the council's extra investment in flood prevention, including the addition of another gully-emptying vehicle to help reduce surface water flooding.

Alongside this, further work with local communities is already underway to better understand where flooding happens and why. This work will continue over the summer.

Once that work is complete, we will be able to confirm what further flood defence measures are needed in Beaminster and set out a clear programme and timescales for delivery.

The aim is to make sure any future works are properly targeted and will make a real difference.

Question 8 submitted by Cllr Louie O'Leary

Reporting of broken glass

Smashed glass has been a growing problem in parts of my ward, with everything from broken bottles to smashed lights being the cause. While not as obviously serious as syringes and needles, it is far more serious than general litter. I have tried reporting smashed glass via normal litter reporting but often have had to deal with it

myself due to the length of time it takes for a response. Will the council create a new self-report portal that makes this a greater priority for the sake of both residents and animals?

Response by Cllr J Andrews

Thank you for raising this. I wasn't aware that broken glass was a recurring issue in parts of your ward, so it's helpful to have it flagged.

At the moment, broken glass is reported under general litter. Creating a brand-new reporting category would take time and would not be a quick fix.

That said, I've asked officers who assess street cleansing reports to actively look out for any reports involving broken glass and to prioritise them where there is a clear risk to people or animals.

We will monitor how this approach works and whether response times improve, and we'll keep under review whether changes to the reporting system are needed in the longer term.

Question 9 submitted by Cllr Louie O'Leary

Weymouth Entrance improvements

The council has made the regeneration of Weymouth and Portland a major issue for this administration. We have heard on several occasions big new ideas and plans for Weymouth, including leisure, energy, and high-tech ambitions. However, while these are no doubt exciting possibilities, there are less ambitious but important things that would make a major impact. The main route into Weymouth runs into my ward, the Weymouth relief road. This road is in major need of beautification and improvement. Graffiti, ugly boarding, dirty signs often obscured by overgrown scrub, and a lack of imagination plague the gateway to Weymouth. Will the council commit to a tidy-up and overall improvement to the main entrance to Weymouth.

Response by Cllr Jon Andrews

I agree that the Weymouth Relief Road is the main gateway into the town, and at the moment it does not look as good as it should.

While longer-term regeneration projects matter, everyday things like how clean, tidy and welcoming a place feels also make a real difference.

Parts of the relief road have clearly deteriorated over time. Responsibility is split across different council teams and, in some places, landowners, but that won't stop us taking action.

Our Community Highway officers are preparing for this work to begin. That will include clearing overgrown areas, removing graffiti, and reviewing signs, barriers and fencing, so poor or unnecessary features can be improved or removed.

This work will be taken forward using existing budgets where possible and linked to wider transport and regeneration work. Local ward councillors will be involved as plans develop.

We accept that relatively small, practical improvements here are achievable and would make an immediate difference - and that work should begin.