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CABINET

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 19 MAY 2026

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

Present remotely: Cllrs

Apologies: Cllrs

Also present: Cllr Mike Parkes, Cllr Gary Suttle and Cllr Chris Tomes

Also present remotely: Cllr Ryan Hope, Cllr Louise Bown, Cllr Alex Brenton, Cllr Rob Hughes, Cllr Carole Jones, Cllr Paul Kimber, Cllr Chris Kippax, Cllr Cathy Lugg, Cllr David Morgan, Cllr Steve Murcer, Cllr Andy Skeats, Cllr Andy Todd and Cllr Kate Wheller

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

Lisa Cotton (Interim Executive Director - Modernisation and Customer Delivery), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic & Governance Services Officer), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director - Children's Services), Grace Evans (Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Richard Freed (Service Manager for Commercial and Procurement), Steven Ford (Assistant Chief Executive), Catherine Howe (Chief Executive), Julia Ingram (Director - Adult Social Care), Rachel Partridge (Deputy Director of Public Health) and Jack Wiltshire (Corporate Director for Highways and Engineering)

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

Sean Cremer (Director - Resources (Section 151 Officer))

1. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest to report.

3. **Public Participation**

There was one question from the public. A copy of the full question and the detailed response is set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

4. **Questions from Councillors**

There was one question from Councillor R Crabb; this along with the response is set out in Appendix 2 to these minutes.

5. Forward Plan

The draft Cabinet Forward Plan for June 2026 was received and noted.

6. 2026 Flood Investigation Studies

The Cabinet Member for Place Services advised that the report outlined how Dorset Council was working with communities to learn from the significant flooding experienced during the winter of 2025-26 and to strengthen local resilience for the future. A £9.25 million programme was underway, following the widespread disruption caused by exceptional rainfall, including Storm Chandra.

As the Lead Local Flood Authority, the Council proposed a clear approach to investigating flooding through strategic and community-level report. Working closely with residents and partners, this would focus on practical actions, immediate improvements and longer-term solutions to help communities better prepare for future challenges.

It was proposed by Cllr J Andrews and seconded by Cllr M Bell

Decision

- (a) That the approach to the flooding investigations set out in the report of 19 May 2026, including the use of Strategic Flood Investigations and Community Flood Reviews in accordance with the proposed framework, be approved.
- (b) That the areas for flooding investigations (as set out in Appendix A of the report), be approved, comprising:
 - a. A Dorset-wide strategic overview report that looks at flooding issues in Dorset's three main river catchment areas.
 - b. Strategic/Detailed Flood Investigations in accordance with the proposed criteria described in this report.
 - c. Community Flood Reviews where a Section 19 investigation is otherwise considered appropriate.
- (c) That a capital budget of £5 million be allocated for flooding resilience measures, including but not limited to addressing the outcomes of Section 19 investigations; and
- (d) Authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Regeneration, Infrastructure and Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Services and the Section 151 Officer, to authorise expenditure from that capital budget, with any individual scheme with a value exceeding £500,000 to be reported to Cabinet for specific approval.

Reason for the decision

To fulfil Dorset Council's statutory duty to investigate significant flooding while providing clear, localised guidance, coordinating partner action across catchments and highways, and targeting evidence-based investment to strengthen flood resilience and secure additional funding.

7. **Green Seafront Ground Stabilisation & Shore Road Improvement Projects - Funding Request**

The Cabinet Member for Place Services introduced the report highlighting the importance of Swanage's seafront to the town's identity, economy and community, and the growing risks it faced from ground instability, accessibility, challenges and climate change.

He advised that Dorset Council and Swanage Town Council had worked in partnership to bring forward two complementary projects to address these issues.

The Leader of the Council welcomed Cllr G Suttle and Cllr C Tomes as the local ward members for Swanage. They expressed their support for the proposal, highlighting the benefits of both the Green Seafront project along with the Shore Road project that would enhance pedestrian safety and the quality of a key seafront route.

Members acknowledged that these schemes represented a coordinated £5 million investment by Dorset Council, to support wider funding secured by the Town Council ensuring that Swanage could continue to thrive for residents, visitors and the wider community.

It was proposed by Cllr J Andrews and seconded by Cllr B Wilson.

Decision

- (a) That funding of £2.5 million as a capital grant for the New Option of Swanage Town Council's Green Seafront Ground Stabilisation Project be approved; and, authority be delegated to agree the terms and enter into a grant agreement for this purpose to the Executive Director for Regeneration, Infrastructure and Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Services and Dorset Council's Section 151 Officer.
- (b) That the allocation of £2.5 million funding from the Local Transport Grant for the Shore Road Highway Improvement Project, be approved; and, authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Regeneration, Infrastructure and Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Services to update the Highway Improvements Capital Programme.

Reason for the decision

The decision promotes targeted investment in two complementary Swanage seafront projects that enhance safety, accessibility and public spaces while strengthening coastal resilience, supporting communities and boosting the local economy.

8. **Modern sustainable unitary - reimagining the role of Dorset Council**

The Leader of the Council introduced the report stating that Dorset Council was operating in a time of significant change. The demand for services was rising, resources remained limited, and expectations of public institutions were shifting. Alongside this social, technological and policy change was accelerating, meaning traditional ways of working were no longer sufficient to meet the needs of residents or sustain services in the long term.

In response to a question about duplication of work and the potential for a mechanism enabling councillors to report such issues to the relevant officers, the Leader agreed to take the matter away for further consideration.

The Chief Executive advised that the council had an ambitious plan and to succeed it must be outcome focused, aligned across services and with its partners.

Cabinet Members unanimously spoke in support of the report, the vision and welcomed the focus on long-term sustainability through improvement and position changes across the council.

It was proposed by Cllr N Ireland seconded by Cllr R Biggs

Decision

That Cabinet endorse the vision and principles of a modern, sustainable unitary council and the overall journey required to achieve this.

Reason for the decision

To ensure members understand the proposed direction, how it supported delivery of council priorities, and how it aligned with existing change programmes. To ensure members were sighted on how this organisational journey would develop over time, with appropriate links to democratic processes built in.

9. **Procurement Pipeline Report - over £500k (2026-27)**

The Cabinet Member for Resources and Finance presented a report outlining a forward view of planned and known procurement activity expected to exceed £500,000, which required approval as Key Decision prior to commencement. The report supported good governance, transparency and forward planning and the appendix set out the indicative pipeline of procurements and contract variations above the threshold.

It was proposed by Cllr S Clifford and seconded by Cllr J Andrews

Decision

Cabinet agreed

- (a) To delegate authority to the relevant Cabinet Member, after consultation with the relevant Executive Director or Director, to:
- (b) To begin each of the procurement procedures (or variation) listed in Appendix 1 of the report of 19 May 2026 (subject to an approved and available budget); and
- (c) Final procurement documentation developed within the broad scope set out in the procurement briefing notes (available on request); and
- (d) Contract award (via a recommendation to award report / Executive Decision as appropriate) provided the tender outcome is within + 5% of the budget agreed with Finance when each project begins subject to agreement of the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Cabinet member for Resources & Finance.
- (e) To support continued early engagement with Commercial & Procurement for higher-value and higher-risk activity. Cabinet endorsed the use of the pipeline as a key governance and assurance tool.

Reason for the decision

Delegation supported timely, well-planned and compliant procurement by improving visibility, prioritisation and resource use, while strengthening audit assurance and allowing significant matters to be escalated to Cabinet.

To ensure compliance with: Procurement Act 2023 and Dorset Council Contract Procedure Rules.

10. **Update on Public Health Disaggregation including plans for future contracts**

The Cabinet Member for Public Health, Prevention and Communities set out the report updating members on progress following the disaggregation of Public Health Dorset in April 2025 and the establishment of separate Public Health teams within Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council. The report also set out the proposed future direction of the delivery and commissioning of Public Health functions and services, including areas where joint working should continue.

Members were further advised that the report was broadly supported by the People & Health Overview Committee at its meeting on 29 April 2026, and a similar paper was being considered by BCP Council.

It was proposed by Cllr M Bell seconded by Cllr N Ireland.

Decision

- (a) That the work completed to establish the Public Health teams within Dorset and BCP councils and the continued good performance in line with statutory responsibilities for Public Health, as set out in the 2012 Health and Social Care Act, be endorsed.
- (b) That the proposed principles for the planned joint commissioning of Public Health services, where this makes sense to continue to do so, to maintain service quality, performance, efficiency and value for money for the residents of Dorset, be agreed.
- (c) To agree the principle that where commissioning and procurement decisions were required for any services that remain jointly provided, the lead commissioning authority's decision making and governance route would be followed. *This included respecting thresholds where Cabinet agreement was required under that lead authority's scheme of delegation.*
- (d) That the proposed future direction for the delivery of public health functions and services through the two Public Health teams in Dorset and BCP council, be agreed.
- (e) That responsibilities for decisions associated with future procurement approaches, where Dorset Council leads, be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Prevention & Communities, in consultation with the Executive Director for Housing, Communities.

Reason for the decision

It has been a year since two new Public Health teams were established in BCP and Dorset Councils. The paper and recommendations provided updates to elected members on the progress establishing the new Public Health teams. They provided an overview of the preferred options for how we intend to commission and provide Public Health functions and services in the future.

It was timely to review and set the future ambitions for the Public Health functions and services over the coming years in line with the 3-year indicative ring-fenced grant allocation and the ambitions set out within the Dorset Council Plan.

11. **Advocacy and Independent Visitors contract spend approval**

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education presented a report outlining the council's statutory duties to ensure that children in care, care leavers and other vulnerable young people had access to independent advocacy to support them in decisions that affect their lives, as well as independent visitors to provide consistent and supportive relationships.

Cabinet had previously approved an indicative budget of £500,000 for this contracted service in 2023. The report provided an update on the procurement and award of the contract, emphasising the importance of maintaining high-quality provision to meet legal requirements and support positive outcomes for young people. It was noted that the contract awarded in April 2024 would exceed the original estimate should the optional extensions through to 2027 be taken up.

Therefore, Cabinet was asked to approve an increase in the maximum contract spend to 1.3 million to take the contract to 2030.

It was proposed by Cllr C Sutton and seconded by Cllr S Clifford.

Decision

- (a) That a maximum spend limit of £1.3million on this contract be approved, which would ensure our children and young people had access to an advocate or Independent Visitor in accordance with our local authority responsibilities.
- (b) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Children's Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education to negotiate and authorise any further contract extensions or amendments subject to the spend limit in as set out in (a) above.

Reason for the decision

Approval was sought to increase the contract spend limit and cover extended demand for Dorset's Advocacy and Independent Visitor Service, reflecting higher than anticipated usage and future growth beyond the original Cabinet-approved value and term.

12. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items considered at the meeting.

13. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business for this meeting.

Appendix 1 - Public Question

Appendix 2 - Councillor Questions

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 7.22 pm

Chairman

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Cabinet 19 May 2026

Public Questions

Question from Megan Sutton

As a local resident, parent, and registered NHS and Primary Care Practitioner, I am writing to raise urgent concerns ahead of the upcoming management transition.

From my personal and individual professional perspective in preventative healthcare, a permanent ending of curriculum swimming at The Purbeck School would fail the council's public health goals to reduce health inequalities in coastal areas. In a coastal community like Purbeck, school swimming lessons are not a luxury; they are a vital vehicle for **essential water safety and drowning prevention training**.

Furthermore, I am deeply concerned by recent cost-cutting measures at the Purbeck Sports Centre. Young, under 16-year-old 'Swim Helpers' have had their hours reduced while their supervision responsibilities have increased. Reducing safety ratios while maintaining class sizes places an unacceptable burden on staff who are minors. This directly risks non-compliance with **HSE Guidelines (HSG179)** for safe pool supervision of children working toward their **STA Awards**. Additionally, these regular young staff are being repeatedly asked to consider moving from casual to Zero-Hours contracts.

1. **Safety:** Can the Council provide the revised risk assessment justifying the reduction of helper hours for children's lessons under **HSG179** standards?
2. **Employment:** Given the **Employment Rights Act 2025**, why is the Council suggesting regular youth staff to move to insecure zero-hours contracts ahead of the April 2026 management transition?
3. **Contract:** Will the new private management contract include legally binding 'Social Value' clauses to protect the long-standing school swimming programme, protect long-term club training slots, and **guarantee a price freeze on lane hire fees** so the Wareham and District Swimming Club is not priced out by a commercial operator?

Response from Public Health, Prevention & Communities

Thank you for your question.

It was unfortunate that last year the Department of Education withdrew its exceptional factor funding for swimming pools on senior school sites due to swimming not being on the secondary curriculum. Dorset Council previously received £330,000 from DofE which allowed Purbeck School free daytime access to most of the leisure facilities, including the swimming pool. Now that this funding has ceased, the Council has taken the opportunity to open up the swimming pool for more community sessions, although the school have still been given some slots free

of charge. This will enable the Council to generate some additional income and reduce the impact of the funding loss. This was agreed with Purbeck School, and we now have a new dual use agreement in place.

We have however continued to honour the bookings from feeder schools and they are continuing to have the same access as before. Learning to swim is unquestionably a vital life skill, especially in a coastal location, so I'm pleased to say that we currently have 4 local primary schools using the pool with a further two schools commencing after half term.

With regards to the swimming lessons, the centre has recently made changes to the programme due to increasing waiting lists. These changes will enable existing swimmers to make better progress through the stages and create more availability for those on the waiting lists to begin their swimming journey. Whilst there has been a change to the number of lessons available at each stage, the individual class structures have remained the same and there has been no reduction in the supervision level or in the ratio of teachers and swim helpers. For example, Stage 1 still has one teacher and two swim helpers, and Stage 2 still has one teacher and one swim helper. These policies have been in place for over 15 years and meet all the necessary safety standards.

Due to the variable nature of the swimming lesson programme, swim helpers are initially engaged on a casual basis. When class levels change, this will impact how many swim helpers are required. Where casual employees develop a regular working pattern, they are contacted on a 13 weekly basis and offered the opportunity to move onto a zero-hours contract.

Transitioning to a zero-hours contract provides individuals with the same contractual rights as other employees, while retaining flexibility in their working hours to reflect service demand. These contracts are used regularly throughout the Council and fully comply with all employment legislation.

There has been no management transition in 2026, and no changes will come into effect prior to procuring a single external leisure operator in 2028.

Dorset Council recognises the importance of social value and incorporates this as a core part of its Commercial Strategy and procurement approach. This means we are able to consider wider community benefits alongside cost when commissioning services. We are beginning to develop a strategy for procuring a single external leisure operator in 2028, and community club usage will be something that this Council will want to maintain. Likewise, ensuring that that club hire prices are protected from unreasonable increases will also be important for us when developing the contract specification.

Cabinet – 19 May 2026

Councillor questions

Question from Cllr Richard Crabb, Sherborne West Ward

The library in Sherborne has been closed since 5th September 2025. The original intention was to provide new Extended Access to Sherborne Library and at the same time essential asbestos removal works would be completed. The Extended Access is to allow members to use facilities beyond staffed opening hours with access to WiFi, self-service and printing.

The library first closed on 5th September 2025 and was planned to re-open on the 18th October.

On 25th September we heard that the date to re-open would be extended to the 8th November. This was because of surveys needed by Building Control and the Dorset Fire Service. On 3rd November we heard that the re-opening would be extended again to the week beginning 15th December.

In January this year, we heard that both Building Control and Dorset Fire Service would need extensive surveys lasting 4-6 weeks for the approvals process. Since then, we have not received any further updates. Our residents understandably are concerned about what has happened to their library as to all practical intents and purposes it has closed completely.

Please could I therefore have an update on progress, and a commitment to complete the work to a given date that can be stuck to, preferably within the next month or two? Also, our residents would like an explanation of what caused the delays with the surveys. Clearly these have been postponed on multiple occasions.

Response from the Cabinet Member for Transformation, Customer & Workforce

Thank you for the question. We recognise that delays to reopening this valued community facility have caused concern locally.

Subject to final approvals being received within the next two weeks, the team is working towards reopening Sherborne Library by the end of July and will do all it can to bring this forward.

The project is currently awaiting formal sign-off of the revised design and fire strategy from Building Control and Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service. All works that could proceed ahead of these approvals were completed by 13 May 2026.

Once approval is secured, the contractor will return to site, with up to eight weeks required to complete the remaining works. This programme includes contingency to support delivery within the stated timeframe.

Delays have been driven by the discovery of significant licensable asbestos and concerns regarding the structural integrity of the roof and frame. These required more extensive investigation and redesign to ensure full compliance with building regulations and fire safety requirements, as well as agreement with regulatory bodies before works could safely continue.

These issues have now been addressed, including asbestos removal, structural assessment, and development of an enhanced fire strategy incorporating additional protection, upgraded detection and emergency lighting, electrical works, and replacement fire doors. Approval of these measures is the final step before works can restart.

Project oversight has been strengthened, and the project is now in its final stage and progressing towards reopening.

In the meantime, residents can continue to access library services through:

- digital services are available 24/7, including e-books, audiobooks and online resources
- full access is available at other Dorset and Libraries West locations
- temporary local arrangements will continue where possible
- our library pages on our website provide the latest information on accessing services