

Public Questions for Cabinet 23 June 2026

1. Question from Karen Tippens

I fully recognise Dorset Council's statutory duties to children with SEND and their families and support the objective of improving local provision and outcomes for children.

Over recent months I have submitted a number of Freedom of Information requests to Dorset Council regarding SEND Home to School Transport costs and the financial pressures associated with SEND provision.

The information disclosed shows that SEND transport expenditure has increased from approximately £10.5 million in 2022 to approximately £18.55 million in 2026, an increase of around 77% in four years.

The Council has confirmed that:

- approximately 95% of this expenditure relates to taxis and minibuses;
- Dorset currently operates 1,032 SEND transport routes;
- 362 of those routes are single-occupancy routes;
- the average annual route cost is approximately £16,373;
- the most expensive route costs £75,710 per year;
- one transport provider received over £1.7 million in a single year; and
- Personal Travel Budgets have averaged around £5,273 per pupil compared with approximately £16,000 for conventional transport arrangements.

The Cabinet report before members today states that Inclusion Hub places cost approximately £19,500 per annum compared with independent placements costing around £64,000 per annum and that the programme will generate savings by supporting more children closer to home.

However, the public report contains no explanation as to whether SEND transport costs have been included in the financial modelling, business case or cost-benefit analysis supporting these proposals, despite transport expenditure now approaching £18.5 million per year. It is therefore unclear from the published report whether the stated financial benefits fully reflect the wider costs of transporting pupils to and from SEND provision.

My question is therefore:

Can the Cabinet Member confirm whether SEND transport costs, taxi and minibus expenditure, and any anticipated transport savings have been included within the financial modelling and business case for the Inclusion Hub programme and, if so,

what level of transport savings are expected to arise from educating more children locally rather than transporting them to specialist placements further away?

2. Question from Chris Pike

On 2 June 2026, the Coastal Learning Partnership opened a public consultation proposing the closure of St George's CE Primary School in Langton Matravers, with pupils to be merged with St Mark's CE Primary School in Swanage. This proposal is presented as a response to falling pupil numbers across Purbeck.

However, despite repeated assurances from CLP that the consultation is open and undecided, the overwhelming view of parents, carers, and the wider Langton community is that the process is biased and predetermined. The consultation materials consistently assume that closure is the only viable solution, frame alternatives as unsustainable, use persuasive rather than neutral language, and position CLP's preferred outcome as both logical and inevitable. This is not the standard of impartiality expected in a statutory consultation affecting children, families, and the school that we consider at the heart of the village.

I would strongly encourage Dorset Council to read Langton Parish Council's consultation reply, which clearly sets out why the consultation appears predetermined and procedurally flawed.

On 7 June 2026, a formal letter was sent to CLP raising serious concerns about the immediate and damaging consequences of the consultation. Parents highlighted that many families now believe the closure of St George's is already decided. As a result, a significant number are actively seeking places at Corfe Castle, St Marys, and Swanage Primary. Pre-school numbers for 2026/27 are also being affected. This is accelerating the very decline in pupil numbers that CLP claims the consultation is intended to address, and it places the schools stability, and children's wellbeing at risk.

The consultation documents repeatedly state that the purpose of the proposal is to secure a sustainable, high-quality educational future. Yet CLP has not assessed the likely parental response to closure, nor the impact on capacity in neighbouring schools. This omission is inexplicable and undermines the credibility of the process.

Ww as parents are deeply concerned about the emotional impact on our children, many of whom are now anxious and unsettled. These harms could have been mitigated had the consultation followed the Gunning Principles: that consultation must occur at a formative stage, provide sufficient information for meaningful response, allow adequate time, and ensure that responses are considered.

Given these issues, I am here this evening to express serious concern about the level of scrutiny and oversight currently applied to CLP.

Question

My question is this: Will Dorset Council commit to full and independent scrutiny of the CLP consultation process—given the serious concerns raised about bias, predetermined outcomes, and failure to meet the Gunning Principles—and will the Council commit to leading a genuinely collaborative, Purbeck-wide approach to falling pupil numbers?