

Full Council – 16 July 2026

Questions submitted by Councillors

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr D Sowry-House

At a recent "Meet Your Councillors" surgery, a resident drew my attention to a social media post discussing Dorset Council's reported year-end underspend.

The post claimed that the underspend was achieved primarily through the use of reserves and by postponing or reducing services, particularly within the Place Directorate.

As elected members will know, residents are increasingly exposed to commentary and assertions on social media, often presented with varying degrees of evidence and context. Many residents understandably find it difficult to distinguish between opinion, interpretation and established fact.

Could the Cabinet Member therefore clarify:

How the reported year-end underspend was actually achieved, what role, if any, the use of reserves played in achieving the final outturn position, whether any material underspends arose from the reduction or delay of front-line services, such as pothole repairs for example, within the Place Directorate and what assurance can be given to residents that the Council's financial reporting provides a complete and transparent picture of its performance?

Finally, in an age where so much local political discussion takes place on social media, does the Cabinet Member agree that residents should reasonably expect claims concerning the Council's finances to be supported by original source information and verifiable evidence, rather than being asked to rely solely upon opinion occupying what might be described as the wasteland between knowledge and ignorance?

I would be grateful for any clarification that can help residents better understand the facts behind the Council's published financial position.

Question 2 – submitted by Cllr S Flower

Sustainability of Place Services following top slicing of the 2026/27 budget
Ward Members in the eastern side of the Dorset Council Area are increasingly receiving complaints about how front-line services have deteriorated since May 2024. The very outdated approach of top slicing budgets, which seems to have been adopted by the administration, will only make matters far worse.

Can the Cabinet Member for Place explain how it will be possible to sustain vital front-line services to our communities to an acceptable standard following the significant reduction in annual in Place Directorate funding.

Thank you, madam Chairman

Question 3 – submitted by Cllr A Brenton

Many residents welcomed the report from Dorset Council's independent, non-political finance director confirming that the Liberal Democrat administration has delivered the first underspend in the history of Dorset Council.

It is therefore disappointing that some Conservatives appear unhappy with this outcome, particularly given that, under their administration, the council budget overspent year after year.

Claims About Council Spending

The Conservatives have publicly claimed that spending at Dorset Council is out of control, that services are being disrupted in order to balance the books, and that the council is running a deficit of millions of pounds.

Can the Cabinet Member for Finance confirm that these claims are false, and reassure the opposition that Dorset Council's budget remains in safe hands under the leadership of the finance director?

Follow-up Question

The Conservatives have also claimed in their public communications that council officers, specifically the Communications team, are acting politically. Can the Cabinet Member comment on this allegation?

Question 4 – Submitted by Cllr M Parkes

In a previous question to full council regarding the withdrawal of the school crossing patrol on Church Road, Ferndown we were advised that motorists get 'confused' where there the is a school crossing patrol on a zebra crossing.

Exploring this matter further I have been in contact with both Dorset Council officers and Dorset Police who are both unable to substantiate this rationale as there is no national or local data or guidance to base this decision on.

Dorset Police have confirmed in writing that they had nothing to do with the decision making and this was purely a Dorset Council decision.

It has been confirmed by both Dorset Council and Dorset Police that no risk assessment has been completed for the removal of the School Crossing Patrol which seems incredulous!

Based on the lack of data and guidance and more importantly no risk assessment, how can removal of the school crossing patrol putting young peoples safety at risk be justified?

Question 5 submitted by Cllr M Parkes

Based on the lack of road safety data and evidence it would be fair to make the presumption that the withdrawal of the school crossing patrol in Church Road, Ferndown is purely a financial based decision made solely by the Cabinet holder using executive powers.

Based on the fact that the cabinet are grandstanding on the £169k saving made by the council, would the cabinet member consider using some of this funding to keep the young people of Ferndown safe?

Question 6 submitted by Cllr C Lugg

The responsible cabinet member made an executive decision to amend the policy for the third party funding of school crossing patrols which removed the ability for external funding,

As local ward councillors we reached out asking for this to be reconsidered particularly as a similar arrangement is already in place in Lytchett Minster with whereby the parish council are providing funding.

In the interests ensuring parity across the Dorset Council will the cabinet member revert back to the original policy to enable third parties to fund the crossing if Dorset Council feels unable to find the funding itself?

Question 7 submitted by Cllr C Lugg

If the council continues with the withdrawal of the School Crossing Patrol in Church Road, Ferndown would the cabinet member commit to the immediate implementation of measures to reduce the risks to the young people caused by poor parking and driver behaviour at the start and end of the school day?

Specifically, the installation of ANPR cameras in both Mountbatten Drive and Peter Grant Way. Appreciating there would be a time delay in getting this installed, the immediate implementation of daily patrols by the traffic enforcement team.

Question 8 – submitted by Cllr J Vitali

Stalbridge Primary School is going from strength to strength, with excellent staff, full year groups and a highly supportive community.

At present, however, many of its children and teachers are having to contend with mobile classrooms that are no longer fit for purpose. These portacabins have an advised lifetime of 10 years. Those being used at Stalbridge Primary School are now 30 years old and rotting. They are cold in the winter and sweltering in these summer months. When temperatures reached 34 degrees recently, the smell from the built-in toilets disrupted lessons. I've visited these mobile classrooms, so has a Dorset Council Health and Safety Consultant. It is to no one's surprise that she recommended they are replaced; they pose a serious risk to school children.

The school itself has been saving hard and can put up over half the cost of replacing the most dilapidated portacabin. Would Dorset Council urgently consider supporting the school with the additional £80k it needs to address this health and safety risk before the new academic year?

Question 9 – submitted by Cllr J Robinson

Can the Portfolio Holder or relevant Cabinet Member explain why so many grass verges across Ferndown have been left uncut for extended periods this year; what is the agreed verge cutting schedule for Ferndown, why that schedule has not been met in many locations, what action is being taken to ensure all outstanding verge cutting is completed promptly and what measures will be put in place to prevent the same problems reoccurring?

Residents have raised repeated concerns that overgrown verges are creating safety issues by restricting visibility at junctions, making pavements more difficult to use, and giving the area uncared for appearance.

Despite these concerns being raised, many verges are still in an unacceptable condition.

Could the Council confirm:

Does the Council accept that the current standard of verge maintenance in Ferndown has fallen below residents' reasonable expectations, and if not, why not?

Residents deserve reassurance that this basic service will be delivered consistently and to an acceptable standard.

Question 10 – submitted by Cllr L Beddow

Farm Lane in West Lulworth is a small road off the main road into West Lulworth, leading to Shepherds Way, The Triangle and School Lane.

You wouldn't know it was there for the last 18 months because, despite regular reporting by me and by local residents, the sign still hasn't been replaced.

When you drive past discarded road signs warning of ice, in July, it's hard not to feel that the important basics of organising and maintaining our street signage aren't being maintained.

May I ask for a detailed update on our maintenance in this area, not least so that people seeking Farm Lane can actually find it?

Question 11 – submitted by Cllr L Beddow

This administration has cut the funding for the Arts Development Company, who provided support to and generated events with the cultural sector across Dorset. Cultural development has now been brought in-house to Dorset Council. But why does the Culture portfolio now sit with the Corporate Director for Weymouth And Portland (for whom I have huge respect)?

Question 12 – submitted by Cllr P Brown

The Thickthorn Cross junction on the A354 remains one of Dorset's most dangerous accident blackspots. When can residents expect to see data-led action taken to improve safety, particularly through the installation of a roundabout, which remains the community's preferred solution?

Question 13 – submitted by Cllr R Legg

In just a few days from now Andy Burnham will become the country's next Prime Minister. He has already indicated that he is open to changing how property and land is taxed. Some commentators believe that Stamp Duty and Council Tax are in his sights. If that change is signalled, will the Leader extend an invitation to the Prime Minister to visit Dorset so that we can impress upon him how unfair the present Council Tax system is for our residents where three quarters of all our funding comes from that source?

Question 14 – submitted by Cllr R Legg

How many Freedom of Information requests have been received by Dorset Council since the formation of the authority in 2019 and of those how many have been referred to the Information Commissioner's Office for determination and with what result?

Question 15 – submitted by Cllr C Monks

Beaminster has experienced an increasing number of power cuts over the last two years, causing significant disruption to residents, businesses and particularly vulnerable members of our community.

Whilst I recognise that Dorset Council does not have direct responsibility for the electricity network, will the Council support local efforts to lobby National Grid and network operators to identify and upgrade failing infrastructure, and what steps will it take to strengthen consideration of power resilience within its planning policies and emergency planning arrangements, both of which fall within the Council's control?

Question 16 – submitted by Cllr B Bawden

The 'Today' programme reported 2,700 excess deaths in the first two heatwaves in the UK, mostly people over 65 years old with underlying health conditions.

The Committee on Climate Change has been forecasting for years that heatwaves will be the 'silent killer'.

As the county with the oldest population, with some of the highest temperatures and hours of sunshine in the UK, we have a duty of care to our residents, workers and visitors to adapt to our changing climate and protect ourselves from extreme heat.

Could Dorset Council offer more guidance to schools, care homes and public and community buildings about mitigating the impact of high temperatures and humidity?

Is there any scope to introduce a byelaw to set a maximum working temperature?

Specifically, we need to support and enable the fast roll out of air conditioning for schools, care homes and hospitals alongside other measures including natural and installed shading.

Did the decarbonisation of the DC schools' estate and our community and business buildings under the Low Carbon Dorset EU funding programme include heat pumps with air conditioning?

What else could and should Dorset Council be doing more to protect ourselves from the impacts of extreme heat and humidity in our rapidly changing climate?