CABINET

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 23 JUNE 2026

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

Present remotely: Cllrs Gill Taylor

Apologies: Cllrs Simon Clifford

Also present: Cllr Piers Brown

Also present remotely: Cllr Beryl Ezzard, Cllr Louise Bown, Cllr Simon Christopher, Cllr Richard Crabb, Cllr Spencer Flower, Cllr Jill Haynes, Cllr Sally Holland, Cllr Jack Jeanes, Cllr Stella Jones, Cllr Paul Kimber, Cllr Cathy Lugg, Cllr David Morgan, Cllr David Northam, Cllr Andy Skeats, Cllr Andy Todd and Cllr Kate Wheller

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):
Sean Cremer (Director - Resources (Section 151 Officer)), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic & Governance Services Officer), Lisa Cotton (Interim Executive Director - Modernisation and Customer Delivery), Sam Crowe (Executive Director - Housing, Prevention and Communities), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director - Children's Services), Jen Furnell (Corporate Director for Education and Learning), Iain Sim (Interim Corporate Director for Housing), Catherine Howe (Chief Executive), Hannah Brown (Acting Head of Corporate Finance), Paul Scothern (Service Manager Capital Commissioning), Louis Wicks (Democratic Services Officer Apprentice) and Sarah Smith (Housing Strategy Lead)

Officers present remotely (for all or part of the meeting):
Steven Ford (Assistant Chief Executive)

14. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 May 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

15. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest to report.

16. **Public Participation**

There were two questions from the public. A copy of the full questions and the detailed responses are set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

17. **Questions from Councillors**

There were no questions from Councillors to report.

18. **Forward Plan**

The Cabinet Forward Plan for July was received and noted.

19. **Draft Outturn Report 2025/26**

The Leader of the Council presented the report, including, in his absence, a video introduction from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources. He set out the Council's draft outturn position for 2025/26, noting that, in simple terms, the Council had ended the year in a broadly balanced position, with a small underspend of £0.169 million. This was a notable milestone, as it represented the first underspend achieved since Dorset Council became a unitary authority.

However, the Leader cautioned that this positive headline figure should be viewed in context, as outlined in the report, with several major service areas continuing to experience underlying financial pressures. Members were asked to note the financial performance for the year ended 31 March 2026 and to approve the movement of the £0.169m surplus to the year end to general reserve.

It was proposed by Cllr N Ireland and seconded by Cllr J Andrews

Decision

(a) That the draft revenue and capital outturn and the financial performance for the year ended 31 March 2026, be noted.

(b) That the movement of the £0.169m surplus at the year end to general reserves be approved.

Reason for the decision

Although the report was primarily for noting the outturn position, Cabinet's approval was required for the transfer of the £0.169m surplus to general reserves.

While the report did not seek Cabinet approval of the outturn, the financial position at 31 March 2026 was critical in informing the next Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) update and the development of the 2027/28 and 2028/29 budget strategy, in line with the multi-year settlement announced in 2025/26.

In addition to reporting outturn, with the financial performance for the year materially complete, it was important for Cabinet to review the risks the organisation now faces and to consider areas where it wishes to make strategic investments and/or to repurpose and prioritise its reserves to facilitate these aims.

20. **Capital Programme Review**

The Leader of the Council presented a report on a review of the Capital Programme, which had been undertaken at the request of the Cabinet Member of Finance and Resources. He explained that the purpose of the review was to move away from an extensive list of aspirations and instead reshape the programme to focus on what the Council could realistically deliver within the year. That involved right sizing the programme to reflect organisational capacity and ensure that all capital investment proposals were supported by robust business cases. The report set out in detail how this approach would be implemented.

It was proposed by Cllr N Ireland and seconded by Cllr S Robinson

Recommendation to Full Council

(a) That the new structured approval framework for capital projects, as outlined in Appendix A of the report to Cabinet of 23 June 2026, be approved.

(b) That a fundamental reset of the capital programme, including removal of legacy, stalled, and inactive schemes, be endorsed.

(c) That the “Standing items” to be included in the capital programme, as shown in Appendix B of the report, be approved.

(d) That the revised “Approved capital schemes” to be included in the capital programme, as shown in Appendix of the report, be approved.

(e) That the increase to the Capital Contingency budget from £2m to £10m, funded from the removal of stalled, low-value and legacy schemes with no recent activity, be approved.

Reason for the decision

The decision aimed to ensure the Capital Programme remains deliverable, affordable, and aligned with the Council’s priorities. Over time, the programme has grown in scale and complexity, making it more challenging to manage and increasing pressure on financial planning, borrowing, and governance arrangements.

The proposed reset introduced a more structured approach by removing inactive schemes, clarifying programme categories, and strengthening oversight and approvals. Alongside an increased Capital Contingency and revised approval framework to support more efficient delivery of smaller schemes, this would enable a more sustainable and well-managed programme that reflects organisational capacity and met audit and Member expectations.

21. **SEND Inclusion Hubs Phase 2**

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economic Growth & Strategic Assets set out a report seeking approval and delegated authority to proceed with an additional six inclusion Hub projects in mainstream schools as part of the Council’s Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Capital Programme. The details regarding these Phase 2 Inclusion Hubs was set out in the exempt business case attached to the report.

It was proposed by Cllr R Biggs and seconded by Cllr C Sutton

Decision

(a) That the capital budget of £4.3 million and funding allocations to projects set out in the Business Case within Appendix A of the Cabinet report dated 23 June 2026 be approved.

(b) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director, Economy and Environment in consultation with the Executive Director, Children's Services, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economic Growth and Strategic Assets and Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education and, together with the Director Resources to procure and award contracts or release agreed funding to third parties delivering projects, for any Phase 2 Inclusion Hub as set out in the Business Case at Appendix A of this Cabinet report, provided the project costs are contained within the programme budget.

(c) That the High Needs Block revenue allocation of £2m per year recurrent, as set out in the Business Case within Appendix A of this Cabinet report dated 23 June 2026 be approved. This has been factored into Dorset's High Needs Block SEND reform modelling. This has been factored into Dorset's High needs Blocl SEND reform modelling.

Inclusion Hub places are approximately £19.5k per annum compared with an independent placement in the region of £64k per annum.

(d) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director, Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education and the Director, Resources to release high needs revenue funding to third parties operating any Phase 2 Inclusion Hub as set out in the Business Case at Appendix A of this Cabinet report, provided the funds are within the high needs revenue allocation.

Reason for the decision

1. To ensure that the projects can move forward at pace, to provide cost savings and improve the sufficiency of SEND placements and support.
2. To ensure appropriate oversight and authority is in place to allow projects to progress through from inception to delivery.
3. To evidence delivery against the SEND Local Reform Plan.

22. Dorset Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

The Cabinet Member for Housing presented a report on the transition from Dorset Council's current Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, adopted in July 2021 and due to expire in July 2026. She noted that, while work had begun on a successor strategy the government published its national plan to end homelessness in December 2025, emphasising prevention, accountability, and measurable outcomes. Detailed guidance for local authorities followed in May 2026.

It was therefore proposed to maintain momentum by continuing delivery against existing objectives while developing a new strategy aligned with the national framework and guidance.

In response to a question, the Director for Assurance and Governance advised that failure to publish its successor strategy within the statutory timeframe would pose a legal risk. However, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had indicated it would not take compliance action where strategies lapsed during the transition provided authorities were actively developing a replacement and intended to publish an updated action plan in autumn 2026.

Addressing a further question, the Interim Corporate Director for Housing noted that the central government toolkit for developing the action plan had been received late, but officers were now progressing this work and remained on track to meet the autumn deadline as set out in the report.

In terms of the timeline for the strategy, external advisors had been engaged to support the development of the strategy in order to meet the July 2027 due date.

In response to a question regarding the Overview Committee's involvement in respect of the development of the plan, the Cabinet Member was happy to discuss this matter with the appropriate Chair.

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

Decision

That the proposed approach to managing the transition from the current Dorset Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy to the next statutory strategy, be approved, and that authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Executive Director of Housing, Communities and Prevention, to approve the updated interim Action Plan for publication in Autumn 2026.

Reason for decision

Developing our new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy would provide excellent opportunities to further build upon and expand our Prevention and Communities agenda as part of the newly formed Housing, Communities and Prevention Directorate.

23. **Aspire Adoption Annual Report 2025-26**

Before presenting the report, the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education acknowledged the distress caused by the Preston Davey case and its impact on the adoption community social care colleagues and others who followed the national coverage. The Council would learn from the forthcoming children's safeguarding practise review and while such cases were rare, it remained vital to endeavour to prevent them.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education presented the annual report which provided a summary of the operational and strategic activity of Aspire Regional Adoption Agency during 2025/26.

It was proposed by Cllr C Sutton and seconded by Cllr A Robinson

Decision

That the activity and performance of Aspire Regional Adoption Agency in 2025/26, as set out in the annual report, be noted.

Reasons for decision

Cabinet was satisfied that adoption statutory duties that the agency discharges on behalf of Dorset Council and the Aspire Annual Report 25/26 satisfies that these activities were discharged to a high standard in the last year.

24. **Procurement of a replacement system for Parking enforcement and permits**

The Cabinet Member for Place Services set out a report seeking approval to proceed with the procurement and contract award of a replacement system for parking enforcement and permit management. He explained that the current system was approaching the end of its operational life and no longer fully met the service requirements or customer expectations.

He advised that the proposed procurement would ensure continuity of service, support future demand and enable the Council to take advantage of digital improvements in permit management and enforcement activity.

It was proposed by Cllr J Andrews and seconded by Cllr N Ireland

Decision

(a) That the procurement of this contract, with an anticipated maximum value of £700,000 and a maximum six-year contract duration, be approved.

(b) That the procurement of a new contract via the Crown Commercial Service Transport Technology Framework RM6347, Lot 3 (Parking Management), be approved.

(c) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Economy and Environment, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, the Monitoring Officer, and the Cabinet Member for Place Services, to approve the final contract terms, award the proposed contract, and approve contract modifications throughout the term where these are compliant with legal advice.

Reason for the decision

To enable the continuity of an essential service via a compliant contract.
To improve efficiency, data integration and customer experience.
To comply with Key Decision governance when the £500k limit is exceeded.

25. **Dorset and BCP Council Local Transport Plan 2026 - 2041**

The Cabinet Member for Place Services presented the Local Transport Plan 2026 to 2041(LTP) and its initial first five-year Implementation Plan, seeking Full Council's approval to adopt it within the Council's strategy framework.

The LTP had also been considered by Place and Resources Overview Committee at its meeting on 4 June 2026.

The recommendation set out in the papers was proposed by Cllr J Andrews with the following addition at the end of recommendation 2, "subject to the equivalent approval by BCP Council". The amended recommendations was seconded by Cllr R Biggs.

Recommendation to Full Council

1. That the Local Transport Plan 2026 – 2041 be adopted

2. That authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Regeneration, Infrastructure and Growth, in consultation the Cabinet Member for Place Services, to approve any necessary minor non-material and non-policy altering changes that such do not materially alter the substance, objectives or strategic direction of the plan before it is published, subject to the equivalent approval by BCP Council.

3. That authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Regeneration, Infrastructure and Growth, in consultation the Cabinet Member for Place Services, to approve timely updates to the Implementation Plan, where the need arises, to take account of changes of national policy, local priorities or funding.

Reason for the recommendation

The Council had a statutory duty under the Transport Act 2000 to prepare and maintain a Local Transport Plan. The current plan (2011-2026) was approaching expiry, and adoption of the new LTP was required to ensure continued compliance.

26. **Dorset National Landscape Defra funding**

The Leader of the Council set out a report on the Dorset National Landscape Partnership, for which Dorset Council acted as the accountable body. The Partnership oversaw management of the designated landscape, covering over

45% of the county, and operated through a Board comprising of Council members and wider stakeholder representatives.

It was noted that the Partnership had received a Defra funding allocation of £1.77m for 2026-27, with indicative funding at the same level for the following two years. This included revenue, capital and farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) funding to support delivery of the national Landscape Management Plan.

It was proposed by Cllr N Ireland and seconded by Cllr J Andrews

Decision

(a) That Cabinet accepts (in principle) the funding offered by Defra as the accountable body for the Dorset National Landscape Partnership, subject to the contract/s being found acceptable by officers representing legal and financial interests.

(b) That Cabinet delegates the signing of contracts according to the Constitution's Scheme of Delegation

Reason for the decision

Funding offered supports the discharge of statutory duties and enables positive delivery in alignment with Council Plan priorities.

27. **Dorset Council response to consultation on permitted development rights for onshore wind turbines in England**

The Cabinet Member for Planning presented a report on the retrospective consultation response regarding the proposal introducing a new permitted development rights for small-scale, non-domestic wind turbines. The response, set out in the appendix of the report, supported the proposal and welcomed the streamlined planning process. A member webinar held in May helped to inform the response.

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

Decision

That the response submitted (as set out in Appendix A of the report) to the recent Government consultation on the proposed introduction of a new permitted development right for small-scale, non-domestic wind turbines, be endorsed.

Reason for decision

The proposed new permitted development right would streamline the planning process for small-scale non-domestic wind turbines which met certain criteria.

The consultation response set out in Appendix A supported the principle of the new proposed permitted development right whilst also highlighting the importance of a full assessment of impacts through a planning application for larger scale schemes.

28. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items considered at the meeting.

29. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business considered at the meeting

30. **SEND Inclusion Hubs Phase 2**

The exempt appendix associated with agenda item 18 “SEND Inclusion Hubs Phase 2” was not discussed at the meeting. The report was considered in open business as set out in min no. 21 to these minutes.

Appendix 1 - Public Questions and responses

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 7.30 pm

Chair

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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?

Response of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Economic Growth & Strategic Assets

The financial case for the Inclusion bases has been developed with consideration of the wider SEND system, including the significant pressures associated with home to school transport. While the published report focuses on direct education placement costs and savings, we expect that Inclusion bases will deliver wider benefits and cost avoidance, including a reduction in transport expenditure.

A key aim of the Inclusion base programme is to increase specialist provision within local communities so that more children and young people can access the support they need closer to home. This aligns with both Dorset Council's Belonging Strategy and the national SEND reform, which seeks to provide support locally and reduce the need for children to travel significant distances to access suitable provision.

Although it is not possible to quantify the level of transport savings that will be achieved at this stage, we expect that increasing local provision will reduce travel distances for many children and young people and, over time, reduce reliance on higher-cost transport arrangements. These benefits will emerge progressively as placements in the new bases are made.

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?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education

The consultation regarding the proposed merger of St George's and St Mark's CE Primary Schools is led by the Coastal Learning Partnership, the multi-academy trust responsible for both schools.

The Trust has provided assurance within its published FAQs that this is a genuine and open consultation process. While the consultation document outlines the option that the Trust believes may best secure high-quality education for the future, no decision has been made. The Trust Board has committed to carefully consider all feedback received before determining whether to proceed with, amend, or halt the proposal.

Additional oversight is provided by the Department for Education (DfE) as any proposal of this nature constitutes a significant change and therefore requires their

formal approval. Any application can only be submitted once the consultation has concluded and must include a full account of the consultation outcomes.
The Local Authority does not have the remit to carry out a full and independent scrutiny of the process. Therefore, concerns regarding the consultation process need to be raised with the Coastal Learning Partnership or escalated direct to the DfE.

Local Authorities have a statutory responsibility to ensure sufficient school places for every child of compulsory school age and work collaboratively with school leaders to balance supply and demand in line with changing demographics locally.
There are other areas of Dorset as well as Purbeck where falling pupil numbers is proving challenging for local schools. Dorset Council works with schools to support them to remain viable in ways such as reducing Published Admission Numbers (PAN) and restructuring staff teams to align with reduced numbers. Both schools have already taken actions to manage the impact of falling numbers, including reducing the number of classes and introducing more mixed age teaching.
However, the Coastal Learning Partnership has concluded that these actions have not sufficiently addressed the financial and organisational pressures facing the schools. As a result, they are now exploring further options, as set out in the consultation document.

As outlined in Dorset Council’s statement within the consultation, we support the need for this process. We encourage all members of the community to engage fully so that final decisions are informed by a broad and representative range of views.
We continue to work closely with the Coastal Learning Partnership and the Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education throughout this process.