

Cabinet 28 July 2026

Questions from Councillors

1. Question from Cllr H Hobbs-Chell

Youth employment

We have all seen the statistics and renewed interest in youth unemployment at a national level, and indeed I have read with interest the latest statistics release in June from the House of Commons. This release showed that nationally unemployment increased, employment rate down, compared to the previous year. Whilst the figures are not currently at the peak historically, the trends are clear – increasing youth unemployment is occurring. This makes for important reading, and, when combined with the SEND reforms coming forward, the cost-of-living difficulties, and the housing crisis faced, I know I am not alone in feeling a renewed sense of duty to do all we can to support our young people to have the opportunities, life experiences and feeling of agency as they embark upon adult life. Furthermore, we as a Council recently published our Economic Development strategy and are working on our Local plan and Design code, housing strategy and delivery, family hub and best start in life reforms, and responding to the SEND reforms as previously mentioned. In all these conversations, youth unemployment, opportunities, and the statistics on youth retention have been topics of great concern and attention, and we all have spoken about the need to examine and support this. At a front-line level, both as a Councillor and in my role as the chair of our food and essentials bank and community support organisation in Ferndown, am acutely aware of the growing problem facing our young people who are desperate to find paid employment, but cannot find the job vacancies, or struggle with interviews, and find that jobs are incredibly oversubscribed and competitive. This is despite young people actively volunteering and having additional skills and experience above and beyond formal education often. Whilst at a local level I am working with the business community to support this, I feel there is a wonderful opportunity for Dorset Council to proactively seek improvements and better outcomes for our young people, in partnership with businesses and the VCS sector. I am therefore asking if the Cabinet lead for Economic Development, and/or other members of the cabinet as best fits, as well as group leaders or nominated representatives, would commit to an initial round table discussion (to be decided pre round table) with business leaders in Dorset and other organisations supporting youth employment and skills, to examine the issues and opportunities we have within Dorset?

Response from Cllr Richard Biggs;

Thank you, Councillor.

You are absolutely right to highlight the importance of youth employment and the challenges many young people face as they move into adulthood.

Supporting young people into employment, training and enterprise remains a key priority for Dorset Council and our partners. We recognise that barriers can include skills development, transport, housing affordability, confidence and, for some, additional support needs.

Importantly, Dorset already benefits from a strong partnership approach through the recently approved **Local Skills Improvement Plan 2026–29**, which was developed through extensive engagement with employers, education and training providers, Dorset Council, BCP Council, employer representative organisations and workforce development partners. The Plan provides a clear framework for addressing current and future skills needs across the area.

Whilst I welcome continued discussion on this important issue, my view is that our priority should be the successful delivery of the actions already identified within the Plan. The focus now needs to be on implementation, accountability and outcomes rather than producing additional strategies. This is an area where scrutiny, the Dorset Skills Board and partners all have an important role to play in monitoring progress and ensuring that commitments translate into real opportunities for young people.

We should also recognise the opportunities presented through devolution. Greater local influence over skills, employment support, economic development and investment has the potential to strengthen the alignment between education, training and employer demand, helping us create more pathways into good-quality jobs and careers for Dorset residents.

I am committed, through my role on the Dorset Skills Board and through the Council's wider economic growth agenda, to working with partners to ensure that young people are equipped with the skills, experience and opportunities they need to succeed.

Supporting young people into employment is not only important for individual life chances but is critical to Dorset's future prosperity, productivity and resilience.

2. Question from Cllr H Hobbs-Chell

School crossing patrol

Whilst much has been discussed and debated recently with regards the school crossing patrol in Ferndown, and notwithstanding the huge importance of children's safety, I would like to take the opportunity to be able to clarify some of the facts which appear to have become unclear during this process. For clarity, the crossings do not sit directly in my ward, however, having taken advice, due to their setting within the schools that serve all of Ferndown, I have a responsibility and desire to reflect and support the considerable number of residents from my ward for whom the schools are their education point.

I recognise and thank the Ferndown North ward members Cllrs Lugg and Parkes for campaigning for many years for permanent crossing points at Church Road, and also thank this Cabinet and Cabinet lead for recognising the urgency of need at this site and delivering the over quarter million pound investment in safer crossing points for both our young people and indeed all our residents, at any time of the day or night, making this stretch much more age and pedestrian friendly. I also wholeheartedly thank Sarah and all our other school crossing patrol officers for their dedication and commitment to ensuring our young people are looked after. Specifically, please could you provide clarity on the following:

Dorset Council have previously advised that it is on the advice of the Police that Dorset Council are not able to continue with a permanent school crossing patrol at this site with the installation of 2 permanent crossing points. Please could you confirm this to be the case, and publish the written advice in the written response to this question?

Confirm commitment to continuing to examine the possibility of a School Street at Mountbatten or Church Road, a school walking bus, and speed reductions at school drop off times, as deemed to be appropriate and necessary to ensure safe travel, (I am grateful to the Cabinet lead and officers as I know this feasibility work is already underway having discussed and sought assistance with this myself)

Outline the specific safety concerns and confusion relating to having a school crossing patrol on a zebra crossing, or advise whom I can contact within the Police to advise on this

Confirm how many near misses and accidents within 50m of either crossing have been reported since the introduction of the permanent crossings.

Confirm that as part of the consultation with ward members, local partners, and the public, the removal of the school crossing patrol from September 2026 was included as currently stated on the Dorset Council web page entry. As part of this, could you confirm the public outcome of the consultation responses from the public.

Response from Cllr Jon Andrews

I thank Cllr Hobbs-Chell for these questions, which I know are important to local families and the wider Ferndown community.

Dorset Council's policy is that School Crossing Patrols do not operate at zebra crossings. Drivers already have a legal duty to stop at a zebra crossing when someone is crossing or waiting to cross. The zebra crossing therefore already provides a controlled place to cross. We do not operate a School Crossing Patrol at the same location, and this approach is supported by Dorset Police's Road Safety team. This avoids having two different crossing arrangements at the same point and provides a clear and consistent approach for drivers and pedestrians.

I will provide the written advice received from Dorset Police as part of my written response, where it can legally be shared.

I'm aware that Cllr Lugg has raised a near miss with our Road Safety team. Other than that, since the zebra crossings were introduced, there have been no recorded injury collisions and no near misses formally reported to Dorset Council within 50 metres of either crossing. However, both Dorset Council and Dorset Police recognise the importance of safe driving around schools apart from an email from one of the ward councillors. We will continue to work together during the next school term to monitor the situation, consider any concerns that are raised and support enforcement activity where appropriate.

The permanent zebra crossings were installed through an investment of more than £250,000 to improve safety. Unlike a School Crossing Patrol, which operates only at certain times of the school day, the crossings are available for pupils, parents, residents and other pedestrians throughout the day and night.

The decision to remove the School Crossing Patrol followed a change in Council policy, supported by Dorset Police about the operation of School Crossing Patrols at zebra crossings. As the consultation on the crossing scheme took place before this policy position was adopted, the future operation of the School Crossing Patrol was not included in the consultation and was not something people were asked to comment on. The policy change was subsequently communicated to ward members and the public.

The consultation related to the introduction of the permanent crossings. Feedback received during that process was considered before the scheme was finalised. A summary of the consultation findings is available in the published consultation documents.

We remain committed to looking at other ways to improve safety around Ferndown schools. This includes exploring the potential for a School Street scheme, supporting the development of a walking bus where there is local interest and capacity, and considering any request for a 20mph speed limit, either at school times or on a permanent basis, in line with Dorset Council policy.

The safety of children travelling to and from school remains our priority. We will continue to work with schools, parents, councillors, residents and Dorset Police to identify practical measures that support safe and active travel.