

Full Council – 22 October 2026

Public Participation

1. Question submitted by Cllr Celia Wright, Chairman Hinton St Mary PC

On behalf of Hinton St Mary PC and residents I would like to ask why the initial consultation of Ward boundaries was undertaken without informing HSM PC of the consultation and ZERO communication.

To find it has been proposed we are removed from Sturminster Newton Ward against our wishes without anyone having the courtesy to communicate with the PC seems unfair.

I look forward to your comments.

Response from Cllr Nick Ireland

Thank you for your question. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is responsible for the current electoral review and for consulting on its proposals. Dorset Council is itself a consultee in that process.

Before the review began, Dorset Council provided the Commission with contact details for all town and parish councils. The email address supplied for Hinton St Mary Parish Council was the address published on the Hinton St Mary website.

The Commission has confirmed that it sent consultation emails to that address at both stages of the review. Its email tracking records indicate that neither email was opened, although we are not in a position to say why that was. I therefore recognise why the Parish Council may feel it was not consulted, but the Commission did attempt to contact it using its published address.

The consultation on the draft recommendations remains open until 9 November 2026, and I would strongly encourage the Parish Council to submit its views directly to the Commission before the deadline, either through its website or by emailing reviews@lgbce.org.uk.

2. Question submitted by Poppy Maltby

Purbeck School buses no longer running to rural villages

From September this year around 30 children from the Purbeck villages, Langton Matravers, Worth Matravers and Kingston had their seats on the local Purbeck School bus removed and switched to the Public Morebus 40 service. This is because

there are more children travelling from the Swanage area than can sit on the existing three buses. There was no consultation on this change nor much notice given by the service provider Damory, or Dorset Council School Travel.

The impact of this on the children is significant. Rural exclusion being one, these children no longer get the bus with their friends but wait at school for these regularly delayed public buses to arrive. They stay there long past when the dedicated school buses have left.

These buses are already well used by the public and now these children, as young as 11, either sit next to strangers, or occasionally are forced to stand by hostile members of the public who want a seat. The existing three school buses cannot have standing passengers, but there is no such problem on public buses. It is unclear how much damory have factored in the impact of the £2 bus fare or summer peak season in ensuring these children have seats.

Parents have also expressed safeguarding concerns. Unlike school buses, drivers do not have DBS checks. They are also concerned about young girls exiting the bus on their own in rural areas, to walk down lanes to hamlets such as to Acton – observed by total strangers. In December and January, being at least 10-15 mins later than the old school bus – this walk will be in the dark.

With their public bus journeys taking around 30-40 minutes a day longer than before, this adds up to a significant disadvantage of around 3 hours a week of time lost to sleep or study compared to Swanage children - who actually live further away from the school.

This 'cost efficiency' outcome is a result of the existing contract, now up for renewal – which prioritised lowest possible cost with little consideration of the cost to children.

I would therefore be grateful if you could let the parents of these children understand:

- a) how safeguarding concerns have been considered in this decision
- b) how Dorset Council are factoring rural needs into their contract negotiations from 2027 – to ensure that these children are not disadvantaged as they are now, in the name of efficiencies and cost savings?

Response from Cllr Jack Jeanes

Thank you for your questions and for highlighting the concerns raised by families in Langton Matravers, Worth Matravers and Kingston. I appreciate that any change to a child's journey to and from school can be unsettling for both students and parents, particularly in rural areas where transport options are more limited.

In response to question (a),

The Council takes the safety and wellbeing of children extremely seriously. While Service 40 is a public bus service rather than a dedicated school transport route, it operates within national regulations and standards for public transport. The service is provided by a professional operator, and the Council is satisfied that it offers a suitable means of travel for eligible students. We recognise the safeguarding concerns that have been raised by some parents and understand the importance of children feeling safe and comfortable when travelling. These concerns have been discussed with the operator and will continue to be kept under review.

The arrangements are also consistent with the Council's statutory responsibilities for home-to-school transport and with national guidance issued by Government. While local authorities must ensure that eligible children have access to suitable transport, there is no statutory requirement for this to be provided through dedicated school-only vehicles.

In response to question (b),

The Council fully recognises the importance of reliable transport for rural communities and understands the challenges that longer journeys can create for young people and their families. As we develop home-to-school transport arrangements from September 2027 onwards, we will continue to consider the needs of rural communities alongside factors such as journey times, vehicle capacity, accessibility, safety, environmental impacts and value for money. Our aim is to make the best use of available transport while ensuring pupils can travel to school safely and efficiently.

In doing so, the Council will continue to meet its statutory duties and have regard to national home-to-school transport guidance, balancing those requirements with the need to provide a sustainable and cost-effective transport network across Dorset.

More broadly, the Council is also making record investment in Dorset's public and community transport network, improving connectivity and travel opportunities for residents in rural areas and helping to ensure that communities remain connected to education, employment, healthcare and other essential services.