

Full Council – 22 October 2026
Questions submitted by Councillors

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr C Jones

The last few months have been beset in the North of Dorset with missed bin collections. Some households, and indeed blocks of flats were left without a collection for a number of weeks.

I understand problems have been around sickness & lorry breakdowns. Could the cabinet member please tell us how sick days there have been at the Shaftesbury depot over the past 6 months and as a comparison, the number of sick days at our other depots please.

Thank you.

Response by Cllr J Jeanes

Thank you for the question. Over the last six-month period, the Shaftesbury waste depot recorded 1,739 sickness days lost, of which around 1,280 days related to long-term absence and 459 days to short-term absence.

For comparison, sickness days lost at the Council's other waste depots during the same period were:

- Weymouth Depot (Crookhill): 1,449 days
- Poundbury Depot: 861 days
- Ferndown Depot: 658 days
- Wareham Depot: 450 days
- Bridport Depot: 322 days

The various waste depots are different sizes and have different number of employees operating from them, so it is not an exact comparison between depots. Whilst sickness absence has been a contributing factor, it is important to note that the majority of absence at Shaftesbury relates to a small number of long-term cases. Service disruption in North Dorset has also been influenced by other operational challenges, including vehicle availability and the difficulty in securing agency staff at short notice to cover unplanned absences.

The service is taking action to address the underlying causes of these issues, including strengthening attendance management arrangements and improving operational resilience. In addition, the Council is investing in improvements to the Shaftesbury depot to provide better facilities and infrastructure, helping to further strengthen the resilience of the service and support reliable waste collections for residents.

Question 2 – submitted by Cllr V Pothecary

Background

For many weeks I have been inundated with complaints from residents regarding our refuse collection service – particularly with regard to food waste. Whilst collection has been inconsistent across the Ward, recently some Villages have had **four missed food waste collections in a row!** No formal apology has been given and no pertinent information has been received. I, and others, have been left to pick up the pieces.

Given the average temperatures we are experiencing, it seems to me that we are failing in our legal responsibility and commitment to adhere to basic health and safety standards. A compostable bin liner is only structurally sound for up to 5 days. After that a food bin left outside is at risk from magots and rats.

Dorset Council has the highest council tax in the Country. This particular issue is at the very heart of what many consider to be a contractual commitment. There are also many villagers in the North who feel they receive little enough for their tax contribution as it is.

I am sure that every member of this Council would agree that the situation is totally unacceptable and must not be allowed to continue.

Question

Please can I be given the reason for this widespread failure to meet this Councils' commitment to a weekly food waste collection and an assurance that the food waste collection, in particular, will return to its hitherto exemplary service in the Gillingham area, without delay.

Response by Cllr J Jeanes

Thank you for the question. I recognise the concerns raised by residents who have experienced missed food waste collections and apologise to those who have been affected. The level of service delivered in parts of North Dorset in recent months has not been where we want it to be.

The main cause of the disruption has been staffing shortages, particularly amongst HGV drivers. This has been driven by increased levels of long-term sickness absence affecting a small number of employees, combined with limited availability of agency drivers to provide short-notice cover. Where qualified drivers are not available, we cannot safely operate our collection vehicles. When this happens, collection rounds unfortunately have to be stood down and recollected at a later date, resulting in delays to some collections.

We are actively managing sickness absence and supporting employees to return to work at the earliest appropriate opportunity. At the same time, we are improving resilience by developing our own pool of relief staff, investing in improvements to the Shaftesbury depot, recruiting additional drivers, and supporting existing operatives to gain HGV licences and progress into driving roles.

These actions are aimed at addressing the underlying causes of the disruption. While some of these improvements, particularly increasing driver numbers and building greater operational resilience, will take time to fully deliver their benefits, we are starting to see some early signs of improvement. We remain focused on restoring reliable rubbish, recycling, food and garden waste collection services and reducing the risk of future disruption for residents.

Regarding the level of Council Tax - you said we're ranked first. It's worth reminding members and the public watching this that the Council Tax bill covers funding for a number of other organisations. Remove the parts of the bill set by the other organisations Dorset is ranked 11th. It is only after factoring in the other preceptors, Police, Fire and the Town & Parish Councils that residents face the highest bill.

Some councils have been able to freeze or reduce council tax due to government support. They were beneficiaries of what government call "fair funding" as we saw more money moved further North - for example Nottingham used to be higher. How did Nottingham fare under fair funding?

Well, Dorset's Fair Funding allocation was £133m with £362m then having to come from Council Tax. Nottingham on the other hand, their Fair Funding allocation is £272m - over double - with only £171m having to come from Council tax. So they get double the funding Dorset gets and this year didn't take the full Council Tax rise. And - it was reported this week that Nottingham are considering freezing Council tax - how this is a fair deal for the residents of Dorset is beyond me.

Question 3 – submitted by Cllr S Murcer

Members will be aware that one of the key roles of the A&G Committee is to highlight risk as well as an oversight on governance.

The ongoing Transformation Programme is an important part of continuing to create a strong and sustainable Council without the need to reduce front-line services. My question relates to the Transformation Update tabled at the Audit and Governance Committee meeting held on Monday 12 October.

Questions were asked and answers given regarding the declared savings expected from Transformation by the end of this financial year of £9.4m.

Progress to Date – July 2026

22.3 Expectations of the savings delivery are shown in the table below

Savings area	Budget	Forecast at P4	P4 confidence	Remainder to deliver	Remainder confidence
Workforce redesign	£2.5m	£1.1m	High	£1.4m	Medium
Third-party spend	£4.0m	£2.0m	Medium	£2.0m	Low
ICT rationalisation	£0.3m	£0m	Low	£0.3m	Low
Full-year effect delivered in 2025/26	£2.6m	£2.0m	High	£0.6m	High
Total	£9.4m	£5.1m	High	£4.3m	Mixed

The Council's own confidence in its ability to deliver these savings is mixed and there is a high probability that there will be a short fall close on £4m.

Moreover, the Council's current year end overspend is forecast to be £8.136m. With 60% of the contingency already spent, these two factors are seen as significant risks to the Council.

Given the challenging nature of local government finances my concern therefore is how a balanced budget can be achieved.

The need for pace and hard-edged outcomes has never been more important to prevent, or at least mitigate the collateral damage to other vital services provided by this Council, particularly in the Economy and Environment Directorate (Place) by not achieving planned savings and overspends

So, my question is what actions are being taken to ensure the Council achieves a year-end balanced outturn without the need to cut front-line services.

Response by Cllr Clifford

I would like to highlight a few points which should give you comfort.

First the director of finance is on the record saying that the headline current overspend is within 2% of target and relative to the size of the total budget is not regarded as significant.

Secondly, he has previously outlined a huge range of options to reduce the overspend including reducing capital spend, delaying spend to following years, a

forensic look at vacancies, tightening 3rd party spend and reviewing new posts and also a close look at borrowing. This latter point is particularly important as the recent government decision to pay the council £145m to fund 90% of the High Needs Block means in all likelihood this council will not need to borrow again this year with a significant cash saving.

Finally, he also responded to this question and compared the council's financial position this year with that of last year. At this stage last year, we were facing an overspend position of £7.7m - very similar to this year's position. As you will be aware, last year we brought in a balanced budget without the need to look at reducing frontline services, and I am confident we will do the same this year.

Question 4 – submitted by Cllr P Brown

How many fly-tipping fixed penalty notices has Dorset Council issued in the last 12-month reporting period and how much has it raised?

Response by Cllr M Bell

Thank you for your question.

The Environmental Enforcement Team, comprising of 5 officers, deals with reports of fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles and other related crime. The team has built up considerable local knowledge and working relationships with partners to act on crime and share intelligence about perpetrators. Over the past 12 months, 97 Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued for environmental crimes including 41 of these for fly tipping with £10,900 received so far in related fines. Over the same period, 8 vehicles involved in waste crime have been seized and disposed of.

The message is clear; we will not tolerate environmental crime in Dorset. My message to our residents and businesses is to ensure that your DIY, building and trade waste is only put in the hands of licensed waste carriers.