Public Participation
Questions

1. Question from Cllr Atkinson on behalf of Weymouth Town Council

What evidence base will cabinet depend upon for its decision on a proposed change to the PSPO to permit dogs on leads on Weymouth Central Beach from 6pm to 6am, 01 May to 30 September?

The proposed arrangement will result in increased risk to a) public health, b) the resort's reputation. c) our ability to regain its Blue Flag Status.

The proposed change ignores the majority view to Q20 in DC's PSPO survey.

1. Q20, (P67, line 4) established 55.2% of respondents (57.4% of residents) supports retaining the current restriction. Those seeking change include a minority likely to seek exclusion. 89.9% of non-dog owners supported retention of the current restriction (P67, 3 lines up).
2. About 59% of respondents were dog owners This over-representation is an example of self-selection bias that officers should correct for by standard procedures (e.g. Spix C. *et al. J. Med. Screen* **23,** 44-49). This would establish that the overwhelming percentage of respondents are against change at Central Beach.

The proposed change would pose environmental, health and reputation risks to Weymouth resort.

1. The imperative #23 of BLUE FLAG BEACH CRITERIA allows only assistance dogs on a Blue Flag beach.
2. EA has established the sources of faecal indicator organisms at Central Beach are birds, shedding by human bathers and dogs.
3. A minority of irresponsible dog owners are likely to fail to pick up dog faeces or find them for those let off the required lead in the dark.
4. It is intestinal enterococci that compromise bathing water quality at Central Beach.
5. An average sized dog releases millions of intestinal enterococci (range according to size 10^7 to 10^9/deposition) The lower end of the range is equivalent to that from about 7000 birds or c 3,000 human bathers (Wright M.E. et al., 2009, *Marine Pollution Bulletin* **58**, 1649–1656). The latter figure contrast with 99±17 (range 0-200) swimmers in the RNLI designated bathing area at noon on Central Beach this August.
6. The high tide between 6pm and 6am will flush faeces in the intertidal zone into the sea before next morning's raking. Faeces are likely to remain for some time in the bathing water in calm conditions.
7. The website of the manufacturer of our sand rake does not list faeces among efficiently collected materials (SURF RAKE Beach Cleaner | H. Barber & Sons).
8. RNLI will again close Weymouth beach if faeces are reported to it. This damages the reputation of the resort.

9. Faeces left on the dry sand allow accumulation of the persistent eggs of *Toxocara canis*. Dogs should be excluded from sand where children play (Toxocariasis - NHS) as at our beach in the summer.

2. Question from Linda Stevenson

At its committee meeting on 28 October, Weymouth Town Council resolved to object to the continuation of dog access on Weymouth Beach between 6.00 pm and 6.00 am during the summer restriction period, and my question is

what evidence Weymouth Town Council has provided to Dorset Council to demonstrate that responsible dog owners using the beach during these permitted hours cause harm, nuisance, safety concerns or environmental impacts sufficient to justify removing this access, particularly when the current arrangement enables people of all abilities, including disabled residents and assistance-dog users, to access the beach at quieter times, provides level access to the waterline, reduces reliance on the Esplanade which is often occupied by cyclists during permitted cycling hours, summer events, attractions and fairground rides, and allows those who may find busy environments challenging to enjoy Weymouth Beach safely and responsibly, while supporting Dorset Council's commitments to accessibility, inclusion and equality under the Equality Act 2010.

Personal Statement

My name is Linda Stevenson, and I am a resident of Weymouth who relies on an assistance dog to manage a clinically diagnosed mental-health condition.
This condition developed following ten years of full-time work supporting older people with complex mental-health needs, much of it undertaken during periods of severe staffing shortages and high emotional pressure.

I have been raising concerns about dog control signage and assistance-dog access in Weymouth since 2016. During that time I have attended meetings of both Weymouth Town Council and Dorset Council and have contacted councillors elected to represent me in Radipole.

Today I want to explain why this issue matters, not just as a matter of policy, but as a matter of daily life.

My assistance dog is essential to my independence, wellbeing and ability to participate safely in the community. However, many Public Spaces Protection Order signs simply state "No Dogs" and fail to make clear that assistance dogs are exempt.

For many people that may seem a small omission. For me, it is not.
When I approach a beach, promenade or public space displaying a sign that says "No Dogs", my anxiety immediately increases. I hesitate. I question whether I am welcome. I worry about being challenged.
Unfortunately, those concerns are often justified. I have been stopped, questioned and challenged by members of the public because the signage suggests that all dogs are

prohibited. Each time this happens I am placed in the difficult position of having to explain my disability or justify my presence.

The emotional impact of those encounters is significant. They leave me feeling vulnerable, embarrassed and unwelcome in my own community.

As a result, there are places I sometimes avoid altogether, despite having a legal right to access them with my assistance dog.

This is not simply about signs. It is about whether disabled residents can move through public spaces with confidence and dignity.

The Equality Act 2010 provides protections for disabled people and recognises the important role assistance dogs play in enabling access. Yet those protections are undermined when signage fails to communicate clearly that assistance dogs are permitted.

A simple addition of the words:
"Except Assistance Dogs"
would remove confusion, reduce confrontation, improve public understanding and help ensure disabled residents can access public spaces without unnecessary barriers.
I am therefore asking Cabinet to support the inclusion of clear assistance-dog exemptions on all relevant PSPO signage and to ensure equality considerations are fully reflected in future signage reviews.

This is a small change with a significant impact on the daily lives of disabled people.
I respectfully ask Dorset Council to take this opportunity to make its signage clear, lawful and inclusive.