

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 August 2026 at 7.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr L Dedman – Chairman

Cllr S Bull – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr C Adams, Cllr S Aitkenhead, Cllr M Andrews, Cllr S Bartlett, Cllr J Beesley, Cllr D Brown, Cllr R Burton, Cllr P Canavan, Cllr S Carr-Brown, Cllr B Chick, Cllr E Connolly, Cllr D d'Orton-Gibson, Cllr B Dove, Cllr M Earl, Cllr J Edwards, Cllr G Farquhar, Cllr D Farr, Cllr D A Flagg, Cllr M Gillett, Cllr A Hadley, Cllr R Herrett, Cllr P Hilliard, Cllr A Keddie, Cllr M Le Poidevin, Cllr S Mackrow, Cllr A Martin, Cllr D Martin, Cllr G Martin, Cllr S McCormack, Cllr S Moore, Cllr A-M Moriarty, Cllr B Nanovo, Cllr E Pankhurst, Cllr M Phipps, Cllr K Rampton, Cllr J Richardson, Cllr C Rigby, Cllr J Salmon, Cllr P Sidaway, Cllr P Slade, Cllr T Slade, Cllr V Slade, Cllr M Tarling, Cllr T Trent, Cllr O Walters, Cllr C Weight, Cllr L Williams and Cllr G Wright

20. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hazel Allen, Sara Armstrong, Julie Bagwell, Olivia Brown, Judes Butt, John Challinor, Peter Cooper, Mike Cox, Anne Filer, Crispin Goodall, Jeff Hanna, Jamie Martin, Pete Miles, Lisa Northover, Rachel Pattinson-West, Vanessa Ricketts, Kate Salmon & Kieron Wilson.

21. Declarations of Interests

No declarations of interests were made.

Council was reminded that dispensations had been granted to all dual-hatted BCP Councillors who sat on or worked in Town and Parish Councils in respect of the motion relating to the provision of assets for Town and Parish Councils. The dispensation had been granted to ensure that all Councillors were freely able to fully participate in the debate and vote on the matter.

22. Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2026 be approved as a correct record.

23. Announcements and Introductions from the Chairman

The Chairman advised Council of her event attendances since the last meeting, including a YMCA charity event with the High Sheriff of Dorset and

a Chinese University artificial intelligence team event at Bournemouth University.

The Deputy Chairman advised that he had attended the Roma Holocaust memorial event.

The Chairman then spoke in tribute to Cat McMillan, BCP Council officer and colleague, who had recently passed away. Council stood to mark Cat's passing.

The Chairman welcomed Tim O'Gara, BCP Council's new Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, to his first meeting of Council.

24. Appointment of Corporate Director of Children's Services

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Education and Skills, Councillor Richard Burton, presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

Council was advised that the report invited Council to approve the appointment of Claire Shiels to the position of Corporate Director of Children's Services in accordance with the Council's Constitution and statutory requirements.

In addition, Council was asked to approve the appointment of Juliette Blake as Interim Corporate Director of Children's Services until Ms Shiels could take up the post.

RESOLVED that:

- a. **Council approved the appointment of Claire Shiels to the position of Corporate Director of Children's Services; and**
- b. **Council approve the appointment of Juliette Blake as interim Corporate Director of Children's Services for approximately a four-month period commencing 4 August 2026, including the discharge of relevant statutory responsibilities, until the appointed candidate commences in post.**

Voting: For:49, Against:1, Abstentions:0

25. Notices of Motions in accordance with Procedure Rule 10

Motion to Council: Protecting Children from Vape Shops Near Schools

The following motion was submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 10 of the Meeting Procedure Rules and was moved by Councillor Sharon Carr-Brown and seconded by Councillor Patrick Canavan.

This Council notes that:

- The Government is moving to strengthen controls on vaping and tobacco to protect children and young people.

- The sale of vaping products to under-18s is illegal, yet proximity of vape shops to schools risks normalising vaping.
- BCP Council has a duty to promote public health and reduce health inequalities.

This Council believes that:

- Children should be protected from exposure to vaping products on their journey to and from school.
- Preventive action through planning, licensing, and public health-led policy is preferable to enforcement after harm occurs.

This Council resolves to:

1. Instruct officers to review planning policies and advise on lawful options to limit the location of vape shops near schools, colleges, and other children's facilities;
2. Explore the use of business licensing and other regulatory powers to prevent clustering of vape retailers near schools;
3. Request a report outlining legal options, risks, and recommended next steps;
4. Write to the Secretary of State and local MPs supporting national powers to regulate vape retailer locations, in line with the Government's direction;
5. Work with BCP's Public Health team, schools, and community partners to monitor impacts and strengthen local prevention and cessation efforts.

Following debate, it was:

RESOLVED: That this Council resolves to:

1. **Instruct officers to review planning policies and advise on lawful options to limit the location of vape shops near schools, colleges, and other children's facilities;**
2. **Explore the use of business licensing and other regulatory powers to prevent clustering of vape retailers near schools;**
3. **Request a report outlining legal options, risks, and recommended next steps;**
4. **Write to the Secretary of State and local MPs supporting national powers to regulate vape retailer locations, in line with the Government's direction;**
5. **Work with BCP's Public Health team, schools, and community partners to monitor impacts and strengthen local prevention and cessation efforts.**

Voting: Nem.Con.

Motion to Council: Air Quality, Traffic Congestion and Public Health in Hamworthy and Across BCP

The following motion was submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 10 of the Meeting Procedure Rules by Councillor Peter Cooper. In Councillor

Cooper's absence the motion was moved by Councillor Patrick Canavan and seconded by Councillor Anne-Marie Moriarty.

Councillor Canavan advised Council that an amendment to the motion had been received and agreed by the moved and seconder, so that the proposed motion read:

This Council notes that:

- Residents in areas such as Hamworthy are experiencing persistent and severe traffic gridlock
- Prolonged vehicle idling and a high volume of HGV traffic contribute to poor air quality, increased pollution
- Residents, including children and young people, are exposed to fumes and poor air quality which are a significant public health issues, linked to respiratory illness, cardiovascular disease, and reduced quality of life.

This Council believes that:

- Residents should not be subjected to unsafe levels of air pollution as a result of traffic congestion.
- The cumulative impact of transport emissions requires urgent and coordinated action.
- Protecting public health, particularly that of children and vulnerable residents, must be a priority across the BCP conurbation.

This Council resolves to:

1. ~~Commission a comprehensive air quality assessment in areas like Hamworthy.~~ Note that BCP Council undertakes comprehensive annual air quality monitoring and assessment through its statutory Air Quality Annual Status Reports, including monitoring in and around Hamworthy and other areas affected by traffic congestion, and commits to continuing this work and publishing the findings.
2. ~~Work with relevant agencies to assess the impact of sustained HGV traffic on underground infrastructure and local roads.~~ Support the delivery of Local Transport Plan 4 measures relating to freight and network management, and continue to work with relevant agencies and infrastructure providers to understand and mitigate the impacts of HGV traffic on the transport network, associated infrastructure and air quality.
3. ~~Develop and implement a time-bound action plan to reduce congestion, improve air quality, and protect public health.~~ Recognise and endorse the BCP and Dorset Local Transport Plan 4, together with its five-year Implementation Plan for 2026-2031, that constitutes a time-bound action plan to reduce congestion, improve air quality and protect public health through investment in public transport, active travel, network management, zero-emission vehicles and transport decarbonisation.
4. ~~Use the findings from this work to inform a wider BCP-wide strategy on air quality and traffic congestion in similarly affected communities.~~ Recognise that Local Transport Plan 4 is already a comprehensive

BCP-wide strategy addressing air quality, congestion, public health and transport emissions across the conurbation.

5. Recommend that the Transport Advisory Group undertake a review of air quality monitoring across the BCP area, including consideration of any gaps in monitoring coverage, emerging areas of concern, and additional measures that could be taken by the Council and its partners to further improve air quality and protect public health and to produce a report for Cabinet.

Council approved the amendment to the motion.

Voting: Nem.Con.

Following debate on the substantive motion, it was:

RESOLVED: This Council resolves to:

1. Note that BCP Council undertakes comprehensive annual air quality monitoring and assessment through its statutory Air Quality Annual Status Reports, including monitoring in and around Hamworthy and other areas affected by traffic congestion, and commits to continuing this work and publishing the findings.
2. Support the delivery of Local Transport Plan 4 measures relating to freight and network management, and continue to work with relevant agencies and infrastructure providers to understand and mitigate the impacts of HGV traffic on the transport network, associated infrastructure and air quality.
3. Recognise and endorse the BCP and Dorset Local Transport Plan 4, together with its five-year Implementation Plan for 2026-2031, that constitutes a time-bound action plan to reduce congestion, improve air quality and protect public health through investment in public transport, active travel, network management, zero-emission vehicles and transport decarbonisation.
4. Recognise that Local Transport Plan 4 is already a comprehensive BCP-wide strategy addressing air quality, congestion, public health and transport emissions across the conurbation.
5. Recommend that the Transport Advisory Group undertake a review of air quality monitoring across the BCP area, including consideration of any gaps in monitoring coverage, emerging areas of concern, and additional measures that could be taken by the Council and its partners to further improve air quality and protect public health and to produce a report for Cabinet.

Voting: For:39, Against:9, Abstentions:2

Motion to Council: Provision of Council Meeting Facilities for Parish and Town Councils Without Charge

The following motion was submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 10 of the Meeting Procedure Rules and was moved by Councillor Gillian Martin and seconded by Councillor Cameron Adams.

Councillor Martin advised Council that an amendment that had been received and agreed by the mover and seconder, so that the motion read:

This Council notes that:

- On 1st April 2019, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council was established as the principal local authority for the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole area following local government reorganisation.
- The parish and town councils within the BCP area were established under legislation and governance arrangements administered by principal authorities and form part of the wider family of local government serving local communities.
- On 1st April 2026 Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council brought Bournemouth Town Council, Poole Town Council and Broadstone Parish Council into being. Thus, BCP was the principal authority administering the process.
- Parish and town councils are funded through local precepts paid directly by residents and businesses within their respective parish areas.
- Charges imposed by BCP Council policy for the hire of meeting rooms and facilities are ultimately funded by those same local taxpayers through parish and town council precepts.
- Every pound spent by a parish or town council on room hire is a pound unavailable for local services, environmental improvements, community projects and support for residents at a local level.
- The Mayor of Bournemouth, Mayor of Christchurch, Mayor of Poole and Sheriff of Poole play an enormous part in maintaining our history and civic pride.

This Council believes that:

- All tiers of local government should work collaboratively to maximise value for money for local taxpayers.
- Public funds should not be unnecessarily transferred between local authorities, where doing so delivers no direct benefit to residents.
- BCP Council should support and encourage strong, effective and financially sustainable parish and town councils.
- Local taxpayers should see as much of their parish precept as possible spent on community benefit rather than administrative overheads.
- The provision of meeting accommodation by BCP Council would represent a practical demonstration of its commitment to local democracy and partnership working.

This Council resolves to:

Request the Chief Executive in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer, to bring forward a report setting out the legal, financial, operational and property implications of providing meeting rooms , civic facilities, parking and storage facilities to parish or town councils **without charge**, including options for implementation, before any final policy decision is made.

Purpose of the Motion

The purpose of this motion is to explore a potential to reduce unnecessary expenditure incurred by parish and town councils by carrying out a costing exercise, thereby putting BCP Council in an informed position to debate future policy regarding charges levied by BCP council against the 8 town and parish councils within the BCP area. This is to potentially protect money raised from residents through additional parish precepts. As the principal authority for the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole area, BCP Council should put itself in a position to consider supporting local democracy by making suitable meeting facilities available without charge to town and parish councils as a matter of policy. Thus, ensuring that locally raised funds remain within local communities and are directed towards services and projects that benefit residents rather than administrative costs.

Voting: Nem.Con

Following debate on th substantive motion, Council moved to the vote, where the motion was lost.

Voting: For:10, Against:36, Abstentions:4

Motion to Full Council: Age Friendly Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole

The following motion was submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 10 of the Meeting Procedure Rules and was moved by Councillor Sandra Moore and seconded by Councillor Patrick Canavan.

This Council notes:

- The Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole conurbation has more older adults than the national average, and this group is growing faster than any other. The 2021 Census data shows that people aged 55-59 increased by 27.3% and those aged 70-74 increased by 39.5%.
- There are currently 166,000 older people aged 50 or over in the BCP area, expected to rise to 181,000 by 2031(41% of the total population). There is a significant presence of post war and sixties baby boomers. As a result, population growth will be primarily among those aged 75-84 in the short term to 2026, and those aged 64-74 and 85 plus in the medium term to 2031.
- Around 13% of people aged 60 or over in the BCP area live in relative poverty, with significant variation across neighbourhoods.

- Our ageing population is a primary driver of adult social care demand. There was an increase in new requests for support of 28% from 2022/23 to 2023/24 for people aged 18-64, and an increase of 7% for older people aged 65+.
- There are notable health inequalities in BCP, with more deprived areas experiencing poorer health and lower life expectancy, highlighting the need for targeted interventions. The importance of addressing these inequalities to improve outcomes for older residents has been recognised by this council and requires BCP Council to plan strategically to meet the needs of our growing older population to ensure individuals can age well.
- Nationally, there is a lower pension credit uptake than those eligible to receive it. In the BCP area an estimated 6000 people are not claiming pension credit despite being eligible.
- People aged 50 and over contribute disproportionately to unpaid care, often balancing this with work, and a higher proportion of women are involved in caregiving roles. There are 21,000 unpaid carers aged 50 plus in the BCP area, almost 2/3 of all unpaid carers. Supporting unpaid carers is a key focus for this council.
- Supporting older workers to remain in fulfilling work through accommodating changing health needs and caring responsibilities and providing access to training and development into later life is very important and another key focus for this council.
- Car ownership decreases with age, impacting mobility and increasing reliance on public or community transport. Evidence suggests concessionary bus passes encourage older people to be more active and make trips they would not otherwise make if they had to pay.
- Concessionary bus pass uptake in the BCP area is high, especially among the 75-84 age group, but lower for women aged 85 plus. This council recognises the importance of good access to public transport to help reduce social isolation.

This Council further notes:

- We want Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole to be age friendly places to live, work and visit.
- We acknowledge older adults in their mid-60's to mid-70's are actively engaged in volunteering and contribute significantly to their communities.
- BCP Council is committed to supporting older people to live healthy, purposeful, independent, connected and fulfilling lives. The Council commissions, funds and provides a range of provision for older people living in the conurbations, across health, (including public health and adult social care), housing, environment, transport and the community voluntary sector.
- We have teamed up with partners to make our communities more age friendly. We believe that talking about healthy aging and improving accessibility can help everyone, including future generations.

- BCP is part of the Centre for Ageing Better's Network of Age Friendly Communities, and our local Age Friendly Community work has been highlighted in the Centre for Ageing Better's Age Friendly Communities Impact report.
- We have now been recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and joined their Global Network of Age Friendly Cities and Communities.

This Council resolves to:

1. Continue to recruit Age Friendly Ambassadors to set out priorities for engagement with residents including Pension Credit Awareness and Age Friendly Training. Ambassadors will also support International Day of Older People, create support resources (BCP Carer Support Podcast) and help the role grow.
2. Continue training staff with support from the Age Friendly Ambassadors. This includes "What is an Age Friendly Community and why this is important in BCP and Ageism Awareness and Age Friendly Communication. In person Dementia Training is also delivered by the Prama Life manager.
3. Continue helping older adults maintain strong social connections because being part of a community helps reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation
4. Continue working with local businesses and Bournemouth BID to improve Age Friendliness of Bournemouth Town Centre through initiative such as the "take a seat" campaign.
5. BCP Council to sign the Age Friendly Employer Pledge, as requested. This is a commitment made by employers to celebrate the value of older workers and help improve the recruitment, retention and development of people over 50, recognise the importance of older workers and aim to provide an inclusive environment to staff regardless of their age of background.
6. To encourage every BCP councillor to sign the BCP Age Friendly Communities Charter as a way of showing commitment to age friendly principles. [BCP Age Friendly Charter](#) This charter was created from listening to older residents about what they felt was important to create an Age Friendly Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

Following debate it was:

RESOLVED: That this Council resolves to:

1. Continue to recruit Age Friendly Ambassadors to set out priorities for engagement with residents including Pension Credit Awareness and Age Friendly Training. Ambassadors will also support International Day of Older People, create support resources (BCP Carer Support Podcast) and help the role grow.
2. Continue training staff with support from the Age Friendly Ambassadors. This includes "What is an Age Friendly Community and why this is important in BCP and Ageism Awareness and Age Friendly Communication. In person Dementia Training is also delivered by the Prama Life manager.

3. Continue helping older adults maintain strong social connections because being part of a community helps reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation
4. Continue working with local businesses and Bournemouth BID to improve Age Friendliness of Bournemouth Town Centre through initiative such as the “take a seat” campaign.
5. BCP Council to sign the Age Friendly Employer Pledge, as requested. This is a commitment made by employers to celebrate the value of older workers and help improve the recruitment, retention and development of people over 50, recognise the importance of older workers and aim to provide an inclusive environment to staff regardless of their age of background.
6. To encourage every BCP councillor to sign the BCP Age Friendly Communities Charter as a way of showing commitment to age friendly principles. [BCP Age Friendly Charter](#) This charter was created from listening to older residents about what they felt was important to create an Age Friendly Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

Voting: Nem.Con

26. Questions from Councillors

Question from Councillor Patrick Canavan on behalf of Councillor Peter Cooper

“Can the administration explain why the recent rollout of the food waste collection service has been so inconsistent and disruptive across our communities?”

Residents have experienced missed or late bin deliveries, confusion over start dates, and collections not taking place on the scheduled day. These issues are not limited to food waste; similar problems are being reported with black and blue bin collections.

On top of this, there are growing concerns about the speed of collection vehicles in residential areas, and bins being left on pavements—blocking access for families, wheelchair users, and those with walking aids. Councillors are also having to chase updates rather than being proactively informed, leaving residents without clear answers.

Can you set out:

1. What has gone wrong across all waste collection services,
2. What immediate steps are being taken to stabilise performance,
3. How safety concerns around vehicle speeds are being addressed;
4. How the Council will ensure clear communication and regular updates to both Councillors and residents; and
5. When can residents expect a reliable, consistent service across food, recycling and black bin collection.

Response from Councillor Andy Hadley, Portfolio Holder for Climate Response, Environment and Energy

Thank you for your detailed question. I'm afraid the question and therefore answer is long, and I will speak as quickly as I can.

The National "simpler recycling" reforms place a range of new responsibilities on all local authorities, with the intention to increase the proportion of waste that is recycled, and to reduce the residual waste going to landfill or incineration. There are many positive aspects to the changes, but also disruption.

I am sorry that the reliability has not been the service that we want for our residents. The BCP team worked hard and met the April 2026 target for separate food waste. Some other authorities failed to order equipment or trucks in time. The team have been responsive in trying to fault-find issues, which are multi-faceted.

Funding from government was very tight, and it quickly became clear that take-up of the service in Poole exceeded the estimates based on historic food collection in Bournemouth.

A further truck was purchased, which has enabled the rounds to be rebalanced to better match demand. Rebalancing is an ongoing process as the service beds in. We have also seen an increase in presentation of food waste in the Bournemouth and Christchurch areas with the media coverage.

Despite the reports of missed bins and dissatisfaction, the tonnage of Food Waste collected has risen in each of the first three months of operation, to 652 tonnes in June 26, compared to 348 tonnes last year, so 13% of the weight of the black residual waste bins is being diverted to Anaerobic digestion, producing gas feeding into the gas mains, and soil improved for local farms.

When food waste trucks are full, crews on the rounds in Poole experience extended delays in getting from the round area over to Hurn, empty, and getting back.

We have procured two sealed skips to site at Hatchpond in order to reduce down time from collecting waste. Because many Authorities have experienced similar issues, the delivery time has extended. The first one arrived this week and is in operation and this should improve reliability.

Quite a few staff are approaching retirement, and we have experienced problems in recruiting and retaining staff, especially with the additional crews needed for the 6 additional food waste vehicles. The new staff and agency crews, sometimes miss unfamiliar addresses on new rounds. All vehicles are fitted with on board CCTV and vehicle telemetry systems.

Food Collections from Flats is also a new service, and familiarity with varied access to bin-stores by these new crews has also been a challenge.

The team service 60 rounds per day; 1.4 million bin collections per month.

The extreme hot weather has affected all waste services, with increased staff sickness, and machinery failure. On only one really hot day, the crews were stood down for 3 hours for their own welfare.

The position is dynamic from day to day, and we have attempted to communicate out as we can. I have written to all BCP Councillors several times and we have held briefings for all Councillors to update them, and I have appeared on the radio, and in the press to advise people of the status of the service.

When bins on a road are not collected, the teams will work late and attempt to collect the next day, including weekend working to catch up.

Food waste can also be taken to any of the 3 Recycling Centres.

My mailbox both from Councillors and the public has been constant on this topic. Where individual bins are missed, we do ask people to check whether their road is on the missed rounds list, wait 24 hours for catchup, and then use the report-it service, which is more reliable and less disruptive than by email.

There is a cross-party working group to delve into the detail of all the forthcoming changes on waste management.

Question from Councillor Patrick Canavan on behalf of Councillor Peter Cooper

At the recent Poole Town Council elections, many residents remained opposed to the introduction of town councils, and that strength of feeling was reflected in the outcome at the ballot box. However, it also became apparent that a significant number of members of the public had little understanding of what they were actually being asked to vote for or why this new tier of local government was being introduced.

The communications and public information campaign was widely perceived as inadequate, with many residents confusing the elections with other polls. Indeed, even some officers across the Council were unclear about the role, purpose and responsibilities of the new town councils.

Whilst I appreciate that the implementation timetable was challenging, the democratic process relies upon an informed electorate, regardless of whether people support or oppose the policy.

Can the relevant officers outline what lessons have been learnt from the communication strategy surrounding the inaugural town council elections, and what improvements will be put in place to ensure that, ahead of future town council elections, residents receive clear, accessible and timely information about the purpose, powers and responsibilities of town councils are, enabling them to make informed democratic choices?

Response from Councillor Millie Earl, Leader of the Council on behalf of Councillor Jeff Hanna, Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Resources and Governance

Thank you Councillor Canavan and Councillor Cooper for the question. I recognise the importance of ensuring that residents have access to clear and timely information about elections and about the role of any new tier of local government. I also recognise that the creation of the new town councils followed a significant public debate and democratic process and

that views about that decision remain strongly held, as we've seen here this evening.

It is important, however, to distinguish between the Council's role in administering elections and the political debate surrounding them. Councillors do not, and should not, control or seek to influence the delivery of elections. Elections are regulated and conducted in accordance with regulation and national guidance, including guidance issued by the Electoral Commission. The Returning Officer is responsible for ensuring that the poll is administered properly, impartially and independently. And I think that our officers have done an incredible job in making sure that is the case.

I do acknowledge that national political factors will often influence voting behaviour at local elections. That is a feature of democratic politics and is not something that the Council can control. The Council's responsibility is to ensure that the election is administered lawfully, fairly and transparently, and that electors are provided with the necessary factual information to enable them to participate.

I do not accept that there was widespread confusion about the nature of the elections. Every registered elector was sent a poll card, which identified the specific election taking place and provided the relevant voting information. In addition, and unusually for town and parish council elections, every seat was contested and turnout was also relatively high when compared with typical town and parish council elections. That level of contest indicates a high degree of candidate and party engagement and ensured that electors in every ward had a choice at the ballot box.

In terms of publicity, the Council promoted and published election awareness information through its own channels, including the website, social media, and through local media routes. There was also substantial press coverage. I understand that the Bournemouth Echo alone published more than 20 pre-election articles relating to the town council elections. Taken together with the delivery of poll cards to every elector, I consider the Council's publicity to have been proportionate.

It is also right to recognise that candidates and political parties share a responsibility for communicating with residents, explaining their positions, encouraging participation and helping electors understand the choices available to them. The Council must remain politically neutral in its own communications and cannot campaign for or against any outcome, candidate or party.

That said, there are always lessons to consider after any electoral event. Officers will review the communications activity undertaken, including the clarity, timing and accessibility of information about the role, purpose and responsibilities of town councils. Any appropriate learning will be incorporated into future planning.

Future scheduled town council elections will be combined with the BCP Council elections in May 2031. That will provide a further opportunity to align public information, electoral communications and wider voter awareness activity. However, as I have said, the turnout for the inaugural town council elections was relatively high, all seats were contested, and the

Council's role was properly focused on the lawful, impartial and proportionate administration of the elections.

Question from Councillor Patrick Canavan

In recent months, public debate both nationally and locally has increasingly involved the use of claims relating to crime, migration and community safety. In some cases, information and statements that have involved misinformation have led to unrest and demonstrations based on false assumptions and speculation.

Given the influence that public figures have within public discourse, and recognising our collective responsibility to act with integrity, accuracy and care. Could the Portfolio Holder outline:

1. What ethical and moral responsibility elected representatives have to verify information before making public statements, particularly on sensitive issues that may affect community relations;
2. Whether the Council agrees that all elected representatives should seek to promote community cohesion, public confidence and respectful dialogue, rather than risk deepening fear, mistrust or division through the sharing of inaccurate or unverified claims;
3. Whether there is scope for strengthened standards around responsible communication and the use of evidence in public statements made by elected representatives;
4. At a time when communities can too easily become polarised is it not vital that those in public office lead with responsibility, accuracy and a commitment to social cohesion?

Response from Councillor Sandra Moore, Portfolio Holder for Communities and Partnerships

Thank you for the question. Yes, statements made by elected representatives and other public officials should be grounded in fact, reliable evidence and valid data, especially where those statements relate to sensitive matters such as crime, migration or community safety.

BCP Council is one of the most politically diverse councils in England. Councillors hold different political views, priorities and opinions, and those differences should be respected. However, we all share a responsibility to ensure public statements are based on facts, reliable evidence and valid data.

Public debate is strengthened when robust but undermined when claims are made without a clear evidence base. Inaccurate or unverified information can damage public confidence, create unnecessary fear, increase mistrust and make the work of the Council, the Police and our partners more difficult. All Councillors should, therefore, take steps to check the accuracy of information before sharing it publicly.

The Seven Principles of Public Life, (the Nolan Principles), apply to all holders of public office. They require honesty, openness, accountability, objectivity and leadership. Councillors are also required to comply with the

Council's Code of Conduct, which exists to protect public trust and confidence in local government. Where conduct falls below those standards, it is often possible to submit a complaint under the Councillor conduct arrangements. Any complaint needs to be considered on its facts and in accordance with the Council's adopted process.

The Council also has an important role in supporting community cohesion, resilience and respectful dialogue. This includes working with Dorset Police, community and voluntary organisations, schools, faith groups, youth services and other agencies, to share accurate information, listen to concerns, challenge misinformation where appropriate and promote confidence between communities. These relationships are especially important at times of heightened national or local tension.

As a Council, we might like to support some continued work through the Monitoring Officer to ensure all Members are reminded of the standards expected of them, including the responsible use of evidence, social media and public statements. These standards apply across all forms of communication: in this Chamber, media statements, social media, written correspondence, and in the wider community role that Councillors undertake every day. Ultimately, all Councillors have a shared responsibility to communicate honestly, accurately and respectfully, in a way that is consistent with the trust placed in us by the communities we serve.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Patrick Canavan

Could the Portfolio Holder outline what steps BCP Council will take, specifically, to robustly tackle misinformation, and to respond to that promptly when it arises?

Response from Councillor Sandra Moore, Portfolio Holder for Communities and Partnerships

I did say that we could do some continued work with the Monitoring Officer but I'm quite happy to talk to you about this afterwards. Thank you.

27. Urgent Decisions taken by the Chief Executive in accordance with the Constitution

None.

The meeting ended at 9.12 pm

CHAIRMAN