

Dorset Council, West Purbeck, November 2020 Report V2.6

Climate Change

Dorset Council has prepared its action plan for how the local authority will help tackle climate change over the next few decades. The draft plan contains 187 actions for how the Council will tackle climate change over the next 20-30 years. Around 97 of these will require additional funding, totaling in the region of £127m over that period. Examples of actions proposed include: –

- Make the most of renewable energy opportunities of all Council-owned buildings; convert all buildings without gas/electricity to heat pumps or biomass, convert heating of all other buildings to hydrogen-ready hybrid heat pumps, install solar panels on every roof
- Construct or buy into large renewable energy installation/s (solar panels or wind turbines) on Council-owned land to meet demand
- Produce a supplementary planning policy to encourage renewable energy being integrated into all new buildings
- Use Council buildings in trial projects to test the use of hydrogen heating
- Reduce use of fertilisers on council land by increased use of locally produced compost
- Develop plan to transition County Farms to low carbon production – Work with County Farm tenants to encourage the adoption of more climate and ecological friendly practice
- Councillors to lobby government for additional resources and the national policy framework to support climate action in Dorset
- Establish a policy to ensure all new buildings that Dorset Council has direct influence over (as landowners, clients, or designers) are zero carbon
- Creation of suitable high ecological value areas on council land (incl. bee-friendly, wildflower, hedge and woodland planting zones) and areas for carbon sequestration and climate resilience
- Ensure access to sustainable transport is considered in planning applications
- Encourage decarbonisation of road transport through development of public Electric Vehicle charging network and promotion of ultra-low emission vehicles
- Where feasible, replace Council vehicle fleet with electric and or Hydrogen replacement.

Budget Shortfall

Like many councils across the country, Dorset Council has taken a big financial hit from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is estimated that the total impact on the council's budget is more than £60million due to additional expenditure and lost income. After grants and reliefs from government for COVID-19, the net impact this financial year is currently around £41.9 million. Without further funding from government, the council will be forced to use virtually all of its own reserves this year to cover the gap. Reserves can only be spent once so this will place additional strain on future resilience and potentially leave the council unable to fund changes in demand-led services in future. There are likely to be ongoing budget pressures resulting from COVID-19, and this is on top of the continually growing demand for adults and children's social care as a result of our changing population.

There are many uncertainties making it hard to forecast the council's financial position over coming years, but the current best estimate is that the council will face a budget gap of £41.9m in 2021/22. Work is underway to close the budget gap in the next financial year. The council has identified £11.9million of tactical savings, and a potential £8.2million of transformation savings, i.e. changing the way it delivers services. At this stage, this still leaves a budget gap of £21.8million so further work is required to be able to present a balanced budget proposal for full council to consider in February 2021.

Office space

There has been speculation as to our plans for office space, particularly existing buildings. This has nothing to do with employees working from home because of coronavirus and it all started long before the pandemic hit. After Dorset Council came into being in April 2019, we started to look at our properties to see if we could reduce our estate and make better uses of the spaces we have.

Dorset Council is working out what it does with its assets. Dorset inherited about 1400 buildings and pieces of land from the merging Councils. Schools, leisure centres, hotels, farms, the list is enormous. We need to work out which we want to keep, either for financial reasons or to deliver services. This was underway when Covid-19 hit us.

We need to work out what we want to keep and what we don't. What we don't want to keep we should do something else with. Sometimes we will want to do something specific, for example in Wareham we have a piece of land and we are working with the NHS to build a new Doctor's surgery and some supported living accommodation for those who need a bit of help. Sometimes we should sell assets to raise money, which we will then spend on care, education or whatever needs investment. But this isn't selling family silver. It is selling bits of land that we have no use for that others can do something useful with. We shouldn't hold land if a builder could put houses on it.

Selling assets produces a capital receipt. Dorset Council is very short of money, but we are short of revenue, that is largely council tax. By law Councils cannot use capital to pay their regular bills, like salaries. The law is to stop Councils spending more than they can afford. What we can do with capital is invest in major things, like new schools, dust carts, school buses. Things that will have a long life. We will either do that with any capital we receive or pay off some of our debt to reduce our interest payments

Letter to the Health Secretary

I reproduce in full the letter my ward partner (Laura) recently sent to the Health Secretary. I am very proud of her battling for Dorset in this way.

Dear Secretary of State,

I write with concern regarding the Government's testing for Coronavirus.

Although I am well aware that this is a national issue, I would like to highlight a very worrying recent experience in Dorset, alongside some more general observations and challenges.

Recently, a local care home ordered 200 tests to be delivered. They were completed by staff and residents and the courier booked. The courier failed to attend in time for the tests to remain viable and all had to be discarded. This would be unfortunate were it a one off; but is unacceptable as it is a common occurrence.

Another issue we face is that Pillar 2 testing programme is being run as if it is a commercial operation, with frequent references to slots 'being sold out'. Language is important - testing is an essential plank of the response to a pandemic; and needs to be developed with a clear public health strategy underpinning it.

Lack of local ownership over regional and mobile test sites and how they are run means complaints about operations are not responded to. This leads to local residents losing confidence in the system, and understandably they will then direct their anger, fear and frustrations at Local Authorities.

It is apparent that there is a lack of transparency from central Government over the extent of issues with laboratory capacity. Leaders in local authorities are not being equipped by your department with honest answers around the timescale for improvement and resolution of this problem - and this just means that public are losing trust and confidence in the capacity of the system to deliver.

Please, give us clear updates that we can be honest with the public about. Saying defensively that more testing is being added all the time with no explanation of the core issues means we all, collectively, lose credibility with the public, who deserve our support, reassurance and efficiency now more than ever.

Kind regards

Laura Miller

Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Health, Dorset Council

Interested in becoming a Carer?

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had a major impact on the economy globally, nationally and in Dorset. Relative to the UK, Dorset has a higher share of employment, output and businesses across the hardest hit sectors such as tourism and leisure. It has been estimated that 40% of people in the county may not be able to return to their former employment due to redundancies or reduced hours and pay. Dorset Council is leading a new recruitment and training campaign for the Dorset adult social care sector. The aim is to raise awareness of the range of jobs available in this sector, and ultimately, recruit and retain new workers who want to make a long-term career in the sector.

This will help social care providers to recruit more staff which in turn, reduces the numbers moving between settings and individual's homes and ultimately, reduces the risk of transmission of COVID-19. The funding behind the campaign will also be used to facilitate access to additional online training courses for all

providers, enabling a better skilled workforce. To find out more and to register your interest, visit www.dorsetsocialcare.co.uk.

Grants for people and communities in Dorset Council

Grants are now available to help improve the lives of people living or working in Dorset. Cultural, sporting and community organisations can now apply for money from Dorset Council's Leisure Development Fund. We award small grants to voluntary, not-for profit community organisations and Town and Parish Councils. This is to support the development of: the arts, museums and heritage, outdoor play, village halls, sport – all for the direct benefit of people living or working in Dorset.

Grants of up to £5,000 are available. Applications can be made for up to 20 per cent of a project's cost and the money can be used for one-off or capital projects. More details are available at the Dorset Council website or you can contact Dorset Council's Leisure Department by email or by calling 01305 252250. The closing date for applications is 31 December 2020. Decision letters will be sent to all applicants in February 2021.

Financial support for people needing to self-isolate

This article is printed in good faith, as grant regimes are changing so fast.

People on low incomes who are told by NHS Test and Trace to self-isolate – either due to a positive Covid-19 test or being in contact with someone who has tested positive – may be entitled to financial support during self-isolation. Since 28 September, people across England have been required by law to self-isolate if they test positive or are contacted by NHS Test and Trace. Breaking this law could lead to a fine of between £1,000 and £10,000. When self-isolating, people must not leave the house for any reason. They must not go to work, school or any other public spaces. Any exercise should be taken within the home, and friends or family should be asked to buy food or other essentials. Residents who receive benefits that have been told to self-isolate but are unable to work from home, losing income, are eligible for a Test and Trace Support Payment of £500.

You must be currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit and have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace. How to Claim
Visit www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/test-and-trace-support-payment

The claim e-form will ask people to provide:

The unique ID number from their NHS Test and Trace notification, details of employment, a recent bank statement, your National Insurance number

For residents who may need help completing the form, please call 01305 221000 and a member of Dorset Council's Customer Services team will attempt to fill the form in for them over the phone.

OFSTED visit

We have recently completed an Ofsted inspection within part of Children's Services which was very positive. Local Area colleagues from across the council, the CCG, schools, health providers and the voluntary sector came together to shine a light on the experiences of children with Special Education Needs or Disabilities during this Covid period. The inspectors recognised that multi-agency working has been significantly strengthened this year. They found that leadership was clear and dynamic, and they praised practitioners from across services for putting children at the heart of all we do. They recognised that our greater focus on co-production and personalisation has delivered improvements for families. The inspectors praised the recent 'Summer in Dorset' as an example of our ambition. We will share OFSTED's official letter when we get it.

Green Homes Grant Award

We have been successful with our joint bid with BCP Council for additional Green Homes Grant funding. The bid was for £859,400.

This money will allow the Council to offer grants at slightly different (more favourable) conditions than the national scheme which will also be available in Dorset. So for example under the national scheme no gas heating systems are allowed however with our funding we can offer gas central heating if that is the only viable option as long as it is future proofed (i.e. can be converted to hydrogen or ground source heat pump in the future). This would be very important in some areas such as Weymouth where there is no real alternative to gas central heating at the moment. It may take some time for the grant to come through and I hope to give more information on this early next year

Missed Bins

There has been a series of vehicle breakdowns and blocked streets which have prevented the lorries from getting through. Residents can report a missed bin <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/bins-recycling-and-litter/report-a-bin-problem/missed-bin-collection.aspx> They can also access this from the Dorset Council homepage by clicking on Bins, Recycling & Litter > Report a Bin Problem > Report a Missed Collection. Once you have opened the form to report the missed collection, and entered your address, the form will alert you to any service disruptions in their area. This will also show when you can expect a recollection. If it's not a widespread problem (just a single bin missed in error) then you will need to complete the form and at the end it will give an indication as to when the team aim to get the bin emptied (usually within 5 working days).

Dorset County Hospital Car Park

Just to show that we do override our Officers' recommendations sometimes!

Multi-storey car park plans at Dorset Council Hospital have been approved against the recommendations of planning officers - to the delight of clinicians and MPs.

Councillors unanimously voted to approve plans to build the car park as part of a £62.5 million government investment to expand key services at the hospital under the National Health Infrastructure plan. The multi-storey car park forms part of wider plans to expand the emergency department and Intensive Care Unit (ICU) as well as establishing an Integrated Care Hub. Planning bosses had advised members of Dorset Council's Area Planning Committee to refuse the car park due to its 'size, positioning and massing'.

But following a lengthy debate about whether the social and economic benefits of the expansion 'clearly and significantly outweighed the visual and landscape impact of the size of the car park on the surrounding area, the plans were given the go ahead.

Brexit - temporary planning permission for processing lorries

Sorry to raise the subject but it now has some local implications. Legislation has been approved in Parliament to grant temporary planning permission for land to be used for processing lorries entering and leaving Great Britain, this came into force on 24 September 2020. Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole are among the 29 local authority areas affected.

In Summary it grants temporary planning permission for development consisting of the use of land, in specified parts of England, for border processing and the associated stationing of vehicles (particularly goods vehicles) entering or leaving Great Britain.

Dorset is host to Portland Port and neighbouring authorities contain significant ports that are easily accessible. Consequently, it is possible that we may see proposals come forward. Nevertheless, there remains a large part of the Dorset that would not be affected.

Surgery

We are not holding face to face meetings now. However, we would be delighted to ring and talk to you. Please ring or email us with the subject matter so that we can prepare ourselves. Peter's email address is peterwharf@hotmail.com telephone 07986600799 and Laura's is clrlaura.miller@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk telephone 07814 569563.

Peter Wharf & Laura Miller, Dorset Councillors for West Purbeck