

Dorset Police

Dorset Police has seen a 6.1 per cent drop in recorded crime; data released by the Office for National Statistics shows the Force has continued to see a drop in overall crime for the third consecutive quarter. In early 2020 Dorset Police received a 'Good' grading from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) for accurate crime recording, which means the reduction of 6.1 per cent during the 12 months to the end of September 2020 is a real reduction, this gives us the ninth lowest crime rate in England and Wales.

A reduction within some crime types has very likely been impacted by COVID-19 and national restrictions requiring people to stay home during the first lockdown. Even with some crime returning to expected levels during the summer months, the overall reduction enabled the Force to proactively focus on the crimes that affect the most vulnerable members of our communities, such as domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation and county lines. The total number of crimes reduced from 54,387 to 51,088 over the 12-month period, a reduction of 4.3 crimes per 1,000 population.

Census 2021

The census is a once-in-a-decade survey that gives the most accurate estimate of all the people and households in England and Wales. It has been carried out every 10 years since 1801, apart from 1941. It will be run predominantly online. All Dorset households should have received a letter in late February with a unique access code, allowing them to complete the questionnaire on their computers, phones or tablet devices. Census day will be on March 21, but households will receive letters with online codes allowing them to take part from early March.

Iain Bell, deputy national statistician at Office for National Statistics, said: "A successful census will ensure everyone from local government to charities can put services and funding in the places where they are most needed. This could mean things like doctors' surgeries, schools and new transport routes. That's why it is so important everyone takes part and we have made it easier for people to do so online on any device, with help and paper questionnaires for those that need them."

Although the census is 'digital first', paper questionnaires and a range of support will be available for those who need it. A trained census team will be available to help people complete the census over the phone via a free phone contact centre. All details will be provided in the letter. Dorset Council's Digital Hotline is also offering support to people who may wish to get online for the first time to complete the census. Their group of volunteer Digital Champions can be reached by telephone on 01305 221048 Monday to Friday, except Bank Holidays, 10am-midday.

A census field team will follow up with households who have not completed their questionnaire after census day. The census field operation will be carried out without anyone needing to enter a home. All contacts with the public will be socially distanced and census field staff will be equipped with PPE in line with government guidance.

Results will be available within 12 months, although personal records will be locked away for 100 years, kept safe for future generations.

Park Home Licence Fees Consultation

Owners and residents of Dorset's park home sites are being asked to give their views on a draft policy for how Dorset Council sets park home licence fees. A new policy is needed to standardise how park home licence fees are calculated across Dorset. It will replace the policies of the county's former district and borough councils which each determined their fees differently. The draft policy proposes that sites should be grouped into bands according to the number of homes on each site. The council needs to find out how the policy might impact on site owners and residents and make sure it is fair. The introduction of a single policy across Dorset will mean that some sites will be subject to an increased licence fee, while others will benefit from a reduced fee.

If you own a site, or live in a park home, please take the time to give us your feedback at www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk. The consultation runs from 1 February to 21 March 2021.

Support for Cultural Organisations.

Cultural organisations across Dorset will benefit from funding support from Dorset Council. From 1 April, some 24 organisations will be supported with a three-year funding agreement courtesy of the council's new Organisational Revenue Support Fund. In November 2020 the council launched a new grant application process for cultural organisations to gain revenue support. The Organisational Revenue Support Fund is the first of three new rounds of discretionary and project funds being brought in as the council streamlines its approach to funding following local government reorganisation in Dorset. The new grant awards will replace all historic funding agreements to cultural organisations originally awarded by former district councils, although Dorset Council continues to fund three museums in which it has an ongoing legal involvement. The new fund has a grant budget of £279,000 and a substantial number of museums, heritage and arts organisations submitted applications totaling £759,000. The grant panel assessed the applications and recipients were informed of the outcome before Christmas. Applications were assessed against how organisations delivered economic and social outcomes aligned to the council's priorities listed in the Dorset Council Plan.

Find out more about Dorset Council's support for voluntary and community organisations online at www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Eat out to help out

For three days a week in August, people could buy a half price meal at outlets that signed up to the scheme and save around £10 per person. New data from HM Revenue and Customs shows around 827,000 cut-price meals were claimed at 453 participating businesses in the Dorset Council area. County business bosses are requesting it returns this summer to support the hospitality industry.

However, the HMRC data only covers businesses with fewer than 25 outlets meaning the true figures may be much higher, with many big-name restaurant chains also taking part in the scheme over the summer. We support this and are lobbying our MPs on this.

New Childrens Home

Councillors have already approved plans to create a new home for Dorset children in Weymouth. This new home will give up to five Dorset children a better and more secure start in life. The site will also be home to our innovative new Harbour Project. This will see a dedicated team from different agencies working together to better support our children and young people, who will also be empowered to make more choices about their care.

Foster Carers

The campaign to recruit more foster carers for Dorset children and young people continues and we would like to thank partners for sharing this campaign, which can be viewed on social media via #FosteringPays. The message remains that anyone interested in making a difference to the lives of Dorset children, should please get in touch and find out about a new career in fostering. We would love to hear from people from all walks of life. More details at: fosterindorset.co.uk or call 01305 225568.

Garden Waste Collection dates

Dorset Council's Garden Waste team have been working hard to optimise the Garden Waste collection rounds to increase efficiency and accommodate capacity for new customer growth. This work will result in some Dorset residents experiencing changes to their Garden Waste collection days from 1 February 2021. The Garden Waste team has written directly to all affected households, clearly explaining their new collection dates before the new rounds come into effect.

Approximately 14,100 households will be affected with a change in their Garden Waste collection day, with the majority of households affected being in North and Eastern areas of Dorset. Only a small number are affected in West Purbeck. The number of households affected by each area is summarised below. Additional 'bridging' collections were provided between 25 January and 5 February 2021 to approximately 1,400 households which will ensure that these customers receive the full number of collections paid for. The bridging collection dates have been communicated to the affected households in the letters that have been sent.

Area	Number of households affected by day changes
East	4,195
North	4,164
West	2,873
Purbeck	1,662
Weymouth & Portland	1,286

If a customer does not receive a letter, they should assume their collection dates are unaffected, any queries should be sent to: gardenwaste@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Additional funding for the disadvantaged

Dorset Council has been successful in securing £306,713 in funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care and managed by Public Health England. It is one of just four local

authority areas in the south west to receive funding through this programme, and one of 43 nationally. Additional funding will be allocated in 2021-22.

The funding will specifically target those who need support with their use of alcohol or other drugs and help them rebuild their lives. Rough sleepers who are being provided with emergency accommodation during the pandemic as part of the government's 'Everyone In' programme, and people who are currently rough sleeping, will also be eligible for support. The funding will support people to access detox and rehabilitation services outside of Dorset where appropriate, as well as improving wraparound support in the local area, such as access to mental health and substance use workers and peer mentors, who are key to working with vulnerable people in treatment services.

The project will work closely with the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP), through which Dorset Council has also received £1.6m to help people find and maintain safe, stable accommodation across the county as appropriate. The council has also agreed a further £4.78m over the next two years to purchase and refurbish properties to support homeless and rough sleeper households. The bid was developed by Public Health Dorset in partnership with the NHS and local charities, and will support work by REACH, The Lantern Trust, The Bus Shelter, Julian House and Shelter, who all already work locally on these issues.

Cllr Graham Carr-Jones, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety at Dorset Council said: "This funding shows how seriously Dorset Council takes the issues around substance use and housing locally – and the strong partnerships we have locally to help address these issues. By bringing together organisations that have the expertise to support people, and providing them with the resources they need, we can really help change individuals' lives, which will also benefit their loved ones and the wider local community, who can suffer from the impact of substance misuse."

Cllr Laura Miller, Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health at Dorset Council said: "We know that some people can find it difficult to access support services, and then their health can continue to deteriorate, which in turn makes it harder for them to turn their lives around. This funding will take help directly to the people who need it most, enabling them to make changes and live safe, productive and fulfilled lives."

For further information, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/extra-help-for-rough-sleepers-with-drug-and-alcohol-dependency>

Dorset Council Local Plan

Planning affects us all. The Council's planning policies are set out in Local Plans which are the legal starting point in determining planning applications. Public and stakeholder engagement is an important part of the plan making process. Involving residents, businesses, organisations, experts, infrastructure providers and town and parish councils allows local knowledge and expertise to be gathered from a wide range of perspectives. This consultation sets out recommended strategies and policies meeting the requirements of Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning Act (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. Between 18th January and 15th March, you are able to comment on the proposals. There will also be a further opportunity to comment later on in the process.

Dorset Council have produced a draft Local Plan containing proposals for guiding future development in the Dorset Council area up to 2038. The plan outlines the strategy for meeting the needs of the area such as housing, employment, and community services

including schools, retail, leisure and community facilities. The plan directs development to the most suitable locations near to existing facilities, and detailed policies promote high quality development that respects and enhances the character of each area. The plan also protects Dorset's natural environment and contributes towards the mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

View the Dorset Council Local Plan consultation on the council's website at www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/Dorset-council-local-plan

Paper copies of the plan are available for loan via click and collect from your local Dorset Council library (Covid-19 permitting) <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/libraries-history-culture/libraries/find-your-local-library/dorset-libraries.aspx>.

If you are shielding volunteers can help you pick up a paper copy of the plan for you from your local library. Find out more about support for those shielding at <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/emergencies-severe-weather/emergencies/coronavirus/community-response/communities-and-volunteering.aspx>

We have been moving away from printed copies in many areas of our work, as part of our commitment to reducing environmental impacts. And during the pandemic we have of course been holding all our meetings online. Nationally, approximately 93% of the population has internet access and this is increasing. We have five printed copies of the Local Plan consultation document in each of our 23 libraries. These will be available for 'click and collect' loan and they will be quarantined in between loans to minimise the risk. We can also arrange for them to be delivered to people who are unable to go to libraries.

There is no requirement in legislation to make individual hard copies available. At this first stage of consultation we are only obliged to notify people and invite their representations: at the next stage the regulations require us to make the document available on the website and hard copies 'for inspection' at our offices and anywhere else we consider appropriate. During last year, this legislation was amended in response to the coronavirus pandemic, to remove the requirement for even inspection hard copies to be available.

The cost of printing and posting 'on-demand' copies would be approximately £55 per copy but would also require officers to make otherwise unnecessary trips into the offices to undertake the printing. While consultation during the lockdown is certainly challenging, we are offering a range of approaches including the loaned copies at libraries as mentioned; a series of online webinars and podcasts; and a dedicated telephone line for people who would like to discuss anything to do with the plan. We also have a dedicated telephone line so that residents can talk to members of the planning policy team about the issues in the plan, and we can send out paper copies of the response form for those who would prefer to respond that way. Residents can also telephone in to listen to the webinars, as an alternative to viewing them online.

We do not know how long coronavirus restrictions will last and delaying the consultation would have a major impact on the programme for preparing the local plan. It is very important that we make progress on the plan, as without an up to date local plan in place, the weight that can be given to local policies is less and we therefore have less control over the development that takes place in the Dorset Council area.

We are holding webinars throughout the consultation period on key themes within the plan. Each webinar will consist of a short presentation followed by a question and answer session. www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/dorset-council-local-plan-webinars

St Mary's School near Shaftsbury

We have unveiled ambitious ideas to transform the St Mary's site near Shaftsbury potentially providing better educational opportunities for Dorset children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Dorset Council wants to work with local people and partners to create a new school which we hope will be the centrepiece of a wider campus offering excellent educational and community facilities for Dorset children and adults.

Local people, partners, community and stakeholder groups are being asked to examine the proposed plans and share their views when the public consultation started on 4 February. We are asking everyone to complete a short survey online or please call 01305 225088 if you need a paper copy. Please respond before the closing date, which is midnight on 18 March 2021. All views will be carefully considered before final decisions are made.

Dorset Council's preferred option is to use the site as a school to provide high quality education for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). There is a growing need for this education provision. Currently around 3,000 pupils with SEND are supported by an Education, Health and Care Plan, but in 2015 it was less than 1,500. Whilst the majority of children with SEND can be supported in mainstream schools, such as local primary and secondary schools, there are some children and young people who need more specialist support and provision.

Climate Change

Our Climate and Ecological Emergency strategy was published in September last year and was recently taken to public consultation. Under the 'Making it Happen' chapter of the document, there is a section called 'Funding the response' that I strongly encourage everyone to read if they haven't done so already. The draft strategy remains available on the website. Dorset Council will need to invest many millions of pounds over the next 20-30 years just to become a Carbon Neutral Council. However, we are off to a great start.

We're installing 44 Electric Vehicle Charge points across the county, at no additional cost to the council. Our Low Carbon Dorset Programme – which helps businesses, community, and public sector organisations by stimulating growth in our low carbon economy and reducing the county's footprint - was recently extended with an additional funding from the MHCLG of £5 million. We have also recently been successful in securing an offer of government funding to upgrade our properties to reduce our overall carbon footprint. The estimated grant award is around £19 million.

Last month, working alongside BCP Council, we began construction of the first sustainable travel route funded through the Transforming Travel – Transforming Cities Fund programme, which was made possible from government funding of £79 million. Our Weymouth Harbour & Esplanade Flood and Coastal Risk Management Strategy, which details how we will ensure that the town is protected from potential coastal flooding and erosion caused by climate change, requires investment from multiple sources in excess of £115million.

The above figures indicate the true scale of the Council's ambition when tackling climate change. The members of the cross-party Climate Committee will shortly be looking at the initial results of the consultation next week with the final version of the Climate and Ecological Emergency strategy coming to Cabinet for approval in early April.

2021-22 Budget

The budget has not yet been agreed but the article below shows our proposals at the time of going to press.

The council has increased its budget for next financial year to £313 million (from £304 million last year). The annual budget pays for all the services the council provides to residents, communities and businesses. 2020-21 was particularly challenging. Like most councils across the country, we faced significant financial pressure due to extra expenditure related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included support for vulnerable residents through a range of services such as adult social care, housing and mental health. We also incurred extra expenditure on PPE and COVID-secure arrangements and saw a reduction in income from our car parks, leisure services, business rates and council tax.

The financial impact of the pandemic continues. For example, when people who have been seriously ill due to COVID are discharged from hospital they often require support from the council with adaptations to their home, occupational therapy, and adult social care. Although the Government provided some funding for the additional costs and loss of income it was not enough to cover it in full.

The demand for our services was already rising before the pandemic, many people living longer and with complex health needs. Dorset has significantly more older people than many other areas of the country: 29% are aged over 65 compared to 18% in England and 12% in London. Although council tax pays for many services, including waste collection and road maintenance, over half of the council's spending goes on social care. This supports vulnerable children at risk of neglect or abuse, disabled children and adults, and older people with significant, complex care needs. Every year, Dorset also sees growing numbers of children diagnosed with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The council has a legal duty to provide these vital services; we can't turn away people in need because we can't afford it.

Overall, despite additional funding from government, the council was significantly overspent at the end of the financial year 2020-21. We covered the increase in expenditure from our revenue reserves. However, reserves are like building society savings; we can only spend them once and doing so reduces our capacity to respond to further unexpected events in the future. Councillors have considered whether we could reduce our expenditure by cutting some or all of our discretionary services, such as libraries, grants to community organisations, and leisure centres. Councillors want to continue providing these important services, but we are looking at ways to deliver them differently, at a lower cost.

Government funding to councils across the country has fallen by 60% since 2010. And here in Dorset we no longer receive a Revenue Support Grant (RSG) from Government, although some other councils still do. We also get less income from business rates than councils in more urban areas. This means that funding for essential local services in Dorset falls more heavily on the shoulders of council taxpayers than in many other counties. We continue to lobby Government for a fairer funding deal. Councillors faced stark choices when setting the budget, and so a total increase of just under 5% in council tax was recommended to safeguard services.

The budget will be funded by increasing council tax by just under 5% (just under 2% increase in general council tax, and just under 3% to fund adult social care – known as the 'adult social care precept'). There will also be a pay freeze for staff - 0% pay award for staff. This will save £3m. There will also be further efficiencies and savings whilst protecting essential services.

The increase equates to the rate for a Band D property increasing from £1,694.79 to £1,779.39 - an increase of £84.60 for the year, or £1.62 per week.

We are also working to make better use of our property and assets. This includes selling some buildings which are no longer needed. The income generated through sales will bring in money called "capital receipts". These are one-off pots of money that can be invested in new building projects but cannot be used to fund the day-to-day running of services.

Financial support

If you have faced redundancy or other financial hardship as a result of the pandemic and are struggling to pay your bills, you may be eligible for Council Tax Support. To find out how to apply, visit www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk and search for 'Council Tax Support'. We also fund Dorset Citizens Advice to provide support and advice to residents who are experiencing financial difficulties or are feeling stressed or worried. Call freephone 0800 144 8848.

Mortality Support Facilities

One of two Mortality Support Facilities (MSF) has recently been activated this week as part of Dorset's ongoing response to the current Covid-19 emergency. Over the last few weeks, the number of cases and deaths due to COVID-19 in Dorset has increased rapidly. The NHS is facing tremendous pressure including on mortuary provision.

The facilities are part of the Excess Deaths Operational Plan, a multi-agency strategy that sees representatives from Dorset Council, BCP Council, H.M. Coroner, Dorset Police, University Hospitals Dorset Foundation Trust, Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust and funeral directors working together to make sure the potential bereavement needs across the county are identified and met. Find more information about registering deaths and funerals in the Dorset Council area, during this pandemic. Anyone grieving and in need help and support can contact Cruse Bereavement Care or call their helpline on 0808 808 1677.

We need more Carers

The last 12 months have been a year like no other. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought communities together like never before and prompted many people to take stock and think about making changes to their lives, including looking at a new career. If you are looking for a new and meaningful role in 2021, now could be the time to make that change.

Dorset Council wants more people to think about paid careers in social care and to register their interest in frontline roles such as working in a residential or home care setting, or as a Shared Lives carer, supporting people to lead fulfilling lives. Shared Lives is a service that helps people over the age of 18 who have care and support needs. Put simply, it's a bit like fostering. Instead of helping children however, you would be offering support to an adult who would live or spend time in your home. Shared Lives carers are paid for the care and support they give. By sharing your home and your family life, you help to create an environment where a person can flourish, develop their independence, and enjoy being part of a community. More details on the website.

Surgery

We are not holding face to face meetings until we are clear to do so under government guidelines. However, we would be more than delighted to talk to you on the telephone or via Zoom. Please ring or email us with the subject matter so that we can prepare ourselves.

Peter's email address is peterwharf@hotmail.com telephone 07986 600799 and Laura's is cilllaura.miller@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk telephone 07814 569563.

Peter Wharf & Laura Miller, Dorset Councillors for West Purbeck