

Bovington - Military Exercises 10 - 15 Oct

Bovington Garrison will host a Military Aviation Exercise from 10 – 15 Oct in support of National Security Taskings. To meet all Training Objectives up to 8 helicopters will operate daily between approximately 0900-0200. The aircrew are required to achieve a number of night sorties, so flights will more than likely continue till 0200 from Monday through to Thursday in order to achieve this. Aircraft routing around Bovington Garrison has been planned to minimise disruption as far as possible and the continued support of the local community is very much appreciated during this essential training.

If there are any major disruptions as a result of Military activity over these dates people are requested to call the Army's Officer, Rich Jenkins (07793 727857) to log their concerns.

Citizens Advice

A further contract has also been awarded to Citizens Advice in Dorset (which is a consortium of Purbeck, Bridport, Central Dorset and East Dorset Citizens Advice), who provide information, advice and guidance on matters such as benefits, debt and money, energy and fuel support and other welfare advice. This contract will also start on 1 October 2021. We are very grateful for the work they do and will continue to work closely with them where required.

Customer Access

Following our phased reopening of customer service points earlier this summer in Blandford, Bridport, Dorchester, Wareham, Wimborne and Weymouth, here is an update: We are seeing approximately 200 customers per week through our doors. We are resolving enquiries such as council tax payments; parking fines; homelessness and housing register enquiries; and requests for small bin containers. Our council colleagues and partners (e.g., Citizens Advice) have been working with us on more complex enquiries that cannot be resolved at 'first point of contact' and require the help of a specialist officer e.g.: housing. We continue to encourage customers to self-serve online or use the telephone whenever possible. These are our most efficient channels which helps us focus on customers who most need our face-to-face support or who cannot go online. Where pre-booked appointments are necessary, many are taking place digitally via video call, saving on travel and in-person contact.

Supporting Afghan Refugees

As a Council we are committed to support the government's Afghanistan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme by providing housing and support to a number (to be confirmed) of Afghan families. The government has announced funding for this scheme: the Afghan LES (Locally Employed Staff) Housing Costs Fund will help councils meet the costs of renting properties. We have now issued a media release and related communications, appealing to private landlords and owners of second homes to come forward if they can provide suitable accommodation. We are looking for a range of homes of varying sizes, particularly larger family homes that are available for at least 12 months.

These need to be self-contained properties as opposed to offers of spare rooms or house sharing as this is not in line with current Home Office guidance. We are asking property owners to contact afghanfamilieshousing@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk with any offers. There will be central government assistance for initial rent and deposits until the families are settled.

Local residents are asking how they can help with relocation of Afghan families. The single thing we need right now is offers of suitable accommodation. However, we also have existing high levels of demand for accommodation for local families on our housing register and in temporary accommodation. This is why we are specifically looking for private landlords or owners of second homes to come forward so we can identify additional properties for this scheme, ensuring the scheme won't disadvantage anyone and we can provide the support we've committed to.

Please note, at this point we are not seeking offers of volunteering or donations. Our overriding priority is to secure suitable accommodation, in line with Home Office guidance. If the position on volunteering or donations changes, we will update you and residents straight away. Please help by spreading the word on this matter and encouraging anyone with suitable properties to come forward. Councils have a long and proud history of stepping up to provide places of safety to those fleeing violence and we want to play our part in supporting efforts to resettle Afghans in the UK, building on our successful Syrian resettlement work over recent years.

Planning Service Cuts and Delays

Dorset Council has announced cuts to its planning services in a bid to alleviate pressure on the department, amid a huge increase in planning applications as well as additional demand for local land searches. Local land searches are a requirement of most mortgage companies - but delays of up to 13 weeks are being reported in the county, as demand has almost doubled amid the current property boom, caused by an influx of city dwellers combined with the stamp duty holiday. In addition, Dorset Council has also been carrying out a significant project to transfer planning records from the six former borough and district councils into one system. It comes as the council's planning teams are also dealing with increased number of planning applications amid a national rise in people carrying out changes to their homes. As a result, cuts have been made to non-mandatory planning services, bringing an end to the practice of sending letters to neighbours when a planning application is lodged, as well as changing the way notices are published, and automating lists for parish councillors, in a bid to free up officers' time to focus on planning applications. The council is urging residents to be patient and not to chase planning applications to avoid adding to the workload.

"The construction industry has seen a huge surge during the pandemic," a council spokesman said. "Homeowners with additional cash in their pockets are considering extensions or changes to their homes because working from home has become the future. Last month planning applications rose in every English region compared to July 2020. This follows a bumper start to the year where February saw an 25 per cent increase in applications (compared to the same month in 2020) across the country. Throughout 2020 there was a 36 per cent increase in the number of applications, compared to 2019. This activity has led to a huge demand on Dorset Council's planning services."

Cllr David Walsh, Dorset Council's portfolio holder for planning said: "We ask our residents to bear with us; we know it is frustrating, but these delays are being felt across the country and it is out of our control. It is incredibly busy, and we are working on all applications in date order. So, I ask for people not to chase their application, by phone or email. Doing this only takes up officer time that could be spent on progressing work. "We have kept fellow councillors, town and parish councils and property agents informed of the situation by newsletters and emails

and will continue to keep them up to date.”

Another area that has seen a huge increase in demand is land searches and charges. The stamp duty holiday encouraged people to move home to new areas to give them a better life balance. This national incentive to help the property market has meant that the number of searches needed to be carried out have almost doubled.

Thankfully there are some areas that are not seeing such delays. The Building Control service have been site checking and visiting sites throughout the pandemic to ensure that buildings are constructed to national building regulations. They have filled vacant positions and have also recruited two apprentices who will start their building control degree in September.

Waste Collection Service

As many of you will know there have been recent incidents of missed collections. The effects of the national HGV driver shortage, coupled with the continuing impact of the pandemic, are starting to be felt across Dorset Council's waste services as collection rounds feel the strain. The impact of the driver shortage is being felt by councils across the country. In Dorset, some crews are regularly having to work overtime and often at weekends, which is not sustainable. These pressures also come on the back of a year of increased household waste amounts as more people stay and work from home. Dorset Council members and senior officers recently briefed local MPs on the issues currently impacting waste collections, street cleansing and bin deliveries, in the hope that a long-term solution can be found.

Recruitment of drivers in Dorset has always been challenging, particularly due to high local housing costs, but the current widescale staff shortages across all depots are unprecedented. The Council currently has multiple vacancies for drivers and loaders across their waste services team, along with some absence due to sickness and others on planned annual leave. All employees across waste services are working hard to ensure that key waste services continue to run throughout this challenging time. We are having to temporarily suspend or delay some garden waste collections so that crews can be redeployed to support vital rubbish, food and recycling collections. Litter bins are also being emptied less frequently in some areas of the county, and new bin deliveries are also being delayed. While we continue to work on tackling the problem, residents are being kindly asked to note the following:

Always report your missed collection, even if your whole street is affected. The website has an automated system that will inform you what's happening with your bins and provide guidance on what to do next

Please ensure your bins are out by 6am on your collection day. Some rounds are being carried out differently, meaning operatives might turn up earlier (or later) in the day than usual
If you find a litter bin is full, do not try to leave your litter on top/next to it or on the floor nearby – please take it home and place in your household bin.

If any garden waste collections have to be cancelled or stood down we will contact customers directly to advise them. As compensation for any garden waste collections you did not receive, we will automatically apply a discount to next year's subscription fee.

Rubbish, recycling, garden and food waste can be dropped off free of charge at any of Dorset's household recycling centres, which are operating as normal.

We are hopeful that the situation will improve with the pandemic unwinding and the recruitment of drivers. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we tackle the issues at hand, many of which are outside of DC's control.

Bere Regis Poole Roundabout & Rye Hill closure

There is to be major resurfacing and repair works on Rye Hill, Bere Regis in November. From Monday 1st November 20:00 to Wednesday 3rd 06:00 the road will be closed at night between the hours of 20.00 and 06.00 but it will be open daily. Then from Wednesday 3rd 06:00 to Friday 5th 06:00 the closure will be in place 24 hours per day. During the closure periods there will be no on street parking available. Parking restrictions will be imposed to prevent waiting or parking on the road. Any vehicle waiting in contravention of any restriction imposed by this Notice may be removed under the provisions of the Removal and Disposal of Vehicles Regulations 1986. If a vehicle has been towed the owner will need to contact our towing contractors Bride Valley on 01305 889421. Dorset Council will be repairing sections of road within the area marked in red indicated on the map. The main diversion route is marked in blue. National regulations state that we have to divert traffic onto the same classification of road as the one we have closed. There will also be a local diversion in place for villagers. In the current financial climate, the highways service has had to focus its budget on targeting the most damaged sections of road and areas with safety issues and this is one. I will put notice on the various Facebook pages if there are any changes (which there might be) to the dates of the work and the closure needed. I have included a PDF attachment (at the end of this report) for those people receiving this via the internet showing the Diversion - which is very long for the reasons stated above.

The residents of Bere Regis will be able to follow the diversions in place to access their properties and to travel in and out. Access for residents, is for any resident that live within the works area and they will be guided through the site to their properties whilst the closure is in place. People in the village will also be able to access the bypass to and from the western end.

If you wish to discuss any issues regarding this work, please contact Jason Loibl Site Agent Dorset Highways 01305 228100.

Letter from Sajid Javid MP

We have received a letter from the new Health Secretary explaining how the proposed rise in National Insurance is going to help Local Government who are the major spenders of the care budget. I will include a summary of this in later reports.

Paths & Rights of Way - Consultation

Dorset residents, landowners and visitors are being asked for their views and ideas to help shape the next Dorset Rights of Way Improvement Plan, which is the prime means for Dorset Council, as the Local Highway Authority, to identify and prioritise actions to develop and improve the network of Dorset's footpaths, bridleways, byways, and wider access routes. Over the past 18 months, more Dorset residents than ever have found that getting outdoors and into the fresh air comforting, restorative, and revitalising. To do this, many have used Dorset Public Rights of Way, footpaths, bridleways and byways to walk, ride, cycle, off-road and horse carriage drive to explore our locality. Some have perhaps discovered paths and places they haven't visited before, immersing themselves in Dorset's stunning landscapes, rich heritage, and fascinating natural world. The consultation – which includes online maps – will help us understand the key issues that need to be addressed, and let people submit location-specific concerns and project ideas to help us improve Dorset's public rights of way.

The survey will allow respondents to: –

Highlight a "missing link" where a new path would join up the network.

Identify a strategic route linking communities that could be shared by walkers, equestrians & cyclists

Explore the possibility of creating a safe off-road route where walkers, equestrians and cyclists currently must use the road

Pinpoint good locations to improve a path's surface, replace stiles with gates and generally indicate where small measures can potentially make a big impact

Suggest areas where better signage would be useful

Raise concerns and how they might be addressed

Reveal historic details such as old stiles and river crossings that need protecting

Let us know how we might work together on ideas and initiatives.

After collating and reviewing the feedback from the consultation, Dorset Council officers will draft a new Rights of Way Improvement Plan early next year. This plan will be publicly consulted on in the Spring, with the final version published and presented to Cabinet for approval in Summer 2022.

Please fill in the questionnaire online at the Dorset Council website by midnight 31 October.

Surgery

We are not (yet) holding face to face meetings for the moment. However, we would be more than delighted to talk to you on the telephone or via Zoom. Please ring or email us with some details so that we can prepare ourselves. Peter's email address is peterwharf@hotmail.com telephone 07986 600799 and Laura's is clrlaura.miller@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk telephone 07814 569563.

Peter Wharf & Laura Miller, Dorset Councillors for West Purbeck



Stakeholder
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