

**A statement from the Leader of Dorset Council, Cllr Spencer Flower on the crisis in Ukraine:**

We are deeply saddened by the tragic events unfolding in Ukraine. Our thoughts are with those affected by this conflict and we are following the situation closely. Dorset Council has a proud history of welcoming new arrivals at times of crisis to offer homes and support so families and individuals can build new lives here.

We are waiting for the Government to further clarify details of its schemes for Ukrainian refugees so we can plan effectively and quickly. We will keep you updated with how you can help with this as soon as we know more. We understand many people are very concerned about the situation in Ukraine and want to help. At the moment, the best way you can help is the best way to help is by making a cash donation to an organisation such as the British Red Cross or Save the Children who are responding to the humanitarian crisis. These organisations are already working on the ground and can direct support in the quickest and most appropriate ways.

In addition, we are currently participating in a number of refugee resettlement schemes, and we do require more private, affordable homes in Weymouth and Dorchester for refugee families. If you are able to help with our housing needs, please contact [refugeehousing@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:refugeehousing@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)

Dorset Council and BCP Council have joined voices from across the country – indeed the world – in support of the people of Ukraine, and the country's flag is now flying from both Dorset County Hall and Bournemouth Civic Centre., County Hall will also be lit in yellow and blue.

**Relationships with Russia**

A number of you have asked about any connections we may have with Russia or Russian companies. To the best of our knowledge, Dorset Council does not have any direct relationship with Russia or Russian companies.

In terms of energy suppliers, Dorset Council does not have any direct contractual links with Gazprom, or any other Russian supply. We have a contract for gas via Laser buy group with Total Gas & Power, and liquid gas with FloGas. It's worth saying we do not necessarily know about the full supply chains of those we contract with. We are committed to reducing our carbon footprint and our reliance on fossil fuels and along with significant investment over the next five years, in services for residents and in our buildings, we are also working to divert our pension fund away from investment in fossil fuels.

We do have some indirect exposure to Russian companies through the pension fund's investments in an emerging markets equity fund managed by Brunel Pension Partnership, Dorset's investment pooling manager. The value of this exposure is estimated to be approximately £5m or 0.13% of the pension fund's total assets of £3.8bn.

**Swanage Ambulance Car**

Dorset Council promised to set up its own task and finish group to look at the future provision of ambulance cover in the Swanage area, and recently wrote to the CCG asking

for reassurance that there would not be any cuts to the service, or alternatively, give us their proposals for a public consultation on the matter so we could review the situation. We are delighted to have received news from the CCG that there will be no cuts to this service and the ambulance car will continue to serve the community in future. We know the service is vital for the local community and surrounding villages, administering life-saving support long before a conventional ambulance can reach many emergency cases.

#### **Letter to Michael Gove following a meeting between the Leader and Officers of Dorset Council**

I am grateful to you and your team for giving time on Monday to talk about Dorset's bold vision for the future. We are an ambitious council that wants to help achieve growth and prosperity for our communities. In particular, we talked about the planning challenges and your Chief Planner explained Government's future plans for planning reform. In my letter to you of 17 January, I set out our ambition and flexibilities I am seeking and now that we have discussed the matter further, feel that my proposals for Dorset sit well with your future plans for wider reform. Indeed, I offered for Dorset to be a pilot for such reforms, and I stand by that offer.

We would like to use that pilot to develop a Local Plan which would run to 2050 and including the new settlement or settlements for Dorset. As you know, we are already working with your officials and Homes England to review sites for a new settlement and we have identified a number of potentially sustainable sites. We have arranged a seminar with the Dorset Council Cabinet members and your officials to be held on 23 March, where we will progress the work already started and look in greater detail at these proposals. However, in order to make a reality of this more ambitious approach, we need some flexibility to our current Local Plan process. We are seeking an extension to the timeframe of two years to May 2026 and freedoms and flexibilities from the five-year local housing supply and delivery requirements. We know that this was something which was granted to Oxfordshire when they similarly were seeking to develop a more ambitious growth plan. We have looked at the specific technical requirements of such a request and would be pleased to share this thinking with your Chief Planning Officer as she develops her response following our meeting. The slightly longer timescale will enable us to fully embed the objectives set out in our Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and Plan which has been well received locally and is regarded more widely in the sector as an example of best practice. It was also valuable to touch if all but briefly, on the matter of local government financing and I am grateful for your offer of a further meeting with the appropriate Minister to discuss the details of the very serious pressures we face in the medium to longer term.

I do hope that we can keep an open dialogue on this matter and also on the currently pressing matter of the Dorset Local Plan. I am really grateful for your intention to get a response back to me within the next two weeks. As I mentioned, we currently have the initiative against the various pressure groups. Any significant delay would certainly mean impact in being able to maintain the upper hand.

#### **Lyme and Charmouth by-election**

Following the Notice of Vacancy being published for Lyme and Charmouth ward (due to the resignation of Daryl Turner) we have received the required signatories to call the election. The election for this ward will be held on 7 April 2022.

#### **Organisational Support Revenue Fund (OSRF) round 2**

Apologies for the short notice of this grant opportunity. Dorset Council has launched a new round of grants to support social, voluntary and community sector organisations. The grants will provide core revenue support to local community organisations that address the needs of disadvantaged, under served and marginalized communities in the Dorset council area. Social, voluntary and community sector organisations that support the needs of vulnerable people in the community and provide activities, particularly emergency, health and social care provision can apply for a grant of between £5,000 - £10,000 per annum for up to two years to help with their core running costs.

All applicants must demonstrate how they meet at least one of Dorset Council's Corporate priorities in their application and show how their work provides support to projects that focus on marginalised and disadvantaged people. Applications must be submitted on the council's online application form. Further details including eligibility, exclusions, funding criteria, closing dates and guidance on completing your application form can be found on the council's website. If you require any further information before applying, please contact a member of the team on [communities@dorsetcouncil.gov](mailto:communities@dorsetcouncil.gov). All applications must be received by Friday 1 April. Awards will be confirmed around the 20 April 2022.

### **Social Work Degree Apprenticeship**

I am pleased to report that Dorset Council is leading the way in offering remote learning apprenticeships. The council is offering places on the Social Work Degree Apprenticeship course, through the Open University. Starting in October 2022, the apprenticeships are available for employees and are suitable for those who currently deliver direct services to residents. The requirement is for candidates to have a minimum of two years' experience working in a face-to-face role. The Level 6 apprenticeships will take between 36-40 months to complete and successful apprentices will receive an honours degree and be eligible to apply for registration as a social worker. Further information can be found on the OU website.

### **Domestic Abuse**

Residents who have experienced domestic abuse will receive further support after Dorset Council received £650,000 of government funding. The grant will be used in the next 12 months to make residents who have experienced any form of domestic abuse safer in their own homes, or in supported accommodation, as well as provide specialist support for their children. The extra investment can be used to finance security devices to allow people experiencing domestic abuse to remain in their own homes along with the support of family, friends, to avoid the disruption of moving away. Funding will also help rebuild the lives and confidence of those who have felt the only way to escape domestic abuse is to move to a refuge.

### **Illegal puppy breeding**

Dorset Council has become a driving force for the prevention of illegal puppy breeding across the county. Asking people across Dorset to 'Stop and Think' before buying a puppy. Dorset Council Trading Standards and Environmental Health Teams are working together to raise awareness of the multi-million-pound puppy breeding trade that is happening right under our noses. Covid 19 has brought a significant increase in both the selling of illegal puppies and the cost of puppies. With more people working from home, dog ownership has become more attractive and easier. This very lucrative market means that puppies are being sold from unlicensed breeders, too often without any consideration of the welfare and environmental needs of the puppy. An unlicensed puppy breeder is someone who

does not have a dog breeding licence but who earns more than £1000 per year from selling puppies. Dorset Council has updated its website facilities to allow users to check if breeders are licensed, to report unlicensed breeders, and tips on knowing what to look for when buying a puppy. More information on the Council website, [Buying and selling Dogs](#).

### **Council's Community Recovery Grants**

Dorset Council's Community Recovery Grants has awarded over £95K in a bid to support local organisations restart activity and recover after the Pandemic. The two new grants were launched last year to encourage and support communities and groups, working at a local level, to restart their activities that was suspended the past two years. One-off grants ranging from £500-£2000 were awarded to 68 different groups.

### **Improving Energy efficiency**

Work to improve energy efficiency and install low carbon technologies has started at over 60 council owned sites using £19 million of grant funding. So far, 40 heating management system upgrades have been completed, 15 lighting upgrades finalised, and six solar panel projects finished. County Hall is the latest site where updates and upgrades are being implemented. It will see a significant number of solar panels and replacement windows installed to help reduce emissions. Other measures include the installation of an Air Source Heat Pump to one of the annexes and low energy lighting throughout the site. Free Air Cooling, an approach to lowering air temperature by using naturally cool air, will be installed in the council's data centre.

The changes at County Hall alone are expected to save over 100 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions each year. It is also expected to provide financial savings circa £69,000 per year, based on current energy prices. In total more than 100 council owned buildings will benefit from the scheme, including leisure centres and local schools and academies. The project is possible due to the successful award from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme grant, following a bid from the council's Sustainability Team and Assets and Property. The works form part of the council's action plan to address the Climate and Ecological Emergency and will help the council in meeting its 2040 carbon neutral target.

### **Fuel Poverty**

Thanks to generous donations from residents in Dorset, over £75K have been raised to help older people struggling to stay warm this winter. Dorset Council, working closely with The Dorset Community Foundation and Citizens Advice launched an appeal earlier this year asking people to donate any winter fuel payments they did not need to help others being able to afford heating their homes without scrimping on food. According to government estimates, there are 19,000 people in Dorset living in fuel poverty – this means they cannot afford to heat their home. As energy prices continue to rise, even more older people will be left cold in their homes and exposed to the risks arising from their body temperature dropping too low. But thanks to the generous donations, more vulnerable older people in need will stay warm over the coming months.

The funds have been allocated to Citizens Advice who are distributing Surviving Winter grants to those households who are in fuel poverty.

### **Platinum Jubilee celebrations**

2022 will mark the year that Her Majesty the Queen becomes the first British Monarch to have served for 70 years, having acceded to the throne on 6 February 1952. To celebrate the Queen's historic reign, Dorset Council is encouraging local communities to start planning local events and parties for the special four-day bank holiday weekend from Thursday 2 June until Sunday 5 June 2022. I know that many have already done so! Celebrations in towns and communities across the country will take place, including street parties and smaller community events. Town and Parish Councils across Dorset are organising events, so check out your local information sites to see what's happening.

The Platinum Jubilee website also has an interactive map which will display all the events and activities that will be taking place in Dorset as well as the rest of UK, and you can find out about local events and add details of your own to the site. To make it easier to host your own street party, Dorset Council is waiving the costs of road closure applications in the area, and welcomes residents to apply for a street party road closure. You need to apply six weeks in advance. Support is also available for communities via a £22million National Lottery fund. This has been made available to help communities across the country come together to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee. More information on the fund can be found on the National Lottery website.

Dorset will also be joining the national Beacon lighting programme with beacons being lit across the county to mark the start of the celebratory weekend on 2 June. Details will be published nearer the time. Check out our website for more information.

#### **Pupils School's choice**

On Tuesday 1 March, young people across Dorset found out which school they will be joining this September. Nearly 98 per cent have been offered their first choice of secondary school and just under 99 per cent offered their upper school of choice. 97.69 per cent of pupils due to start secondary school (Year 7) have been offered their first choice. For those starting upper school (Year 9), 98.64 per cent have been given a place at their preferred school.

#### **Street lighting.**

The link below allows you to report a fault with a street light and It also shows if a particular light is DC's responsibility.

Dorset Street Lighting Services | Report a fault with an item ([lightsonindorset.co.uk](http://lightsonindorset.co.uk))

#### **Boosting mobile digital coverage.**

Joining forces with partners Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and Hampshire County councils, this new 'Wessex Digital Infrastructure Accelerator' scheme will examine how online mapping technology can help speed up the rollout of connectivity. The successful funding bid was led by Dorset Council and is one of eight pilot projects to receive a share of the government's £4million Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Accelerator fund. It will build on the platform already developed by the award-winning 5G RuralDorset team, which has looked at how using publicly owned buildings and equipment can be used to encourage mobile operators to speed up coverage and reduce costs.

#### **Holiday Activity Fund (HAF)**

The programme has recently been extended for three years, following the successful national roll-out in 2021. The HAF is administrated by the Department for Education and partly run by Dorset Council, In summary, councils are being asked to, make the offer of free holiday activities available to all children eligible for free school meals (FSM), deliver a range of enriching and accessible activities that include a healthy food offer and ensure activities are available at least 6-weeks over the year (1 x Easter, 4 x summer, 1 x Christmas) with a minimum of 4 hour sessions each day

School holidays can be particular pressure points for some families because of increased costs (such as food and childcare) and reduced incomes. For some children that can lead to social exclusion for children from disadvantaged families:

If you have any questions, please feel free to drop an email to the [holidayactivities@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:holidayactivities@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk) mailbox. Or ring as below - the phone lines are open Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5.00pm Tel: 01305 221016.

### **Transformation project savings report**

Work is progressing across all directorates to deliver our year one programme of work, with £7.1m in savings projected for realisation by 31 March 2022. Work is also underway to start to prioritise our ambitions for the future.

Customer Transformation. It has been agreed in principle, a new approach to our out of hours customer service offer which will bring all the various arrangements together in a joined-up way. This will enable us to provide more consistency to customers out of normal office and reduce our costs

One domain - has now successfully completed moving our ex-district colleagues over to the same domain.

Planning transformation - the convergence phase of work is nearing completion, with over four million documents transferred in one year. The project has proved to be successful and paves the way for the second phase of work where the customer processes will be transformed and embedded into our new customer platform. A proposal has been put forward for further project delivery support, this has been approved in principle

Adults Directorate has achieved a further £1m in savings related to continued progress on residential spend work. This is a huge achievement despite the ongoing workforce challenges due to Covid

Children's Services Directorate, a new approach to how we trade services with schools has been approved. Work is now underway to identify how our Corporate Services team can support our schools, and how a wider service provision could support partners and Town and Parish councils in the future. This supports our ambition to 'be more commercial' as a council. A further £700k in savings have been delivered from continuing work to reduce external care placements. This completes the full savings realisation profile for the Children's directorate for year one.

### **Purbeck Gateway**

Plans to build new affordable homes for people with care and support needs on the site of a former school have been agreed. The development for the 1.6 hectare site at Worgret Road, Wareham, is part of Purbeck Gateway: a scheme which will provide homes, care and jobs for the local community.

The development includes, an Extra Care Housing scheme – providing housing with onsite care and support for adults aged 18 and upwards. Affordable housing – including Supported Living accommodation for residents of neighbouring Red Oak Court. Space for a GP Surgery and community pharmacy. Space for early years provision, incorporated in the Extra Care accommodation

These recommendations vary from the plans made before the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has had a huge impact on health and social care, so the council and partner organisations have reassessed the care market and how colleagues deliver services, utilising technology and hybrid working. The development will happen in phases, with the empty council-owned land off Worgret Road being the first area to undergo construction.

### **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 cllrlaura.miller@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk telephone 07814 569563

Peter Wharf & Laura Miller, Dorset Councillors for West Purbeck