

## **Dorset Council Report September 2023**

This month is a relatively brief (and late – apologies!) report as we have tried to take some time off during August.

At the September Cabinet meeting Cllr Gary Suttle (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance) gave a really interesting and positive update which is reproduced in full below and which we hope you find informative.

Please do circulate with your networks and we promise to be on time for the October report!

Cllr. Cherry Brooks

SE Purbeck Ward Member

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### **Have Your Say On Housing**

The residents of Dorset are being urged to have their say about the future of housing. Having launched five weeks ago the Housing Strategy Consultation is now more than halfway through.

Residents who do take part, and tell us what's important to them, will have the opportunity to influence the council's approach to housing over the next five years.

The Housing Strategy will not be produced until the consultation and engagement process comes to an end on 2nd October 2023.

It's quick and easy to take part and should only take a few minutes. There's also an evidence-based document alongside the questions, which provides a picture of the current housing climate in Dorset.

[Please visit our website to take part in the consultation.](#) There are also short videos about residents' experiences as part of our Voices of Dorset. The consultation is open until 2 October 2023.

If you are unable to complete the consultation on -line or wish to request a paper copy, please call [01305 221000](tel:01305221000) for further information.

### **Let's Banish Disposable BBQs – update from Litter Free Dorset**

As you know, we have been campaigning on the issue of disposable barbecues for several years now. Our campaign began with providing customer messaging on safe usage and

disposal at point of sale; it has since developed into a call for customers to stop using them and for retailers to stop selling them altogether.

We have seen considerable success in the last 18 months, with Southern Co-op, Waitrose, Aldi and M&S permanently removing disposable BBQs, as well as some Tesco and Morrisons stores in close proximity to either a national park (Morrisons Verwood) or the site of a heathland fire (Tesco Canford Heath and some Express stores).

We are also grateful to all the local retailers, caravan parks, and garden centres that have removed disposable barbecues from sale. They are helping to spread the simple message that Dorset does not do disposable BBQs.

### **Dorset in Government Pathfinder Programme**

Dorset Council has been recognised for its ground-breaking work with children and families and has been selected as one of three local authorities to be a pathfinder in the government's new programme to ensure families are better supported.

Families First for Children is the name the government is using for its project to implement some of the most significant reforms to Family Help, child protection, kinship care and safeguarding partners in recent years.

Work will start on the programme in the autumn and the three local authorities (Dorset Council, Lincolnshire County Council and City of Wolverhampton Council) will work with police, health and education in their areas over the following two years. The programme will attract funding for the Dorset Council area to help with the implementation.

### **Deputy Leader's Update To Cabinet 5<sup>th</sup> September**

We are now 4 and a half years into this new Unitary Authority and I know you, like me, often get people asking why it was done and what's the benefit, especially as so many rate the Councils achievements by the weeds outside their house. Perhaps on the face of things the old system of District Councils and a County Council worked well and there is no doubt that it did for many years following reorganisation in 1974 however, those involved could see the winds of change, the financial challenges on the horizon meant that the old system would fail and public services would suffer.

The aim of this reorganisation was to save the Public from service cuts and ensure the continuation of local Govt in Dorset. The budget that we tackle each year does its best to achieve that goal, but as I have said over the years the Govt funding for this authority is considerably less than we require and so each year is a fight. Central Govt needs to change its funding formula and ensure that weighting is given to age of population and rurality and until that happens financial life in this council will always be a challenge.

This also means that so many of the things that we want to do and support in our communities are impossible to fund from our scant resources, this leads to the need to

explore external funding sources and each year there are numerous grants and other funding that Govt will release, only those who bid with the most ambitious targets and are able to demonstrate the ability to deliver are going to be successful and in Dorset we have been able to bring significant grant funding to this authority.

Based on the committed future funding we have been able to achieve £121.6M. The paper gives more detail of the headline funds including £19.5M for Weymouth Regeneration, £18.8M for public sector decarbonisation, £14.2M for the DfT transforming cities fund and far more detail is in appendix 1. This money enables us to do things that under normal annual funding would be impossible and we have to thank all those involved in the grant applications that show the professionalism that lives within this authority and the confidence it gives and because of those attributes the money flows to us.

You get nothing for poor grant applications, we are successful because this authority is recognised as excellent.

But we also have been working to transform the 6 into 1 and this has meant significant changes and savings and over the short life of this Council we have achieved savings of £96.4M, all of which has been reinvested in front line service. If we go back to where we started and think and about the old regime I cannot see that we would, as individual Councils ever have been able to make these savings, but as I said at the beginning this was all about the financial crisis on the horizon, only as a Unitary authority has the future of local Govt in Dorset been secured and only as a Unitary authority have we been able to make these savings.

We are dealing with an organisation with a complex structure from Childrens and Adults Social Services to picking up the bins outside your house. This is an enormous organisation that deals with everything you see from the moment you leave your house in the morning until you return in the evening.

It's so difficult to explain this to the general public, the majority of our budget goes on things that in your daily life don't touch you at all and yet there is so little money left to provide the things that affect you most, the litter, the weeds, the roads, your bins, I would say that this Council has continued to provide the services that matter most in difficult circumstances. For this we should say thank you to all the directorates of this council who work hard to achieve, they are the swan in the river serene and effortlessly gliding against the flow but beneath the surface feverishly pedalling like mad.

Remember the task of finance is simple; spend £10 with £9.