

Dorset Council Report January 2023

Dorset Council Budget – update on government announcements

Council tax flexibility - the government is giving local authorities in England additional flexibility in setting council tax by increasing the referendum limit for increases in council tax by up to 3% per year from April 2023. In addition, local authorities with social care responsibilities will be able to increase the adult social care precept by up to 2% per year. The plans for adult social care reform – with a lifetime cap on social care costs – are now delayed for two years. A further £1bn nationally was pledged as grant funding for social care next year, with £1.7bn the following year. We are expecting the local government financial settlement to be announced on 21 December. This will inform discussions on the budget in January.

The government is going to refocus the investment zone programme, and councils' previous expressions of interest for investment zones will not now be pursued. However, the round 2 Levelling Up fund of £1.7bn will be maintained. Dorset Council submitted an application in this round and await the outcome which we understand will be given by early next year.

Missed Recycling collection

There have been several missed collections of late and these have generally been due to the recycling lorry being unable to get through because of difficulties due to parked vehicles or the driver is unwilling to take a risk on turning round in a confined space if they are entering a no through road

Do you qualify for financial assistance?

Qualifying for benefits can not only unlock income but could lead to additional assistance where outgoings become reduced. Even if you think you are not entitled to any assistance or have previously applied, you should still check if you haven't done so recently. It takes a few minutes and could have an impact on your day-to-day life. Below are just some examples of where our Welfare Benefits Team has helped residents.

An older council resident who did not qualify for Pension Credit due to his assets, was entitled to the highest rate of Disability Living Allowance where once he had a lower amount. The rebanding of this benefit unlocked £92 a week in income, which in turn allowed him to claim Pension credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support totalling £220 a week. The entitlements also led to a free TV licence, reduced tariff utility bills, assistance with glasses, dental treatment and hospital transport. The resident also got access to technological devices in his home to notify others if he fell.

In another example, a resident with a learning disability who was assisted with a benefit check when her circumstances changed, was owed tens of thousands of pounds due to previous unanswered claims from the Department of Work and Pensions. This led to an additional £180 benefits which unlocked Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support, assistance with glasses, free dental treatment and prescriptions as well as hospital transport.

The children of families with changing circumstances may be able to benefit from free school meals if they qualify for certain benefits. In addition, school holiday activities may become available and some after school activities become free. The qualifying benefits includes Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Child Tax and some Working Tax credits. Qualifying criteria here: <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/w/free-school-meals>

How to report abandoned vehicles

Following enquiries about abandoned vehicles in our areas, I thought I would forward you the link below that you can use to report any abandoned vehicles you may come across.

https://dorset-self.achieveservice.com/service/Abandoned_Vehicles

Care Worker Support accommodation

Dorset Council is inviting private landlords to work in partnership with them to provide good quality accommodation for young people leaving the care of the council. At an event in Dorchester on 1 November, representatives from Dorset Council told landlords that in exchange for letting out their property to a care

leaver, they could expect a guaranteed deposit, rent in advance and regular, guaranteed rent payments for the first 12 months of tenancy. Care leavers receive statutory support until they are 21 and this can be increased to 25 depending on their circumstances.

Currently, Dorset has 526 care leavers (data from June 2022), some looking to set up their first home, with practical and financial support, and moving-in kits provided by Dorset Council. Each tenant also has a dedicated worker who will liaise with the landlord to ensure the tenancy is a success. The council also equips the young care leavers with essential life skills such as tenancy readiness, being a good neighbour and budgeting.

If you are a landlord and interested in finding out more, please contact our Care Leavers Team on 01202 868257 or email cloportunities@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk for a no obligation chat.

Powerfuel application

Please note that committee consideration of the planning application from Powerfuel Portland Limited has been delayed and is now unlikely to be determined by councillors before March 2023.

Illegal Puppy Farm

A judge has given a pair of convicted illegal puppy sellers just 3 months to pay over £150,000 or risk up to 18 months in prison. All the puppies rescued were brought back to full health and successfully rehomed via a well-recognised animal rescue charity. The pair pleaded guilty to causing unnecessary suffering to a protected animal, failing to take steps to ensure the needs of animals were met and carrying out a dog breeding and selling business for 14 months without a licence.

Dorset Council are set to receive 37% of the confiscation order funds, which amounts to £55,440. This will go into the Community and Public Protection budget to be spent for the benefit of the community on general prevention and enforcement measures. The rest is split between central government and the HM Courts & Tribunals Service.

Mockingbird for Dorset Families

Foster care families in Dorset will benefit from even more support thanks to a partnership with The Fostering Network to deliver the global award-winning Mockingbird programme. Mockingbird delivers sustainable foster care. It is an evidence-based model structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides. The model nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families supporting them to build a resilient and caring community. The first extended family group, or constellation, met for a party to celebrate the official start of the programme with Dorset Council.

It works by setting up a group of six to ten fostering families, known as a constellation, who provide support to each other in a similar way to an extended family. Relationships are key to the success of Mockingbird, so at the centre of each constellation there is a hub home family who organise at least one social event every month for the families, offer emotional and practical support and can even have the children in the constellation for sleepovers. The model offers supportive relationships for everyone in the fostering family, including the sons and daughters of foster carers.

The hub home carer builds strong relationships with everyone in the constellation, so families are better placed to support each other and overcome problems before they escalate. Best of all, the children have another trusted adult they can talk to if they are going through a tough time. Dorset Council's fostering service puts the children who need loving, local foster homes at the heart of everything it does. The key focus is on keeping local children close to their schools, friends and birth families so they are always looking for more foster carers. Foster carers transform the lives of children and young people by opening their hearts and homes to those who need it the most. At present, demand for foster carers in Dorset is high – especially for teenagers and sibling groups. Find out more about fostering with Dorset Council – there's no commitment to apply. Keep up to date with the latest fostering news and subscribe to our monthly enewsletter.

If you'd like to find out more in-person, the fostering team hold regular fostering drop-in events across Dorset and you can follow us on Facebook for all the latest fostering news and updates.

Durlston Newsletter

A regular Newsletter is produced detailing events and progress at Durlston Castle. Please click on the link for details [62 Durlston News Issue December 62.pdf](#)

Digital Champions

A free training programme has now recruited and trained 750 special advisors to help Dorset's digitally excluded residents get online. Called the 'Embedded Digital Champion (EDC) programme, the Dorset Council-run course aims to train 1,000 of the county's frontline workers by 2023. This is to help make sure no one is left behind in an increasingly digital world. Previous surveys have revealed that nearly a third of Dorset residents lack the skills, devices, or connectivity to be online.

Since the start of the programme, 750 embedded digital champions have been recruited from places such as GP surgeries, libraries, voluntary organisations, and housing associations.

The EDC training takes place entirely online and is available to anyone with a front-line role who regularly encounters Dorset residents who struggle to be online. Topics such as password security, accessibility features, setting up email accounts and more are covered. Many people who have completed the course, have reported that their own digital skills have improved, as well as their confidence when supporting others.

Dorset volunteers honoured at tree planting ceremony

5 fruit trees, donated by Dorset Council, have been planted at Tumbledown Community Growing in Weymouth to thank and honour Dorset's volunteers who came together to help through the covid-19 pandemic. Nearly 100 people were nominated for their selflessness and commitment following an appeal to the public to nominate their volunteering heroes through the Dorset Volunteer Heroes Award scheme.

The council has donated a further 45 fruit trees in honour of the volunteers, which will be planted over the next few weeks across Dorset, including locations in Bridport, Blandford, Dorchester, Gillingham and Wimborne. If you would like to be a volunteer, please visit Dorset Volunteer Centre

Have your say on the future of Dorset archives

The Dorset History Centre is asking people how they use or would use their services in the future. The survey will form part of an application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, to extend the archive stores, improve public facilities and offer outreach services. Dorset History Centre in Dorchester is the publicly funded archive service for Dorset and BCP Council areas. It holds 1,000 years of the county's written history held within thousands of varied collections. These include:

- Photographs from local photographer Graham V Herbert.
- The archives of writers Thomas Hardy and William Barnes
- The Dame Elisabeth Frink collection.
- The Bankes archive from Kingston lacy – including William John Bankes's notebooks that helped crack the code of Hieroglyphics.

The Dorset History Centre gives free access to thousands of original maps, books, letters and photographs. There is also an opportunity to discover your family history with free access to ancestry.com, parish and newspaper collections. There are also resource packs that can be used by schools and other groups. One of these packs is Imagining the past that includes conversation prompts for those affected by mild to moderate dementia and their carers.

Please find this [release online](#). You can visit the survey at www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/DorsetHC2.

Comms team wins national award

The Dorset Council comms team have won a national award for the Promise To Love Dorset campaign that ran earlier this year, encouraging visitors to treat our lovely county well and not litter/light fires etc.

Of particular note are the comments by the judges: 'outstanding' and 'real value to the tax payer'.

Gold award for DC Armed Forces support

A Gold Award has been given to Dorset Council as part of the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme at a recent Official Ceremony in Dartmouth. Representing the highest badge of honour, the MoD bestows the Gold Award to businesses and organisations which go the extra mile to demonstrate their commitment to aiding and employing members of the military community. The council previously held a silver award, bestowed in 2021. To achieve the Gold Award, the council has developed a number of initiatives to encourage and support employees who are veterans, reservists, and cadet force adult volunteers, as well as spouses and partners of those serving in the Armed Forces.

Achieving the Gold Award is part of Dorset Council's pledge through the Armed Forces Covenant to ensure those who serve, or have served, in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated with fairness and respect in their communities, economy and society.

We are now back to holding face to face meetings. However, I would also be delighted to talk to you on the phone or via Zoom. Please ring or email me .My email address is cllrcherry.brooks@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk and my phone number is 07512 897908.

Cherry Brooks