

Cllr Christopher's E-mailed Report – 30 January 2023.

January may be associated with many things amongst those are the annual Oxford Farming Conference,(more later) but a great deal of the attention of many Dorset Councillors this January will be the Dorset Council budget for the year ended 31 March 2024.

The cost of living crisis shows few signs of reducing .

The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Rural Business and the Rural Powerhouse has been holding its second parliamentary inquiry on the impact of the cost of living crisis for rural communities and businesses.

I continue to stress the main themes:

Impact on rural communities and businesses employment housing and energy

Rural areas are characterised by lower wages , fewer well paid jobs sparse public transport and amenities such that the crisis bites deeply in rural areas.

Access to skills and labour connectivity and housing disadvantage rural areas.

With respect to rural housing there is much discussion from areas as diverse as modular housing or for instance new houses to be built within 15 minutes walking time of all essential public health and education services.

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.

Cllr Gary Suttle, Dorset Council's Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy, said:

“We have carefully developed proposals to deliver a balanced budget, in a national context of significant financial challenge. Our overriding aim is to protect the essential frontline council services on which local residents and businesses rely. The proposals do include a council tax increase, however we have kept to it to the minimum possible, despite the current high level of inflation. We continue to provide financial support for those hardest hit.

Since becoming a unitary council in 2019, we have made efficiency savings of £76 million, and this money has been reinvested to protect frontline services, including funding the growing need for adult social care with our ageing population. Our prudent budget management has meant that Dorset has not faced the same cuts to essential services as many other areas.

“However, we continue to lobby Government for fairer funding for Dorset so that we can reduce the burden on local taxpayers in future.”

The government is going to refocus the investment zone programme, and councils' previous expressions of interest for investment zones will not now be pursued.

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

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](tel:01202868257) or email cloppportunities@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk for a no obligation chat.

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 newsletter](#).

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.

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](#)

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.

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](https://www.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.

You can visit the survey at www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/DorsetHC2.

At a previous meeting there was discussion around the question of food security and labour shortages .

Farming Minister Mark Spencer at the OFC, commented that “the shift to a more sustainable resilient food system is critical to feeding a growing population to meeting our world leading commitments to halt the decline of nature by 2030 and reach net zero.

Amongst other comments made by Mr Spencer was that:

“ I am well aware of the importance of seasonal labour to the sector and to our National Food Security. In my time in post I have championed the seasonal workers scheme across Government . Mr Spencer went on to say that “ Just before Christmas we made an initial 45,000 visas available for seasonal workers to travel to the UK for up to six months - that's 15,000 more than this time last year ,with the possibility of an extra 10,000 more , if we can show that they are required and needed.”

He further commented “ We commissioned an independent review into labour shortages in the food supply chain. The review will report later this year and I look forward to ensuring the sector has the labour it needs to thrive “

I will continue my agricultural comments given the importance of agriculture to the economy , the Marshwood Vale Ward and the County Farms Estate by making further reference to the Oxford Farming Conference . However before I do so I note that farming has the highest fatal injury rate according to recent Health and Safety Executive (HSE) statistics .

The HSE health and safety at work report shows that farming has a fatal injury rate roughly 21 times higher than the average across all industries. This is a subject which should be addressed by further funding by H M Government so farmers are as safe at work as anyone else. I believe MP's should be told of the need for funds for education/ health and safety education with the hope of reducing the tragedies that shatter farming families and communities.

Many farmers will be interested in the Minister's comment that "with over 30,000 agreements in our improved Countryside Stewardship scheme that's a 94 per cent increase over the last 3 years, we are sticking with it, rather than reinventing the wheel." (he also made the commitment that the median increase to the value of a Countryside Stewardship will be about 10 per cent). Also highlighted were the further rounds of grants from the Farming Investment Fund. The slurry infrastructure grants part of the Farming Transformation Fund, is designed to help farmers in England improve or expand their slurry storage capacity. The online eligibility checker closes on 31 January 2023.

There has been much debate about pollution in West Dorset and I would like to close this report by quoting the following from the speech of Mr Spencer in which he spoke of "tackling the polluters who stubbornly continue to refuse our help and threaten to undermine everyone else's hard work"

Dorset Council's Cabinet has taken the decision to defer their "[Council tax premiums on second homes and empty properties](#)" report to allow more councillors to be involved before a decision is made.

[The report](#) recommends that the Council should take advantage of flexibilities contained in [the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill](#) which, if it becomes law, will enable the introduction of a 100% council tax premium on second homes. As written, [the Bill](#) requires the Council to make a decision a year in advance of introducing a premium on second homes and so the earliest the change could be introduced is from April 2024.

A 100% premium could bring in an extra £9.5 million of council tax revenue from second home owners each year. Another change proposed in [the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill](#) would enable the Council to introduce a premium where a dwelling has been empty for a year.

Deputy Leader of Dorset Council Cllr Peter Wharf was set to present [the report](#) at today's (Monday 23 January) Cabinet meeting. However, the Cabinet agreed that [the report](#) should be discussed by as many councillors as possible before it is taken to a vote at Full Council.

Cllr Wharf said, "Parliament is still considering [the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill](#) which will give us the flexibility to apply a council tax premium on second homes and other homes if they have been empty for a year. We originally had a report about this on today's Cabinet agenda so that a recommendation could be made to the February Full Council meeting. As [the Bill](#) is still being considered in Parliament we have a great opportunity to further discuss and debate [the report](#) locally."

[The report](#) will now be added as a new item to the [Place and Resources Overview Committee](#) on Thursday 9 February to consider before providing recommendations to Cabinet on Tuesday 28 February. If agreed, it will then go to a Full Council meeting at the end of March, which has been brought forward from April so the proposed introduction of the premium isn't delayed.

Cllr Wharf continued, "This ensures as many different opinions as possible are heard before we make such an important decision, and demonstrate the transparency of local democracy in Dorset. I strongly encourage everyone to follow [this report's](#) committee journey by going to our website and watching our live and recorded video streams. If you have an opinion or question about [the report](#), please contact us via the [committee webpages](#) or [engage with your ward councillor](#) to make your views known. I look forward to hearing – and participating in – the discussion around [this report](#) next month."

In order for the premium to be implemented in 2024, [the government's Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill](#) must have received Royal Assent by 1 April 2023. According to the council tax database, there are 5,722 second homes registered in Dorset.

All three meetings where [the report](#) will be considered will be available to watch online via [the Dorset Council website](#).

Warm Welcomes in Dorset
Cost of Living Support in the Community
How to get help and how to give help

Getting Help

Times are hard, and many of us need a bit of extra support at the moment. Rising food costs, redundancy, repossession, fuel price rises, and more, all put a huge pressure on us all.

People are running out of money to buy food, pay for housing and heating, and cover the basic costs of living. **If you are facing these difficult challenges, you are not alone and support is available.**

There are lots of projects across Dorset who can help provide support and a warm welcome to you when you need it.

These include offering warm spaces and places where you can bring your family, or sit and work, affordable food projects and lunch clubs, social activities, and advice and guidance services to help you cope with the cost of living crisis.

People are ready to help you and those you care for. Do get in touch.

Giving Help

If we all pull together, we have the best chance coping with this crisis. Lots of help is needed to support and run Warm Welcomes in Dorset.

If you are able to give support to your local projects, please do. If you'd like to set up something new, or if you want to add your service to these listings, please get in touch. The need is growing rapidly. Any help that can be offered will make a world of difference.

[You can add in a new Warm Welcome listing here.](#)

We would like to hear about warm spaces and places where people can go, lunch clubs and community meals, affordable / free food and clothing, social events, and more.

We've put the contact details for the current Warm Welcomes below. Click on the listings to contact the projects and find out what help is needed.

Everything you can do to help will be really appreciated. Thank you.

Warm Spaces and Places

Warm spaces in Dorset: places and spaces where you can drop in and keep warm. These are sometimes known as warm hubs or warm banks.

[View Listings](#)

Community Meals and Lunch Clubs

Lunch clubs and community meals in Dorset: affordable or free warm food available in the community. These are groups who get together to share a meal. Sometimes the group cooks the meal together too.

[View Listings](#)

Affordable And Emergency Food

Affordable and emergency food in Dorset.

[View Listings](#)

Affordable Clothes and Household Goods

Affordable clothing and household goods in Dorset.

[View Listings](#)

Advice And Information

Information, advice and guidance about managing with the cost-of-living crisis in Dorset.

[View Listings](#)

Dorset's Community Response

If you need any further help with finding services, advice or support, please send an enquiry to the DCR team, who will do all they can to help.

[Send an enquiry](#)

Best regards

Simon

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