

**Report to the Parish Council August 2023**  
**Councillor Jill Haynes Chalk Valleys Ward Dorset Council**

Hello Councillors and Members of the public.

Here are a few headlines for a very busy September.

**This year's budget**

We started the 2024/25 budget setting process last week. The session reviewed current spend and looked at trends going forward. The first thing I would like to say is that Dorset Council has a secure financial footing. There has been a lot in the press recently about councils going “bankrupt”, Birmingham in particular, but I want to assure you we are financially secure. That does not mean to say there are not considerable pressures in some areas. We are looking to invest to save and find better ways of working to ensure we remain in budget. One of the big areas where this is important is the prevention agenda in both our adult's and children's services. Between the two areas Adult's cost the council £143M and Children's £77.8M in addition in the place directorate there is a further £17M on special needs children's transport.

Various cross party working groups will now do further work to understand some of the big issues and come back to a November workshop with proposals. We will still not be able to set the budget until January as we have been told we will not know what Central Government contributions we will receive until the new year. It is a bit of crystal ball gazing too and we try to decide what the inflation rate and pay awards will be. (Pay awards are negotiated nationally.) An idea of what this might mean next year is 1% inflation = £2.8M cost to the council and 1% pay award = £1.7M

**Our Future Council ( digital contact)**

We have received £750K from the department of Levelling up and Communities to do a pilot on how digital ways of working will affect both the council and the public in the future. We are one of four councils in the country doing this pilot. This is a massive piece of work which should join up all our computer systems, provide comprehensive Business Intelligence and a one stop shop for the public. At the moment the customer access is rather clunky, and you often have to enter information a number of times for each service you require. The new system will provide a customer account and hopefully a better experience. I will update further as this work progresses. We will be encouraging those that can use this service when it opens and this will free up our call centre staff to deal with those people who, for various reasons, need to speak to a real person!

## **Some Planning facts and figures**

Dorset Council is the 7<sup>th</sup> largest planning authority in the country by area. We deal with more than 5000 applications a year and this has continued to rise during the council period. We are exceeding nationally set determination times running at 96% for major applications and 87% for minors. We often see that the validations are taking a long time, this is because the applications are often incomplete. The validation and thus the determination process will not start until all the paperwork on the checklist is received, this includes things like flood assessments, drainage and environmental assessments. Dorset Council Building Control look after the development of 65% of these applications and have a high customer satisfaction rating.

## **Digital Champion Roadshow**

The Dorset Council's volunteer digital champion service is ten years old and to celebrate is holding a 'get online' roadshow.

During national 'Get Online' week (16-20 October) the council's volunteers will be manning stalls in Sherborne, Bridport, Wool and Wimborne and anyone needing help to navigate the digital world are urged to come along.

The volunteer digital champions will be able to answer any questions people have and visitors will also get the chance to try out some tablets and take part in fun interactive quizzes.

And everyone who visits one of the volunteer digital champion stalls will be able to enter a free draw with the chance of winning a tablet of their own.

In the last decade they have helped around 15,000 people in their face-to-face appointments and a further 3,500 over the phone since the Digital Hotline was launched in 2020.

## **Bright Spots for Dorset Children in Care**

Results of a recent survey show that the majority of children in care in Dorset feel their life has got better since coming into care.

The 'Bright Spots' survey, which was commissioned by Dorset Council, was carried out by Coram Voice and asked the views of children and young people in care between the ages of 4 and 17. The report set out six factors associated with wellbeing: trusted and available social workers, having good friends, liking school, seeing siblings as often as they want, feeling safe and settled, having trusted and sensitive carers.

For all children and young people having good friends and trusting and supportive relationships were really important. This included trusted carers and social workers. Liking school influenced well-being for all age groups and feeling safe where they lived and settled was also important for children in care whether they were aged 4 or 17. Seeing mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters as often as they wanted was highlighted by all age groups.

82% of children in Dorset in the age range 8 to 17 who had been taken into care felt that their life had got better since coming into care.

All of the primary school children aged between 8 and 11 had a trusted adult in their life. One child commented: 'I love my life now and I don't want to change it because I love my carers and my dog.'

### **Is your child due to start Secondary or Upper school in September 2024?**

Parents/carers will need to apply by Tuesday 31 October 2023 for the best chance of getting a place at their preferred school. This applies to all children moving from primary to secondary school, or middle to upper school in September 2023.

Finding the right school place for your child is important for any parent/carer. [The admissions pages](#) will provide you with all the information you need to apply, and you can also check out our [parents' guide](#) for information about the different types of schools and the way to apply to each one.

### **School application deadlines:**

If your child is due to start secondary or upper school in September 2024, you should [apply now](#) to avoid disappointment. Parents/Carers must apply by **31 October 2023**.

If you're not able to apply [online](#) you can download a Word document from the [admissions pages](#) or contact the School Admissions Team on 01305 221060, or email: [admissions@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:admissions@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)

### **Turn off analogue phones**

There has been little publicity about the removal and replacement of our analogue phones. (landlines). By 2025 these are all due to be switched off and will need to be replaced with a different phone and an internet connection. The replacement phones will have battery back up so they can work in a power cut. However, people are concerned about what this means to them. I can confirm you will not need a computer for this to work and I have asked for a detailed briefing note which I will circulate as soon as I receive it, this is nothing to do with Dorset Council but I feel people want to have more information.

