

Transformation update

Dorset Council is currently delivering a five-year transformation plan which was approved by Cabinet in November 2020. Despite the significant disruption experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic and the more recent cost of living crisis, the council has maintained a focus on improving services for customers and achieving long-term financial stability.

Dorset Council is 4 years old, and during that time it has initiated large scale change on a number of fronts that have reflected the need for convergence and adaptation of the way that we operate to reflect the change environment around us. To date, the council has saved £96m as a direct result of the convergence of systems and processes following local government reorganisation. This exceeds the planned outcome of £70M by the end of year five more than £20M in the first four years with more to come. Without the decision to go a Unitary council we would undoubtedly be in a very serious financial situation today and services would have had to have been reduced or cut.

The changes and progress that Dorset Council has both experienced and delivered during this time have been significant, multifaceted and have involved service specific and council-wide changes that can be categorised along the following lines:

- Staff integration
- Service improvement through change and performance management
- Improvements driven by capital investments
- Enhanced partnership working and governance
- Transformation

Household Support Fund

The Household Support Fund (HSF) will reopen for applications at 6 June 2023 for low-income households in the Dorset Council area. The support will be in the form of supermarket vouchers. Citizens Advice will be allocating this fund on behalf of Dorset Council and vouchers will be issued to residents who meet the eligibility criteria within 6 – 8 weeks. Dorset Council households will be able to apply if they have an annual household net income of less than £30,000 and savings of less than £16,000 and **not applied** for a previous HSF payment within the last 6 months. Calculations for the annual net income . should not include Personal Independence Payments, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Carers Allowance or Child Benefit. Applications are limited to one per household. Funds are limited for each window and the form will close when they have been allocated. The April window opened and closed on the same day, so please get in touch as soon as possible once the form opens. If applicants need help completing the form, they can telephone Customer Services on 01305 221000.

Community Grants

Grants of up to £5,000 are available for projects that bring communities across Dorset together. If you are looking to kickstart a new project that will make a difference for people in your community, round 5 of the Community and Culture Project Fund has now reopened. The grants, which are managed by Dorset Council,

welcome applications for projects and events for community, arts, accredited museums, heritage, sport, youth, play and physical activity.

Last year the grants supported a wide range of local projects including arts and crafts, physical activities, sports clubs, warm spaces, foodbanks, lunch clubs and cost of living support for childcare places. Not for profit groups who meet our funding criteria are welcome to apply for the grant, which can fund up to £5,000 towards a project that will have a social impact and support local communities and hard to reach groups.

A total of £54,420 was awarded to heritage, museums, and arts organisations across Dorset last year. In addition, 27 grants worth a total of £64,970 were awarded to voluntary and community organisations that work with disadvantaged, under served and marginalized communities in the Dorset council area.

The closing date for applications is Sunday 7 July and decision letters will be sent to all applicants at the end of July. Application details are on the Dorset Council website.

Car Parking Machines upgrade

All our car park and on-street pay and display machines are to be replaced. Replacement of the machines is expected to complete by mid-July, with the new machines offering improved reliability and a consistent user experience.

The machines will provide customers with a range of payment options, including cash, card, Apple Pay, Google Pay, and an online app. Wi-Fi will also be improved in car parks with weak phone signals, ensuring smoother transactions. The payment facilities and display screens will at a height suitable for wheelchair users.

Nitrates.

We have had many questions at to how the nitrates policy affects development. Below is a summary article explaining this.

There are five catchment areas for internationally protected wetland habitats within, or overlapping with, Dorset Council's administrative area where phosphorus and/or nitrogen levels have the potential to adversely affect water quality. Dorset Council has a legal responsibility to ensure that any development it permits will not adversely affect the integrity of any internationally protected site. Therefore, in all affected catchments, new residential development cannot be granted planning permission if it is unable to demonstrate that it is capable of achieving nutrient neutrality.

The catchment areas within Dorset are:

- Poole Harbour – Nitrogen and Phosphorus nutrient deposition
- Somerset Levels and Moors - Phosphorus nutrient deposition
- River Avon – Phosphorus nutrient deposition
- Chesil and The Fleet – Nitrogen and Phosphorus nutrient deposition

- River Axe – Phosphorus nutrient deposition

The largest and most significant catchment area affecting Dorset in terms of geographical area and housing applications is Poole Harbour, and Dorset Council has in place an adopted strategy to mitigate the impacts of nitrogen from new residential development. However, the advice from Natural England in September 2022 confirmed that phosphorus is also an issue for Poole Harbour.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill is proposing measures which will require improvements to wastewater treatment works which, if enacted, will go a significant way to mitigating phosphorus impacts. However, as drafted, there is a risk that smaller treatment works would not be in scope and so the Leader of Dorset Council has written to the Secretary of State to request that all necessary wastewater treatment works in the Poole Harbour catchment are within scope of the intended improvements, and officers have held subsequent meetings with government departments, Natural England and Wessex Water to look at this further. Government is giving careful consideration to Dorset Council's position and the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill is anticipated to receive Royal Assent during the Summer, at which point we hope to have greater certainty to offer applicants and developers. In the meantime, officers at Dorset Council are continuing to work proactively to look at finding solutions, including:

Working with Registered Providers to deliver mitigation to existing housing stock to provide additional capacity for affordable housing units;

Engaging with DLUHC to seek additional funding to bring forward mitigation;

Investigating mitigation options outside of the Poole Harbour catchment, in partnership with neighbouring authorities.

Our website contains information on the latest position on nutrient neutrality and we will continue to provide updates and guidance as the situation evolves.