

Dorset Council Report – September 2019 **Cllrs. Toni Coombs, Spencer Flower and Simon Gibson**

Dorset Council Plan – This is the first plan for the Dorset Council setting out aspirations and priorities for the next four years. The five priorities are:

- Sustainable Economic growth
- Unique environment
- Staying safe and well
- Strong, healthy communities
- Suitable housing.

The Council Plan outlines proposed activity to achieve these priorities, all contributing towards making Dorset “a great place to live, work and visit”.

Cutting across all of these priorities is the council’s commitment to tackling climate change and reducing its carbon footprint – work on which is currently underway through a cross Party Executive Advisory Panel chaired by the Cabinet Member for Highways, Travel and Environment.

Subject to Cabinet approval on 1 October, Dorset Council will then engage with residents, Town and Parish Councils and other partners throughout October, November and December to seek views and feedback on the draft Council Plan.

All Dorset councillors had been given the opportunity through a member seminar/workshop in shaping this draft Council Plan over recent weeks. Members are ambitious for the people of Dorset and this plan sets out our proposals for what we believe Dorset Council should deliver over the next four years.

The final Council Plan, incorporating any feedback received from public engagement, will then be submitted to Full Council for approval alongside the council’s budget and the medium-term financial plan in February 2020. The Council Plan will inform all future decisions and policies adopted by the council.

The Somerley HRC - Discussions have recently taken place between the Leader of Hampshire County Council [HCC] and the Leader of the Dorset Council seeking a way forward for Dorset residents, living in the eastern part of the Dorset Council area, to have continued free access to the Somerley HRC at the point of need.

As Local Councillors, we had requested that all Dorset residents affected by the introduction of a £5.00 per visit charge for non-Hampshire residents from January 2020 be consulted, so that DWP can make informed decisions regarding HRC provision and the potential impact on household waste facilities in Dorset. Results from the survey were very helpful in getting us to a better understanding of the various post codes in Dorset who use the Somerley HRC.

The matter needs to be resolved before the end of October so that necessary arrangements, whatever they may eventually be, are in place ahead of January 2020 when the current HCC plan to charge non-Hampshire residents £5.00 for each trip commences.

DWP Household Collections – Following numerous complaints from Verwood residents, who have experienced missed collections in recent weeks, we have been in conversation with the Corporate Director responsible so DWP to get a better understanding of the issues and importantly of the recovery action in place to return the collection service to an acceptable level. We were informed previous delays in vehicle replacements, causing repeated vehicle breakdowns and challenges of staff recruitment and retention, where action has also been taken to resolve the situation.

Given the importance of this service, which impacts on every household in the town, we will continue to keep a close watch on performance and encourage residents to report any missed collects and make us aware at the same time, so that we can follow up the complaint and get the matter resolved quickly.

Government Spending Review - Dorset Council welcomes the Chancellor's spending round announcement to increase funding for council-run services including adult social care and services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Chancellor Sajid Javid promised access for councils across the country to £1.5bn new funding for social care, and an additional £700m to support children and young people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). He also outlined plans to increase school spending by £7.1bn by 2022-23 and £54m of additional funding to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping.

Dorset Council will not find out its local allocation of this promised funding until December. However, the council's finance officers estimate that the funding could be as much as £10m from government for the next financial year. This is against current funding levels of £295m.

The Leader of the Council wrote a personal letter to the Chancellor on the 20 August setting out the funding pressures facing the Dorset Council, seeking fairer funding for Dorset. We are therefore pleased to see that the government has recognised the need to rebalance the past cuts in funding for essential local government services. The Leaders' letter also explained to the Chancellor that the recent local government reorganisation in Dorset, which he approved in his former role as Secretary of State at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, is indeed achieving significant efficiencies and cost reductions. We are on track to achieve a £10m pa reduction in our salary bill resulting from de-duplication of roles. And we will make further significant budget savings next year and in ongoing years through service redesign and economies of scale.

However, despite this, Dorset Council still faces a challenging budget position due to growing demand for children's services (both children in care and SEND services) and adult social care, both of which we have a statutory duty to provide. This growing demand is due to demographic changes such as our ageing population and more children being diagnosed with special educational needs. Due to these pressures, we find ourselves forecasting a budget overspend of £12.6m for this financial year, which we are working hard to address. This is despite an increase in our 2019/20 budget provision in both adults and children's services of about £10m.

Councils have extremely limited tools at their disposal to deal with such demographic and demand pressures. With the lack of funding provided by government over recent years, we have had to rely on income from council tax to provide 82% of the council's funding to deliver essential services for residents.

The letter also made absolutely clear that the financial situation for local government in Dorset would be significantly worse if we had not gone ahead with local government reorganisation and the creation of Dorset Council.

The government's promise of additional funding is very much welcomed and should help to address the Dorset Councils' immediate budget pressures. We must now wait to see the detail of what additional funding Dorset Council when the spending round is announced in December."