

Dorset Council

Beacon Ward

Cllr Jane Somper

August/September 2019

The first three months in the life of Dorset Council has been busy, interesting and challenging in equal measure. Full Council has met twice, with “lively” interventions from the public each time. A raft of committees, boards, and panels are now up and running. Cross-party panels are looking at assets, leisure services, climate change, locality working, planning policy, and much more.

So, a good start has been made, but the challenge will be to maintain the momentum and deliver the transformation needed to achieve the full potential of the new council, and the Leader, Cllr Spencer Flower has recently written to the Chancellor stating that without a contribution from Government for the expensive demand led services for Children and Adults, it will become increasingly challenging to continue to provide the services that residents expect from Dorset Council.

Council Workforce

We continue to shape the new workforce through converging the services of the six predecessor councils.

The Senior Leadership Team and most of the Corporate Directors are in post and work is pushing ahead to restructure the remaining tiers of staff. This work will be completed by the end of the year, reducing costs of service delivery by £5.5m in year, and £10m in the first budget year. This is in line with the case for reorganisation submitted to Government and with the 2019/20 budget.

Council staff are facing this tough and fast paced programme of change with commendable professionalism.

Highways

You will all be aware of the extensive programme of repairs to our roads in recent months. In particular, Dorset Highways have undertaken a number of high profile bridge repairs, most notably the major engineering project to replace the flood culverts at Durweston, and work on Blandford Bridge and at Sturminster Newton. The Durweston project has run to time throughout and is expected to finish on schedule. In engineering terms this is a nationally significant project of which our Officers are rightly proud. We have also seen a swathe of resurfacing on roads small and large throughout the spring and summer.

Residents have experienced a good deal of inconvenience while this work is undertaken, but the work must be done and we were equally inconvenienced by the potholes. Dorset Highways are reasonably good at coordinating road closures and communicating with local communities before and during disruption. But given the impact on local people we should require Highways to make minimising this hardship a priority, against which the local community will measure their success. I will continue to press this view with the new Corporate Director.

All scheduled work can be seen on the website, including a useful online roadwork map. Paul Starkey is the Community Highways Officer, available on p.a.starkey@dorsetcc.gov.uk

Planning

Work has started on producing a new *Local Plan for Dorset*. A Local Plan determines what level of development is needed to meet known housing demand over a 15 year period, and sets out in broad terms where development should be located. It also enshrines local planning and conservation policies. We are required to have a new Local Plan in place by 2024. Consulting with local residents and Parish Councils is a statutory requirement of the Local Plan procedure.

The Cabinet Member with responsibility for planning is David Walsh, whose contact details are cllrdavid.walsh@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk.

In the meantime, the existing *North Dorset Local Plan* and the various *Neighbourhood Plans* continue in force across our area and remain the basis for any comments by Parish Councils or other consultees.

The arrangements for requesting planning applications to be considered by committee varied slightly across the former Districts so have now been simplified and agreed across the new council. Details are on the website but, essentially, a Parish Council or Ward Member can request committee consideration. This must be done within the consultation period and the planning grounds must be given. The final decision rests with the Head of Planning.

The newly appointed Head of Planning is Mike Garrity and the new Service Manager for Development Management and Enforcement is Anna Lee.

Relationship with Town and Parish Councils

In the run up to the new Council there was, perhaps inevitably, some misinformation about the future role of Town and Parish Councils. A cross-party panel has been set up to work with Town and Parish Councils to establish an effective way of working in partnership for the future. The Cabinet Member leading on this is Cllr Tony Alford who can be contacted on cllranthony.alford@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk. 4

Corporate Plan

I attended a presentation last week and will be forwarding information to the Clerk and Councillors of the Parish Council when it becomes available, so you will input your valuable views in to the plan. Public Consultation October-December 2019. I would like to, if possible and you are willing, to arrange a public meeting for the whole ward, perhaps with neighbouring wards.

Getting in Touch

The quickest way to contact Dorset Council is via the website, Dorsetcouncil.gov.uk. This has been upgraded and updated, though it is still not without the occasional glitch! If you encounter a problem please do report it so that it can be picked up.

Contacting individual officers is not always easy at present because of the upheavals across the workforce. In due course Parish Councils will get to know the new Officers and re-establish the good working relationships we have been used to.

You will have seen the first edition of the council magazine, *Dorset Council News*. This is a transitional publication, with two more editions planned for November 2019 and March 2020. If it proves popular it will be continued. The content is produced in-house and the production and distribution costs are covered by advertising, so there is no additional burden on the taxpayer.

I have a new, official (and very long) email address which I am required to use for data security. So if you are still using one of my old emails could you change your records to cllrjane.somper@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk.