

Dorset Council - Beacon Ward

Cllr Jane Somper

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The Dorset Council Plan

The council is seeking views from residents and partners on the draft Dorset Council Plan, outlining its priorities for the next four years. This feedback will inform the finalised Plan which will go to Full Council in February 2020, alongside the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget.

As part of this consultation, two neighbouring Ward Councillors, Sherry Jespersen and Piers Brown, and I will hold a joint meeting for all our Parish Councils. We will run through the Plan with you and take forward your views and comments.

The presentation will be on Thursday 5th December, at 7.00pm at Stourpaine Village Hall. Please do come along and share your views. An email invitation has been sent to clerks to enable you to RSVP.

Highways

I have been asked a number of times about the new Eurovia micro- surface treatments being carried out on residential roads. So, for the engineers among you...

I am told by Highways that this is a cost effective treatment for worn, but not structurally failing, roads which preserves and reinforces the surface and fills in cracks and holes. The micro-surface is laid over the existing surface, sometimes after holes have been patched in preparation. This is why we sometimes see what appears to be two repairs in the same location. Due to the size of the equipment roads are often closed while work is in progress.

Children and Young People

Dorset Council has agreed that young people who have spent time in foster or residential care will be exempt from paying council tax, if they live alone, or allowed 25% discount if they live with someone else, up to the age of 25.

This follows a national campaign by the Children's Society, who say that managing household finances can be particularly difficult for care leavers who often do not have the same support networks as other young people.

Dorset Council is responsible for 225 care leavers aged between 18 and 25, and it is estimated that 104 of these live in Dorset and are likely to qualify for council tax exemptions, which would cost the council around £46,500 a year.

In October, Ofsted looked at the council's arrangements for children in need and those subject to a child protection plan and concluded that children are now benefiting from better help and support and parents better understand the changes they need to make and are better supported. More work needs to be done and the Children's Services Directorate has begun a long term plan to transform the way the council supports children and families. The Council is also seeking more Foster Carers, if you or anyone you know in the village may be interested please contact me and I will put you in touch with the relevant body.

Fuel Poverty

Dorset Council is working with Dorset Community Foundation's Surviving Winter appeal which gives individuals grants of up to £200 for everything from fuel bills to boiler repairs. Residents over 60 who are in fuel poverty and those over 50 who meet the criteria can apply to dorsetcommunityfoundation.org.uk.

Meanwhile, residents who receive the Winter Fuel Payment and don't feel they need it can donate their payment to fellow vulnerable residents via the Dorset Community Foundation.

Climate Emergency

Since Dorset Council declared a climate emergency in May, Dorset Council's Low Carbon Dorset Team has received an influx of applications for support from Town and Parish Councils seeking to discover what they can do to reduce their carbon footprints.

In response we are running a Parish and Town Council Climate Emergency Advice Seminar on 19th November, at South Walks House in Dorchester. This will provide information on

- What needs to be considered when making a Climate Emergency Plan
- Obstacles and issues
- Support and funding available
- Examples of carbon reduction projects already underway by Dorset Town and Parish Councils.

Contact the Low Carbon Dorset Team on lowcarbondorset@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk to book a place.

Working with Parish and Town Councils

Dorset Council has begun a series of conversations with Parish and Town Councils to redefine our working relationship. The first part of this consultation includes a number of workshops - and I will be attend the workshop on the workshop on 7th November. We will also be sending an electronic survey in November following which all the suggestions and comments will be fed into a report on how to go forward, which will be the subject of further consultation in the New Year. Dorset Council is genuinely looking to forge a new way of working with Parish Councils so this is your opportunity to be part of this.

Peer Review

In line with good practice established by the Local Government Association, Dorset Council invited a small team of officers and councillors from successful councils around the country to Peer Review our progress since May. This was a very useful exercise.

In summary, they told us:

- Political leadership is setting the agenda and there is good cross party working
- It is good that we are asking residents about our draft Council Plan, but we need to develop our relationships with Town and Parish councils.
- We need realistic plans to balance financial pressures, balancing priorities with aspirations
- We must be aware and respect the levels of change being experienced by our staff.