

## **Dorset Council Report**

### **BEACON WARD**

**Cllr Jane Somper – [cllrjane.somper@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:cllrjane.somper@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)**

**AUTUMN/WINTER 2021**

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#### **Domestic Abuse Strategy**

Tackling domestic abuse has been a priority for the council and organisations in Dorset for many years and this year the Government passed legislation in the form of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 that places specific responsibilities on Councils, including creating a domestic abuse strategy.

Dorset residents and stakeholders are invited to have their say on the draft strategy that will set out how Dorset Council will work with organisations and communities in Dorset to tackle domestic abuse over the next three years.

The consultation can be found on the Dorset Council website (link below) and I'd encourage this to be shared with as wider engagement in the community as possible

[2021 \(snapsurveys.com\)](https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/consultations-and-communications/2021/snapsurveys.com)

#### **Gore Clump**

Local consultation is currently underway for approval on the improvement works at Gore Clump by Compton Abbas airfield. The work to pull all the different landowners and stakeholder groups together has taken far too long, but now details on previous objections have been addressed the legal process of consultation can take place. I have engaged with all four Parish Councils that this small but significant piece of land sits in to ensure they have been kept informed of all the planned work and have met twice with Chairmen (or representatives) from the four PC's along with Portfolio Holder and Highways Officers. Any works to the area will not require disruption (road closures) to surrounding roads ie. A350/C13 as the main works are being done away from the main road

## **Funding agreed for SEND Strategy**

Dorset Council has agreed £37.5m over the next five years to help deliver its new strategy for children and young people with special needs and disabilities (SEND). The funding will support the new Centre of Excellence, the former St Mary's school in Shaftesbury, expansion of existing special schools and expansion of facilities in mainstream schools, such as Inclusion Hubs. The aim is to ensure more of Dorset's SEND children can attend a local school, rather than having to travel great distances, sometimes out of county, to receive the support they need. Independent provision costs about £60,000 per year per pupil whereas provision in one of Dorset's own schools costs around £22,000.

The SEND Sufficiency Programme will ultimately deliver 100 extra places in Inclusion Hubs in mainstream schools. The new Centre for Excellence (at St Mary's site in Shaftesbury) will open in 2021/22 starting with 60 places, rising to 280 places in subsequent years and the expanded Beaucroft Special School will add an additional 75 SEND places by 2022/23.

This is an ambitious plan, but the intention is to provide better support for Dorset's children and better value for money for taxpayers.

## **Grant to develop former council office buildings**

Dorset Council has been awarded £2.3m following a bid to the Government's Brownfield Land Release Fund. The money will be used to enable work on two key sites owned by former District Councils - North Quay in Weymouth and Furzehill in Wimborne. These redundant office sites will be released to create almost 200 new homes, open spaces, community facilities and workspaces, all subject to planning permission. £385K will be set aside for sites in North Dorset. The capital from the sale of these assets will be available to Dorset Council for much needed capital projects.

## **NHS Outpatient Assessment Centre**

South Walks House, the Dorset Council office in Dorchester, is to become an NHS Outpatient Assessment Centre for six months. This initiative will bring a range of outpatient services together under one roof as well as health and wellbeing advice and information services. The SWH centre is part of a Dorset wide Think Big initiative to help reduce waiting times and

bring diagnostic services closer to the community and is one of the first of its kind in the country

### **Funding to improve insulation**

DC has also been awarded £98,000 of Government funding to insulate the most poorly insulated rented homes in Dorset. In the coming months landlords with properties with low EPCs will be invited to apply for grants for improvements such as insulation, solar panels and more efficient boilers.

### **Budget Pressures**

You will have recognised how many of the initiatives reported rely on grant funding from central government. This is the new funding reality for Local Government, competitive bidding on a project-by-project basis. This has the advantage for government that it directs scarce funding exactly where it is most needed, but it makes planning and budgeting doubly difficult for councils. Dorset Council has a successful record in securing funding, which is just as well given the current and future pressures on the budget. The council is predicting an in-year increase in the gross cost of care services of 7% or £10.3m. This is due to a combination of more people needing care and an increase in the unit cost of care charged by providers of services to the Council. The funding recently promised by government will be welcome, but it is not due until 2023 and there is much uncertainty around it. The Leader of the Council takes every opportunity to lobby Ministers and Dorset MPs on the funding crisis faced across local Government.

### **Dorset Library Consultation – What do you want from your library?**

Dorset Council has launched a public consultation to inform how they develop and deliver their library service in the future. Library users and non-users are being asked to share their views on how they want to shape the use of libraries. The consultation runs from 25 October 2021 to 7 January 2022.

Libraries are at the heart of our Dorset's communities and provide highly valued services, including book lending, activities and events, reading groups, skills and learning, health and wellbeing, information provision,

digital access and support, and art and cultural exhibitions. People of all ages can enjoy all of this and more, within a safe and welcoming environment.

The current library strategy is 11 years old. Over those 11 years, there have been significant changes in public behaviour and digital technology, and the impacts of the Covid pandemic have been felt. This consultation seeks to look to the future of Dorset's libraries – how can they best meet the needs of local residents and communities, now and over the next ten years?

It's important to hear from as many people as possible including people who don't ever use the service to understand why and what can DC do to encourage more use.

[2021 \(snapsurveys.com\)](https://snapsurveys.com)

There is also a link for 5-15 year olds to feed their own views in to

[2021 \(snapsurveys.com\)](https://snapsurveys.com)

**Next Full Council – Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> December at 6.30pm**

**Next Cabinet Meeting – Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> December at 10.00am**

**Ward Meetings**

I continue to carry out face to face meetings with residents and hold regular ward/village walks and have recently hosted Cllr Andrew Parry (Portfolio Holder for Children's Services) and Cllr Simon Gibson (Lead Member for Highways) in a tour of the Beacon Ward. I will be inviting the Leader of the Council Spencer Flower for a ward tour.

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