

Dorset Council February 2022 Report Final

Dorset Council Tax

We propose limiting the council tax increase to just under 4%. This is less than the 5% increase made possible through the Government Spending Review and is well under the current rate of inflation. However, organisational changes are possible at Dorset Council during the year as the authority works to balance its books. We are protecting frontline services: Our careful management of Dorset Council's budget means no proposals for cuts to services (and no mass redundancies) over the coming year, unlike many other councils across the country.

The council's total net budget for 2023-24 will be £348 million. Dorset Council provides around 450 different services to just under 380,000 residents. The proposals are in contrast with many other councils nationally, which face the prospect of cuts to services, such as library closures and reduction of road maintenance, to balance their budgets. The council is required by law to set a balanced budget which means its expenditure must be balanced by income without unsustainable use of one-off, or short-term sources of finance. This year's budget setting exercise once more takes place against a national background of extreme pressures for councils. These pressures include the high level of inflation which affects the cost of delivering council services, and also the continued growth in need for social care services as a result of the ageing population.

The council proposes to increase council tax next year by just under 2% and to levy the adult social care precept of 2%. This is less than the maximum 5% increase outlined in the Government's Spending Review in December 2022. The increase would be equivalent to £1.41 extra per week for a Band D property.

Since becoming a unitary council in 2019, we have made efficiency savings of £76 million, and this money has been reinvested to protect frontline services, including funding the growing need for adult social care with our ageing population. Our prudent budget management has meant that Dorset has not faced the same cuts to essential services as many other areas. However, we continue to lobby Government for fairer funding for Dorset so that we can reduce the burden on local taxpayers in future.

The budget setting process will complete in Full Council 6.30pm, 14 February for final approval.

Rubbish and Recycling Collections

There have been some difficulties across the County in collections. The refuse vehicles are (obviously) large and not particularly manoeuvrable. If entering a dead end - the vehicle will normally reverse in. Residents can help by ensuring that vehicles are not parked on the corner any of these entrances, or in parking spaces that restrict access or prevent free movement. Thank you.

Grants to DC

Central government has confirmed that Dorset Council is to receive around £4.5m over the next two years to continue several key programmes, as well as launch some new initiatives. They have approved local spending plans for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), which matches and succeeds EU funding, while giving local leaders greater say in how the money is spent.

A new Investment Plan for Dorset, led by Dorset Council with input from a wide range of contributors, has been approved by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and will see the county benefit from £4.5m of UKSPF money. The flexible approach to the Investment Plan also means Dorset Council will have the opportunity to adapt its plan to reflect new economic priorities over the period to 2025. The £4.5m will be focused on building pride in place, supporting high quality skills training, supporting pay, employment and productivity growth, and increasing life chances across the county. All of these are key objectives for Dorset Council over the coming years, especially as we tackle post-pandemic financial challenges and offer help to our residents. The council aims to launch the first elements of the Investment Plan shortly and will be providing more details on how businesses and individuals can access this support.

SSEN £2.2M investment in Dorset

MORE THAN two million pounds is to be invested in low-carbon technologies across Dorset. Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) Distribution has announced £2.2million of funding to replace nearly 3km of cable. That will create an extra 7.2megawatts of capacity for low carbon technologies which, they say, could be harnessed for electric vehicle charging points.

Nutrient neutrality implications for Planning

Natural England has informed us that their position on phosphorus in Poole Harbour has significantly changed. We are, therefore, no longer in a position to agree planning consents using a pre-commencement condition. This is a change of approach from our communications about nutrient neutrality implications for planning we issued on 12 December. This has come about as a result of the implications of the detail of amendment NC77 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. The amendment means that more work may be required to make improvements to reduce phosphorus leeching into Poole Harbour. We are considering the impact of these changes alongside Natural England and continuing discussions nationally with the aim of finding a positive way forward to enable consents to be granted whilst meeting the statutory requirements surrounding nutrient neutrality for Poole Harbour. This could make granting planning applications more difficult

Wildlife Haven

Dorset Council has completed a land purchase to create new habitat and wildlife corridors to support the survival of one of the rarest bats in Europe, the Greater horseshoe bat. The project will see hedgerows restored, a wildflower meadow established, and more trees planted. This purchase has been made possible through our Habitat Compensation Fund, using money secured through developer contributions. With extra funding for the project coming from Defra's Farming in Protected Landscapes programme (administered by Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), Blandford Forum Town Council and Dorset Council. The new nature reserve will provide crucial habitat for adults and juvenile bats from the nearby Bryanston Site of Special Scientific Interest roost, whilst also supporting other bat species and a host of other wildlife.

Illegal Parking

Dorset Council, Dorset's Police and Crime Commissioner and BCP Councils have asked central government for higher fixed penalty fines for those who ignore parking restrictions – especially in areas close to beaches. It comes after several summers where motorists abandoned their cars on double yellow lines, roundabouts, verges and even blocked residential drives – some taking the view that a penalty, shared between a carload, was as cheap as paying for parking and saved the bother of trying to find a vacant car park space. We await government's response

Disposal of furniture

New guidance recently introduced by the Environment Agency means Dorset Council must treat upholstered furniture differently when it is being disposed of from now on. Waste Upholstered Domestic Seating – mainly furniture with cushions and/or fabric – is often treated with fire-retardant chemicals known as Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). These chemicals have not been used since 2019 but can remain intact in the environment for a long time if not dealt with properly and need to be incinerated safely. This means that all Waste Upholstered Domestic Seating will be separated from other waste types at our household recycling centres (HRCs) from now on, with a separate skip for these items. Residents using our HRCs may see the following being set aside, sofas, sofa beds, armchairs, kitchen and dining room chairs, stools and foot stools, home office chairs, futons, bean bags, floor and sofa cushions.

All these items can still be dropped off at any of our 10 sites free of charge. Visitors to our HRCs can help by following on-site guidance on where to place their waste and speaking to on-site staff if you have any questions. The new rules only apply to furniture when it is being disposed of, and we strongly encourage everyone to consider whether their old items can be sold or donated for reuse instead of being thrown away. If your furniture cannot be reused and you're looking to pay someone for its removal and disposal, please ensure you are handing your items to a licensed waste carrier. Always ask how your rubbish will be disposed of and get an invoice or receipt for the waste they're taking, including their contact details. If someone unlicensed were to fly-tip your furniture, you could end up paying a fine or being taken to court.

Cllr. Cherry Brooks

07512897908

cllrcherry.brooks@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk