**Dorset Council Report**

**BEACON WARD**

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SPRING 2022

**Ukraine - How You Can Help**

I know that the situation in Ukraine is top of many peoples mind right now, and that more information is being sought on how to help.

The council has a proud history of welcoming refugees and asylum seekers and we want to offer Ukrainians the warmest possible welcome. We recognise that many of you have received questions from residents on how they can help and what support is being offered nationally and locally. Please do share any information from this briefing note and attached Q&A.

The council is working closely with local voluntary and community organisations to make sure that refugees arriving from Ukraine will be warmly welcomed and get the support they need.

There are two government schemes available for Ukrainian refugees to come to the UK:

* [**Ukraine family visa**](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-ukraine-family-scheme-visa) which allows applicants to join family members already based in the UK
* [**Homes for Ukraine**](https://homesforukraine.campaign.gov.uk/) for those who wish to travel to the UK and who have named people in the UK willing to sponsor them

Residents wishing to sponsor and host Ukrainian refugees should register directly with the government’s Homes for Ukraine scheme through the [gov.uk website](https://www.gov.uk/register-interest-homes-ukraine). Potential sponsors then need to find a named Ukrainian individual or family for whom they can provide accommodation. The attached Q&A explains the routes residents can take to get a named contact.

We received some [government guidance](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-guidance-for-councils?utm_medium=email&amp;utm_campaign=govuk-notifications-topic&amp;utm_source=684a1c3a-5fdf-4e53-b9a2-75bcaa99d197&amp;utm_content=immediately) on the Homes for Ukraine scheme and we are awaiting further detailed government guidance on some aspects of the support programme including pre-arrival/post-arrival checks, wraparound support, administering funds, fallback accommodation, and data management. We will continue to keep you updated.

As you can appreciate many of our officers are working hard to set-up and coordinate the support services needed for those arriving through the two government schemes, alongside our business as normal activity. A sincere thank you goes to all those involved in the council’s efforts to provide a safe haven for refugees.

**A statement from the Leader of Dorset Council, Cllr Spencer Flower on the crisis in Ukraine:**

We are deeply saddened by the tragic events unfolding in Ukraine Our thoughts are with those affected by this conflict and we are following the situation closely. Dorset Council has a proud history of welcoming new arrivals at times of crisis to offer homes and support so families and individuals can build new lives here.

We are waiting for the Government to further clarify details of its schemes for Ukrainian refugees so we can plan effectively and quickly. We will keep you updated with how you can help with this as soon as we know more. We understand many people are very concerned about the situation in Ukraine and want to help. At the moment, the best way you can help is by making a cash donation to an organisation such as the British Red Cross or Save the Children who are responding to the humanitarian crisis. These organisations are already working on the ground and can direct support in the quickest and most appropriate ways. In addition, we are currently participating in a number of refugee resettlement schemes, and we do require more private, affordable homes in Weymouth and Dorchester for refugee families. If you are able to help with our housing needs, please contact refugeehousing@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Dorset Council and BCP Council have joined voices from across the country – indeed the world – in support of the people of Ukraine, and the country’s flag is now flying from both Dorset County Hall and Bournemouth Civic Centre., County Hall will also be lit in yellow and blue.

**Letter to Michael Gove following a meeting between the Leader and Officers of Dorset Council (about Planning)**

‘I am grateful to you and your team for giving time on Monday to talk about Dorset’s bold vision for the future.  We are an ambitious council that wants to help achieve growth and prosperity for our communities.  In particular, we talked about the planning challenges and your Chief Planner explained Government’s future plans for planning reform.  In my letter to you of 17 January, I set out our ambition and flexibilities I am seeking and now that we have discussed the matter further, feel that my proposals for Dorset sit well with your future plans for wider reform.  Indeed, I offered for Dorset to be a pilot for such reforms, and I stand by that offer.

We would like to use that pilot to develop a Local Plan which would run to 2050 and including the new settlement or settlements for Dorset.  As you know, we are already working with your officials and Homes England to review sites for a new settlement, and we have identified a number of potentially sustainable sites.  We have arranged a seminar with the Dorset Council Cabinet members and your officials to be held on 23 March, where we will progress the work already started and look in greater detail at these proposals.  However, in order to make a reality of this more ambitious approach, we need some flexibility to our current Local Plan process.  We are seeking an extension to the timeframe of two years to May 2026 and freedoms and flexibilities from the five-year local housing supply and delivery requirements.  We know that this was something which was granted to Oxfordshire when they similarly were seeking to develop a more ambitious growth plan.  We have looked at the specific technical requirements of such a request and would be pleased to share this thinking with your Chief Planning Officer as she develops her response following our meeting.  The slightly longer timescale will enable us to fully embed the objectives set out in our Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and Plan which has been well received locally and is regarded more widely in the sector as an example of best practice.  It was also valuable to touch if all but briefly. on the matter of local government financing and I am grateful for your offer of a further meeting with the appropriate Minister to discuss the details of the very serious pressures we face in the medium to longer term.

I do hope that we can keep an open dialogue on this matter and also on the currently pressing matter of the Dorset Local Plan.  I am really grateful for your intention to get a response back to me within the next two weeks.

**Domestic Abuse**

Residents who have experienced domestic abuse will receive further support after Dorset Council received £650,000 of government funding. The grant will be used in the next 12 months to make residents who have experienced any form of domestic abuse safer in their own homes, or in supported accommodation, as well as provide specialist support for their children. The extra [investment](http://www.thisismoneyback.co.uk/money.php) can be used to finance security devices to allow people experiencing domestic abuse to remain in their own homes along with the support of family, friends, to avoid the disruption of moving away. Funding will also help rebuild the lives and confidence of those who have felt the only way to escape domestic abuse is to move to a refuge.

**Illegal puppy breeding**

Dorset Council has become a driving force for the prevention of illegal puppy breeding across the county. Asking people across Dorset to ‘Stop and Think’ before buying a puppy.

Dorset Council Trading Standards and Environmental Health Teams are working together to raise awareness of the multi-million-pound puppy breeding trade that is happening right under our noses. Covid 19 has brought a significant increase in both the selling of illegal puppies and the cost of puppies. With more people working from home, dog ownership has become more attractive and easier. This very lucrative market means that puppies are being sold from unlicensed breeders, too often without any consideration of the welfare and environmental needs of the puppy. An unlicensed puppy breeder is someone who does not have a dog breeding licence but who earns more than £1000 per year from selling puppies. Dorset Council has updated its website facilities to allow users to check if breeders are licensed, to report unlicensed breeders, and tips on knowing what to look for when buying a puppy. More information on the Council website, Buying and selling Dogs.

**Pupils School’s choice**

On Tuesday 1 March, young people across Dorset found out which school they will be joining this September. Nearly 98 per cent have been offered their first choice of secondary school and just under 99 per cent offered their upper school of choice. 97.69

per cent of pupils due to start secondary school (Year 7) have been offered their first choice. For those starting upper school (Year 9), 98.64 per cent have been given a place at their preferred school.

**Land searches**

The number of working days to respond to land search requests shot up during the pandemic due to a variety of reasons including a massive increase in the number requested and a major shortage of skilled staff who were also being poached from Local government. The response rate is now down to 28 days from 63 last October.  It is still some way off the target of 10 days, but work continues to achieve that soon.

**Maintenance of highway verges**

Maintenance of highway verges is an important but costly undertaking for Local Authorities. It is necessary for safety as well as aesthetic reasons. With the squeeze on public finance Dorset Council are taking an innovative ecological approach to managing our verges, reducing soil fertility through the collection of grass cuttings, introducing species of flowering plant which restrict grass growth and ensuring low nutrient soils are used in road construction. The result, slow growing, beautiful wildflower verges which attract and sustain pollinating insects, and lower costs as the need to cut verges is reduced.

Maintenance of highway verges is necessary to provide safe passage on our roads ensuring good visibility for drivers and pedestrians. The need to cut verges is linked to the underlying fertility of the soils in which the grass grows. The milder autumns and springs have led to extended growing seasons, and with it, greater public pressure to cut more frequently.  Starting from the principle that if we can reduce the amount that grass grows in the first place, we will have less to cut, and this should cost us less, whilst not compromising public safety. Of the four main components of the ecosystem that make grass grow – light, water, temperature and soil nutrients – it is only the soil nutrients we have some control over.

There are two main ways to reduce soil fertility:

On existing road verges, we can collect the grass cuttings and remove them, gradually reducing the amount of nutrient which fuels grass growth.  We can also add plant species such as Yellow Rattle which naturally reduce the amount that grass grows by sucking the life out of the roots.

When designing a new road scheme, or as part of works to existing roads, we make sure the finishing layer of soil is as low in nutrients as possible - or leave it as bare mineral and add some wildflower seed. The ecosystem established will never require high levels of maintenance. This methodology has been introduced successfully on the Weymouth relief road and on the Blandford bypass with fantastic results where verge cutting is required only twice a year compared to the seven cuts previously carried out. Wildflower coverage has increased significantly along with the associated pollinating insects. Since these pilot studies this method of highway verge maintenance has been rolled out across many of our urban verges. It does take a couple of seasons for the results to start to be seen which can make it difficult for residents to accept the change particularly where they are used to numerous cuts happening over the summer months. However, the long-term results are aesthetically pleasing, great for the environment and significantly reduce costs.

<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/countryside-coast-parks/countryside-management/verge-cutting/verge-cutting-information-dorset>

**Enforcement**

There is little publicity given to enforcement. An East Dorset resident was recently successfully prosecuted for ignoring Planning Enforcement Notice for putting a building on the Green Belt. This followed repeated requests to remove it and was only done as a last resort. Hopefully this will dispel the myth that the Council do not prosecute people who break planning laws.

**What can you do to help people who need to leave Hospital?**

A huge thank you is being sent to relatives who are playing a valued role in helping loved ones to leave hospital. As health and social care services continue to be stretched due to the exceptional pressures of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and seasonal impact of winter, the role of relatives in supporting patients is key. Relatives play a key role in enabling patients who are medically ready to leave hospital to do so, helping them to recover more quickly in the comfort of their own home. This could include providing some personal care for their relatives in their home, including looking after them during the initial period after they have left hospital. People are making a real difference by supporting with shopping, administering medication, changing dressings, meal preparation, checking on their welfare and wellbeing and having regular contact with them particularly following discharge from hospital.

Cllr Peter Wharf, Dorset Council’s portfolio holder for adult social care, said: “When residents are well enough to leave hospital and cannot leave, it can have such a detrimental effect on their wellbeing. “This is compared to recovering in their own homes where with a little help from family and friends, they can feel so much better and can lead to a successful recovery. “Residents have done amazing things for each other over the last few years and such help is invaluable, not only to those coming out of hospital but it then allows a bed to be used by the next patient, which helps everyone. All Councillors are supporting this initiative.

**Dorset Tourism Award - Moors Valley**

Moors Valley in Ashley Heath won the Dorset Tourism Awards Large Visitor Attraction of the Year <https://www.dorsettourismawards.org.uk/winners> This is a fantastic achievement for the team and great recognition for the work Dorset Council have undertaken with regards to large open spaces / visitor provisions throughout the pandemic. One of the daytime cleaners, Christine, also won the Unsung Hero Award for her efforts throughout the pandemic in ensuring the facilities were clean and hygienic. Christine isn’t actually employed by Dorset Council and works for Churchills, who are contracted for our cleaning provisions, but was nominated by the ranger team for her exceptional efforts and attitude over the last 2 years.

**Vulnerable women – help available from the Pause Project**

I am delighted and proud that a project I have worked on with a highly skilled team will help vulnerable women in Dorset benefit from a new scheme which supports them to develop new skills and responses that can help them create a more positive future. Dorset Council has committed to this nationally evaluated programme, called Pause, which works with women who have experienced, or are at risk of, repeated pregnancies that result in their children needing to be removed from their care.

The programme aims to give women the opportunity to pause and take control of their lives, breaking a destructive cycle that causes both them and their children deep trauma. There are women in every local authority in the UK with complex and challenging needs to whom many children are born but who are unfortunately subsequently removed into care. Dorset is no different. The mothers are typically disadvantaged and living with social, emotional, environmental and health related challenges. In Dorset, most shockingly, women who are eligible for Pause support are 36 times more likely to die earlier compared to women of the same age. This includes death because of suicide or domestic violence but also preventable or treatable physical illnesses. Children who are removed into care are more likely to experience outcomes significantly poorer than their peers

[**Capital Leverage Fund - Dorset Council**](https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/your-community/support-for-voluntary-and-community-organisations/funding/capital-leverage-fund)

Dorset Council has recently launched a new grant fund for voluntary and community groups who are looking to secure funding towards the development, improvement or refurbishment of their facilities, spaces, and community buildings. The Capital Leverage Fund will look to provide successful applicants with a grant of up to 20% of their total project costs up to a maximum of £25,000. Not for profit organisations both small and large who meet the funds criteria are welcome to apply. Applicants will need to demonstrate clearly when applying how they plan to secure the remaining project costs and ensure that if awarded a grant that they can secure the remaining funds within two years of any grant offer. Grants will not be released until all funding is in place.

Full details of the fund’s priorities, criteria; eligibility and guidance on how to complete the online application form are provided on the Dorset Council webpage. Furthermore, there is also comprehensive information on what questions applicants can expect to be asked when completing their application form along with details of the assessment dates.  The Capital Leverage Fund is an ‘open access’ fund for organisations in the Dorset Council area and applicants can submit their application at any time between 10th January 2022 and early January 2023.  There will be three separate assessment dates throughout the year so please ensure you read the guidance fully and understand what supporting information you will be required to provide when applying.  Applications will only be accepted on the council’s online application form.

The fund is open to a range of different organisations including Cultural themed organisations such as arts, heritage, and accredited museums. Village halls can also apply to the fund to help with capital projects that might include hall repairs, addressing climate change, new build projects, landscaping or improvements to existing facilities including play areas, multi-use games areas and parking. Sports clubs wishing to improve their club facilities can also apply to the fund. For more details on other projects that are eligible click on the link above.

Places of worship (church buildings) are not eligible to apply. However, the panel will consider ‘distinct buildings’ used for community activities i.e., a community hall but it must be a separate charity or trust and you must be able to demonstrate extensive community use.

We expect interest for this new grant to be very high, so please can you circulate to any local groups you think might be interested. If having read the guidance you still require further information, or wish to discuss your project in more detail before you apply please contact a member of the teams via communities@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk for Voluntary and Community projects (including play) and LeisureWDWP@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk for Cultural projects (arts, accredited museums , heritage, sport and physical activity).

**New Care Company for Dorset Council Residents**

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Dorset Council is creating a new company to provide adult social care for residents now and in the future.

The council will end its current contract with Tricuro and ensure the safe transfer of adult social care services provided to its residents to the new company, Care Dorset.

DC is responsible for arranging the social care for around **4,000** residents at any one time. Not all care for those residents is provided by Tricuro.

DC is working closely with the regulator and all stakeholders, to ensure Care Dorset is set up correctly and meets the required standards.

The transfer of care service to the new company will happen later this year but will not be before October.  Tricuro will continue to provide care services to residents in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole residents.

DC residents will continue to receive the same level of care by Care Dorset and importantly residents who currently receive care are being contacted directly about the changes.

DC Cabinet members believe social care services will be better provided by a new company which serves just the Dorset Council area, which is large, rural and whose residents have different needs.

Tricuro was set up in 2015 as a provider for social care services under the former council structures, to cover the whole of Dorset. Since then, there have been significant changes including the creation of the two new unitary authorities – Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council.  These two councils are very different, geographically and demographically.

The council will keep residents and colleagues updated on the plans.

DC has decided to act, as spending on adult social care represents around half of all Dorset Council expenditure which will be £141m in the 2022/23 budget. In addition, demand for adult social care is growing year on year, and Dorset Council has the highest percentage of residents aged 85 and over of any county or unitary authority in the country.