# Councillor Carl Woode Monthly Report – Feb 2025

## Introduction

February has been a significant month for Dorset Council, with key developments in budget planning, leadership transitions, service transformation, and community support initiatives. The council has passed its 2024/2025 budget, reinforcing its commitment to financial sustainability and a preventative approach to tackling long-term challenges. Alongside this, important discussions took place regarding night-time parking charges, the appointment process for a new Chief Executive, and the "Our Future Council" transformation plan, aimed at improving efficiency and service delivery. Dorset Council has also maintained stable rough sleeping levels despite national increases, and launched a Social Housing Wait Time Calculator to improve housing transparency. This report provides an overview of these key issues and the council’s ongoing efforts to address the needs of residents while navigating financial pressures.

## Dorset Council Budget 2024/2025: A Preventative Approach

Dorset Council has passed its budget for 2024/2025, setting out a financial plan that aligns with the administration’s priorities while adopting a more proactive approach to tackling chronic issues. Recognising the ongoing financial challenges posed by limited central government funding, the budget focuses on preventative measures, aiming to address problems before they escalate into crises.

During the budget debate, an amendment was tabled proposing to divert funds from housing plans to remove night-time parking charges. However, this amendment was voted down, and the charges have since been postponed pending a review. The amendment also sought to increase youth funding from what was thought to be a reduced level, but the budget ultimately maintained it at its previous level. A clerical error initially created confusion regarding youth funding, but this was clarified in the full council meeting by Portfolio Holder Clare Sutton. The approved budget reflects the council’s commitment to financial sustainability while prioritising early intervention in key areas such as social care and housing.

Council Leader Nick Ireland and portfolio holder Cllr Simon Clifford took part in a Facebook live session to address questions about the budget. A video of this is available [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECHmbxFnz80) on the Dorset Council YouTube channel.

## Night-Time Parking Charges: A Deliberate and Considered Decision

Night-time parking charges have been a concern for several residents who have contacted me, and I appreciate the feedback shared on this issue. The matter was first raised during the budget scrutiny process when Cllr Derek Beere brought it to the attention of the [Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WtaAIkiu90&t=19s). This led to extensive discussions behind the scenes, with careful exploration of affordability, practicality, and the local impact of introducing such charges.

It is important to emphasise that the decision to postpone implementation was not made overnight but was the result of thorough deliberation and a recognition of potential drawbacks. While it is reasonable, and responsible, for the council to assess various revenue streams, it was ultimately agreed that any changes to parking charges should only be introduced following a comprehensive Dorset Council parking review. This approach ensures that future decisions are based on data, community needs, and financial sustainability while balancing the council’s responsibility to fund essential services.

## Chief Executive Transition and Cross-Party Collaboration

Matt Prosser, Dorset Council’s Chief Executive, has left his role for an exciting new opportunity in Wellington, New Zealand. His departure marks a significant transition for the council, and in response, it was proposed that the Chief Executive position be filled on a rotational basis among senior officers until a permanent replacement is appointed.

During the full council meeting, Council Leader Nick Ireland proposed that the appointment process for the new Chief Executive include representation from all political groups within the council, ensuring a fair and inclusive selection process. This proposal was put to a vote and successfully passed, reinforcing the administration’s commitment to cross-party collaboration.

## Transforming Dorset Council for the Future

Dorset Council has reviewed its "Our Future Council" (OFC) transformation plan, a strategic initiative aimed at streamlining operations, improving service delivery, and achieving long-term financial sustainability. The plan prioritises efficiency through smarter use of technology, enhanced digital services, and greater collaboration with local communities.

Given the financial pressures on the council, including rising service costs and limited central government funding, the transformation plan is designed to reduce expenditure while maintaining high-quality frontline services. By modernising internal processes and exploring innovative service delivery models, Dorset Council aims to build resilience and adaptability for the future.

## Addressing Rough Sleeping: A Proactive Approach

Despite a nationwide increase in rough sleeping, Dorset Council has successfully maintained stable numbers of people recorded as ‘street homeless’ in the area. While rough sleeping has risen by an average of 20% across the country, Dorset’s proactive approach to homelessness prevention has helped mitigate this trend.

The council continues to work closely with local charities, housing providers, and support services to offer rapid rehousing solutions, targeted outreach, and emergency accommodation. Investment in homelessness prevention initiatives, including personalised support plans and funding for long-term accommodation options, has played a crucial role in ensuring timely assistance for those at risk. Dorset Council remains committed to tackling homelessness through preventative measures, reinforcing its strategy of early intervention over crisis management.

## New Social Housing Data Tool Launched

Dorset Council has launched a Social Housing Wait Time Calculator, designed to provide residents with clearer insights into expected waiting periods for social housing in various areas. This online tool allows applicants to input specific criteria, such as desired location and property size, to receive an estimate of how long they might wait for housing.

By offering this information, the council aims to enhance transparency and help residents make informed decisions about their housing options. The initiative reflects Dorset Council's commitment to improving accessibility to housing information and supporting residents throughout the application process. The tool is available on the Dorset Council website: [Social Housing Wait Time Calculator](https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/housing-wait-times?p_l_back_url=%2Fsearch%3Fq%3DSocial%2BHousing%2BWait%2BTime%2BCalculator).

## Council Responds to Auditor’s Report

Dorset Council has acknowledged and responded to the findings of the auditor’s annual report, which identified areas of concern regarding governance and procurement arrangements. While the council remains committed to maintaining high standards of financial management and transparency, the report highlighted the need for improvements in oversight and decision-making processes.

In response, Dorset Council has outlined a series of actions to address these issues, including strengthening internal controls, enhancing procurement practices, and ensuring more rigorous financial scrutiny. The council has also committed to increased transparency in reporting and will work closely with external auditors and stakeholders to implement the necessary improvements. Ensuring robust governance remains a priority as the council continues to navigate financial challenges while delivering essential services to residents.

## Meetings

* [Dorset Council Full Council](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DN8Ug7V9AKk)
* [People and Health Scrutiny Committee](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5tjtaAFEyU)
* [Northern Area Planning Committee](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMOtx4-H9lE)