

Councillor Carl Woode Monthly Report – Apr 2025

A Year of Progress and Partnership

As we mark the end of the council year, it's a good time to reflect on the work that's been done across Dorset and in our local communities. From major steps forward in housing and transport, to recognition of outstanding services and growing partnerships that support our economy, there's been a great deal to be proud of. It's also been a year of learning and growth for me personally, as I work to represent our area and champion the issues that matter most. Here's a round-up of some of the key developments and milestones from recent weeks.

Delivering Homes for Dorset: A Long-Term Housing Vision

In April 2025, Dorset Council's Cabinet approved a comprehensive housing delivery plan, reaffirming its commitment to the priorities outlined in the Dorset Council Plan 2024–2029. This initiative aims to provide affordable, suitable, and secure homes, enabling residents to thrive within sustainable communities. The strategy encompasses short, medium, and long-term objectives.

In the short term, the council plans to develop 100 temporary accommodation units to reduce reliance on bed and breakfast facilities for homeless households. Medium-term goals include a large-scale leasing approach to supply 400 homes annually over three years, totalling 1,200 homes to address immediate housing needs. For the long term, the council is exploring partnerships to build affordable housing on council-owned land and considering the potential of its housing company, Homes Dorset, to support these ambitions. These efforts are a key part of the council's broader transformation plan, focused on high-quality housing, economic growth, inclusive communities, and addressing climate and ecological challenges.

Public Transport Boost: Improved Bus Services in North Dorset

Dorset Council is set to launch significant enhancements to bus services in North Dorset, particularly benefiting Gillingham and Shaftesbury, starting Saturday, 24 May 2025. Funded through the council's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), these upgrades include the introduction of Saturday services and increased frequency on key routes.

The CR2 route between Shaftesbury and Gillingham will now operate half-hourly across most of the day, six days a week, improving connections to the CR3 route linking Gillingham and Sturminster Newton. These changes aim to provide residents with more reliable and convenient transport options, improving access to local amenities and rail links at Gillingham station. This is part of Dorset Council's wider efforts to increase public transport use, reduce carbon emissions, and support rural accessibility.

Outstanding Recognition for Children's Services

Dorset Council's Children's Services have been rated 'Outstanding' in their latest Ofsted inspection, published on 9 May 2025, a major milestone for the council. The inspection, carried out in March 2025, judged overall effectiveness as 'Outstanding', with three of the four assessed areas receiving the top rating, and the remaining area rated as 'Good'.

The report praised the high-quality support provided to children, young people, and families, and the strong participation of children in shaping their own services. This recognition is a testament to the dedication of council staff, foster carers, adopters, and local organisations who work tirelessly to improve outcomes for Dorset's children.

Showcasing Gillingham: A Community with Ambition

The recent "Discover Gillingham" event, organised by Gillingham Town Council, was a resounding success, highlighting the town's potential, growth, and community spirit. Attended by Dorset Council officers, Cabinet members, and other key stakeholders, the event began with presentations on Gillingham's development and aspirations.

Participants then enjoyed a guided tour of local businesses, new housing developments, and St Martin's House extra care facility, showcasing both existing achievements and future plans. Importantly, the event also recognised the vital role that surrounding villages play in the area's wider success. The needs and opportunities of these rural communities were part of the conversation, helping to raise awareness of the challenges and aspirations not just within the town itself, but across the wider Gillingham area.

The event was exceptionally well received. Special credit goes to Town Clerk Julie Hawkins and Assistant Town Clerk Jill Ezzard for their seamless organisation, and to Mayor Roger Weeks, who was an engaging and knowledgeable host and guide throughout the day.

Reflecting on One Year as a Councillor

It's now been a year since I was elected, and with the end of the council year, Dorset Council has undergone its usual committee reshuffle. I'm pleased to confirm that I will continue to serve on the Northern Area Planning Committee, the People and Health Scrutiny Committee, and the Police and Crime Panel.

Over the past year, I've learned a great deal, not just about how the council works, but about the depth and complexity of the issues that affect our communities. I'm incredibly grateful for the support and encouragement I've received from residents, colleagues, and officers alike. That support has helped me to grow in the role, and I'm committed to continuing to develop as a councillor so I can better represent and serve the ward. These committee appointments offer valuable opportunities to contribute meaningfully to key decisions, and I look forward to building on everything we've achieved so far.

Neighbourhood Plans Matter...Even with Housing Supply Pressures

I believe it is essential for communities to keep their Neighbourhood Plans regularly updated. While Dorset Council is expected to fall short of its five-year housing land supply in October 2025, allowing more speculative applications, Neighbourhood Plans will still hold legal weight in planning decisions.

Under paragraph 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), if a plan is under five years old and Dorset can demonstrate at least a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites, developments that conflict with that plan may be refused on the basis that the harm would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. Even if the five-year supply threshold is not met, other elements of Neighbourhood Plans, such as design standards, local infrastructure expectations, and environmental policies, remain important material considerations. Keeping these plans current ensures communities retain a meaningful say in how their areas evolve.

Partnering for Growth: Dorset Council and Dorset Chamber

In April 2025, Dorset Council formalised a strategic partnership with the Dorset Chamber by becoming a Platinum Business Partner. This collaboration highlights the council's commitment to supporting local enterprise and promoting economic development throughout the county.

Dorset Council already spends over 50% of its budget with more than 6,000 suppliers, over half of which are Dorset-based. The partnership with the Chamber aims to build on this by encouraging innovation, attracting inward investment, and creating high-value jobs. Initiatives such as the Dorset Work Explore 2025 programme will help connect young people with local employers and career paths. Together, the council and the Chamber are working to ensure Dorset is a thriving place for businesses to start, grow, and succeed.

Meetings

- [Full Council](#)
- [Northern Area Planning Committee](#)