**Dorset Council Report**

**BEACON WARD**

**Cllr Jane Somper – cllrjane.somper@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk**

AUTUMN 2021

As you will know the planned return to Dorset Council face to face meetings on July 19th did not take place due to concerns from some on the practicalities of holding large meetings safely. Some meetings have taken place in County Hall, namely licencing but Full Council, Cabinet and Scrutiny meetings remain virtual. This is being reviewed in September and I hope that we will be heading back to some face to face meetings.

**Covid-19 as of 31.8.21**

There has been a slight rise in COVID-19 cases in the Dorset Council area this week and a small decline in COVID-19 case rates across the BCP Council area. Both Dorset Council and BCP Council case rates are below the average for the South West and England. Hospitalisations related to COVID-19 have remained at around 40-50 since the beginning of August, with 40 people currently in hospital with COVID-19. We have started to see a number of COVID-related deaths each week due to COVID-19, but these are at much lower levels than during previous waves. This shows that the vaccine is having an impact on protecting people from serious illness and death.

We can see that vaccinations are having a significant impact on preventing serious illness and stopping many people from needing hospital treatment, as hospitalisations remain much lower than at similar points during previous waves. Anyone who hasn't yet had their COVID-19 vaccine can still take up the offer, there are plenty of options available with appointments and walk-in clinics located across the county.

**Summary of the most recent data:**

* 7 day case rates per 100,000
  + BCP: 298 (compared to 310 in last update on 3rd September)
  + Dorset: 321 (compared to 362 in last update on 3rd September)
* Confirmed cases in last 7 days
  + BCP: 1186 (compared to 1231 in last update on 3rd September)
  + Dorset: 1219 (compared to 1089 in last update on 3rd September)
* Current COVID-19 patients in hospital beds in Dorset: 40 (compared to 48 in last update on 3rd September)

Vaccinations administered in Dorset (as of 5th September) 1,138,228

**Face to Face Service Points Re-open**

Dorset Council Customer Service points reopened from 5th July. Throughout lockdown many more people have been accessing Dorset Council services via the website or by phone and the “digital first” strategy remains a priority. But there will always be some users who need face to face support. Help with council services is available from Nordon Lodge in Blandford, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10.00am to 4.00pm. Generally, there will be pre-booked appointments, and Covid regulations will be in place to keep everyone safe, and residents will still be contacting the Council by phone.

**Planning**

Work continues the Dorset Local Plan. The first consultation, which took place earlier this year, received over 60,000 comments from a good cross section of residents. All these comments are being considered and it is hoped that they will be published on the council’s website before the end of July. The reviewed Plan is now due to be publishes early next year and is still on track for submission to the Secretary of State in May 2022 for public examination by the Planning Inspectorate and adoption in 2023.

The number of houses allocated to Dorset under the national methodology remains the most challenging aspect of the plan, and Dorset Council and Dorset MPs have lobbied on this. However, it was interesting to note that, on a recent visit to Bournemouth, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government gave indication that he intended to give way on this issue.

Dorset Council Planning Department, like many others across the country, has been dealing with a huge increase in the number of planning applications. This is apparently in part due to a boom in the DIY and home extensions resulting from a year of working from home. The Council has tried to manage this extra workload, including by appointing new officers, contracting out what it can and introducing streamlined processes. Nonetheless, there is a significant backlog and applications are taking longer to be decided. Deeply frustrating for everyone involved.

**Bus Services**

In response to the Governments new National Bus Strategy, which aims to improve bus services, Dorset Council is developing a Bus Service Improvement Plan in collaboration with local bus operators, community groups and passengers. The Improvement Plan will look at networks and services, fares and ticketing and passenger facilities. I will keep you informed as more information comes through on this.

**Bin Collection Round Changes**

Around 34,000 households in north Dorset had their bin collection days changed at the start of June. The new rounds were designed using data from the live vehicle tracking system and local knowledge from the crews and drivers and involved purchase of some new vehicles. 34,000 households were written to directly with clear information, as well as numerous electronic reminders. Except for a few teething problems the changeover seems to have gone smoothly. It will result in increased reliability and cost savings on vehicle use and more efficient round configuration.

I did send an email recently in relation the pressures the Waste Collection service is under and will provide updates. It does appear now that the garden waste collection has potentially been affected (attached report).

**New Police and Crime Commissioner**

David Sidwick is the new Police and Crime Commissioner for Dorset and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. Several of his priorities are particularly relevant to our area, including rural crime and rural roads. Cllr Sherry Jespersen, in neighbouring Hill Forts and Upper Tarrants ward, and I have invited David to meet some of our Community Speed watch leaders and Parish Chairmen in September.

**The Environment Bill**

This Government Bill is schedule to come in to law in the autumn this year, it is are reaching and does much to underpin the aspiration and plans of local government in dealing with climate and ecological concerns.

The Bill also includes a section on the provision of waste, recycling and garden waste collections, seeking to create a universal system across all LA areas.

As part of the Dorset response to the consultation the leader, Cllr Flower has written to the Minister responsible, George Eustice MP, setting out the concerns of DC. These concerns are shared by most councils across the country, particularly the significant new burdens of cost of some of the proposed measures and the negatie impact on the environment caused by increase HGV usage. There are also concerns regarding the questionable quality of some of the base data being used.

**Afghan Relocation Scheme – Dorset**

Dorset Council is urging private landlords and owners of second homes to come forward if they can provide suitable accommodation for the Afghan relocation scheme.

Dorset Council has pledged to support the scheme, which is being **funded by the UK Government.**

Dorset Council **will not** use accommodation, such as social housing, intended for Dorset families on the housing register or for people who are homeless. The council is seeking offers of additional privately owned, self-contained accommodation to house families under this scheme.

The council is looking for a range of homes of varying sizes, particularly larger family homes that are available for at least 12 months.

The contact details private landlords or a second home owner who may be able to help with any of these housing needs, please contact [afghanfamilieshousing@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:afghanfamilieshousing@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)

Dorset Council will work with property owners on all aspects of setting up the tenancy and support the family to settle in when they arrive. There will be central government assistance for initial rent and deposits until the families are settled.

**Continued Support & Advice For Dorset Council Residents**

Dorset Council has awarded two, 5-year contracts to voluntary and community organisations to continue with the provision of support, advice and guidance to residents.

Following an open tender process, [Volunteer Centre Dorset](https://www.volunteeringdorset.org.uk/) have been awarded the contract to provide Volunteer Infrastructure Support across the Dorset Council area. The new contract will start on 1 October 2021 and will provide volunteers, development and recruitment for all the organisations and charities across the Dorset Council area, ensuring volunteering continues to thrive.

A further contract has also been awarded to [Citizens Advice in Dorset](https://www.citizensadvicedorset.org.uk/) (CAiD – a consortium of Bridport, Central Dorset and East Dorset and Purbeck Citizens Advice),  providing information, advice and guidance on matters such as benefits, debt and money, energy and fuel support and other welfare advice. This contract will also start on 1 October 2021.

If you would like to volunteer or need some help and would like to find out more, visit [volunteeringdorset.org.uk](http://www.volunteeringdorset.org.uk/) or call 01305 269214.

For help and support from Citizens Advice, visit [citizensadvicedorset.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvicedorset.org.uk/) to find your local branch or call Dorset Adviceline on 0800 144 88 48.

**Current Consultations/Surveys**

Dorset Council wants to hear from resident Blue Badge holders to help shape a unified approach to parking charges across the council area. Link here: <https://wh1.snapsurveys.com/s.asp?k=162825060301>

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