

Place & Resources Scrutiny Committee

25 January 2022

Post-scrutiny review of plans for summer 2021 tourism in Dorset

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr R Bryan, Highways, Travel and Environment

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: J Sellgren, Executive Director of Place

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Report Status: Public

Recommendation:

Members of the Place & Resources Scrutiny Committee are recommended to:

- (i) review the response set out in this paper
- (ii) review and test/challenge any assumption or proposed course of action as part of the scrutiny role
- (iii) understand the gaps that remain at this stage in terms of the expectations for the response to anticipated increased visitor demand in 2022 and the risks this represents

Reason for Recommendation:

This paper is coming to the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee to ensure there is effective consideration of the actions taken to respond to the increased visitor demand in 2021 that was generated by pandemic guidance and the desire for staycations.

1. Executive Summary

Easing of lockdown restrictions and the uncertainty over foreign holidays in the first half of 2021 created an additional visitor demand for Dorset during the summer. Dorset Council provided a proactive response for elements that we could control or influence and a coordinated reactive response for live incidents.

Key to the response was the formation of a Dorset Council Operational Group that met weekly from February 2021 to coordinate an internal response running in tandem with key stakeholders.

Although an unprecedented level of visitor demand was seen, Dorset Council contributed to a multiagency response with no issues escalating to the point where a major incident needed to be declared.

2. Financial Implications

Dorset Council's response to the additional visitor demand (above business as usual costs) was £2,482,514 and was funded through the central government's Contain Outbreak Management Fund (£1,930,900) and the Welcome Back Fund (£551,614).

3. Well-being and Health Implications

Positive Impact. The work of the group sought to:

- (i) reduce transmission of Covid 19
- (ii) work with blue light services to plan responses to events with the potential to cause harm
- (iii) work with Town Councils to help reduce risks associated with large influxes of people to high tourist destination areas
- (iv) coordinate a safe space programme for vulnerable people
- (v) improve community safety through support to licencing operations

4. Climate implications

Positive Impact. Particular focus on:

- (i) Multiagency response to the risk of fires caused by BBQs.
- (ii) Supporting active travel
- (iii) Reduction in air travel as visitors chose staycations over foreign holidays

5. Other Implications

Coordinated volunteer response with an ambassador programme to welcome visitors.

6. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

The response does not adversely affect any groups with protected characteristics

8. Appendices

A: Dorset Council Response Plan 2021

B: Summer Operations Debrief

C: Promise to Love Dorset Campaign Evaluation

9. Background Papers

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

Post-scrutiny review of plans for summer 2021 tourism in Dorset

10. Introduction

- 10.1. At the beginning of 2021, the UK population was in a 'lock down' owing to pressures caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Once the lock down eased, restrictions remained in place that prohibited or inhibited foreign travel. Dorset is seen nationally and internationally as a tourist destination and a well-established hospitality sector welcomes visitors who holiday here. Approaching summer 2021, it was clear that we would experience a higher than normal visitor demand. Dorset Council provided a proactive response for elements that we could control or influence and a reactive response for live incidents.

Experience from 2020 showed that the visitor demographic was likely to be different to the typical demographic seen prior to the pandemic (mainly family holidays). We anticipated that a larger proportion of our visitors than usual would be in the 18-30 age group. We also knew that people in this age group are likely to make day trips to our coastal areas when the weather is particularly good. Past experience had shown we were likely to see significant numbers of day trippers from areas as far away as London and Birmingham. The related risk was that on days with particularly good weather, the demand on our most popular visitor areas could exceed the capacity.

- 10.2. Dorset Council needed to formulate a specific response to increased visitor demand as we had seen in 2020 that localised tourist locations had on occasions been overwhelmed by visitors. Dorset Council expects all visitors to protect, respect and enjoy our tourist areas. Sadly in 2020 major incidents arose when people did not behave in this way.

Figure 1 shows a photo taken at Durdle Door when a major incident took place requiring a multiagency response. Two helicopters were required to land on the beach to respond to casualties linked to "tombstoning" from the Durdle Door arch. At the same time visitors continued to try to travel to the Lulworth area and it was necessary for Dorset Council to close the access roads.

High demand visitor days in 2020 also saw many visitors park unlawfully. This was particularly the case at Ferry Rd, Studland where local car parks became full early in the day. In some cases, visitors' cars were left obstructing the road, meaning that vehicles such as buses couldn't pass. This had the potential to also impeded blue light services.

With some visitors unable or unwilling to stay in local accommodation, there was an increase in unlawful wild camping in areas such as West Bexington. Some wild campers created their own latrines on the beach. There were also

significant issues with visitors unlawfully parking campervans as the legitimate campsites were full. Issues with disposing chemical toilets at the roadside were linked to this.



Figure 1, Major Incident at Durdle Door in 2020 (picture by Dorset Police)

A heath fire at Wareham Forest was triggered by a disposable BBQ. This destroyed 470 acres of heath and forest. This is shown in figure 2.



Figure 2, 2020 Heath Fire at Wareham Forest caused by Disposable BBQ (picture DWFRS)

- 10.3. Key to the 2021 response was the formulation of a Dorset Council Operational Group that met weekly from February 2021 to coordinate an internal response running in tandem with external stakeholders.

Although an unprecedented level of visitor demand was seen, Dorset Council contributed to a multiagency response with no issues escalating to the point where a major incident needed to be declared by the authority.

11. Additional services provided

- 11.1. Table 1 shows the allocation of funding for the additional services provided to prepare for and respond to the additional visitor demand from the government funded Contain Outbreak Management Fund.

Additional Services	ACTUALS (December 2021) £
Waste and litter management	5,373
Waste Operatives	50,921
Litter Free Dorset Campaign	23,383
Waste Disposal	50,000
Car Park Management	50,571
Purchase and placement of 'No Waiting' cones	3,128
Traffic Control Room	5,288
VMS Signage - Four Sign	86,289
Studland Ferry Road Towaway Zone	15,551
Lulworth Towaway Zone	2,490
Airlock Closures with CCTV	705
Communication Management	120,423
Country Park/Visitor Destinations	28,769
Signage	2,317
Public Toilets	50,798
Multi Agency Command Centre - Controlled Events Ltd	33,939
Marshalls - Events Security Southern	153,577
Ambassadors/Volunteer Programme	100,000
Licencing Enforcement	2,628
Beach Management	43,391
Emergency Planning Resource	4,750
Harbour Seasonal Staff	47,073
RNLI Cover Bridport & Lyme Regis Harbours	27,645

Piddlehinton Traveller Site Operating Costs	17,527
Planning Resource - 2 x Enforcement Officers	80,000
Planning Resource - 1 Administrative Officer	6,000
Town and Parish Assistance	5,190
Unbudgeted CCTV	96,241
Unbudgeted Safe Space	28,647
Extra Barriers at Lyme Regis	19,537
Custom House Quay Place Making	154,000
Total	1,322,134

Table 1, Actual Costs as of December 2021

As of December 2021, additional spend remains planned to bring the total value up to £1,930,900.

- 11.2. Table 2 shows the allocation of funding for the additional services provided to prepare for and respond to the additional visitor demand from the government funded Welcome Back fund.

Additional Services	ACTUALS (December 2021) £
Signage re Increasing Safety	784
Radio Advertising Campaign	2,242
Temp Public Realm Changes	12,095
Seafront & Harbour Safety Activities	15,000
Provision of Beach Accessibility Matting	5,038
Temp Visitor Facilities at Country Parks	48,661
Temporary Toilets at Country Parks	11,175
Pop up Food & Drink Markets	5,480
Temporary Seating	9,855
Temporary Cycle Racks	10,331
Additional Litter Bins & Street Cleansing	106,400
Dorset Waste Operations	106,000
Total	333,061

Table 2, Actual Costs as of December 2021

The constraints for the funding require spend to be committed within the 2021/22 financial year. As of December 2021, additional spend remains planned to bring the total value up to £551,614.

12. Coordinated response

12.1. To coordinate Dorset Council's response for the enhanced visitor demand, a Dorset Council Operational Group (DCOG) was setup. This group met formally each Wednesday starting in February 2021. The group's main aims were to plan how to facilitate the additional visitor demand, review lessons learnt and identify upcoming priorities. Key objectives to facilitate this were:

- Have a robust plan to respond to additional visitor demand.
- To maximise the commercial and economic opportunities.
- To keep people safe.
- To protect our natural environment and encourage a collective sense of responsibility.
- To manage and minimise any local vs visitor tension that may arise e.g. over issues with illegal parking, traffic, wild camping, anti-social behaviour.
- Early warning systems - using a multi-agency dataset.
- Trigger system and scaled response - informing an early response to risk and management of issues.

12.2. For days that were anticipated to be high risk, an external event management company called Controlled Events was engaged to reactively manage the collation of situation reports and coordinate Dorset Council's visitor response activities with relevant town councils and blue light services. Controlled events typically operated Friday to Sunday in the build up to the main school summer holidays and every day during the actual holiday period.

12.3. Figure 3 shows the standing members of the multi-agency DCOG. This included the duty Officer In Charge, who was Dorset Council's silver coordinator. The group also included a representative of the coastal town councils, this was normally the Town Clerk of Weymouth Town Council (WTC).

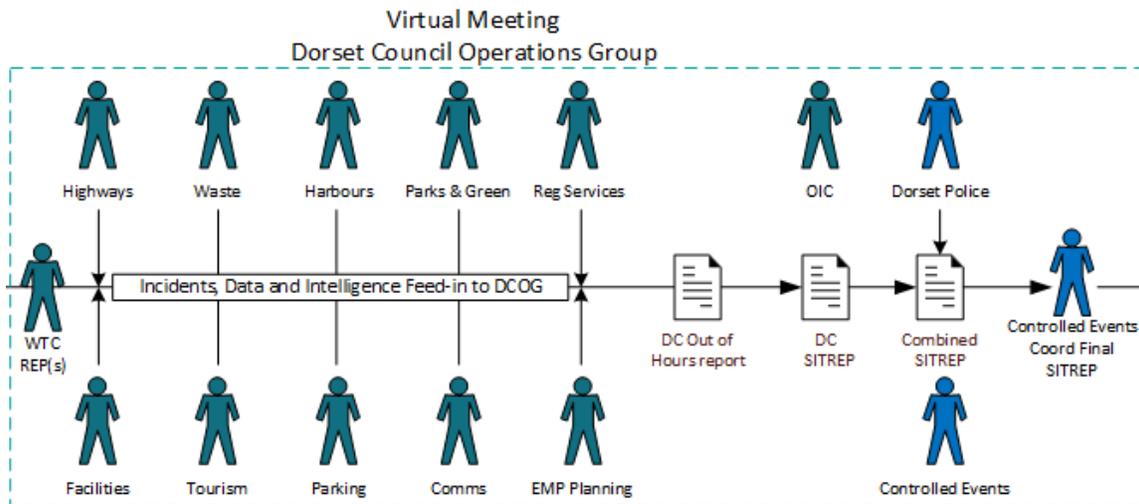


Figure 3, Standing Members of the DCOG

Full details for the operation of the group are shown in Appendix A, this is the response plan setup by the Operational Group and was used as the procedure to respond to incidents and proactively reduce risk.

- 12.4. During the highest risk periods of the weekends during the school summer holidays, members of the DCOG met virtually to assess live risks and coordinate responses.

13. Promise to Love Dorset

- 13.1. With the experience from 2020 demonstrating that some visitors showed little respect for the areas they visited, a communications campaign was launched to ask visitors to “Promise to Love Dorset”. This was predominantly an online campaign. The key messages as part of this campaign are shown in Appendix C.

14. Local Resilience Forum

- 14.1. The multi-agency Local Resilience Forum has operated both strategic (gold) and tactical (silver) coordinating groups throughout the Covid response, which continued into summer 2021. Summer operations issues were largely delegated by the Tactical Coordinating Group to a Forward Look Group that met each Thursday and was attended by agencies across Dorset at the silver level. The work of the Dorset Council Operational Group was fed into this group by Dorset Council’s Service Manager for Assurance.

15. Review

A review session was held on 20 October 2021. Full details are shown in Appendix B. The main findings were that the summer 2021 response went well and that the proactive approach had put us in a better position than summer 2020. The most significant opportunities for the review were around the level of service that could be provided in Summer 2022 recognising that currently no central government funding has been announced for an increased visitor demand response.

The following improvement action plan was generated as the key outcome of the review session.

Improvement Action Plan

Ref	Lessons Learnt	Actions	By Whom	By When
A) Summer Operations Structures (Dorset Council Operations Group)				
A1.1; A3.6	The Dorset Council Operations Group (or similar) has been very effective and should be retained	Determine chair/membership of DCOG (from February to end Summer)	Place Management Team	21/2/22
A3.4		Invite to be provided to duty officers and SAG coordinator	Emergency Planning	21/2/22
A3.7		Establish quarterly meetings between Police and DC (regulatory services)	Head of Community & Public Protection; Service Manager for Licencing	21/2/22
A3.1	Proposed funding requirements need to be presented to SLT at an early stage, as COMF funding unlikely to continue	Outcomes from the debrief to be shared with Executive Director for Place	Covid Silver / Service Manager for Assurance	21/2/22
A3.3	Briefing on summer operations could be extended to a wider set of stakeholders	Internal DC briefing to be extended from Gold/Silver to other duty groups. This needs to clarify roles and manage expectations	Place Corp Director (tbc) / Emergency Planning	21/2/22

Ref	Lessons Learnt	Actions	By Whom	By When
A3.9; B3.5		Briefing sessions for elected members and parish & town councils, including contact points (emails etc)	Place Corp Director (tbc) / Emergency Planning	11/4/2022
A3.5	Required command and control involvement could be clarified by DCOG agreeing risk level (RAG) based on	RAG level to be determined by DCOG based on police / weather / service intelligence.	DCOG Chair	11/4/2022
B3.2		OOH meetings attendance to be based on DCOG risk ranking (i.e. Green = Bronze/MACC; Amber/Red= Silver/Bronze/ MACC/Duty Emergency Planning / Comms)	DCOG	11/4/2022
A3.9	Demands on officers are not sustainable and need to be recognised with job descriptions/remuneration	Decision needs to be reached on how we manage staff resources in future years, either by backfilling or remuneration. This is primarily a Place Directorate issue.	Place Management Team	11/4/2022
A3.10	There is a Local Resilience Forum expectation that local authorities will lead an ongoing forum for partner engagement	Reiterate importance of partner engagement with SAGs, via Local Resilience Forum	Service Manager for Assurance / Service Manager for Licencing	11/4/2022
		Communicate awareness of SAGs to Parish & Town Councils, including invites to specific SAGs where appropriate	Service Manager for Licencing	11/4/2022

Ref	Lessons Learnt	Actions	By Whom	By When
		Liaise with Place Management Team on extent of LRF forum and lead	Service Manager for Assurance / Place Management Team	11/4/2022
B) Multi Agency Command Centre				
B1.1; B1.2; C3.1	There is a need for some level of multi agency coordination group to continue for next summer	A decision needs to be reached as to whether a MACC is retained or integrated into a revised Bronze role. This needs to include operation hours (with flexibility)	Place Management Team	11/4/2022
D3.1		If Bronze arrangements replace the MACC for coordination, this will need to be reflected in a revised role as it would not be possible on current standby/duty arrangements	Place Management Team	11/4/2022
B3.4	Updates need to be sense-checked to ensure messages are appropriate for audience, without impacting on timeliness of information sharing	Agree who has sign-off responsibility for update reports	DCOG lead	11/4/2022
C) Information Sharing / Situation Reports				

Ref	Lessons Learnt	Actions	By Whom	By When
C3.1; C3.2; C3.3	Situation reports play a vital role, but we need to ensure that key messages / nil returns can be provided more easily by busy operational teams	Work with Digital and Change team to enable an effective SitRep tool, including 'tick box' for nil return/mobile phone reporting	tbc	11/4/2022
D) Operational / Bronze				
D3.2	Out of hours duty officers play an important role and we need to ensure that we have access to the knowledge that is needed	Link in with Digital and Change team as to how Delve can provide greater access to resources/knowledge/contacts	Tbc – Emergency Planning?	11/4/2022
D3.5		The Duty gypsy / traveller rota should be reinstated for 2022, or integrated into an existing operational duty rota	Service Manager for Coast & Greenspace / Place Services Management Team	11/4/2022
D3.3		Ensure that there is summer operations input into the review of out of hours services	?	11/4/2022
D3.4	There are too many channels of communication to responding officers (teams / phone / whatsapp / email etc)	Consolidate methods of communication (particularly for Bronze / Duty Emergency Planning Officer). It may be useful to discuss this with Digital and Change colleagues.	?	11/4/2022