

Cabinet

5 April 2022

Council Plan Performance: January-March 2022

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr J Haynes, Corporate Development and Transformation

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: M Prosser, Chief Executive

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary: A report on progress towards delivering [Dorset Council's Plan](#) for the period January-March 2022.

Recommendation: That Cabinet note and comment on progress against the council plan priorities for the period January-March 2022.

Reason for Recommendation: To ensure progress towards the Council Plan is measured and monitored.

1. The council's priorities

1.1 In October 2021 Cabinet agreed a refreshed council plan, based on six priorities, which are:

- Economic growth
- Unique environment
- Climate and ecology
- Suitable housing
- Strong, healthy communities
- Staying safe and well

1.2 Detailed performance measures are available to the public via the [People and Health Scrutiny Dashboard](#) and the [Place and Resources Scrutiny Dashboard](#). Rather than repeat the data already available

there, this report provides a high-level, qualitative description of the council's performance against its priorities from January to March 2022.

2. **Economic growth**

2.1 Work to support the local economy progressed at pace, including:

- A £500,000 grant to spearhead a new pilot project looking at ways of boosting mobile digital coverage in the county. It is one of eight pilot projects to receive a share of the Government's £4m Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Accelerator Fund and will build on the platform already developed by the award-winning 5G RuralDorset team.
- The Cabinet approved a partnership agreement that will allow the Council and local bus operators to deliver the much-needed Bus Service Improvement Plan for Dorset.

2.2 Dorset has 2,500 miles of roads and the number requiring urgent attention remains a concern. It is hoped that the new Highways Asset Management plan and 3 year funding from Central Government will help to address this, moving into the new financial year. There is an extensive programme of road maintenance scheduled for 2022, and the full schedule can be found on the Council's website.

2.3 The impact of inflation and the rise in fuel costs are also a cause of great economic uncertainty. The council will continue to monitor developments and work with partners to mitigate any negative impacts that are within its control.

3. **Unique Environment, Climate and Ecology**

3.1 Key achievements in the period include:

- Work to improve energy efficiency and install low carbon technologies started in over 60 council owned sites using £19 million of grant funding. So far, 40 heating management system upgrades have been completed, 15 lighting upgrades finalised, and six solar panel projects finished. In total more than 100 public buildings will benefit from the scheme, including leisure centres and local schools and academies.
- The first project was completed as part of Dorset and BCP councils' Transforming Cities Fund programme, which includes a 78km network of new walking, cycling routes and bus improvements being rolled out across south east Dorset.
- Moors Valley County Park and Forest won a Gold Award in the 2022 Dorset Tourism Awards.

3.2 Several services were affected during the storms on 17 and 18 February. Significant parts of the county were without electricity for several days, and a number of services were disrupted. Emergency procedures were enacted to keep residents and visitors safe, and the lessons learned from the events will inform future response to local emergencies.

4. **Suitable Housing**

- 4.1 Suitable Housing remains a significant challenge in Dorset. Targets for housing delivery in adopted plans were not met last year, in part due to national lockdowns which effectively closed down the construction industry. This is a factor that has been recognised by Government. Our local Housing Associations are excellent developers of new and existing social housing, helping us to exceed our new build targets last year (301), and already having exceeded the annual target this financial year
- 4.2 The number of homelessness approaches increased significantly at the start of the new year and was higher than anticipated. This is being monitored but will add pressure to the system and the number of people accommodated in bed and breakfast.
- 4.3 Some important progress was made in the last quarter however, including:
- The Leader of the Council and the acting Chief Executive met with the Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, to discuss Planning. The Council has put itself forward as a potential pilot area to explore a radically new approach to the Local Plan process which, if successful, could lead to significant change in planning laws and the provision of suitable housing. We are waiting to hear if we will be granted a two-year extension to our Local Plan timeline.
 - The Council approved plans to develop a former school site in Purbeck into a new housing scheme and community hub – Purbeck Gateway - which will provide homes, care and jobs for the local community.
 - Plans to develop the Weymouth Bowl site moved one step closer in January. Residents will be encouraged to take part in the plans as they develop, but it could see the creation of 59 flats, offering affordable housing, and some commercial units.
- 4.4 The council also made significant improvements in processing local land charge searches, which are required when purchasing a property. In February, the average time to return a search was 26 working days, compared to an average of 62 working days in October 2021, a result of unprecedented demand. The service has also recently moved onto a new IT system.

5. **Strong, Healthy Communities**

5.1 A number of achievements were made in the last 3 months, including:

- The council secured over £2m from the Government's Household Support Fund which has been used to help vulnerable households across the county, including one-off winter energy vouchers of £200 allocated to 3,500 households, and a range of other support.
- An additional £650,000 was given to the council to help support victims of domestic abuse. The money is due to the Government's introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act which became law last year.

5.2 In the last quarter a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Officer and an Equality Reference Co-ordinator have joined the Council. A summary of the work to date is shared below:

- Reviewing the Council's EDI Strategy and action plan to publish an updated new version.
- Publish equality information by 30 March in response to the requirements of the Public Sector Equality duty.
- Establishing an EDI Strategic group responsible for overseeing and embedding the work across the council. Membership will be drawn from all council areas, employee networks and Trade Unions.
- Reviewing the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) framework to launch a new streamlined approach.
- Establishing an EDI Officer working group that brings together the leads of the employee networks, allies/champions and members of the Equality Reference Group. This group focuses on sharing activity reports and identifying issues to be discussed at the EDI Strategic Board.
- Launching the new Equality Reference Group made up of local community groups representing protected characteristics. Currently being established, members of the group will help shape strategic policy and how council services are delivered.

5.3 There were also major challenges during this period, including:

- Insufficient local placements for young people with complex needs. The council is developing its own provision and new children's homes will finish construction in Weymouth in May 2022. These and some other identified properties in Dorset will be registered as children's homes with Ofsted during 2022.
- Insufficient numbers of foster carers in Dorset. Again, there is a plan in place to address this - and everyone can help by promoting Fostering with Dorset Council – but there is no 'quick fix'.
- Increases in the numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children joining our Children in Care population.
- The insufficient supply of home care workers (a national problem) which is resulting in greater use of residential care.

6. **Staying Safe and Well**

6.1 Achievements in the last three months include:

- 68 local social, voluntary and community organisations received council funding to help them restart activity and recover from the pandemic.
- A consultation was launched asking families, carers, education settings and communities for their thoughts on laying the right foundations so that Dorset's children have the best opportunities to thrive and services and support are designed accordingly.
- The council committed to a 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 will focus on vulnerable women and help them to develop new skills and approaches.

6.2 There were also severe challenges during this period. Although the council's budget – which was agreed in February – continues to prioritise resource allocation to front-line services wherever possible, it continues against a national background of extreme pressures resulting from the coronavirus pandemic, increases in demand and price pressures.

6.3 Councillors continue to work with government and with Dorset's MPs to lobby for a fairer deal on funding. This was raised again by two Dorset MP in Parliament in February and discussed at a recent meeting with the Secretary of State.

7. **Financial Implications**

There are no direct financial implications at this stage.

8. **Climate Implications**

As part of the review of the Council Plan, climate and ecology is now one of the Council's six priorities. A summary of progress is provided below. The Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy can be found [here](#).

9. **Wellbeing and Health Implications**

Two of the five Council Plan priorities relate to the wellbeing and health agenda: strong, healthy communities and staying safe and well. Updates are provided against both of these priorities.

10. **Other Implications**

None.

11. **Risk Assessment**

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

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

12. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

An EqIA of the Council Plan was agreed by Cabinet on 28 January 2020. An update on the council's equality, diversity and inclusion work is included at section 5.2.

13. **Appendices**

[Dorset Council's Plan - Dorset Council](#)

14. **Background Papers**

Dorset Council Plan: Quarter 3 Performance Update - Cabinet, 18 January 2022