

Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee

26 January 2023

Summer Operations 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

Brief Summary:

Due to Covid-19 travel restrictions, summer 2021 saw unprecedented visitor numbers to Dorset and numbers remained higher than normal through summer 2022. The Council and its partners were well prepared and the implications were managed effectively. Your Committee received a report on 26 May 2022 about the plans for summer 2022 and this report gives an overview about that work and the position for summer 2023.

Recommendation:

Your committee is recommended to;

- (i) comment on the review of work undertaken for summer 2022.
- (ii) review the proposals for managing visitor numbers to Dorset during summer 2023.

Reason for Recommendation:

To ensure that council services are prepared to effectively manage the consequences of visitor numbers during the summer.

1. Report

- 1.1 Covid-19 foreign travel restrictions led to exceptionally high visitor numbers to Dorset during summer 2021 and associated issues such as illegal parking and major incidents including serious injuries from tombstoning at Lulworth Cove and the Wareham Forest fire, most likely resulting from the use of a disposable BBQ. During this time there was a strong national focus on preventing the further spread of Covid-19 through restrictions and social distancing and council resources were deployed to assist with this and support the welfare of those more vulnerable to the consequences of infection.
- 1.2 With the experience of high visitor numbers to Dorset due to international travel restrictions, an Improvement Action Plan was developed to ensure that services were prepared for future demand. The plan was implemented and progress reported to your Committee. The plan is completed and is given at Appendix 1.
- 1.3 In 2022, foreign travel restrictions were mainly lifted and as a result, visitor numbers to Dorset were lower but still above pre-Covid levels. Given the good feedback from the arrangements put in place to help manage summer demand in 2021, the following were again used during summer 2022;
 - Summer Delivery Group with core membership of key council services; coastal town councils and Dorset Police. Its overarching objective being to effectively manage the implications of high visitor numbers and keep people safe.
 - Red/Amber/Green (RAG) rated calendar for the period informed by the Safety Advisory Group and Dorset Police. The calendar primarily drove the level of preparedness of summer operations and the resources put in place by services.
 - A Multi-Agency Command Centre (MACC) stood up at key times, informed by the RAG rated calendar. As in 2021, it was provided by an experienced contractor and operated remotely. It provided an operational communications hub and facilitated the input of services and agencies to live issues. It linked into Emergency Planning and the Local Resilience Forum as necessary.

These arrangements were again valued by stakeholders including Dorset Police and the Dorset Local Resilience Forum and there is support for their continuance in future years.

- 1.4 Also, additional services were again deployed funded by an allocation of Government Covid-19 grant which was able to be used to manage the implications of restrictions being removed.

Additional Services
Litter bins & street cleansing
Temporary harbour seasonal staff
Weymouth Park & Ride operation
Coastal Town Council visitor management
Illegal parking and tow away zones
MACC and ancillary arrangements
Weymouth ASB Patrol & additional signage
Weymouth Safe Space project
Mobile CCTV units

- 1.5 The grant allocation for summer 2022 was £688,000 and to date, £469,000 has been claimed. Some services continued up to Christmas 2022, for example, Weymouth Safer Space, which provides shelter and services for those who become vulnerable in the night time economy. Any underspend in the current financial year will be returned to Public Health Dorset who manage the grant.
- 1.6 Generally, our resort towns and visitor attractions were less busy than in summer 2021 but activity remained above 'business as usual.' There were less issues with irresponsible parking at visitor attractions, unauthorised camping etc. but incidents still occurred. There were incidents of wildfires but not on the scale of the Wareham Forest fire in 2020. Campaigns about the danger of disposable BBQ's continued as did the work to reduce their availability from retail outlets. New ASB-related Public Space Protection

Orders came into force which included provisions about unauthorised camping on certain beaches and the lighting of fires on certain land. Enforcement of provisions has been problematic even with additional temporary resources, the main benefit has been to 'warn and inform' people of the restrictions.

- 1.7 A short survey of those who participated in the 2022 summer demand work was undertaken and the results given in Appendix 2. Whilst all of the additional services are considered valuable to visitors and communities, the Multi-Agency Command Centre (MACC) and Summer Demand Group (SDG) were highly rated in survey responses.
- 1.8 Whilst demand is returning closer to a pre-Covid position, it would be helpful for some components of additional summer services to be built into the new 'business as usual' whilst recognising the financial limitations. A £350,000 budget growth request was made through the 2023-24 budget setting process however, due to the financial climate, this was unsuccessful. An application was made for an allocation of remaining COMF (Covid Outbreak Management Fund) funding however, this too was unsuccessful due to the demand on a limited budget.
- 1.9 Due to the reduction in funding, officers have considered how to continue aspects of the summer demand services that are most beneficial. The MACC has been valuable in maintaining communication and information sharing between stakeholders especially during incidents. It also complements the approach adopted by BCP Council. As an externally contracted service, it has required funding from the Covid grant. Officers are in discussion with the Council's in-house call handling service, Dorset Direct to see what features of the MACC operation can be accommodated within existing resources or at a reduced cost.
- 1.10 The multi-stakeholder Summer Demand Group met weekly throughout the summer season to coordinate tactical operations. It's role has been valued in the feedback from both 2021 & 2022. It is proposed to continue this approach with the Council organising and chairing the virtual meetings. There are no direct costs to this element of the summer demand work.
- 1.11 If no funding is available for additional summer demand services, the alternative MACC approach and Summer Demand Group can be accommodated within existing budget. Other services including some of those given in paragraph 1.3 will still operate but at a pre-Covid level e.g. litter bins & cleansing; illegal parking; and some may be funded

elsewhere. For example, funding has been gained from the Government's Safer Streets Programme to continue Weymouth Safe Space. An area of specific concern is the potential loss of additional ASB Patrol resource which has been very beneficial through Covid restricted summers and would continue to be of benefit in future years. Officers are considering how a more permanent solution can be reached.

1.12 For 2023, it is anticipated that the excellent working relationships between council services, stakeholders and agencies will continue. The Council's emergency planning and response arrangements will be in place linking into the Dorset Local Resilience Forum.

1.13 It is appropriate that with reduced implications from the Covid pandemic on summer visitor numbers, additional resources should be scaled back. And this is the case with the finishing of Covid grant from Government. However, useful experience has been gained and continuing some approaches such as a MACC type arrangement and the Summer Demand Group, will be beneficial to stakeholders, visitors and our communities.

2. Financial Implications

2.1 Covid grant funding is finishing and to accommodate this, additional summer demand services are being reduced for 2023. Some measures will continue which will be funded from existing budget.

3. Environmental Implications

3.1 Additional summer demand services have helped to protect our natural environment such as beaches and open land. With visitor numbers returning to a more normal position, it is appropriate to review the need for these additional services.

4. Wellbeing and Health Implications

4.1 Access to open space for leisure and relaxation is essential for wellbeing and health. The additional summer demand services have helped to reduce the adverse effects of high visitor numbers on communities. It is important to recognise good practice that has been developed and where possible, continue measures that make a positive difference.

5. Other Implications

Nil.

6. **Risk Assessment**

- 6.1 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**

- 7.1 Covid grant funding was provided for the Traveller Transit Site at Piddlehinton to help accommodate additional visitors. The site will continue its pre-Covid operational level.

8. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Improvement Action Plan

Appendix 2 – Stakeholder Summer Demand Survey 2022

9. **Background Papers**

Reports to Place & Resources Scrutiny Committee on Summer Demand, 26 May 2022 & 25 January 2022.