

Cabinet

3 March 2026

Towards a New Model of Day Opportunities For Decision

Cabinet Member:

Cllr S Robinson, Adult Social Care

Local Councillor(s):

All

Senior Leadership Team:

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Executive summary

- 1.1 Day opportunities remain a key element of Dorset's adult social care provision, offering structured and purposeful activities to approximately 600 residents requiring support. These services underpin wellbeing, independence, and social inclusion. Recent engagement and research indicate a growing demand for flexibility, diversity, and opportunities for social interaction, particularly among younger cohorts.
- 1.2 Public engagement exercises conducted in 2021 and 2023 identified key priorities for service improvement. The formal consultation undertaken in Spring 2025 reinforced the need for a broader, more personalised offer. Evidence demonstrates that while some individuals do not seek or require building-based provision, there remains a significant need for people who use services to develop skills, confidence, and pathways to independence. Concurrently, a smaller group of individuals with complex needs will continue to require building-based support.
- 1.3 Proposed changes reflect the evolving system-wide approach that the council is taking to better align and integrate locality-based working within our communities. This includes our evolving social policy priorities, including Integrated Neighbourhood Teams, the Council's commitment to whole-population services, and a focus on preventative, community-led support. The Council must ensure that day service transformation optimises resources,

aligns with strategic objectives set out in the Council's Strategic Asset Management Plan and leverages existing community assets, such as Children and Family Hubs and libraries ensuring better use of Council property and assets. This integrated thinking will allow for joined-up thinking and approaches to the delivery of shared-outcomes across our local system, placing communities at the heart of how we design service provision and policies moving forwards.

- 1.4 This paper asks Cabinet to endorse a series of recommendations as set out below.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 This report asks Cabinet to:

- i) Endorse the review of our commissioning model with Care Dorset and the private sector
- ii) Endorse the introduction of the revised delivery model, as described within the report and appendix 1, supporting development of a range of activities across multiple locations for implementation subject to Cabinet approval

3. Reason for the recommendations

- 3.1 The recommendations aim to create a modern, sustainable model of day opportunities that reflects the changing needs and aspirations of Dorset's residents. They support the Council's ambition to deliver flexible, community-based services that promote independence, wellbeing, and social inclusion, while continuing to provide specialist support for those with complex needs. By endorsing these changes, the Council can make better use of existing community assets, integrate services within local neighbourhoods, and align with wider priorities such as prevention and early help as part of a wider outcomes-based approach that will help drive joined up models of delivery and partnership.
- 3.2 This approach also ensures that resources are used efficiently and commissioning arrangements with Care Dorset and the independent sector are optimised. It will enable the delivery of the Commissioning for a Better Life Strategy 2023–2028, offering a broader, more personalised range of opportunities that reduce reliance on traditional building-based provision. In doing so, the Council will strengthen pathways to independence, help reduce future care needs, and create a service model that is responsive, inclusive, and financially sustainable.

4. The Report Consultation

- 4.1 Extensive engagement in 2021 and 2023 gathered feedback from individuals using day opportunities to identify areas for improvement. This informed the proposal for an expanded offer combining community-based activities with building-based support for those with complex needs. The approach was further validated through formal consultation launched in Spring 2025, ensuring broad participation and representation.
- 4.2 The consultation provided valuable insights into what people want from day opportunities, confirming a strong sense of community attachment and a clear desire for flexible, vibrant, and locally accessible services, particularly among younger people. The following key themes were identified:
- **Flexibility and Variety:** Younger cohorts expressed a preference for non-building-based day opportunities, favouring local activities that promote independence and skill development.
 - **Choice and Change:** Respondents highlighted the importance of greater choice and flexibility, with interest in alternative models of day provision.
 - **Local Provision and Community Support:** There was strong support for community-based services, with many people indicating a willingness to access opportunities closer to home.
 - **Specialist and Respite Services:** Retention of specialist and respite services was considered essential by service users and carers.
 - **Availability:** Weekday mornings were the preferred times for service users, while carers expressed strong support for weekend and evening options.
 - **Understanding of the Hub and Spoke Model:** Over half of respondents recognised the potential benefits of this model, demonstrating openness to a broader range of activities and innovative approaches.
 - **Transport:** Both service users and carers emphasised the need for more flexible transport arrangements.
 - **Communication:** Feedback indicated a requirement for clearer information and improved promotion of available services, as some respondents were unaware of local provision.
- 4.3 Some concerns were raised regarding the proposed changes. These will require careful management and appropriate support during implementation. It is important to emphasise that all individuals with assessed Care Act eligible needs will continue to receive an appropriate form of day service.
- 4.4 The [full published Consultation report can be found here](#).

Service Changes and Developments

- 4.5 The proposal includes implementing a community Hub model across Dorset Council's five localities (North Dorset, Weymouth & Portland, East Dorset, West Dorset and Purbeck) with a range of building and community-based services. The hub model will act as the foundation to support future delivery of more joined up services in Neighbourhoods, working closely with communities. This ambition requires partners to work in a more proactive way, particularly paying attention to early help and prevention and enabling communities to thrive; an ambition that aligns with our Communities for All council plan priority and the required system-wide approach to the delivery of shared outcomes.
- 4.6 A Hub could provide and host a range of activities, and services that may include:
- Specialist community activities/day opportunities for individuals with complex needs
 - Introduction of a community brokerage service supporting individuals access a wider range of bespoke services closer to their homes. Supporting development of the private sector and VCSE options.
 - Act as a neighbourhood base for outreach services delivered by health, the VCSE and other partners.
- 4.7 In addition to the five hubs officers propose to retain and develop two specialist services for people with complex needs in Verwood (East Dorset) and Ridgeway (Weymouth & Portland). The remaining centres will continue to deliver a diverse range of options for community activities/day opportunities for adults across Dorset.
- 4.8 The Council will offer Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds as a first option to encourage and promote flexibility and choice in accessing day opportunities. People will still be able to access a day service via the block contract mechanism if that is their choice.

Building Changes

- 4.9 As part of the transformation of day opportunities, the Council has reviewed the use of all 13 Care Dorset-managed building-based services to ensure they are fit for purpose, aligned with community needs, and maximised as local assets. This review considered consultation feedback, demand trends, and opportunities to integrate services within the wider neighbourhood model. While the initial proposals for each building are set out in the *appendix 1*, the overarching approach seeks to retain and repurpose key sites as community hubs, develop specialist provision where required, and ensure that any changes support flexibility, independence, and better use of Council

resources. Under the agreed Strategic Asset Management Plan, the council will work through the asset review process to refine and ensure all factors influencing future asset usage are fully considered.

Review of Commissioning Mechanisms

- 4.10 The current Care Dorset contract for Day Services is funded via a block contract, comprising of a mix of direct service costs and building costs. Initial work has been undertaken to benchmark the private market, reviewing current volume of market placements, flat session rates, day rates and 1:1 rate. In addition, officers have reviewed Care Dorset financial and operational data as well as analysis of placements, frequency, expenditure, staffing levels and the self-funder market.
- 4.11 Completion of financial and operational analysis will act as a catalyst for future commissioning mechanisms. This will include removing a proportion of day centre costs out of the block contract and supporting Care Dorset to become commercially independent through the development of the self-funder market.

Next steps

- 4.12 Officers are committed to continuing the engagement with stakeholders and will ensure there are robust engagement and feedback structures in place. This will include further face to face sessions with people who use services, carers and families. Officers will support engagement with wider council departments where changes may impact, for example transport and utilisation of other resources including libraries. Further discussions will also be had to ensure that future approaches to locality working are symbiotic with this new model, enhancing the delivery of the outcomes that have been recognised through the extensive consultation that has been undertaken. Members will be kept apprised of progress in implementing recommended changes.
- 4.13 Subject to Cabinet decision, next steps to be prioritised are:
- April – Oct 2026**
- Review contracting mechanism and cost base for Care Dorset and the private market.
 - In line with the Strategic Asset Management Plan asset review process, continue to work with Asset & Property to review lease arrangements, associated costs, building condition, compliance, value, sustainability, and service change implications for each centre.
 - Issue new service specifications and contracts
 - Further embed 'pathways to independence' approach with front line social work staff, users and families and providers, as well as integration with wider approaches to prevention and new approaches to locality working to enhance the delivery of the outcomes identified in this paper.
 - Review Community Brokerage model

- Further market engagement with micro providers and VCSE.

5. Legal considerations

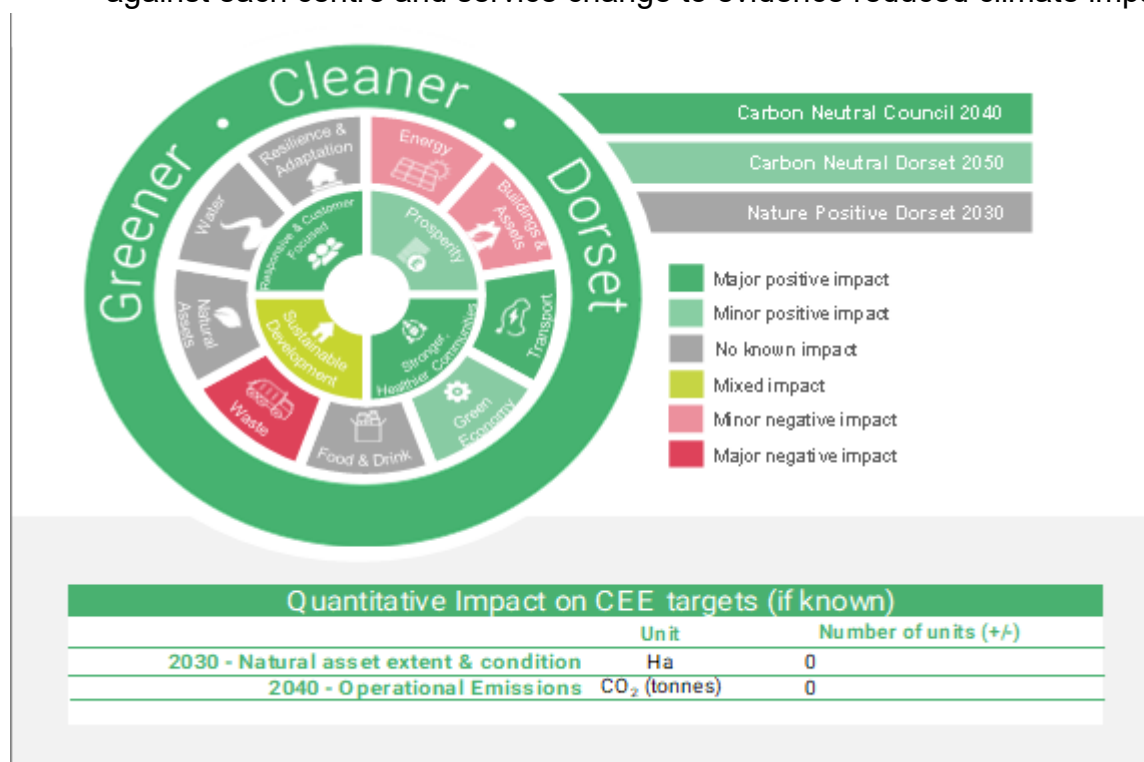
- 5.1 The Council has a duty under the Care Act to meet assessed needs and adopt a strength- based approach to delivering outcomes for eligible individuals. Moreover, the Care Act supports increased choice and control for people through individual budgets. The proposed changes to our day service operating model will enhance available options for individuals and strengthen the mechanism in which services can be purchased.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 There are no immediate negative financial pressures through adopting a new service model. As change is implemented opportunities will emerge to review contracting mechanisms which will drive efficiencies, alongside any changes to building usage may have financial implications related to changes in building usage. The focus on building skills and independence for people who use services will have a positive financial impact over a medium term as care and support needs will reduce.

7. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

- 7.1 Reduction in travel and transportation of individuals will result in reduced carbon emissions and carbon footprint. The climate wheel will be utilised against each centre and service change to evidence reduced climate impact.



8. Well-being and health implications

- 8.1 The Adults Directorate Transformation programme continues to drive change that improves how the Council supports individuals, ensuring services are tailored to meet diverse needs. The move towards a new model of day opportunities strengthens this ambition by redesigning provision to deliver personalised, meaningful activities in local settings. This approach will be delivered in partnership with community organisations, voluntary groups, and local businesses, creating a richer and more inclusive offer.
- 8.2 By embedding day opportunities within neighbourhoods, the proposed model enhances the ability of the wider health and care system to improve population health and wellbeing. It supports early intervention and prevention, reduces isolation, and promotes independence, all of which contribute to better long-term outcomes. Through proactive collaboration with partners and local networks, the model will enable communities to thrive and ensure that individuals receive support that is holistic, accessible, and aligned with their aspirations. This forms part of a systems-wide approach to redefine the way that we are working with communities with shared-outcomes at the heart of all we do.

9. Other implications

- 9.1 Changes in building use and enhanced community activities will require a review of transport options including the use of the VCSE, Council Transport and increased use of Direct Payments that will support people have more flexibility on how they access a day opportunity.
- 9.2 Aligning to the approved Strategic Asset Management Plan, which was approved by Cabinet in October 2024, officers will work to ensure there is a comprehensive understanding of existing community provision and opportunities to design services that address existing gaps and reduce service provision.
- 9.3 This paper and the provisions within it align with the broader redefinition of the approach to locality working as articulated in the Communities for All council plan priority, where shared outcomes will be at the heart of how we approach future service delivery.

10. Risk implications

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

Current Risk: LOW

Residual Risk: LOW

The decision is assessed as low risk because it maintains statutory compliance under the Care Act, ensures continuity of support for all

individuals with eligible needs, and introduces changes through a phased, consultative approach.

11. Equalities

- 11.1 An EQIA has been completed for each centre and approved by the Equalities Team. Consideration was given to any potential impact for people who use services now and those who may in the future. The Impact Assessment evidenced the proposed model of day services increased people's choice, would support more bespoke options particularly in rural areas and support people ambitions to develop more independence and skills.

12. Appendices

- 12.1 Appendix 1: Towards a new Model of Day Opportunities – Building proposals

13. Background Papers

- 13.1 [Commissioning for A Better Life for Adults in Dorset 2023 to 2028](#)

14. Report sign-off

- 14.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)