

# **Cabinet**

## **28 July 2026**

### **Dorset Council Annual Report 2025/26**

### **For Decision**

**Cabinet Member:**

Cllr N Ireland, Leader, Climate, Performance, Communications and Safeguarding

**Local Councillor(s):**

**Senior Leadership Team:**

S Ford - Assistant Chief Executive

**Report author and job title: Liz Crocker, Head of Strategy**

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**Statutory Authority:**

**Report status:** Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

**1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 Dorset Council's Annual Report 2025–2026 provides a clear and accessible summary of the council's performance over the period April 2025 to March 2026. It sets out the progress made in delivering the Council Plan (2024–2029), which focuses on four priorities: providing high-quality and affordable housing, growing the economy, supporting communities for all, and responding to the climate and nature crisis.
- 1.2 The council plan was based around administration priorities and extensive community engagement that created a set of ambitions designed to stretch the organisation over and above its ongoing commitment to delivering the very best statutory services.
- 1.3 The report highlights strong progress across these priorities. This includes effective early help services for children and families, reduced reliance on temporary accommodation, accelerated support for economic growth and business development, and ongoing action to reduce carbon emissions and support nature recovery.
- 1.4 The council continues to deliver essential frontline services, including waste and recycling, highways, planning, libraries, regulatory services and customer support, maintaining strong performance and responding effectively to

increased demand and emergency events. Alongside this, the council is progressing an ambitious programme of change and transformation to drive continuous service improvement, strengthen support for communities and enhance delivery of its strategic priorities.

- 1.5 The report also reflects the context in which the council operates. Like many local authorities across the country, Dorset Council continues to face significant pressures, including rising demand for services, particularly in social care and housing, alongside wider financial constraints. Despite this, the council has maintained strong performance, delivered key services for residents, and achieved a balanced financial position.
- 1.6 Importantly, the Annual Report provides a balanced view of performance. Alongside achievements, it identifies areas of continued focus, such as improving educational attainment, increasing the supply of affordable housing, strengthening economic productivity, and maintaining momentum in delivering long-term climate and infrastructure ambitions.
- 1.7 The report forms part of the council's commitment to transparency and accountability, giving residents, partners and stakeholders a clear overview of what has been delivered over the past year and how the council is responding to challenges.

## **2. Recommendation(s)**

### **2.1 That Cabinet:**

- Notes and approves the Dorset Council Annual Report 2025–2026.

## **3. Reason for the recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 The annual report provides a comprehensive summary of the council's performance and achievements over the past year and demonstrates delivery against the Council Plan priorities. Approval ensures the report can be formally published as part of the council's commitment to transparency, accountability and effective governance.

## **4. The report**

- 4.1 The annual report 2025–2026 brings together performance information reported throughout the year and presents a single, coherent narrative of progress, impact and areas requiring further focus.
- 4.2 It highlights delivery across all four Council Plan priorities:

- Provide high-quality and affordable housing
  - Growing our economy
  - Communities for all
  - Respond to the climate and nature crisis
- 4.3 Alongside progress against the council's strategic priorities, the report highlights the continued delivery of a broad range of essential services that residents rely on every day, including waste and recycling, highways maintenance, planning, libraries, regulatory services and customer support. These services continue to perform strongly and provide vital support to communities across the county. The report also recognises the council's ongoing programme of change and transformation, which is driving service improvement, strengthening organisational resilience and capacity, and enabling the council to deliver more effective, efficient and sustainable services in support of its long-term priorities.
- 4.4 The report also includes case studies, performance data, and examples of partnership working, demonstrating the collective effort of councillors, employees, partners and communities.
- 4.5 Performance information is drawn from the council's established performance management framework, including quarterly reporting to the People and Health Scrutiny Committee and the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee, ensuring structured quarterly oversight and a commitment to continuous improvement.
- 4.6 Performance is also reported through publicly available dashboards, including the Council Plan performance dashboard, which provides a quarterly view of progress against priorities, alongside wider dashboards covering broader service performance.
- 4.7 The report is intended to be read alongside other performance and assurance documents, risk reporting updates, including quarterly performance reports, financial outturn reporting, and inspection outcomes. Links to other reports are included in the background papers section of the report.

### **Annual highlights 2025/26**

- 4.8 Overall, performance during 2025/26 was strong, with positive progress delivered across all four council plan priorities despite continued service demand and financial pressures. The council maintained a strong focus on prevention, partnership working and delivering value for residents, while continuing to provide a wide range of essential services.
- 4.9 Under providing high-quality and affordable housing, Dorset continued to perform above the national average in preventing homelessness and

supporting residents to remain in their homes. Reliance on temporary accommodation reduced during the year, supported accommodation schemes were expanded, and the council's Empty Homes Strategy successfully brought long-term empty properties back into use.

- 4.10 Under growing the economy, the council delivered the Dorset Economic Growth Strategy, established a new delivery company for Dorset Innovation Park, secured significant external investment, and continued to support local businesses through Growth Hub programmes, mentoring and Shared Prosperity Fund investment. Our focus on Weymouth 2040 continues with a strong focus on improved economic outcomes for our residents and businesses. These initiatives have strengthened the foundations for longer-term economic growth, investment and job creation.
- 4.11 Developing communities for all, strong outcomes were delivered for children, families and vulnerable residents. Early help services continued to demonstrate positive impact, supporting families at an earlier stage and reducing demand on more intensive services. Care leaver outcomes exceeded targets, more residents were supported to live independently, and health and wellbeing programmes continued to deliver positive outcomes. Dorset also secured £20m of Pride in Place funding and strengthened community engagement through locality-based and partnership approaches.
- 4.12 As part of efforts in responding to the climate and nature crisis, there was strong progress in reducing the carbon emissions of the council and Dorset, expanding electric vehicle infrastructure, increasing renewable energy generation and supporting nature recovery. Significant partnership working also delivered programmes such as Switch Together Dorset (solar panels), strong progress in the Farming in Protected Landscape scheme and a successful energy saving campaign called Home Habitats was also delivered. Dorset maintained one of the highest recycling rates in England, expanded support through the Low Carbon Dorset programme and Healthy Homes Dorset programmes and adopted the Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy to support long-term environmental improvement.
- 4.13 Alongside delivery of the council plan priorities, several services achieved notable success during the year. Children's Services were rated Outstanding by Ofsted, Adult Social Care was assessed as Good by the Care Quality Commission, and Dorset Council's Building Control Service received national recognition as Local Authority Building Control Team of the Year. Dorset Council also won a national award for its climate leadership. While planning, highways, libraries and customer services maintained strong performance for residents.

- 4.14 Taken together, these achievements demonstrate strong overall performance during 2025/26, with the council continuing to deliver positive outcomes for residents while responding effectively to ongoing financial, demographic and legislative challenges.

### **Risk Management**

- 4.15 During 2025/26, Dorset Council has significantly strengthened and embedded its risk management arrangements through the implementation of a comprehensive Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) Framework. This framework establishes a clear and consistent approach to identifying, assessing and managing risk across the organisation, explicitly aligning all risks with the council's strategic objectives, including delivery of the council plan and the provision of high-quality public services.
- 4.16 The ERM Framework defines how risk information is governed and flows through the organisation, ensuring that leadership and committee structures receive timely, accurate and relevant insight to support informed, risk-based decision-making. It also sets out the council's approach to risk appetite, providing clarity on the level of risk the organisation is prepared to accept in pursuit of its objectives, thereby strengthening organisational control while improving predictability of outcomes.
- 4.17 These arrangements have been embedded within the council's Strategic Performance and Risk Frameworks, bringing together performance, risk and assurance information into a coherent system of oversight. This has been supported by the introduction of clearly defined principal and strategic risks, enhanced governance arrangements, and the development of a corporate Risk Dashboard. The dashboard provides a central, accessible platform for recording, monitoring and reporting risk information, improving transparency and enabling more responsive, data-driven management outside of formal reporting cycles.
- 4.18 As a result of these improvements, the council has achieved full compliance with risk reporting requirements across the year, demonstrating strong organisational engagement and ensuring that risk information is both timely and robust.
- 4.19 Further progress has been made in strengthening the council's control environment and ensuring a more mature approach to risk management. This includes closer alignment between internal audit activity and the ERM Framework, enabling a more risk-informed and proportionate response to audit actions. By considering factors such as criticality, resourcing and organisational capacity, the council is better

positioned to prioritise and implement improvements that deliver the greatest impact.

- 4.20 Collectively, these developments have created stronger links between strategic planning, performance management and risk management, resulting in a more consistent, coordinated and effective approach across the organisation.
- 4.21 The council has also continued to respond proactively to emerging and external risks affecting Dorset's communities. During the year, services worked collaboratively with emergency responders and partners through the Local Resilience Forum to manage the impact of severe weather events and flooding, supporting residents, protecting infrastructure and maintaining service continuity. In addition, the council, working closely with health partners, responded to a public health incident involving an outbreak of meningitis.
- 4.22 Lessons learned from these events are being systematically captured and used to inform ongoing resilience planning and future mitigation activity, further strengthening the council's preparedness and adaptability in the face of evolving risks.

## **5. Alternative options considered**

- 5.1 Do not produce an annual report; this would reduce the council's ability to remain transparent and provide timely feedback to residents and stakeholders and would also undermine its commitment to best value standards.

## **6. Legal considerations**

- 6.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. The publication of an Annual Report supports good governance and aligns with the council's responsibilities around transparency and accountability.

## **7. Financial implications**

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with approving the Annual Report.

## **8. Natural environment, climate and ecology implications**

- 8.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report.
- 8.2 However, the Annual Report demonstrates progress in responding to the climate and nature crisis, including reductions in emissions, investment in renewable energy, and actions to support nature recovery across Dorset.

## **9. Well-being and health implications**

- 9.1 There are no direct implications arising from this decision.
- 9.2 The Annual Report highlights the council's role in supporting residents' health and wellbeing, including delivery of preventative services, support for independent living, and partnership working with health services to improve outcomes.

## **10. Other implications**

- 10.1 No other implications have been identified.

## **11. Risk implications**

- 11.1 Not applicable. The report presents information on past performance although it does highlights strengthened approaches to risk management.

## **12. Equalities**

- 12.1 There are no direct equality, diversity or inclusion implications resulting from this report.

## **13. Appendices**

- 13.1 Appendix A- Annual Report 2025/26

## **14. Background papers**

- [Dorset Council Strategic Performance Management Framework](#)
- [Dorset Council Risk Management Framework](#)
- [Council Plan dashboard](#)
- [Place and Resources Scrutiny dashboard](#)
- [People and Health Scrutiny dashboard](#)
- [Cabinet Mid-Year performance report 2025/26](#)
- [Ofsted - Dorset Council Children's Services SEND](#)
- [Care Quality Commission – Dorset Council Adult Social Care](#)

## **15. Report sign-off**

- 15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Assurance and Governance (Monitoring Officer), the Director for Resources (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Cabinet Member(s)