



Working together | ambitious for **Dorset**



Foreword

Leader of the Council



Nick Ireland
Leader of the Council

I am pleased to introduce Dorset Council's annual performance report, which sets out how we have delivered services over the past year and the progress we have made against our Council Plan priorities.

In December 2024, we set out our ambitious Council Plan, outlining our commitments to residents and partners across four key priorities to be delivered to 2029: providing high-quality and affordable housing; growing our economy; supporting communities for all; and responding to the climate and nature crisis. Over the past year, we have made good progress against each of these priorities.

This report is an important part of our commitment to transparency. It provides a clear overview of what we have achieved, where challenges remain, and how we will continue to use evidence to drive improvement. It highlights a range of shared achievements, reflecting the collective efforts of councillors, employees, partners, residents, volunteers, and businesses across our communities.

We are proud of what has been achieved this year, with plenty of optimism for the future, as we continue to work together to create a fairer, more prosperous, and more sustainable Dorset for current and future generations.

Perspective from the Chief Executive



Dr Catherine Howe
Chief Executive of Dorset Council

When I joined Dorset Council in August 2025, I was struck by the strength of its communities, the dedication of its workforce, and the shared ambition to create a fairer, more prosperous, more sustainable Dorset.

Since becoming a unitary authority in 2019, the council has achieved a great deal. We are now at an important point in that journey, focused on realising the full benefits of being a modern, sustainable unitary council that can deliver consistently for residents now and into the future.

This next phase focuses on modernising how we work - acting as one joined-up organisation, reducing complexity, strengthening collaboration, and focusing decisions and resources on the outcomes that matter most to Dorset's communities.

Over the past year, we have

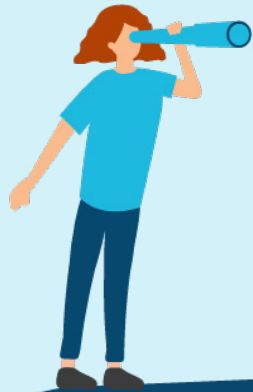
continued to embed our Council Plan priorities of housing, economic growth, strong communities, and responding to the climate and nature crisis. We have seen tangible progress in areas such as homelessness prevention, community support, and environmental action while recognising where we need to go further, particularly in speeding up housebuilding and delivering more consistently across the organisation.

A defining feature of this next phase is a stronger focus on working as one council and one system, bringing together services, partners and communities to tackle problems early and deliver shared results for lasting change.

I would like to thank our councillors, employees, partners and communities for their continued commitment and support.

Council Plan delivery

“Working together to create a fairer, more prosperous and more sustainable Dorset for current and future generations”



Our Council Plan (2024–2029) sets out four priorities focused on making a positive difference for residents, communities, and the environment. They are:



Provide high-quality and affordable housing



Grow our economy



Communities for all



Respond to the climate and nature crisis





Providing high quality and affordable housing

We want to make sure all residents have safe, affordable and good quality housing because it underpins the wellbeing and opportunity of our communities.

This includes:

- reducing homelessness and the need for temporary accommodation
- increasing the supply of affordable homes
- improving housing quality and accessibility
- working with our partners to get the best use from our land, housing and other properties



Target measures

- 30% reduction in the number of households in temporary accommodation over the next 5 years
- eradicate use of bed and breakfasts for family households over the next 5 years
- maintain annual homelessness prevention levels consistently higher than the national average
- achieve the desired balanced position of a smaller but sustainable temporary accommodation stock over the next 5 years
- deliver 450 new affordable homes every year through the housing association development programme
- bring forward new housing supply of 100 new accessible homes and 90 larger family homes per year at affordable rents
- implement approved new models of delivery to increase affordable housing supply, making best use of council assets
- deliver 100 new supported accommodation homes over the next 5 years, secured through grant funding and support from providers



What has gone well

We have made strong progress this year in helping residents to find and keep a home that is right for them, with a continued focus on preventing problems by acting early.

Dorset has performed consistently better than the national average¹ at preventing homelessness and helping people stay in their homes. This early help is reducing the need for more intensive support.

We are reducing reliance on temporary accommodation. Numbers have fallen by 9% compared to last year, with an ambition to achieve a 30% reduction over the term of the Council Plan. Use of bed and breakfast accommodation has also reduced overall, with fewer families having to use it.

Our new Empty Homes Strategy has resulted in 25 long-term empty properties being brought back into use over the year, with over 240 further cases actively being progressed.

Supported accommodation at West Farm in south Dorset has provided safe and stable housing for young people at risk of homelessness, with further schemes in development.

Taken together, these achievements reflect a strong and coordinated focus on prevention, partnership working and making best use of available housing, ensuring more residents have access to safe, secure and sustainable homes.

¹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Live tables on homelessness. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

Case study

The first 24/7 supported living scheme for 18 to 25 year-olds who are at risk of becoming homeless opened in November 2025, in partnership with new provider, Salvation Army Homes. West Farm is a six-bed temporary accommodation site providing a stable and safe environment for young adults so they can learn how to manage a home of their own and gain new life skills, which will benefit them long-term.



Councillor Gill Taylor, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, speaking at the opening ceremony at West Farm



Our areas of continued focus

While progress continues to be made in increasing the supply of affordable housing, delivery this year has fallen short of the annual target, with 423 homes completed against an ambition of 450.

In response, we are adjusting delivery timescales to recover this shortfall. The poor weather earlier this year hindered progress, so some developments are now expected to complete in 2026/27.

Despite this, the overall programme of new schemes remains strong. We continue to work closely with our housing association partners, supporting them to build more homes, and we have confidence in meeting our longer-term targets.

This position is further strengthened by the opening of the government's new Affordable Housing Programme,

with partners actively preparing bids to secure funding for new social and affordable homes in Dorset. This will help us work together to deliver our housing goals.

As our delivery approach matures, we will deliver priority housing projects faster, including accessible homes, larger family homes and supported accommodation.

We are also exploring new ways to deliver additional affordable housing, such as large leasing arrangements with investors and making better use of smaller, more complex council sites. The council is committed to the expansion of supported and Extra Care housing opportunities across the area by 2029 and is actively working with a range of partners to achieve this.



Grow our economy

A strong economy underpins everything we aim to achieve. We will help businesses grow and support innovation, creating opportunities and helping people get good quality jobs.

We want to create a strong, sustainable local economy that:

- supports job creation
- increases productivity
- encourages entrepreneurship
- maximises Dorset's natural and economic strengths



Target measures

- narrow the Dorset to UK productivity gap by 5% by 2029
- generate over 2,000 jobs and over £500 million of private sector investment in renewable energy projects by 2029
- increase total visitor-related spend in Dorset by 5% by 2029
- by 2029, create 1,000 business start-up courses for 16 to 34-year olds to encourage young people into entrepreneurship
- support community-led masterplans in at least 70% of the coastal and market towns by 2029
- launch a new delivery company for the Dorset Innovation Park, creating 300 jobs by 2029



What has gone well

Good progress has been made this year in strengthening Dorset's economy, with a focus on supporting business growth, attracting investment and developing key sectors. The 2025 Economic Growth Strategy provides a clear long term plan to support growth and investment across Dorset.

The launch of a new delivery company for Dorset Innovation Park was a key milestone to help high value sectors, such as defence and clean energy, to grow faster. The company aims to create 300 jobs and reach a break-even budget by 2029. It has also helped secure Dorset's role in the South West Local Innovation Partnerships Fund, giving access to a share of £20 million to invest in high potential local innovation clusters.

Progress has also been made in exploring future opportunities through the Morwind offshore wind feasibility study, which is assessing the potential for renewable energy development and associated economic benefits. By positioning Dorset to take advantage of emerging clean energy sectors, the study supports longer-term

ambitions for sustainable growth, investment and job creation.

This is complemented by the continued progress of major regeneration plans for Weymouth, which will help unlock new jobs, homes and opportunities, while supporting the long-term economic vitality of the area. These works included rebuilding sea walls, significant archaeological investigation and the strategic partnership with Willmott Dixon and Milligan.

Portland has also secured significant external investment, including £20 million government funding for the MEMO project, a major new visitor attraction and environmental education facility located in former stone quarries and mine tunnels. The project will create an immersive experience focused on biodiversity, evolution, and the Jurassic Coast, alongside a stonemasonry training centre. It is expected to generate significant economic benefits through job creation, skills development and increased year-round tourism.



Support for local businesses has remained strong, with over 700 businesses supported through Growth Hub programmes and 248 people taking part in start-up courses, contributing to progress towards the target of supporting 1,000 businesses by 2029.

Dorset Business Mentors marked its 20th year, having supported over 2,500 businesses since 2005 by connecting entrepreneurs with experienced mentors. This impact is reflected in local businesses like CoreFit Health, owned by Gemma Puzas, where mentoring has supported both professional and personal growth.

Over the past two years, UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment has supported more than 100 Dorset businesses across sectors including tourism, food, farming and manufacturing, helping them grow, create jobs, and improve productivity, including in rural areas.

Together, these achievements reflect a positive trajectory, with the building blocks in place to support long-term growth and opportunity across Dorset.



Our areas of continued focus

While Dorset continues to make progress in strengthening its economy, we know there is more to do to realise our full potential. Productivity levels remain below the national average, underlining the need for sustained focus on long-term growth, skills and investment.

Improving productivity is a complex, long-term challenge. It depends on workforce skills, business investment, infrastructure and wider national conditions. As a result, meaningful change will require consistent effort over several years, working closely with partners beyond the current Council Plan.

Whilst early enabling activity is underway, it will take continued effort to translate this into measurable outcomes over the coming years.

By maintaining a clear and sustained focus on these areas, we aim to improve productivity and deliver lasting economic benefits for Dorset's communities over time.

² Dorset Local Skills Improvement Plan (2025) Dorset LSIP Progress Report, June 2025. Available at: https://dorsetchamber.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Dorset-LSIP-Progress-Report_June-2025.pdf

³ Office for National Statistics Productivity measures. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/economicoutputandproductivity/productivitymeasures>

Case study

Dorset businesses identify digital skills as a key gap² The Weymouth Digital Skills Hub, funded through the Shared Prosperity Fund, piloted local, face-to-face training to help address this.

Hazel Hoskins from Maiden Castle Farm used skills from a two-day digital marketing masterclass (covering design, AI tools, and content planning) to promote the Sunflower Trail near Dorchester.

Over four months, the Hub supported 22 organisations, helping businesses build confidence and improve their digital marketing.



Hazel Hoskins from Maiden Castle Farm



Communities for all

Strong communities are at the heart of a good quality of life. We want to improve residents' lives at every stage by creating places where everyone can thrive, with accessible services and support to live well.

By strengthening community connections and making the most of public money and services, we will work differently with our communities to meet local needs and build a stronger, more inclusive Dorset.

We aim to support Dorset's communities to be places where people:

- feel safe and supported
- can access services locally
- have opportunities to thrive
- live healthy, independent lives



Target measures

- a joined-up model of locality working, delivering through prevention and partnership: measures to be agreed with local partners and linked back to our priorities and the work of the NHS, the Health & Wellbeing Board and the Integrated Care Partnership
- improve educational attainment by working through leadership in the education community: increase Dorset's Key Stage 2 results (55% in 2024) to be as good or better than the national average levels by 2029 (60% in 2024)
- transfer up to £500,000 a year of Dorset Council's apprenticeship levy to increase the number of apprenticeships offered by local businesses and organisations
- be the best Corporate Parent that we can for our children in care and care leavers. Improve levels of engagement in employment, education and training among our care leavers to 65% through provision of good, stable and consistent care and accommodation, good multi-agency wraparound support, and a sufficient number and range of opportunities
- seek internationally recognised accreditation as an 'age-friendly' county
- work specifically with those groups at higher risk, including supporting unpaid carers, those ageing without children and those ageing alone
- increase the number of age and disability friendly environments to enable people to stay in the homes they want for longer, reducing the proportion of people in traditional care settings, as well as creating all-age friendly environments, equally accessible by young parents with pushchairs as they are to older people with walkers or disabled people



What has gone well

This year has seen strong progress in supporting communities to thrive, with a continued focus on early help, inclusion and improving outcomes for residents. An important step this year was establishing a separate public health service for Dorset Council as part of a new directorate, Public Health and Prevention, alongside colleagues working in regulatory services such as environmental health, licensing and trading standards.

Support for children and young people remains a key strength. All families are offered a new birth visit, and over 90% of babies are seen face to face by a health visitor within 14 days of their birth. Families and children are receiving help earlier, closer to where they live, with only a small number (10.29%) needing further referrals, and most families (71%) reporting less conflict at home. This is supported by strong local partnership working and services provided through Family Hubs.

The Best Start in Life programme continues to deliver high-quality results, achieving a 5-star the National Portage Association accreditation for the fourth consecutive year.

Care leaver engagement in employment, education and training continues to exceed targets across all age groups, with 98% in suitable accommodation.

We are also seeing positive results in helping people to live independently and stay connected to their communities. With support, over 1,400 people have been able to stay in their own homes, while 192 working-age adults with learning disabilities or mental health needs have been supported into employment, training or volunteering. Since launching the new Adults' Prevention and Early Intervention Service, over 1,100 people have received early support, with 87% of needs met at first contact and most assessments (72%) starting within 2 days.





What has gone well



Health and wellbeing outcomes have strengthened, with over 4,900 residents supported through LiveWell Dorset, 5,008 NHS Health Checks, and over 2,100 adults supported through drug and alcohol treatment services, with results exceeding the national average⁴.

In 2024/25, Dorset was one of only eight councils where over 5% of smokers successfully quit, supported by an innovative digital platform. We continue to seek new ways to reach the 30,000+ residents who still smoke. Quitting improves health, boosts the local economy, and reduces costs of social care. In Dorset, the negative impact of smoking is estimated at £139 million in lost productivity and £117 million on social care⁵.

Dorset remains one of the safest areas in the country. Recent years have witnessed a reduction in local instances of both antisocial

behaviour and violent crime. In addition, the levels of repeat offending against domestic abuse victims is currently at its lowest level for five years⁶.

Partnership working and community engagement have strengthened. Dorset's membership of the UK Age-Friendly Network provides a clear approach to respond to Dorset's rapidly ageing population, while programmes such as Thriving Communities and Age Friendly Dorset and the relaunch of Shared Lives are strengthening participation, local networks and service design.

The Community Conversations programme has been established to shape place-based working and closer collaboration with town and parish councils, voluntary organisations and local partners.

We have strengthened the delivery structures for this work, including member oversight, a dedicated delivery team, and new capabilities in participation, policy design and strategic relationship management.

⁴ Office for Health Improvement and Disparities Alcohol and drug misuse and treatment statistics. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/alcohol-and-drug-misuse-and-treatment-statistics>

⁵ ASH Ready Reckoner. Available at: https://ashresources.shinyapps.io/ready_reckoner/

⁶ In-house research based on Dorset Police data

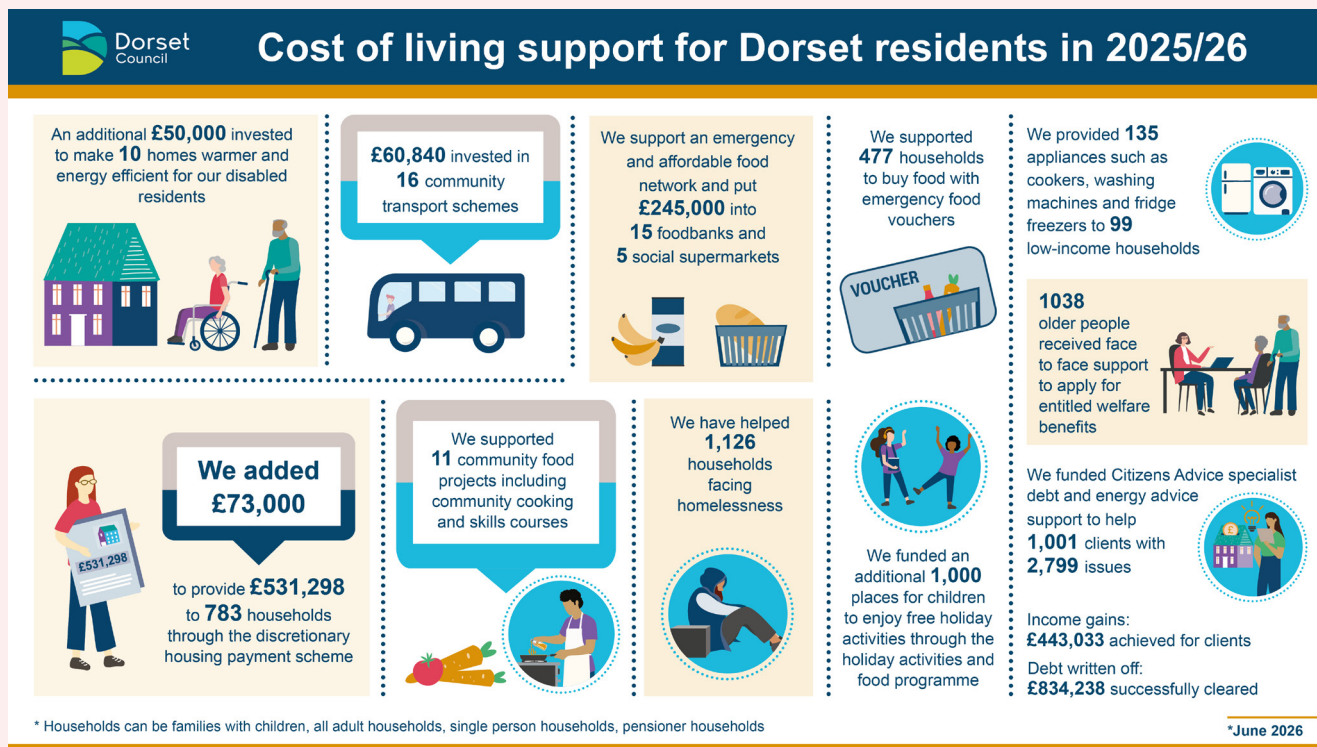


What has gone well

£20 million of Pride in Place funding was secured for Littlemoor and Broadway in Weymouth, with strong community engagement shaping plans for local regeneration.

Alongside this, targeted support has continued to help residents manage the impact of rising living costs. Over 1,000 residents received specialist advice, generating £1.36 million in financial gains. Housing support helped 783 households through Discretionary Housing Payments and prevented homelessness for 155 households. Wider support reached over 3,200 households through food provision (with 477 households getting emergency food vouchers), while 1,038 older residents received benefits advice, unlocking £1.5 million in additional income.

Taken together, these achievements demonstrate a strong and growing focus on prevention, partnership working, and supporting people to live healthy, independent and fulfilling lives within their communities.





Our areas of continued focus



While strong progress continues to be made across many aspects of work in our communities, there are areas where sustained focus is needed to build on this progress.

Improving education outcomes remains a priority, with Key Stage 2 attainment still below the national average. We are working closely with schools and partners to drive long-term improvement, recognising that school performance is not wholly within the council's direct control and that sustained, system-wide effort will be required beyond the lifetime of this Council Plan⁷.

We will also focus on delivering the national SEND reforms and improving outcomes for vulnerable children. By building on better school attendance and reduced exclusions, we aim to improve education participation and future opportunities.

We have made strong progress in supporting more children to stay safely with their families and in their communities, with increases in

kinship care (+18%), more children returning home, and high levels of placement stability. We will build on this by further expanding stable, local homes and reducing reliance on moving children out of the area.

Our ambition to use the apprenticeship levy to support local skills and employment opportunities remains strong. We committed our target of £500,000 to local businesses in 2025/26; however, take-up of these funds has been slower than anticipated. For 2026/27, we have committed the full £500k again, and we will work closely with partners to raise awareness, remove barriers and ensure the funding is fully used to give the best benefit possible to local businesses and residents.

Work is continuing to develop a new Health and Wellbeing Strategy, supported by a clear plan that reflects the needs of Dorset's communities and supports us working together across services with partners.

We continue to work alongside health and

community partners in the Neighbourhood Health Implementation Programme to move more support for people with health conditions into communities and invest more in prevention. New smoking legislation introduced in April 2026 creates further opportunities to reduce smoking rates.

As with many areas of community delivery, progress is influenced by the wider national context, particularly ongoing health service reform and changes within the NHS. We will continue to work with partners to navigate this evolving landscape and maintain momentum in getting improved results for residents.

Finally, in recognition of the vital role that effective community and public transport networks play in supporting people of all ages, this will be an increased area of focus. Transport is a key enabler across many of the Council Plan's priorities, underpinning community connection as well as access to opportunities, employment, and services.

⁷ Department for Education Key stage 2 attainment.
Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-2-attainment>



Responding to the climate and nature crisis

Tackling the climate and nature crisis is essential to protect our environment, support strong communities and secure a sustainable future. While global in scale, many solutions are local. Dorset Council has an important role in reducing emissions, restoring nature and adapting to the impacts of climate change across our communities. Action now will protect our natural assets and support sustainable economic growth.

We are working to:

- reduce carbon emissions
- protect and recover nature
- adapt to climate risks
- promote sustainable living



Target measures

- deliver a revised carbon reduction target of 80% from 2019 baseline by 2030 to include:
 - Dorset Council fleet: transition all small vehicles to electric by 2030 and all large vehicles to use alternative low emission fuels by 2026 to reduce our fleet emissions by 70% by 2026
 - generate more of our own energy by installing an additional 5MW of solar PV on our estate by 2030
 - switch all our oil-fired heating systems to non-fossil fuel alternatives by 2028
 - reduce our emissions from staff travelling for business by at least 25% by 2029
 - ensure our services are resilient to climate change by having climate adaptation plans for each service by March 2026
- achieve a 65% recycling and composting rate by 2035 and ensure the optimum use of the recycling and composting services provided
- nature recovery target is for 30% of our land to be in positive management for nature by 2030. Other targets include:
 - 80% of our urban verges will be managed to enhance their value for nature by 2030 (currently 50%)
 - improve 300 miles of the Rights of Way network, making it more accessible to connect people's access to nature by 2030 (30 miles in last 10 years)
 - 70% of our county farms land will be managed using sustainable farming practices that balance food production and nature by 2030 (currently 5%)
 - 79,000 hectares of land Dorset contributes to nature recovery through the Nature Recovery Dorset network by 2030



What has gone well

Good progress has been made this year in delivering Dorset's ambitions to respond to the climate and nature crisis, with continued focus on reducing emissions, nature recovery and building long-term sustainability.

In the latest report (2024/25), the council reduced carbon emissions from its own buildings, energy use and vehicles by 35% compared to 2019/20. When including wider emissions, such as supply chains, this reduction is 31%. Due to reporting timelines, data for 2025/26 will be published in November 2026.

Progress towards carbon reduction is being driven by investment in fleet decarbonisation and renewable energy. All suitable diesel vehicles have been switched to hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO), cutting emissions by up to 80%, and over a third of the council's small vehicle fleet is now electric. Dorset's EV

charging network has also expanded, with 75 new sockets added in 2025/26, bringing the total to 261 council-sponsored chargers.

Work is also progressing to increase renewable energy generation across the council estate. A new solar programme will deliver an additional 2.2MW of capacity, alongside feasibility work on leased properties and wider renewable schemes, including solar and battery storage projects. A Local Area Energy Plan, being developed with partners and due in 2026, will provide a clear roadmap for Dorset's clean energy future.

The Low Carbon Dorset programme continues to support organisations to reduce energy costs and emissions. With UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UK SPF) funding, over 112 organisations received support, resulting in 34 projects and £450,000 in grant funding. Together these projects will have saved over



349 tonnes of carbon each year, generated over £1.2 million in local investment and delivered 2MW of solar capacity. Although external funding ended in March 2026, the programme is continuing with council support.

The Healthy Homes Dorset programme continues to take a preventative approach to cold, damp homes, supporting residents at risk of fuel poverty or poor health. This year, 141 households were supported through insulation, heating improvements and energy advice, helping reduce bills and improve living conditions. Strong delivery led to grant funding increasing from £807,000 to £1.4 million during 2025/26. A total of 53 homes in Dorset were upgraded, including heat pumps, solar panels and insulation measures⁸. A further £1.5 million has been secured for both 2026/27 and 2027/28.

⁸ Dorset Council, Healthy Homes Dorset programme monitoring data (2025/26)



What has gone well



Community engagement in Dorset's climate response is also strengthening. A Citizens' Climate Panel was established to bring together residents to explore key challenges and shape future plans, supporting a more inclusive, community-led approach to issues such as flooding, coastal erosion and extreme weather.

Dorset continues to perform strongly in waste and recycling, with 59.4% of household waste reused, recycled or composted reflecting the continued efforts of residents, communities and services.

Progress is also being made in supporting nature recovery. Nearly 29% of council-managed land is now in positive management for nature, against a target of 30% by 2030. In addition, 62% of urban verges are managed to support wildlife, contributing to a target of 80% by 2030. This work is supported by the adoption of the Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy, providing a clear framework for coordinated action with partners in the years ahead.

Case study

Dorset Council has stepped up practical action to help nature recover. This work runs across many council services and major projects, from managing verges and parks for wildlife to supporting nature-friendly farming and development.

A strong example of this approach can be seen at Tarrant Keyneston, where Dorset Council has worked with local landowners to create a 100 hectare habitat bank under new Biodiversity Net Gain rules. Known as The Ferals, the former arable land is being transformed into species-rich grassland, scrub, woodland and wetland, creating space for wildlife to recover over the long term.



Conservation volunteers have been collecting monthly air samples at heathland sites in Dorset to pinpoint local pollution hotspots.



Our areas of continued focus

Dorset continues to make good progress in reducing emissions and supporting nature recovery. While some targets have proved more challenging to achieve within the original timescales, action is underway to build on progress made and accelerate delivery in key areas.

Work to expand the electric pool fleet is continuing, supporting our ambition to reduce staff travel emissions. While progress has been slower than planned, new approaches to fleet management are being developed, including more sustainable, efficient and data-driven delivery models, and increased sharing of vehicles across services.

While progress has been made in improving the Rights of Way network, delivery has been slower than planned. In response, we are reviewing our approach and priorities to help accelerate improvements and maximise

impact. This will support our ambition to make it easier for residents and visitors to access and enjoy Dorset's natural environment.

Further feasibility work is planned to help complete the transition of the remaining estate heating systems to low-carbon, non-fossil fuel alternatives.

Progress in developing climate resilience plans has fallen behind the original timetable. To address this, a Climate Resilience Officer has been appointed to lead the development of a new Climate Adaptation Strategy, working with Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council and wider partners. This will build on the work from the Climate Citizens Panel to provide a clear framework to align activity, prioritise risks and coordinate action across the whole county.

We will also continue to build on the progress

already made in nature recovery, maintaining focus on delivering the actions and ambitions set out in the council's own Biodiversity Duty Report and the county-wide Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

A year in Dorset

Dorset rated top nationally for waste recycling again



April '25

Children's Services receives 'outstanding' rating from Ofsted



May '25

New economic strategy launches to drive investment, innovation and high-value jobs for Dorset



June '25



July '25

Annual figures show hundreds of new affordable homes built in Dorset



Aug '25

Innovation and investment to tackle homelessness reduces the number of people in temporary accommodation by 50%



Sept '25

Increased funding to help Dorset businesses grow, bringing total to £6.4 million

A year in Dorset

Dorset is the UK's 100th local authority to become an Age Friendly community

Oct '25



£115 million Highways Capital Programme strategy unveiled

Nov '25



New Dorset Local Nature Recovery strategy adopted

Dec '25



Tired of being a blanket bison?



Jan '26

Home Habitats campaign helps thousands of Dorset residents take first step to cut energy bills



Feb '26

£16.5 million project announced to bring more than 3,000 on-street charge points across Dorset, supporting the switch to greener travel



Mar '26

Council responds to record number of flood-damaged roads

How we performed



Alongside our Council Plan priorities, we deliver a wide range of services that residents use and value. This section provides a snapshot of performance, highlighting areas of strong delivery and the progress we are making.

This year, Dorset Council has continued to deliver high-quality services for residents, even in the face of increasing demand and significant pressures. Across the area, this has been reflected in both the everyday services people rely on, and in how the council responded when communities needed support most.

One of the clearest examples of strong service delivery has been the national recognition of Dorset Council's Children's Services, which were rated "Outstanding" by Ofsted. This reflects the quality of support provided to children, young people and families, with strong early help services, effective safeguarding, and a clear focus on ensuring children feel safe, supported and able to thrive.

A recent Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection also rated our Adult Social Care Directorate as Good, highlighting that local authority staff demonstrated a strong commitment to prevention. Practice was recognised as both 'person centred and strengths based', and the inspection noted the 'unbeatable' level of support delivered through close-knit teams and highly collaborative working relationships.

Other frontline services have also been recognised nationally. Dorset Council's Building Control team was named Local Authority Building Control Team of the Year, highlighting the high standards, professionalism and customer focus that residents and local businesses can expect when interacting with the service. The team also successfully completed a rigorous inspection by the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) with no actions required under the Building Safety Act.

Throughout the year, the council has also demonstrated its ability to respond quickly and effectively during challenging situations, working alongside partner agencies as part of Dorset's Local Resilience Forum. During a period of severe winter weather and flooding, services worked alongside emergency responders and local communities to provide immediate support, protect infrastructure, and keep residents safe. Dorset experienced the second wettest January on record for the Wessex area, with around 190mm of rainfall (approximately 200% of the long-term average), culminating in Storm Chandra. The response included a range of road closures, temporary lights, liaison with flood wardens, gully clearance and jetting of drains, alongside supporting the evacuation and rehousing of residents who suffered flooded properties. Building on this, a £9.25 million recovery and resilience programme is now underway to repair damage and help communities better prepare for future extreme weather.

How we performed



Alongside these major events, day-to-day services have continued to perform strongly:

- Planning applications are being processed more efficiently than the national average⁹
- Waste and recycling services remain among the best performing in the country; in 2024/2025 Dorset Council was the 7th best performing council in England with a recycling and composting rate of 59.4%, compared to a national average of 43.8%¹⁰
- Our roads are in better-than-average condition when compared nationally¹¹
- Our greenspaces continue to thrive; we welcomed over 1.6 million visitors to our four country parks and delivered educational content to thousands of school children and visitors on heaths, wildlife and our local environment
- Libraries continue to deliver high impact community services, with over 7,600 events and activities delivered to more than 100,000 attendees, alongside supporting over 117,000 residents with information, advice and signposting.

These achievements reflect the dedication of staff across the organisation, who continue to deliver for residents whether responding to emergencies, supporting vulnerable people, or providing reliable and effective services every day.

⁹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Planning applications statistics. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-applications-statistics>

¹⁰ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Local authority collected waste management: annual results. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-collected-waste-management-annual-results>

¹¹ Department for Transport (n.d) Road condition statistics: data tables (RDC). Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/road-condition-statistics-data-tables-rdc>

Spending your money wisely



In 2025/26, the council delivered services through a £417 million budget, balancing investment in priority areas with the need to manage significant financial pressures. This has been made more challenging by Dorset's unfavourable national funding settlement. The council receives very little direct government support, with Revenue Support Grant and Rural Services Delivery Grant together accounting for just 1.2% of the council's income. As a result, the council relies heavily on council tax and business rates, which fund 98.8% of the budget. Further pressures have arisen from funding reforms that have reduced recognition of the additional costs associated with delivering services in rural areas.

Alongside many councils across the country, Dorset is facing rising demand for services, particularly in adult social care, housing and support for children and families; alongside wider pressures such as inflation and increasing costs.

Despite these challenges, the council achieved a small underspend of £169,000 at year-end (its first recorded underspend as

a unitary council) reflecting strong financial management in a very constrained funding environment.

A key part of managing the financial challenge has been taking a proactive approach to efficiency. The council has identified around £44 million in savings and efficiencies, including reducing third-party spend, improving how services are delivered, and making better use of resources.

At the same time, Dorset has secured significant additional funding to support local priorities. This includes over £8 million from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund¹², £19.5 million in Levelling Up funding for Weymouth¹³, and nearly £100 million through Local Growth Fund programmes¹⁴. Together, this funding is unlocking new opportunities, attracting private investment, supporting economic growth and reducing pressure on core council budgets.

During 2025/26, the council delivered a capital programme totalling £75.7m, supporting investment across infrastructure, housing, schools and corporate assets. The programme

continues to be heavily weighted towards highways, transport, and regeneration schemes.

Investment has also been significant in Children's Services, including SEND provision and school modernisation, alongside schemes supporting Adults and Housing. The programme is funded through a mix of external grants, borrowing and capital receipts, with a significant share coming from external funding, reducing the direct pressure on council resources while enabling delivery of priority projects. The programme is funded through a mix of external grants, borrowing and capital receipts, with a substantial proportion supported by external funding streams, helping to reduce the direct call on council resources while enabling delivery of priority projects.

While the financial outlook remains challenging with ongoing pressures and increased demand, the focus remains clear: prioritising spending where it has the greatest impact, protecting essential services, and ensuring that every pound spent delivers value for Dorset's residents.

¹² Dorset Council UK Shared Prosperity Fund 2025 to 2026. Available at: <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/w/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-2025-to-2026>

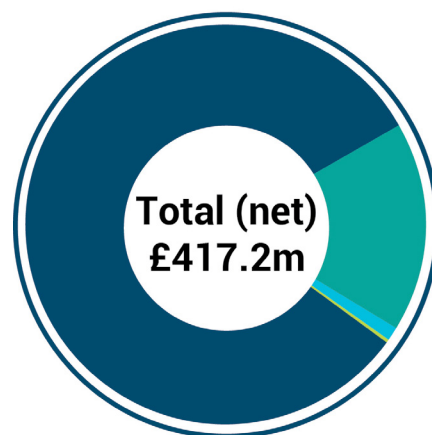
¹³ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Dorset receives £19.5 million to regenerate Weymouth (Levelling Up Fund Round 2). Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/dorset-receives-195-million-to-regenerate-weymouth-levelling-up-fund-2>

¹⁴ Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership Local Growth Fund. Available at: <https://www.dorsetlep.co.uk/local-growth-fund>

Spending your money wisely



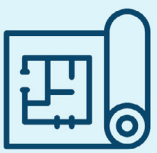
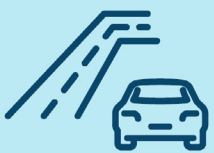
2025/26 Dorset Council sources of funding



- Council Tax £342m (82%)**
The money we receive from our residents to pay for the services we provide
- Retained Business Rates £70.2m (16.8%)**
The money we receive from businesses such as shops, offices, hotels and factories to pay for the services we provide
- New Homes Bonus £3.2m (0.8%)**
Specific grant from central government
- Revenue Support Grant £1.8m (0.4%)**
The funding we receive from central government in the form of revenue support grant

Spending your money wisely

2025/2026 - How will Dorset Council spend its money?

Adult social care  £159.6m	Children's social care  £72m	School travel & public transport  £41.1m	Street cleaning, waste collection & disposal  £35.4m	Education & learning  £15.3m
Environment & wellbeing  £8.3m	Customer services, libraries & archives  £7.9m	Housing  £7.7m	Planning  £6.1m	Highways & parking  £5.7m
Properties  £5.5m	Communities & Public Protection  £3.5m	Supporting businesses & creating jobs  £2.4m	Corporate Services & Central Finance *  £46.7m	Total budget £417.2m

* Includes Revenues & Benefits, Finance, Procurement, Human Resources, IT, Legal & Democratic Services

Transforming how we work



Over the past year, Dorset Council has continued to transform how it delivers services, taking important steps towards becoming a more modern, sustainable and resident-focused organisation. This work has been central to how the council has responded to increasing demand and financial pressure, while improving outcomes for residents and communities.

Our transformation activity has focused on three priorities:

- making it easier for residents to access services and get the support they need
- improving how the council works behind the scenes to reduce cost and duplication
- building a more joined-up organisation that can deliver change at pace and scale

Over the past year, services have been redesigned to be simpler, more accessible, and more responsive to local needs. This has included improving digital access, reducing hand-offs between teams, and creating a more consistent experience across services.

The Customer Hub has been established to bring together services that respond to enquiries from residents, partners and

communities in one place. This has included adult social care and prevention, libraries, school admissions, highways and planning.

This has:

- made it easier for residents to get help in one place
- improved response times and consistency
- reduced duplication across services which saves money

Alongside improvements to customer access, the council has streamlined how it operates behind the scenes.

The Business Support Hub has also been created, bringing together administrative and business support functions.

This has:

- supported better use of staff capacity
- enabled more consistent ways of working
- led to a reduction in duplication which saves money

Over the past year, the council has strengthened how transformation is led and delivered.

The Transformation Management Office (TMO) has been established, providing a single, coordinated approach to managing change. It has brought together previously separate activity, improving oversight, prioritisation and delivery.

This has ensured that:

- change activity has been better aligned to council priorities and financial plans
- resources have been focused on the areas of greatest impact
- progress and benefits have been tracked more consistently

This more disciplined approach has supported the delivery of change at pace while maintaining service stability.

The Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) programme has been launched to modernise how we work, bringing together processes and systems for finance, HR and procurement in a more joined-up way. Once in place, it will simplify everyday tasks and give teams better access to the information they need to work efficiently.

Looking ahead



Looking ahead, Dorset Council will continue to improve how we work in partnership and deliver for our residents. Our focus will remain firmly on what matters most to communities: delivering more homes; improving transport and connectivity; protecting our natural environment; strengthening the resilience of our coastal areas; creating sustainable economic opportunities and ensuring residents have a stronger voice in shaping their future.

This will require us to continue working in a coordinated and strategic way across the organisation and with our partners, embedding preventative approaches and making the best use of resources to deliver lasting outcomes. The examples and case studies throughout this report demonstrate the progress already being made, which we will continue to build on in the year ahead.

As national reforms move forward, the emerging Wessex devolution agenda presents a significant opportunity to strengthen local decision-making and deliver at scale. We will respond proactively to this evolving landscape, managing risks while actively pursuing opportunities to secure the best outcomes for Dorset.

We will also continue to strengthen Dorset's voice at a regional and national level. Through active engagement with government, MPs and partners and by contributing to the Wessex devolution agenda, we will seek to influence policy, remove barriers and unlock investment aligned to our priorities.

Further information



The links below provide further detail on our performance, priorities, and the frameworks that support delivery of the Council Plan:

- [How are we performing](#)
- [Strategic Performance Management Framework](#)
- [Risk Management Framework](#)
- [Dorset Council Plan](#)