

## Dorset Council March 2023 Report

### Dorset Council Budget

Dorset Council's budget of £348m for 2023-24 has been approved by councillors at the Full Council meeting on 14 February. This continues the council's commitment to maintain frontline services, without the need for cuts to balance the budget. Dorset Council provides around 450 different services to just under 380,000 residents. This year's budget setting exercise took place against a national background of extreme pressures for councils. These pressures include the high level of inflation which affects the cost of delivering council services, and also the continued growth in need for social care services as a result of the ageing population.

Council tax will increase next year by just under 2% and the adult social care precept by 2%. This is less than the maximum 5% increase available to councils, as outlined in the Government's Spending Review in December 2022. The increase is equivalent to £1.40 extra per week for a Band D property. This is a balanced budget in a national context of significant financial challenge. Our overriding aim has been to protect the essential frontline council services on which local residents and businesses rely. The proposals do include a council tax increase; however, we have kept to it to the minimum possible despite the high level of inflation and we continue to provide a range of support for those residents hardest hit by the cost of living.

Since becoming a unitary council in 2019, we have made efficiency savings of £76 million. This money has been reinvested to protect frontline services, including funding the growing need for adult social care with our ageing population. Our prudent budget management has meant that Dorset has not faced the same cuts to essential services as many other areas. However, we continue to lobby Government for fairer funding for Dorset so that we can reduce the burden on local taxpayers in future.

### Cost of Living Help

We have set aside £2M from our reserves to help residents with the cost-of-living crisis. This is a one-off allocation and we will use this to target financial support in the short-term and include some longer-term solutions to issues such as the challenge of energy costs for residents through property improvement schemes. More details next month.

### RUOK – Mental Health campaign to connect with you people – Mental Health Week

Public Health Dorset (PHD) launched a new children and young people's mental health campaign 'RUOK?' to coincide with Children's Mental Health Week. Recent research by Dorset Youth has shown that only 60% of Dorset young people know where to turn for mental health advice, so the campaign will address this by highlighting the wide range of mental health support available to children and young people in Dorset. This includes 24/7 crisis support from local and national helplines, NHS services in Dorset and support provided by local and national charities.

The campaign, produced on behalf of Dorset's Suicide Prevention Group, involves a wide range of partners including both councils, NHS Dorset, local NHS mental health services and the voluntary sector and has three areas of focus: A multi-channel communications campaign including news stories, social media and other content using real stories to highlight local and national support. A shareable graphic signposting to support that is easily accessible for young people which we're encouraging everyone to save on their phones and share with friends and loved ones and a targeted social media advertising campaign on Snapchat, Instagram and YouTube. If you would like to support the campaign or share with others in your community, you can use the following resources:

Shareable graphic – can be found on the PHD website: Shareable graphic - RUOK - Public Health Dorset - Dorset Council. Flyers, posters and digital screens –can be printed and displayed or contact Public Health Dorset if you require professionally printed copies. Social media – please share content from Public Health Dorset's social media pages (Facebook – Public Health Dorset; Twitter – @HealthyDorset; Instagram - @healthydorsetuk). Please do let PHD know if you need any additional information about this campaign and content by emailing PHDComms@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk.

### Still time to get flu and covid vaccines

Public Health Dorset is working with health colleagues to urge eligible people who haven't had their COVID-19 or flu vaccines to do so. Cases of flu and other respiratory viruses remain high in the community. The best

way to stay protected from flu and COVID-19 is to get vaccinated. First, second and booster doses of the COVID-19 vaccine are still available in Dorset, and some residents are also eligible for a seasonal booster. Information about how to get yours is available by visiting COVID-19 vaccination service ([dorsethealthcare.nhs.uk](http://dorsethealthcare.nhs.uk)). Lots of residents can get a free flu jab such as people aged over 65, pregnant women, and residents living with long term health conditions. All primary school children and some secondary school children are eligible for the flu nasal spray vaccination this year, which is usually given at school. Information about school immunisations can be found by visiting:

[www.dorsethealthcare.nhs.uk/schoolageimms](http://www.dorsethealthcare.nhs.uk/schoolageimms)

Parents and carers of children aged 2 and 3 are encouraged to get a free vaccine for their child. This flu vaccine is also a nasal spray with no needles involved.

Most young children will not have encountered flu yet, particularly as it was largely kept at bay by COVID-19 restrictions in the past few years. This means they will not have built up any natural immunity to the virus, so it is particularly important for them to get a flu vaccine this year.

Dorset residents can find out more about who is eligible for the flu vaccine and how to get one by visiting [www.nhs.uk/flu](http://www.nhs.uk/flu)

### **DC wins £19.5 Levelling up bid.**

Government has announced today, 19 January, that Dorset Council has been successful in securing £19.5 million of Levelling Up funding, intended for investment in Weymouth.

Dorset Council submitted an ambitious bid to the second round of the government's Levelling Up Fund last summer, with the aim of regenerating Weymouth's waterfront economy. The council will support the government's investment by making a contribution of £3.5m to project costs, making a total of £23m.

### **Second home report to be given extra opportunities for consideration.**

The Dorset Council has taken the decision to defer their "Council tax premiums on second homes and empty properties" report to allow more councillors to be involved before a decision is made.

The report recommends that the Council should take advantage of flexibilities contained in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill which, if it becomes law, will enable the introduction of a 100% council tax premium on second homes. This will be determined in time for the May report.