

HILTON PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of Hilton Parish Council held on Tuesday 9th January 2024

PRESENT: Catherine Langham (CL) (Chairman) Cllrs Justine McGuinness (JMcG), Shulla Jaques (SJ), Clive Jones (CJ), Rodney Northover (RN), George Sotiriadis (GS) (via Zoom), Marion Walbridge (MW), Unitary Councillor Jill Haynes (JH) (via Zoom)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr. David Green, Clerk (DG)

Members of the Public – None

- 1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES:** The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING:** The minutes of the previous Parish Council meeting held on the 7th November 2023 were agreed and signed the Chairman.
- 3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** Cllr Langham re Hilton PCC grant request, Cllr Jaques re Smithy Cottage planning application

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE LAST PC MEETING

Included within minutes below.

5. UNITARY COUNCILLORS REPORT

Cllr Haynes noted that Dorset Council would need to make savings of £10-12 million in the forthcoming year from a budget of around £370 million; it is anticipated that this will be manageable under the 'transformation process'. The Council will be re-purposing some existing buildings, for example libraries, to provide other services and consideration will be given as to whether some services can be outsourced or need to be provided at all.

Flooding is a major concern in the county with rising groundwater levels and river related issues. JMcG noted that blocked gullies were the main local concern. SJ mentioned a severe flooding event in Hilton and her belief that blocked drains along Village Road in Hilton may have contributed to this. JH advised that all gullies should be cleared twice yearly but if additional clearance is necessary this should be requested. Dorset Council is moving back to a system of 'Parish Maintenance Units' to deal with roads and drainage issues from March 2024.

It was pointed out that roads appear not to be being swept after re-surfacing and the loose gravel is blocking gullies. JH confirmed that the edges of potholes are no longer sealed for employee Health & Safety reasons. JH noted that recent rainfall has been exceptional and there is a real difficulty in dealing with this situation via existing drainage systems.

A complaint was raised concerning Dorset Council's intention to charge to straighten the 'Hilton' village sign, JH agreed to look into this.

6. OPEN FORUM

JMcG raised the issue of the sudden switch off of power supplies in Ansty and Melcombe Bingham on 18th December. This was apparently communicated by letter though not all households received this. The community is not happy that this took place shortly before Christmas in a rural area which had quite an impact. The Clerk will raise a complaint with SSEN.

7. HILTON ELECTRICITY SUPPLY ISSUES

The Chairman thanked Cllr Jones for his work in dealing with the on-going issue concerning the power line to Hilton. The landowners say that they are investigating burying the cable rather than dealing with the felling of nearby trees, citing the difficulty of safe working, and have asked for part funding of the cost of this from the PC. CJ noted that these ash trees could in fact be felled and the wood sold to cover the cost of the contractors' fees and in addition there may be a replanting grant available. It was agreed that the proposed burying of the cable is unlikely to be viable as SSEN don't invest in this activity unless reimbursed. The Parish Council certainly cannot provide any funding in relation to such an undertaking.

It was agreed that CJ would write to landowner suggesting a course of action and would explain the position of the Parish Council. This correspondence will be copied to Milton Abbas PC, given that the trees in question are actually in Milton Abbas Parish, although it is Hilton residents who are affected by power outages.

8. LOCAL BUSING REPORT

SJ noted that the service has been well used and is averaging weekly income of £ 51.33, which meets the breakeven criteria of £2,500 per annum. It is understood that Melcombe Horsey Parish have set up and contributed to the reserve account that backs the project. It has been agreed that the contribution of Hilton Parish is likely to be £ 625, if this is required.

9. PARISH EVENTS PLANNING

GS reported that a notice concerning D DAY 80 events has been posted to the Village News. A meeting will be held later in January to start the planning for the event. Consideration is being given to marking the event with an Annual Parish Picnic. It was noted that information from the Pageant Master had been received concerning the lighting of beacons to mark the day; it has been confirmed that a beacon will be lit in the Melcombe Horsey area. CL noted that usually the Bulbarrow beacon would be used to mark such occasions and confirmation of this will be sought.

10. GRANT APPLICATIONS

Hilton PCC - The Clerk reported that the PC had now received a formal grant application with financial information documentation from Hilton PCC, concerning an application to assist with churchyard maintenance. It was agreed that this work is of community rather than exclusively church benefit. It was agreed that the PCC had provided an impressive and detailed financial summary with their application. The Chairman noted that if the churchyard needed to be 'closed' at any stage, the full financial responsibility for maintaining this would fall on the Parish Council. It was unanimously agreed to provide a grant of £500 for 2024. Proposed CJ, 2nd SJ

Glebe Field – a formal grant application has been received to part fund the purchase of bee-keeping equipment, including hives and bees. It was agreed that this is a new and highly commendable project. It was unanimously agreed to provide a grant of £ 250. Proposed CJ, 2nd SJ

11. PLANNING APPLICATIONS, DECISIONS & ISSUES

There were no new applications requiring a decision at the meeting.

P/HOU/2023/07272 - Smithy Cottage Village Road Hilton Blandford Forum DT11 0DB - Erect summerhouse, (demolish existing).

The PC had agreed to support this application prior to the meeting due to the reply deadline imposed.

12. ELECTIONS 2024

The Clerk advised that the deadline for receipt of nominations by Dorset Council is 5th April 2024. The Clerk will circulate the nomination application form to all those interested in standing and asked that these be brought to the next PC meeting on 5th March. The Clerk will receive an updated electoral roll on 1st February to assist with application data and will make an appointment to take the completed nominations to either Blandford or Dorchester during March 2024. The first meeting of the new Council will not be until after 13th May 2024. If the election is uncontested and there are unfilled vacancies after 2nd May, these will be filled by co-option.

13. FINANCIAL MATTERS:

11.1 Finance report:

The Clerk reported that the balance bank was healthy at £10,208.

11.2 Retrospective payments approved:

Date	Amount	Payee	Reason
08/11/2023	£ 9.00	David Green	Expenses
10/11/2023	£ 23.98	G Sotiriadis	Wreath
10/11/2023	£ 50.00	Hilton PCC	Church clock
13/11/2023	£ 108.00	Defibstore	Defib pads
28/11/2023	£ 338.00	David Green	November 2023 pay inc arrears
01/12/2023	£ 500.00	Glen Brice	Glebe Field
08/12/2023	£ 143.88	Zoom US	Zoom renewal
21/12/2023	£ 35.89	C Jones	Land Reg fees
28/12/2023	£ 226.00	David Green	December 2023 pay

11.3 New payments

- Clerks expenses - £ 9.20 authorised.

11.4 Precept proposal

The Clerk proposed a precept request of £ 6,432 for 2024/2024, reflecting the general inflationary environment including pay agreements and making appropriate contingencies. Following the tax base revision, the impact of Council Tax will be an annual increase of £2.34 for a Band D property. It was **AGREED** to accept the precept request. Proposed CL, 2nd SJ

14. HIGHWAYS & RIGHTS OF WAY REPORTS

Hilton & Ansty Noticeboards – SJ noted that a quote from a local carpenter had been received and Cllr Jones had offered free wood which will reduce the cost of this. It was agreed to proceed with this work. Consideration will be given to replacing the Ansty (Brewery Hall) notice-board after the Hilton project has been completed.

Hilton Village sign – Dorset Council have advised that would charge to ‘straighten’ this sign. Referred to Cllr Haynes as noted above.

Blocked gullies – RN reported further instances of blocked gullies. The Clerk advised that these should be reported directly to Dorset Council using the online reporting tool.

Ansty Bridge railings - these have been inspected and will be re-inspected in April 2024 when hopefully the decision to reinstate will be taken.

15. CORRESPONDENCE:

Correspondence received in the period November 2023 to January 2024:

Date	From	Subject
14/11/2023	Wessex Internet	Important update - Wessex Internet is bringing full fibre broadband to Hilton
28/11/2023	Hilton PCC	Churchyard maintenance grant request
04/12/2023	Climate and Ecological	Notes from Nov C&EE meeting
06/12/2023	Stephen Musgrave	Glebe Field grant application
07/12/2023	DAPTC	Working Together Webinars - Dorset Council's Recycling Team 14 Dec @4pm
13/12/2023	Dorset Highways	Temporary Traffic Regulation Order for Church Row Hilton 18th March 2024
15/12/2023	Adrian Simmonds	Flood Alert for the Devil's Brook, Dorset (R. Piddle Trib)
19/12/2023	Dorset Council	FW: Hilton signs quotes
22/12/2023	DAPTC	Election Toolkit & Training Packages for May/Nov 2024
05/01/2024	DAPTC	letter from Bruno Peek CVO - Re D DAY 80 6th June 2024

16. ITEMS FOR THE NEXT AGENDA:

- Receipt of election nomination forms
- Hilton Noticeboard update

17. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Tuesday 5th March 2024 in the at the Fox Inn, Lower Ansty.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 20.10.

Signed(Chairman) Date

Report to the Parish Council October 2023 Councillor Jill Haynes, Chalk Valleys Ward, Dorset Council

Dear Clerks, Councillors and Residents,

Please find my Dorset Council report for November and December. There is still a lot more work to be done on the budget and in particular we will not know our actual government grant and settlement details until 21st December giving the number crunchers much unwanted work over Christmas. The weather has been particularly bad, and many have suffered with the high rainfall and flooding, my deepest sympathy if this has happened to you and if there is anything in particular I can assist with please let me know. I therefor wish you all a Merry Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

Dorset Shared Prosperity Investment Fund

The allocation to Dorset Council is £6.4M across three categories!! This is a HUGE amount of available grant funding so get your thinking hats on and apply.

The Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) and the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) are part of UK government Levelling Up policy. Their aims are twofold: To level up economically through improvements to productivity and to increase pride in place. They fulfil a broadly similar function to that covered by EU regional funding in the recent past, the main differences being (i) these funds are to be administered by Local Authorities rather than Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) and (ii) rules governing how the funding can be used are much less prescriptive. Funding is to be used for

three Investment Priorities: Community and Place, Local Business, and People and Skills. Funding can be used for any combination of 41 defined Interventions within the three Investment Priorities. The funds will be opening next week and are available to businesses, schools, towns and parishes, community groups and the voluntary sector on a first come first served basis. Please share this as widely as possible this is a great opportunity to get proper funding into our rural areas. Please check the Dorset Council website for the information there isn't a link for me to send just yet.

Planning update

As of the 6th December central government has agreed an increase in planning fees to reflect the true cost of determining an application. Fees will rise by 30% for major applications and 25% for other applications. The increase in fees come with an expectation on councils to make decisions in a timely manner. Decision times are being reduced from 23 weeks to 16 weeks with immediate effect on all applications paying the new rates. Failure to determine in the new timescale will result in a refund of the application fee.

Dorset Council is one of the largest planning authorities in the country and receives over 4000 applications every year. As previously mentioned in my reports recruitment continues to be a problem with considerable competition from the private sector. Our Building Control section is rated very highly and although we compete with private sector, we service over 70% of the market due to the good service provided. Currently there are 33 towns and parishes which have a neighbourhood Plan.

Budget

We are predicting that our end of year figure will be a £15M overspend on a total revenue budget of £361M. The bulk of the overspend has been due to the high rates of inflation during the year running at over 10%. Construction materials for our highways for example have risen by over 20%. Our budget for 24/25 will require savings across the council of £22M to be made in efficiencies in year. We are determined not to cut services but to look at ways of working differently to make the savings. It will mean that there will need to be some staff cuts as we streamline services.

We are assuming that inflation will run at 3.2% in the coming year. 1% variance inflation causes + or - £2.8M difference to Dorset Councils budget. The recently announced raise in the National Living Wage will be managed through our inflation assumptions. The draft budget is assuming that we will take the 3% increase in council tax and 2% increase in the Adult Social Care precept. It is disappointing that we did not receive any additional funding from central Government in the autumn statement and as a rural area council we are challenging central Government that the formula for funding is wrong and does not take into consideration the additional costs that a very rural area brings to the council. It makes me personally very cross that we are penalised in this way when London boroughs with much more business rates in their budgets get as much as quadruple the grant which Dorset receives.

Childrens services update

Dorset Council has 460 children in care of which some 66 are unaccompanied asylum seekers. The numbers of Dorset children in care are reducing and dropped 75 last year to this year. However, our cost remain the same as our provider costs have escalated this year partly due to inflation but also because some of the providers are to be quite frank making money for their shareholders from this area as they know there is insufficient provision. Some are showing profits of £500M in the last year. We are working hard to create our own children's accommodation in Dorset with four new sites opened this year to help control these costs. Some of the children in care have extremely high-cost placements because of their high needs. The NHS has closed all the mental health beds for level 4 the most complex cases and this has pushed these children out into council care. Our most expensive case costs over £60,000 a week! Our costs in this area have increased over 1000% in the last 5 years.

The key to controlling the costs is to know the children of our area and to provide support and help as early as possible. To help make our services accessible we are developing family hubs across the area with two opened this year and two more scheduled to open next year. We currently are working providing early help with some 1500 children to help keep them safe and well living with their own families. The council supports 7102 children with special needs, 601 children being home educated and importantly 295 young adults as care leavers. The service obviously also works closely with our schools and colleges, both council run, church schools and academies.

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IN ATTENDANCE: Mr. David Green, Clerk (DG)

Members of the Public – Three

1. **WELCOME & APOLOGIES:** The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING:** The minutes of the previous Parish Council meeting held on the 9th January 2024 were agreed and signed the Chairman.
3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** None
4. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE LAST PC MEETING**

Hilton Power failures

The Chairman reported that considerable progress has been made following referral of the issue to Simon Hoare MP by Chris Slater. The Parish Council has been advised that an improvement scheme is now scheduled for the summer although no details are available at this stage. SSEN have also advised that they are discussing issues with a landowner.

5. **UNITARY COUNCILLORS REPORT**

Cllr Haynes reported that Dorset Council had confirmed that double Council Tax would be applied to empty homes from 1st April 2024 and to holiday homes from 1st April 2025. The revenue receipts of around £8 million would be shared with all precepting authorities. A percentage of these funds would be used for affordable housing for local people, although it wasn't clear at this stage how the allocation would be made. Cllr Haynes confirmed that there would be further detail from central government on exemptions but it was likely that those properties which had planning permission to be solely holiday lets would be exempt and that future planning applications would be considered on a case by case basis. The Parish would be informed when further government guidance was available.

Cllr Haynes reported that flooding is an issue in parts of the county, particularly due to rising ground water levels in places such as Sydling St Nicholas. The condition of local infrastructure is being considered with Chris Loder MP. Dorset Council will allocate resources to acquiring land for carbon offsetting to address the phosphates issues relating to the Poole catchment area. A new fund for community projects has been launched

6. **OPEN FORUM**

David Sharman, candidate for the Liberal Democrats, introduced himself to Parish Councillors as did two prospective Parish Councillors.

7. **Local policing issues & Neighbourhood watch consideration –**

Following recent burglaries and other incidents JMcG had discussed setting up a local What's App group with interested parties. This would be used as a means of providing a local 'alert' system for Melcombe Bingham, Ansty and Hilton. This will be a community rather than Parish Council project and would be preferable to a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme, which has been rather superseded.

8. **Hilton Village Noticeboard replacement update**

SJ confirmed that the new noticeboard had now been installed, was of a very high standard and should hopefully be maintenance free for a least a couple of years. A replacement board for the Brewery Hall will be discussed with John Lilley. The PC thanked SJ for co-ordinating this work and CJ for providing the wood free of charge.

9. Tree planting initiative

CJ suggested that planting of oaks to replace lost ash trees along the roadside would be a good idea but would require careful co-ordination with landowners. SJ also suggested planting along Rights of Way could also be considered. It was agreed to seek funding information from the Woodland Trust.

10. Elections 2024 – nominations

The Chairman and Council thanked Cllrs McGuinness, Jaques and Jones, who were retiring as Councillors, for all their work for the Parish over many years.

Nominations for the 2024 Election were collected by the Clerk and will be submitted to Dorset Council. If the election is contested there will be a cost to the Parish Council which will be met from earmarked reserves.

11. PLANNING APPLICATIONS, DECISIONS & ISSUES

There were no new applications requiring a decision at the meeting.

12. FINANCIAL MATTERS:

12.1 Finance report:

The Clerk reported that the reserves balance was in a good position, at this stage of the year, at £8,811.95, including a general reserve of £ 4411.90

12.2 Retrospective payments approved:

Date	Amount	Payee	Reason
10/01/2024	£ 250.00	Glen Brice	Glebe Field
10/10/2024	£ 500.00	Hilton PCC	Grant
10/01/2024	£ 9.00	David Green	Expenses January 2024
11/01/2024	£ 186.00	HMRC	Q3 PAYE
29/01/2023	£ 226.00	David Green	January 2024 pay
28/02/2024	£ 226.00	David Green	February 2024 pay

11.3 New payments - Clerks expenses - £ 27.58 authorised.

7. HIGHWAYS & RIGHTS OF WAY REPORTS

- **Hilton Village sign** – Dorset Council have 'straightened' this sign.
- **Blocked gullies** – RN reported further instances of blocked gullies.
- **Ansty Bridge railings** – a re-inspection in April 2024 is awaited

8. CORRESPONDENCE:

Correspondence received in the period January to March 2024:

Date	From	Subject
10/01/2024	DAPTC	Working Together Webinar 18 January 2024 at 4pm via Zoom

16/01/2024	Maria Pollard, Dorset Council	Hilton sign straightening - re -quoted
30/01/2024	Democratic Services, Dorset Council	Information about standing as a local councillor for Dorset Council in 2024
30/01/2024	Chris Slater	Hilton Power Failures
31/01/2024	Rogan Craik, SSEN	Hilton Power Failures
01/02/2024	DAPTC	Election 2024 Resources - Dorset Council Area
05/02/2024	Dorset Highways	Revised Temporary Traffic Regulation Order for Church Row Hilton on the 21st of March 2024
06/02/2024	Climate and Ecological	Notes from January C&EE meeting
06/02/2024	Chris Slater	Letter to Simon Hoare MP, re power outages
08/02/2024	DAPTC	Training at a Glance
08/02/2024	DAPTC	DAPTC Councillors' Networking Event 7 March
08/02/2024	DAPTC	Dorset Local Transport Plan 4 Consultation
09/02/2024	Simon Hoare MP	RE: Power Failures Hilton Dorset
19/02/2024	Rogan Craik, SSEN	RE Hilton Power failures
20/02/2024	Dorset CPRE	talk by George Hosford on The Future of Farming in North Dorset
20/02/2024	DAPTC	Training & Events at a Glance Test
20/02/2024	DAPTC	Recognition for long serving councillors stepping down in May
22/02/2024	Dorset Highways	Revised Temporary Traffic Regulation Order for Church Row Hilton on the 20 th of March 2024
29/02/2024	Dorset Highways	TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF CHURCH ROW, HILTON

9. ITEMS FOR THE NEXT AGENDA:

- Annual Meeting of the Parish Council, Parish Meeting and PC meeting

10. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Tuesday 14th May 2024 in the at the Fox Inn, Lower Ansty.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 20.00.

Signed(Chairman) Date

Report to the Parish Council January 2024 Councillor Jill Haynes, Chalk Valleys Ward, Dorset Council

Double Council Tax for second homes up for vote

At the Full Council meeting of Dorset Council on 13th February I will be bringing a paper to ask members to consider agreeing to the recent legislation within the Levelling Up bill that will allow us to charge second homeowners double council tax. The number of people buying houses as second homes in Dorset has continued to increase and is responsible in part for the shortage of affordable homes here. Living in Dorset is a privilege and I hope that at least a proportion of the extra revenue that this could bring to the council will be used to support building affordable housing for local people. More on the next month

Dorset Council tops the national polls for recycling!

DEFRA have just published the annual recycling figures for 2022/23. We have just found out that we are the **number one** unitary and disposal authority in the Country for the first time ever!

(Those ahead of us are collection only councils (i.e. the figures are on the kerbside service only and do not include Household Recycling Centres).

This is testament to the commitment of our residents; our waste strategy teams and our frontline waste operatives. This is a fantastic achievement for Dorset and one that we are hugely proud of.

Tree-mendous grant opportunity (sorry!)

A new grant scheme aimed at supporting local communities to plant and care for trees in their area is now open for applications.

Funded by Dorset Council and managed by the Dorset National Landscape team, the [Dorset Community Tree Fund](#) is open to community organisations in the Dorset Council area. This includes parish and town councils, as well as schools and other established community groups interested in planting and caring for trees in their patch.

Trees play a crucial role in our natural world, from providing homes for wildlife to tackling climate change. However, planting the wrong tree in the wrong place can have a negative impact on local wildlife, communities, and landscape.

So, unlike traditional tree planting schemes, the [Dorset Community Tree Fund](#) goes beyond just providing grants for trees. It also offers support for the planning and design phases of planting projects. This extra support can help make sure trees and hedges planted in and by communities have a positive impact on Dorset's natural environment for years to come.

Almost half a million pounds awarded to local culture

Dorset Council Organisational Revenue Support Fund for Culture has awarded £486,000 to 28 organisations over the next three years.

A total of 41 applications were received from arts and heritage organisations and accredited museums. A total of £217,000 has been awarded to arts and heritage and £269,000 to accredited museums.

This funding has been spread across the Dorset Council area to ensure residents and communities have cultural benefit around the county. All the organisations awarded with this money are based in and deliver their programmes within the council's boundaries.

Dorset Council prepares to sell old District Council office site and buildings in Wimborne

Dorset Council has instructed its agents to begin marketing the vacant buildings and site of the old East Dorset District Council (EDDC) offices in Furzehill, Wimborne.

Following Local Government Reorganisation in 2019, the unitary authorities of Dorset Council and BCP Council were created to replace the county's former district and borough councils. As Furzehill was declared surplus to requirements by EDDC, Dorset Council inherited the empty office buildings.

Following Cabinet's approval of the Council's capital programme in March 2023, Furzehill was identified as a priority to sell to generate capital receipts. Capital receipts are money that councils can spend on funding other capital expenditure – such as land, buildings, and equipment - or for paying off debt. They generally cannot be used to fund services.

The Furzehill site consists of 2.73 hectares (6.76 acres) which was allocated for residential development and other alternative uses in the Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plan back in 2014.

Cabinet approves next steps in Levelling Up journey for Weymouth

At its meeting on Tuesday 30 January, Dorset Council's Cabinet agreed to approve recommendations to progress vital next steps in the Levelling Up programme of work.

In January 2023 Dorset Council was awarded £19.5m by Government to help regenerate Weymouth's Waterside Economy. The council's ambitions include essential enabling groundworks to allow the eventual development of several key sites in the town.

North Quay and Weymouth Bowl

Included in the recommendations discussed by councillors, was a request from officers to start a procurement process which will seek one or more development partners to develop both the North Quay and Weymouth Bowl sites. This would be subject to planning consent to demolish the old bowling alley on the St Nicholas Street site and an agreement from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to repurpose an amount of Levelling Up funding originally allocated to New Bond Street.

The former Weymouth and Portland Borough Council offices at North Quay are currently mid-demolition and until plans for a development in its place can be agreed upon, the site will become additional, temporary car parking. It is hoped the temporary car park will be ready in time for the Easter break later in spring.

A planning application to demolish the former bowling alley site is live on the council's website and is inviting comments from local people and businesses. A decision on this application is due to be made at the beginning of March by the council's Western and Southern Planning Committee. Following a robust soft market testing process, the council's property advisers recommend that the best strategy for future development on the North Quay site is for the council to dispose of it through a procurement process. This will allow the council to retain a considerable degree of control over the design and quality of any future build. Councillors have agreed that this is the best approach and approved the recommendation.

A vision for the Harbour and Peninsula

Councillors also agreed to adopt a vision for the Harbour and Peninsula areas of Weymouth. A vision was developed by Professor Tony Bovaird, commissioned by Dorset Council to establish its ambitions, following engagement with stakeholders. The report divides the strands of proposed regeneration activity at the Harbour and Peninsula into short, medium and long-term options. Councillors agreed that the short and medium-term options are taken forward for progression, and the long-term options outlined in the report to be revisited at a later date.

Round 4 of the Household Support Fund reopens for applications

Round 4 of the Household Support Fund (HSF) will reopen for applications at 10am on Tuesday 6 February 2024 for low-income households in the Dorset Council area.

The government scheme funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, provides support in the form of supermarket vouchers. Citizens Advice will be allocating this fund on behalf of Dorset Council and vouchers will be issued to residents who meet the eligibility criteria within 6 to 8 weeks.

Dorset Council households will be able to apply if they:

- pay council tax to Dorset Council
- have an annual household net income of less than £30,000 and
- have savings of less than £16,000 and
- **have not applied** for a previous HSF payment within the last 6 months (since August 2023)

Calculations for the annual net income should not include Personal Independence Payments, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Carers Allowance or Child Benefit. Applications are limited to one per household.

Residents should apply online. The application form will open at 10am. Find more details including future application window dates here: <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/household-support-fund>

If you need help completing the form, you can telephone Customer Services on 01305 221000 or visit a [customer access point](#).

For further information on all the support available, whether be access to food, money and debt advice or support with your household bills, visit our cost of living webpages at [dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help](https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help).

Could you offer a stepping stone to a young person leaving care?

Supported Lodgings can help young people who are leaving our care, experience the transition to adulthood in a safe and secure environment, whilst learning emotional and practical skills that will help them thrive.

We want to end the 'cliff edge of care' that can happen when young people turn 18 years old, and to do this, we need more people to open their homes and become Supported Lodgings carers.

Katie* has been living with a Dorset Council Supported Lodgings provider for the past three years and says:

"My experience in supported lodgings has been really positive and it has taught me a lot. I've learnt lots of things that have grown my confidence and made me feel ready for moving on. I've made a great connection with my supported lodgings provider, and she has supported me through anything I've needed help with."

Supported Lodgings is often able to be combined with a career or busy lifestyle as you do not need to provide full-time care. Sharon Cooper, age 56, lives in Wimborne and is a Dorset Council Supported Lodgings provider who also runs her own business. Over the last 10 years, Sharon has looked after around 10 young people between the ages of 16-25. She said: "I enjoy helping the young people achieve their goals or aims in life no matter how big or small, and watching them grow and develop as people. When you provide Supported Lodgings, you have a fantastic support

network around you, including help from Dorset Council's Fostering service and other Supported Lodgings providers."

All Dorset Council [Supported Lodgings](#) carers receive training and support and are paid an allowance to assist with day-to-day living costs. To find out more, [visit our website](#) or contact fosteringenquiries@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report to the Parish Council February 2024

Council Tax Premium on Second homes and empty houses in Dorset

I was pleased to present the paper to full council on this matter and to have received the support of fellow councillors at full council.

For those properties classified as Long-Term Empty and Unoccupied a 100% premium will, from 1 April 2024, this will be applied after one year rather than the existing 2 years.

The introduction of the 100% council tax premium on second homes will come into effect on 1 April 2025, making a total council tax charge of 200%. Unlike empty dwellings, there is no requirement for a property to have been used as a second home for a fixed period of time before the premium can apply so it becomes chargeable from day one that a property is considered a second home (or dwelling periodically occupied).

Where exceptions are provided for in law and once final regulations have been provided, Dorset Council will adopt and apply such exceptions. The council website will be updated as soon as this information is available.

The additional funding will be distributed to all precepting authorities and Dorset Council are looking to spend a percentage of the new monies on affordable homes.

Voters encouraged to get their ID ready ahead of this year's local elections

Residents are reminded that they will need to be registered to vote and show an approved form of photo ID when they go to the polling stations on 2 May to elect for Dorset Council councillors as well as Town and Parish Councils.

The Police and Crime Commissioner elections also takes place on the same day.

Following the Elections Act 2022, photographic identification is a mandatory requirement for everyone voting at polling stations.

Residents will also need photo ID to vote at parliamentary general elections, expected to be called sometime this year.

Various forms of photo ID are accepted, including a driving licence, passport, Older Person's Bus Pass, a blue badge or Disabled Person's Bus Pass. The full list of accepted ID can be found [here](#). Residents can also use an expired ID as long as the photograph is still a good likeness.

For those without accepted photo ID, a [free Voter Authority Certificate can be obtained online](#). Applications must be submitted by Wednesday, 24 April to be processed in time for the 2 May elections. The Voter Authority Certificate is valid for 10 years and is valid for all elections.

If you need further guidance, you can also contact the Electoral services team on:

Email: elections@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Tel: 01305 838299

To cast your vote in the upcoming elections, you must be registered by Tuesday, 16 April, 2024. If you're not already registered, you can complete the process on the [Government's website](#). Voters only need to register once, unless they have changed their name or address.

Postal votes: There is no need for people to provide photo ID if you vote by post, but you will need to give your National Insurance number and date of birth. Once your [postal vote](#) is set up, whenever an election, referendum or poll at which you are entitled to vote is called, you will be sent a postal poll card giving details of the forthcoming election, referendum or poll. This will be followed by a postal vote pack.

Bike It Plus - More children are now cycling to school in Dorset thanks to the success of the Bike It Plus project, says a [new report](#). Bike It Plus, which is funded by Dorset Council and run by the charity [Sustrans](#), has been working with schools across Dorset to help encourage more young people to walk, cycle or wheel to school. In the past year, the project has supported over 36 schools to deliver fun and engaging activities that boost the skill levels of young people in walking,

wheeling or cycling. Giving children and their parents the confidence and ability to travel to and from school actively. The sessions have proven to be very popular and last year were attended by over 15,000 children, staff and parents. As a result, over 470 children in the county have been supported to learn how to ride a bike or improve their cycling skills. According to the project, this has led to an increase in the number of children now travelling to school by active means. The team recently surveyed schools supported through the project and over 65% of respondents said they had seen a rise in the number of pupils now using an active mode of transport to get to school.

Council approves a balanced budget - Dorset Council's budget of £377 million for 2024-25 has been approved by councillors at the Full Council meeting on 13 February. This continues the council's commitment to maintain frontline services, without the need for cuts to balance the budget. This year's budget setting exercise once again 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 services that we provide to some of our most vulnerable residents. Dorset Council provides around 450 different services to just under 380,000 residents. While Dorset Council is not in the same financial position as many other councils across the UK, council tax will increase next year by just under 3 per cent and the adult social care precept by 2 per cent this is essential to ensure that services are not cut. The increase is equivalent to £1.82 extra per week for a Band D property.