

Dorset Council April 2022 Report

A statement from the Leader of Dorset Council, Cllr Spencer Flower on the crisis in Ukraine:

We are deeply saddened by the tragic events unfolding in Ukraine. Our thoughts are with those affected by this conflict and we are following the situation closely. Dorset Council has a proud history of welcoming new arrivals at times of crisis to offer homes and support so families and individuals can build new lives here.

We are waiting for the Government to further clarify details of its schemes for Ukrainian refugees so we can plan effectively and quickly. We will keep you updated with how you can help with this as soon as we know more. We understand many people are very concerned about the situation in Ukraine and want to help. At the moment, the best way you can help is the best way to help is by making a cash donation to an organisation such as the British Red Cross or Save the Children who are responding to the humanitarian crisis. These organisations are already working on the ground and can direct support in the quickest and most appropriate ways. In addition, we are currently participating in a number of refugee resettlement schemes, and we do require more private, affordable homes in Weymouth and Dorchester for refugee families. If you are able to help with our housing needs, please contact refugeehousing@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Dorset Council and BCP Council have joined voices from across the country – indeed the world – in support of the people of Ukraine, and the country's flag is now flying from both Dorset County Hall and Bournemouth Civic Centre., County Hall will also be lit in yellow and blue.

Relationships with Russia

A number of you have asked about any connections we may have with Russia or Russian companies. To the best of our knowledge, Dorset Council does not have any direct relationship with Russia or Russian companies.

In terms of energy suppliers, Dorset Council does not have any direct contractual links with Gazprom, or any other Russian supply. We have a contract for gas via Laser buy group with Total Gas & Power, and liquid gas with FloGas. It's worth saying we do not necessarily know about the full supply chains of those we contract with. We are committed to reducing our carbon footprint and our reliance on fossil fuels and along with significant investment over the next five years, in services for residents and in our buildings, we are also working to divert our pension fund away from investment in fossil fuels.

We do have some indirect exposure to Russian companies through the pension fund's investments in an emerging markets equity fund managed by Brunel Pension Partnership, Dorset's investment pooling manager. The value of this exposure is estimated to be approximately £5m or 0.13% of the pension fund's total assets of £3.8bn.

Letter to Michael Gove following a meeting between the Leader and Officers of Dorset Council (about Planning)

I am grateful to you and your team for giving time on Monday to talk about Dorset's bold vision for the future. We are an ambitious council that wants to help achieve growth and prosperity for our communities. In particular, we talked about the planning challenges and your Chief Planner explained Government's future plans for planning reform. In my letter

to you of 17 January, I set out our ambition and flexibilities I am seeking and now that we have discussed the matter further, feel that my proposals for Dorset sit well with your future plans for wider reform. Indeed, I offered for Dorset to be a pilot for such reforms, and I stand by that offer.

We would like to use that pilot to develop a Local Plan which would run to 2050 and including the new settlement or settlements for Dorset. As you know, we are already working with your officials and Homes England to review sites for a new settlement, and we have identified a number of potentially sustainable sites. We have arranged a seminar with the Dorset Council Cabinet members and your officials to be held on 23 March, where we will progress the work already started and look in greater detail at these proposals. However, in order to make a reality of this more ambitious approach, we need some flexibility to our current Local Plan process. We are seeking an extension to the timeframe of two years to May 2026 and freedoms and flexibilities from the five-year local housing supply and delivery requirements. We know that this was something which was granted to Oxfordshire when they similarly were seeking to develop a more ambitious growth plan. We have looked at the specific technical requirements of such a request and would be pleased to share this thinking with your Chief Planning Officer as she develops her response following our meeting. The slightly longer timescale will enable us to fully embed the objectives set out in our Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and Plan which has been well received locally and is regarded more widely in the sector as an example of best practice. It was also valuable to touch if all but briefly, on the matter of local government financing and I am grateful for your offer of a further meeting with the appropriate Minister to discuss the details of the very serious pressures we face in the medium to longer term.

I do hope that we can keep an open dialogue on this matter and also on the currently pressing matter of the Dorset Local Plan. I am really grateful for your intention to get a response back to me within the next two weeks. As I mentioned, we currently have the initiative against the various pressure groups. Any significant delay would certainly mean impact in being able to maintain the upper hand.

Domestic Abuse

Residents who have experienced domestic abuse will receive further support after Dorset Council received £650,000 of government funding. The grant will be used in the next 12 months to make residents who have experienced any form of domestic abuse safer in their own homes, or in supported accommodation, as well as provide specialist support for their children. The extra investment can be used to finance security devices to allow people experiencing domestic abuse to remain in their own homes along with the support of family, friends, to avoid the disruption of moving away. Funding will also help rebuild the lives and confidence of those who have felt the only way to escape domestic abuse is to move to a refuge.

Illegal puppy breeding

Dorset Council has become a driving force for the prevention of illegal puppy breeding across the county. Asking people across Dorset to 'Stop and Think' before buying a puppy. Dorset Council Trading Standards and Environmental Health Teams are working together to raise awareness of the multi-million-pound puppy breeding trade that is happening right under our noses. Covid 19 has brought a significant increase in both the selling of illegal puppies and the cost of puppies. With more people working from home, dog ownership has become more attractive and easier. This very lucrative market means that puppies are

being sold from unlicensed breeders, too often without any consideration of the welfare and environmental needs of the puppy. An unlicensed puppy breeder is someone who does not have a dog breeding licence but who earns more than £1000 per year from selling puppies. Dorset Council has updated its website facilities to allow users to check if breeders are licensed, to report unlicensed breeders, and tips on knowing what to look for when buying a puppy. More information on the Council website, [Buying and selling Dogs](#).

Fuel Poverty

Thanks to generous donations from residents in Dorset, over £75K have been raised to help older people struggling to stay warm this winter. Dorset Council, working closely with The Dorset Community Foundation and Citizens Advice launched an appeal earlier this year asking people to donate any winter fuel payments they did not need to help others being able to afford heating their homes without scrimping on food. According to government estimates, there are 19,000 people in Dorset living in fuel poverty – this means they cannot afford to heat their home. As energy prices continue to rise, even more older people will be left cold in their homes and exposed to the risks arising from their body temperature dropping too low. But thanks to the generous donations, more vulnerable older people in need will stay warm over the coming months.

The funds have been allocated to Citizens Advice who are distributing Surviving Winter grants to those households who are in fuel poverty.

Pupils School's choice

On Tuesday 1 March, young people across Dorset found out which school they will be joining this September. Nearly 98 per cent have been offered their first choice of secondary school and just under 99 per cent offered their upper school of choice. 97.69 per cent of pupils due to start secondary school (Year 7) have been offered their first choice. For those starting upper school (Year 9), 98.64 per cent have been given a place at their preferred school.