

200518 Cranborne & Alderholt Ward Dorset Councillor Report for Alderholt Parish Council

Most of the Council's work is being driven by the response to the current Covid-19 pandemic.

The Council has not furloughed any staff, and around 2,500 employees are now working from home – other than refuse, roads etc. The IT team has been extremely busy setting up all these home workers.

Many of the staff are being deployed outside their normal jobs to assist with issues directly caused by the pandemic.

The Council has suspended all physical Council and Committee meetings due to social distancing requirements. The new legislation brought out by the government has now allowed virtual meetings to be held remotely – with requirements that the public are able to observe live.

However, the Council has been very slow to use this new ability, Cabinet on 5th May was the first proper meeting – although we have had 4 webinars over 4 weeks, where Councillors can listen to information from Portfolio holders, and hear responses to previously submitted questions. Other than Cabinet, then only a few Planning Committee meetings are to be held and two of the Executive Advisory Panels will go ahead, the Climate Change Panel, and the Local Plan Panel. I understand only one of the Scrutiny Committees will be held. All of these will use MS Teams and be remote meetings.

Several of us on the Lib Dem Group have asked why we can't do more with remote meetings, but we don't seem to be getting very far – Senior Leadership team feel its too hard to do effectively – so we are being run mainly by the delegation rules, which means that officers and Cabinet are pretty much running the show.

The response to Covid-19 has imposed a huge financial burden on the Council. Income is very much reduced – eg Car Parks are empty, fees and charges are reduced – and expenditure is very much increased. The Council produced a balanced budget of £304 million for this FY, but the targets within that for savings will not be met. Indeed the forecast is for additional costs of around £53.6 Million – there has been Government Aid from the two tranches of support of £1.6 Billion each – Dorset Council's share of this was £10.6 million and £10.4 million respectively. Without further Government funding this will lead to a shortfall of £32.6 million. Dorset Council has Reserves of £28 million, so even exhausting them would not close the gap. Dorset – like most Local Authorities (and we are better placed than many) we need a great deal of help from Government.

To co-ordinate activity 10 cells have been set up, each with a nominated lead

1. Community Shield

To co-ordinate the provision of food, medicine and emotional support to those people and families identified on the "Shielded" list – and working with registered Volunteer groups within the community, as well as

NHS Dorset CCG,
Dorset Health Care Foundation Trust
Primary Care Networks
Public Health
Dorset & Wilts Fire and Rescue
MOD Planners

2. Property

Co-ordinating the safe management of all Dorset Council properties including

Closures
Restricted access
Repurposing where necessary
Facilities Management including deep clean where required
Providing accommodation for services such as Social Care, Key Workers and the Homeless

3. Workforce

It became apparent that several critical services had a shortage of staff, whilst other areas were over staffed. A skills survey matched employees skills to the Council's needs and around a 100 staff have subsequently been redeployed in to the areas of shortage. Many others have been moved within their own teams, and for example the Libraries staff were mostly redeployed to work within the telephone hub.

4. Commercial

This has been responsible work with Dorset residents and businesses in relation to the package of financial measure set out by the Government involving

Hardship fund
Business Rates Relief
Business Grants
Supplier Relationships (The council has changed payment terms to suppliers to immediate rather than 30 Days)
Fees and Charges

5. Transport and logistics

Co-ordination of delivery of food and prescriptions – redeploying Council vehicles and employees as appropriate

6. PPE

Normally the Council does not buy or distribute PPE except to its own workers who require it. For the purpose of this crisis though the Council has developed a PPE Hub, in close co-operation with BCP. Priority is being given to social care colleagues. Supply chains are still uncertain, and there is concern around rising costs from suppliers.

7. Testing

Co-ordinating a whole Dorset approach but with significant challenges in place. Many Care home workers do not have personal transport and getting to a testing station is an issue, exacerbated by social distancing. There was a problem in Blandford recently where booked appointments for tests were not able to be carried out, leading to several people making unnecessary journeys

8. Digital

Set up to support services and other Cells with technical aspects of their work and to help get 2500 employees successfully working from home, and has created a number of web based solutions to make the work of other cells more effective.

9. Safety

Supports Dorset Children in relation to:

School and Early Years provision for vulnerable children and those of key workers

Remote Education for children unable to attend school

Teacher resilience during Covid-19 closures

Free School Meals

Domestic abuse

10. Recovery

Will undertake an impact analysis and create a Recovery strategy for Dorset focusing on the economy, welfare and wellbeing of residents and employees.