

210216 Alderholt & Cranborne Ward Dorset Councillor Report for Cranborne & Edmondsham Parish Council

Budgets & Finance

The Budget Strategy Report set out that Dorset Council will increase general council tax by 1.997%, and will levy 2.995% on the social care precept, providing a Dorset Council tax figure of £1779.39 for a Band D property.

Dorset Council’s share of the national £1.55Bn provided by Central Government to fund Covid-19 pressures will be £8.6 Million. This will be added to Contingency reserves to allocate against costs as they arise.

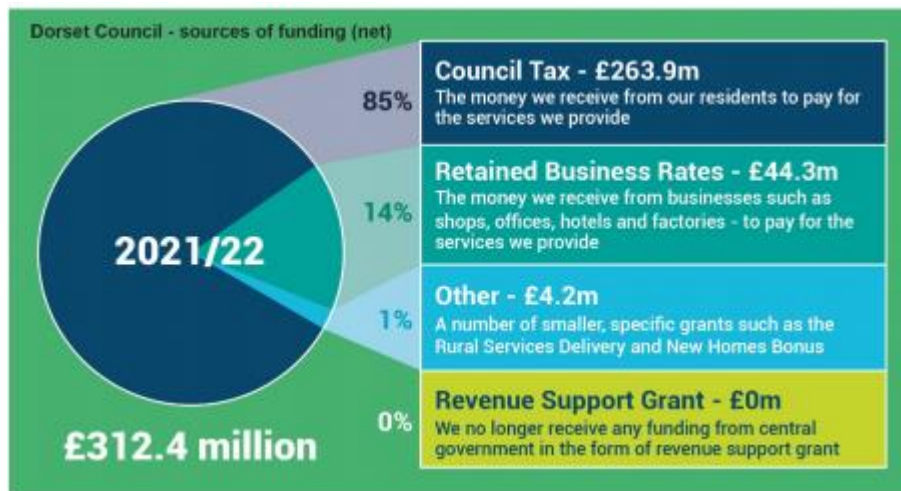
The Council’s Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) shows that whilst the budget gap has been closed for the next (21/22) Financial Year, there is still work to be done to around future projections – which could potentially rise to a cumulative budget gap of nearly £40 Million in FY 25/26.

Medium Term Financial Plan summary					
	MTFP Yr1	MTFP Yr2	MTFP Yr3	MTFS Yr4	MTFP Yr5
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Council tax	263.905	271.197	278.691	286.392	294.303
Business rates (NDR funding)	44.312	44.534	44.756	44.980	45.205
Other grants treated as general funding	4.177	3.515	2.475	2.475	2.475
Total funding	312.394	319.245	325.923	333.847	341.983
Budget requirement	312.394	328.199	345.100	362.984	381.416
Budget gap (cumulative)	0.000	(8.954)	(19.177)	(29.137)	(39.434)

The tactical and transformational savings which have always been a part of the logic of creating a Unitary Council will be key balancing the future budgets, and Councillors need to continue to look closely at how these targets are being met.

there are also a number of grants in our funding for 2021/22 which are not yet baselined and are therefore at risk in future spending reviews. These include, for example, the improved better care fund and the social care support grant; the latter of these having been increased by £0.3bn national, although only £426k of that came to Dorset as much of the funding was applied to “equalisation”. This creates an issue in that councils with relatively high council tax are forced to raise it further still (through the social care precept) because they do not

get a proportionate or equitable share of additional grant. Dorset Council leadership must continue its work with Government to rectify this.



Children in Care

As of the end of November 2020, there were 476 children in care; a rate for Dorset of 70 per 10,000 - against neighbouring authority average of 65. To reduce the number of children to a rate per 10,000 comparable with neighbouring authorities would mean a care population of 390. It is estimated that this would take three years to achieve.

As of the end of November 2020, 41% of all children in care were placed outside of the Dorset area – some 194 children and young people. To reduce this percentage to the target figure of 30% would require the creation of, or assured access to, 51 additional places for children and young people in Dorset. This growth in capacity in Dorset would reduce the need to send children outside of Dorset and away from their family, friends and school.

St Mary's School Purchase

Dorset Council has purchased the St Mary's School buildings and site, near Shaftesbury but in Wiltshire, at a cost of £10.5 Million, and is required to go out to Public Consultation regarding the best use of the site. The cost of the purchase has come from Dorset Council's capital budget, and the use of the site is expected to offset revenue expenditure that would otherwise be incurred elsewhere by the Council.

St Mary's is currently a large, well-equipped school, which was run as a private school until last summer. It is set within large grounds and has extensive educational facilities. The buildings date from the early 20th century to the 21st century, however despite appearances, it is not a historic building.

There is a main school building, assembly hall, large canteen refectory, many classrooms and small study rooms, as well as science laboratories, an art block and studios. There is a music block built in 2003 with an auditorium, a language block built in 1990s, conference facilities, a junior school built in 2000, a medical centre and a library. There is a drama studio which was converted in 1995, a gymnasium and purpose-built sports hall developed in 1992 with changing rooms and an indoor swimming pool complex built in 2006. There is also extensive living accommodation (former boarding houses) built from 1990s and extended in 2011, staff houses, a chapel and more. Outside facilities include playing fields, sports pitches and woodlands.

The Council's preferred option is the creation of a school for children and young people with SEND. However, there are alternative uses for the site which have been put forward, including a respite care centre, a training and conferencing suite and an innovation centre for a start-up businesses.