

Report to the Parrish Councils July 2024

Cllr Jill Haynes Chalk Valleys ward.

Dear Councillors, Clerks and members of the public, please find my report for July.

The new council is looking at priorities and has reduced them down to four areas. The Council are doing some public consultation on this at the moment but unfortunately all the eight sessions do seem to be in the main towns. With little representation for rural areas. However, you can make your views known by going to the Dorset council web site on www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/a-big-conversation

There are going to be four main priority areas

- 1 Communities for all
- 2 Responding to the climate crisis
- 3 Providing high quality housing
- 4 Growing our economy

At the moment there is very little further in detail and the consultation will no doubt bring further clarity about the public's requirements and help guide priorities

I thought I would give a single topic report about the current position on Priority 3 Housing and Housing need to give you greater information in this area, and my apologies if it is a bit lengthy.

Dorset's average house prices are twelve times the average local wage, this is one of the highest ratios outside of London and the South East. The Council wants to increase the supply of housing that local people can afford to rent and buy. This includes increasing the supply of affordable housing and social housing by working with developers and with Registered Providers of social housing / Housing Associations.

Over 80% of the households currently on our social housing register are of working age (16 – 64 years). This statistic shows we need to prioritise and increase housing supply.

We currently have 6133 people and families on the housing register with approximately 485 new applicants each month. **The council gives free advice, assistance and information to everyone even if they are not on the register.**

There are four categories on the register A-D but it is definitely NOT only those in the top category are those who are housed. Some 50% of those on the register are single people – not surprisingly, needing 1 bed accommodation.

Dorset Council does not own or manage any social housing, this is dealt with by our register Providers/ Housing associations. They advertise between 75 & 100% of their stock through the Dorset Home Choice Allocations Scheme. All applications must go through the scheme and the council shortlists before sending on to the provider to make the decision. Shortly a new update on the system Social housing in our area makes up approximately 12% of the total homes. These are provided by locally active Housing Associations, also known as Registered Providers of Social Housing.

will also give people an idea of the waiting time for appropriate housing in the area they have asked for. The backlog is reducing and has, for most people, gone from 12 to 6 weeks. Social housing in our area makes up approximately 12% of the total homes. These are provided by locally active Housing Associations, also known as Registered Providers of Social Housing.

During 2022/23 the number of households losing their private rented accommodation increased dramatically as landlords decided to turn many properties into an Air B&B.

This accounted for 17.8% of all homeless approaches, where households were unable to find other rental properties, and impacts the council's ability to discharge its homeless duties. Compared to other councils we have done rather well in this area but there is always more to do. Our homeless cases last year were **down** 17.4% compared to the national average **up** 15.4%. Working in a number of ways we have ensured that over 200 families did not become homeless. Measures include working with landlords, helping with ensuring people claim the right benefits and support into employment.

As of September 2023, just over 360 landlords have joined our Landlord Forum and we are encouraging new members from across the whole Dorset Council area. Whilst this is a sizeable number, membership is mostly landlords with properties in the west of our area, who have been established as a group since before Dorset Council became a Unitary Authority in 2019.

In a survey of Dorset landlords, 25% of respondents said that they were planning to leave the market or reduce their number of rental properties, within the next 5 years which is of considerable concern to the council.

We need to work with landlords and other housing providers to improve the quality of accommodation for Dorset residents, not least because in turn this will help to improve people's health and wellbeing.

Reduce the number of long-term empty homes in Dorset

Empty properties can make an area feel run down and undermine community spirit. They can also become the focus of anti-social behaviour, fly tipping and rodent activity.

Returning an empty property to use cannot only resolve these environmental and social problems, but can also provide a 'new' home, which helps meet housing demand, reduces pressure on new build development and can also provide an income and asset for the owner.

We want to encourage owners to bring empty properties back into use as homes. We recognise that properties are often empty for a wide variety of reasons and our role is therefore to initially influence and encourage property owners. This can include advice about undertaking repairs, selling the property or renting it. However we may also take appropriate enforcement action where these informal negotiations fail. We have brought back into occupancy 41 houses in the last 4 years but it is a very slow and complex process.

The council also takes action on housing standards in the private rental sector and took over 116 actions and notices served against landlords last year to ensure that people live in safe and healthy homes. Housing is a very small team and I am proud of the excellent work that they do to support people in our communities