

# Beacon Ward ANNUAL Report to Parishes

## Dorset Council

Cllr Jane Somper

MAY 2024-May2025

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It has, as ever, been a busy year representing the Beacon Ward here in beautiful North Dorset. As I looked back through my calendar to prepare this report, I was struck by the number of home visits I've carried out—significantly more than previous years. The nature of the issues raised has been varied and often familiar (though one involving chicken noise was a first!). But one clear theme has emerged: a growing frustration from residents at the lack of response from Dorset Council.

Too many constituents have found their emails and calls going unanswered. In speaking with other councillors, I've heard similar experiences. It appears the Council is retreating from one of its core responsibilities, providing timely and respectful responses to the people it serves. We don't expect instant solutions, but we do expect acknowledgment and some indication of when we can expect a reply. It is wrong that residents should need to keep chasing for updates on pressing issues, this erodes trust in Dorset Council.

There are also growing concerns about Dorset Council's performance in several other key areas:

Too often, significant decisions affecting our communities are being taken behind closed doors or pushed through with minimal consultation. There's a growing sense that our local voices are being sidelined, especially in rural areas like ours heightening concerns around the democratic deficit.

While budgets are tight, there remains a lack of transparency about how funds are being prioritised. Many Councillors feel that spending is concentrated in urban centres such as Weymouth and Dorchester, while rural services are left to decline, particularly evident in the underfunding of transport and planning enforcement.

- **Planning Enforcement Inaction:** I've dealt with several cases this year where residents have raised legitimate concerns about planning breaches, only to see little or no enforcement action. This creates a dangerous precedent and undermines the integrity of the planning system.
- **Rural transport** continues to be a persistent concern. After sustained pressure, we are finally seeing signs of progress. It's too early to celebrate, but conversations are happening, and some movement has begun. I will continue pushing hard to ensure rural Dorset isn't left behind and will keep you updated as concrete developments emerge.
- I recently supported a motion declaring an **Economic Emergency** in Dorset. The damage done to local businesses by national policies has been significant, and

support at a local level is now urgent. While the Council's powers are limited, it can take steps, such as targeted discretionary rate relief and prioritising local procurement to keep the “Dorset £” in Dorset and support our local economy

### Positive Recognition

While there are concerns at the corporate level, there are also two exceptional teams working on the ground in the Beacon Ward who deserve credit for their reliability, hard work, and communication.

### Highways Team

Despite a shrinking budget, our local Highways team continues to deliver. In particular, Community Highways Officer **Patrick Carpenter** deserves recognition. Patrick regularly patrols our roads, identifying potholes, damaged verges, and blocked drainage. His dedication goes above and beyond—on one occasion returning with a metal detector to locate a hidden drainage cover that was causing serious flooding in one village.

### Waste and Recycling

The Waste Collection Team, led by supervisor **Darren Johnson**, also continues to impress. Missed bins are often followed up the same day, sometimes with Darren himself taking a small vehicle out to reach blocked or inaccessible areas. Most missed collections are caused by factors like roadworks or obstructive parking—not the operatives. Compared to what we see in some larger cities, our team is doing a fantastic job.

### Speeding and Road Safety

Speeding remains a major concern on our small rural roads. I've been working with the Road Safety Team, who themselves are facing staffing pressures, on a number of traffic calming proposals. After strong advocacy, I'm pleased to report that Stour Provost is set to benefit from a new **20mph zone** in parts of the village, along with speed reduction measures on a section of the B3092.

I am also supporting similar efforts in other villages across the ward. These processes can be slow and outcomes are not guaranteed, but my motto remains: “**Never give up.**”

### Local Plan Progress

On 25th February, the Cabinet agreed to a new timeframe for the Local Plan, aligning with central government deadlines. The revised scheme will be published shortly, with consultation set for August 2026 and potential adoption in 2027. Given the tight timeline, it is crucial to stay informed and engage during consultations.

## Public Health Reorganisation

Following BCP Council's withdrawal from the joint public health arrangement, Dorset has appointed a new Director of Public Health and Prevention, effective April 2025. Public Health Dorset focuses on prevention, and I highly recommend taking advantage of services like LiveWell Dorset's health checks.

## Dorset Council's New CEO

Dr Catherine Howe has been unanimously recommended by the cross-party Staffing Committee as Dorset Council's new Chief Executive, and approved at by Dorset Full Council.

She will succeed interim Chief Executive Sam Crowe, following the departure of Matt Prosser earlier this year. Catherine is currently Chief Executive of Adur and Worthing Councils, where she has led major financial restructuring and climate and organisational design programmes. With a strong background in local government and previous senior roles at Cancer Research UK and Capita PLC, she brings extensive experience in managing complex change, digital transformation, and community-led initiatives.

Thank you once again for your support, input, and engagement over the past year. I remain committed to being a visible and accessible representative for the Beacon Ward. Please do continue to get in touch, I'm always here to help.

For any ward work, please contact me at [CllrJane.Somper@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:CllrJane.Somper@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk).