

## Dorset Council April 2023 Report Final

### Dorset Council closes the gender pay gap

Every year employers with more than 250 must publish figures on differences in pay between their employees through the Government's gender pay gap service. Nationally, out of the 307 councils that submitted data, the average local authority paid women 3% less than their male colleagues – a small improvement from 3.3% the year before. Female employees at Dorset Council (in total) earned 2% more than men for the year ending March 2022 although this is a slightly smaller difference than last year.

### Boundary Commission

We expect Parliament to approve the new parliamentary boundaries by July 1st this year. There are several suggested changes and some recent alternatives have been proposed. The consultation period on this has now closed so we await the conclusions with interest.

### Fuel Bills

The government's Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding (EBSS Alternative Funding) is now open for applications. The EBSS Alternative Funding is a payment of £400 to households who do not have a direct relationship with an energy supplier and therefore were unable to previously receive it. This includes residents living in park homes, houseboats or off the electricity grid or who pay for their energy through a landlord, housing manager or site owner. Applications can be made through an online form on the government website.

### Dorset Council introduces sign language communications

The deaf community are now able to communicate in real time with Dorset Council thanks to our partnership with SignVideo using British Sign Language (BSL). SignVideo is an online video interpreting service that connects users with a qualified BSL interpreter and relays their query to a customer advisor. We are always looking to improve accessibility, remove barriers and provide inclusive services that are designed for our communities and their needs. We want to make communicating with us as easy as possible for everyone, and this is positive step towards achieving that.

SignVideo can be accessed on a Smartphone or tablet using the SignVideo app, or on a computer when visiting [dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/contact-us](https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/contact-us). Users will first need to set up an account and once signed in then select 'Dorset Council' from the directory. They will then be connected to a BSL interpreter who will translate their query to one of our customer advisors. This free service is available online Monday to Friday, 8.30 am – 5pm. Or, it can be used for emergency calls outside of these hours.

Find out more on <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/contact-us-using-british-sign-language>

### Armed Forces Covenant

The Dorset Armed Forces Covenant Conference, which took place at the Tank Museum at Bovington recently, was attended by more than 90 people.

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The theme was 'Serving those that serve' as well as exhibitions from local organisations that provide help and advice to veterans and their families, the conference included speakers, interactive workshops and networking opportunities.

The event witnessed all those at the Tank Museum signing up to the Covenant, a pledge to acknowledge and understand that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities they serve. Dorset Council remains a leader in this field and we are privileged to have strong connections with t

The Armed Forces Community in Dorset, with serving personnel, veterans and their families making up a highly valued and an important part of our community. Through the Armed Forces Covenant and links to health and wellbeing services, welfare, housing and employment, support is available for both current and past members of the Armed Forces and their families.

#### **The Role of a Councillor**

I have been asked by many people what is the defined role of a Councillor, there is no precise definition. Whilst each Councillor can follow their own practices there are some guidelines which are on the website which people may find helpful. There are elections this May for BCP (Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole) whilst Dorset Council's elections will be held in May 2024. Below is a summary of the role and duties.

Councillors do not need any previous experience to become a councillor, they just need a genuine commitment to help their local community. All councillors are expected to represent and champion the interests of the community, businesses and residents in their ward. By representing the views of local people, as a community advocate, they can ensure that local community interests are listened to. However, this is tempered by following their own instincts. They are representatives and not delegates.

Councillors can help residents on specific council related issues (casework). As a councillor they will find that much of their time is taken up by contact with local people, in the form of dealing with enquiries or complaints. Their role is to listen, explain council policy and make sure that the policy has been carried out according to the correct procedures. They get help and support from council officers to deal with enquiries, requests for services and complaints.

Councillors act as a communication channel between the council and its citizens. They promote citizens' interests and needs to the council and assist the public to better understand the issues being addressed by local government and the services it provides.

In addition, through a councillor's democratic mandate, they can build relationships between different groups, organisations and individuals to achieve solutions to local ward and county issues. Councillors may also be nominated by the council to serve a wide range of organisations such as community groups and charities, or to represent the council on local and regional bodies.

Councillors are responsible for the democratic decision-making at Dorset Council. At full council meetings they agree the council's annual budget and important policies. In committee meetings, councillors make specific decisions on a range of issues.

Being a unitary councillor will require a time commitment to address residents' concerns, reply to communications and to attend meetings. Other calls on their time may involve; attendance at local meetings, reading committee agendas and documents before the meeting, attending political group meetings, evidence gathering in respect of scrutiny

reviews, engaging with learning and development opportunities, meeting with council officers, attending parish or town council meetings.

A census of Local Authority Councillors found that councillors spend an average of 25 hours per week on council work. Councillors with additional Chairing or Cabinet responsibilities spend significantly more than this!

Councillors do not need any special or formal qualifications. It is important that councillors not only represent the communities that they serve, but also have a wide range of backgrounds, skills and experience.

The council provides a learning and development programme for its councillors. This includes key pieces of knowledge that councillors will need including information on how services work, understanding the council's budget and legal considerations that the council has to comply with. Some training is compulsory, for example, if a councillor serves on a regulatory committee such as planning or licensing.

The way in which councillors conduct themselves in office, particularly over matters where they have a financial interest, is governed both by the law and by a code of conduct. Councillors have to sign a declaration stating they will observe the council's code of conduct. They have to declare certain financial and other interests which they may have and can not take part in decisions if they have any related financial interests.

The first term of office for the new unitary council is five years from May 2019 to May 2024. At the end of the five years the councillor's term of office expires and they may stand for re-election.

#### **Landowners asked to submit land for consideration**

Dorset Council is asking landowners to submit land for consideration as part of the next stages of preparing the Dorset Council Local Plan. We have a statutory duty to maintain an up-to-date register of available land for all types of development for the future of the council area.

#### **Contacting us**

We are always available to our residents. Our contact details are below and we are happy to meet in person, over zoom or to discuss your concern on the phone. Peter's email address is [peterwharf@hotmail.com](mailto:peterwharf@hotmail.com) telephone 07986 600799 and Laura's is [cllrlaura.beddow@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:cllrlaura.beddow@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk) telephone 07814 569563

**Peter Wharf & Laura Beddow, Dorset Councillors for West Purbeck**