



GILLINGHAM TOWN COUNCIL

The Town Hall, School Road, Gillingham, Dorset SP8 4QR

FULL COUNCIL MINUTES

Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on **Monday 25th April 2022** at The Town Hall, Gillingham, commencing at 7.30pm.

Present:

Cllr Paul Harris, QGM, Mayor
Cllr Sharon Cullingford, Deputy Mayor
Cllr Laura Ashfield
Cllr Alan Frith
Cllr Fiona Cullen
Cllr Rupert Evill
Cllr Mike Gould

Cllr Mick Hill
Cllr Val Potheary
Cllr Donna Toye
Cllr Barry von Clemens
Cllr Mark Walden
Cllr Roger Weeks

In attendance:

Town Clerk, Julie Hawkins
Projects and HR Admin Officer, Serena Burgess
5 members of the public

737. Public Participation. Please note: a period up to a maximum of fifteen minutes will be allowed for public comments and questions restricted to items listed on the following agenda.

There was no public participation.

738. To receive apologies for absence.

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** to accept the apologies for absence from Cllr John Kilcourse, Cllr Graham Poulter and Cllr Alison von Clemens who were unable to join the meeting for personal reasons.

739. Declarations of Interest: Members are required to comply with the requirements of Section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 disclosable pecuniary interests.

There were no declarations of interests.

740. To receive questions pertaining to the previous minutes.

There were no questions.

741. To approve the minutes as a true and accurate record of the last meeting of the Full Town Council held on 28th March 2022.

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 28th March 2022. The chairman duly signed the minutes.

742. To receive, consider and adopt the following standing committee reports:

a) General Purposes Committee meeting held on Monday 4th April 2022.

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the General Purposes meeting held on Monday 4th April 2022 are approved and adopted.

b) Planning Committee meetings held on Monday 28th March 2022 and Monday 11th April 2022.

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held on Monday 28th March 2022 and Monday 11th April 2022 are approved and adopted.

c) HR Committee meeting held on Monday 19th April 2022.

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the HR Committee meeting held on Monday 19th April 2022 are approved and adopted.

d) Finance and Policy Committee meeting held on Monday 19th April 2022.

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Finance and Policy Committee meeting held on Monday 19th April 2022 are approved and adopted.

743. To approve payments of £10,000 and over.

There were no payments of £10,000 and over.

744. To receive and consider a Health and Safety Report.

A report had been circulated prior to the meeting. The report was noted.

745. To receive and consider reports from sub-committees and task and finish groups, as follows:

a) The Queen's Platinum Jubilee Task and Finish Group

Please refer to [Appendix A](#).

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** that Royal Mail are instructed to distribute the programmes at a cost not to exceed £1,000 (excl VAT) and the cost be taken from the Queen's Platinum Jubilee budget line 5417.

746. To receive and consider written reports from outside bodies, if available, for consideration and approval:

a) Gillingham Town Team

There was nothing to report this month.

747. To receive and approve the internal auditor's report dated 23rd March 2022 and agree the management responses.

A report had been circulated prior to the meeting. Please refer to [Appendix B](#).

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** that the Town Clerk will speak to the Council's insurer regarding increasing the Council's fidelity insurance cover and report back to the next Finance and Policy meeting.

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** that the Internal Auditor's report dated 20th April 2022 and the management responses, as presented, are approved.

748. To receive and approve the draft transfer of the proposed LEAP and LAP at Barnaby Mead and witness the signatures of Cllr Harris and Cllr Poulter.

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** to defer this item to the next available Full Council meeting due to the absence of Cllr Poulter.

749. To receive and consider a request from Walkers are Welcome for free room hire for the financial year 2022-2023.

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** that the request from Walkers are Welcome for free room hire for the financial year 2022-2023 is approved.

750. To consider and agree the three remaining free parking days for Gillingham (*please note that two free days have already been agreed for the Jubilee weekend in June*)

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** that the requests for free parking on 11 June for Gillingham in Gear, 8 October for the Carnival and 2 December for Festive Lights are all approved.

751. To receive and consider a request form the Mayor Elect to take the Mayoral Chain of Office to Le Neubourg, France for a Twinning visit 26th – 30th May 2022.

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** to approve the request from the Mayor Elect to take the Mayoral Chain of Office to Le Neubourg, France for a Twinning visit 26th – 30th May 2022.

752. To receive an update on the Councillor vacancy.

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** that the proposed Timetable for recruitment of a Councillor be approved.

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** that the advertisement for the recruitment of a Councillor be approved.

753. To receive and consider a request from The Gillingham Youth Collective to change the date of the daytime event for young people in Hardings Park from Saturday 30th July 2022 to Saturday 23rd July 2022 (Please refer to Minute no. 706 of the Full Council meeting held on 28th February 2022).

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** that the date of the Gillingham Youth Collective event for young people in Hardings Park is changed to Saturday 23rd July 2022.

754. To review the Council's Five-Year Action Plan and to consider and approve proposed revisions.

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** that a Task and Finish Group is set up to review the Five-Year Action Plan and submit a report and recommendations to Full Council at the end of June 2022.

It was agreed and **RESOLVED** that the members of the Group are Cllr Gould, Cllr Harris, Cllr Kilcourse, Cllr Barry von Clemens, the Works Manager and the Town Clerk (Assistant Town Clerk if the Town Clerk is absent).

755. To receive a report on the Mayor's and Deputy Mayor's civic activities.

Reports were circulated prior to the meeting. Please refer to [Appendix C](#). The report was noted.

756. To receive and note reports from Dorset Councillors, if available.

Dorset Council agenda and minutes are available to view [here](#)

A report from Cllr Belinda Ridout was circulated prior to the meeting. Please refer to [Appendix D](#).

Cllr Barry von Clemens and Cllr Potheary expressed their disappointment that no 'Bus Back Better' funding had been allocated to Gillingham in this round of funding.

The report was noted.

757. To receive matters pertinent to this meeting. Note: Members are advised that inclusion of any item is at the Chairman's discretion and that a Council cannot lawfully decide upon any matter which is not specified in the summons (agenda).

- a) The road closures for Gillingham Carnival on 8 October 2022 were noted.
- b) The Chairman read out a letter of thanks from the Chair of the Trustees of the Charity of William Read for the donation from the Mayor's charity.
- c) Cllr Barry von Clemens was joined by Councillors in thanking the Mayor for a successful and well guided year in office.

The meeting closed at 7.56 pm

Full Council – 25 April 2022

Minute no. 745

Gillingham Town Council

The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee Task and Finish Group Report

Author: Cllr Donna Toye

With thanks to Jamie Francis and all Town Hall staff the programme is now ready to go to print.

The Task and Finish group have explored three distribution options to all 6,744 homes within the Gillingham boundary, as follows:

- Royal Mail -

Collection and delivery to Swindon depot for distribution - £84.00

Charges are per 1,000 delivered:

Weight	
20grms	£63.00
35grms	£68.00
60grms	£88.00
80grms	£96.00
100grms	£111.00

All plus VAT

- Gillingham and Shaftesbury Guide were approached but they don’t deliver to all properties, so this is not a feasible option.
- Use of volunteers – the distribution is too large to use volunteers.

Proposal

- **That Royal Mail are instructed to distribute the programmes at a cost not to exceed £1,000 (excl VAT) and the cost be taken from the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee budget line 5417.**

Full Council Meeting – 25 April 2022

Minute no. 747

Internal audit report 2021/22

Date: 20th April 2022

Report Author: R Darkin-Miller

Introduction

This report contains a note of the audit recommendations made to Gillingham Town Council following the carrying out of internal audit testing on site on the 23rd March 2022.

The audit work has been carried out in accordance with the 2014 Appendix 9 of the 'Governance and Accountability for Local Councils: A Practitioners' Guide', as amended by later IA sections of the AGAR.

An internal audit covers the review of the operation of the Council's internal control environment. It is not designed to review and give full assurance over every transaction carried out by the Council. Instead it enables the auditor, following the sample testing of a number of different types of transaction, to give an opinion as to whether or not the control objectives are being achieved across a range of financial and governance systems.

Audit Opinion

As this audit report is an interim one, no audit opinion is offered at this stage.

The report issued after the final visit for 2021/22 (which will be in May or June 2022) will contain the audit opinion for the year.

The following areas were reviewed during this audit visit:

1. Risk Management
2. Budgetary Control
3. Income
4. Payroll

Audit Recommendations

Recommendations made during the audit are shown in appendix one to this report.

Recommendations are graded as follows:

Rating	Significance
High	Either a critical business risk is not being adequately addressed or there is substantial non-conformity with regulations and accepted standards.
Medium	Either a key business risk is not being adequately addressed or there is a degree of non-conformity with regulations and accepted standards.
Low	Either minor non-conformity with procedure or opportunity to improve working practices further.

The number of recommendations made at this audit visit, and their priority, are summarised in the following table:

Rating	Number
High	0
Medium	1
Low	3
Information	0
TOTAL	4

I would like to thank Julie Hawkins, Town Clerk; and Debra Edwards, Responsible Financial Officer for their assistance during this audit.

Appendix 1 – Recommendations and Action Plan

Recommendation number	Detail	Priority (low/Medium/High)	Management Response	Responsible Office	Due Date
3.2 – Check adequacy of fidelity insurance cover	<p>Guidance for the level of fidelity insurance cover suggests the value should be broadly equivalent to the amount of cash held and 50% of the precept. This gives a value of £1.04m for 2021/22. The current level of fidelity cover is £1m.</p> <p>I recommend that the Council considers whether to increase the level of fidelity insurance cover.</p>	L	A recommendation will be made to Full Council at the meeting scheduled for 25 April 2022 that the level of fidelity insurance cover is increased.	RFO	25.04.22
3.3 – Minutes review	<p>I reviewed the Council minutes and noted the following:</p> <p>1. Planning - there is a duplicate set of minutes for the meeting of 24/01/22, with a signed set of minutes on the old minutes file and an unsigned set on the current minutes file. Minutes of the meeting 09/08/21 and the minutes from 22/11/21 have not yet been approved</p> <p>3. HR - the minutes of the meeting of 20/01/22 have been headed up 20/01/21. The minutes of the meeting 25/10/21 have not yet been approved.</p> <p>I recommend that the duplicate planning minutes are removed, that the January 2022 HR</p>	L	<p>The duplicate set of Planning Minutes dated 24 January 2022 have been removed.</p> <p>The meeting held on 9 August 2021 was held under the council's temporary scheme of delegation with decisions reported to Full Council on 23 August 2021 Minute 571.</p> <p>The Minutes of the Planning meeting held on 22 November will be approved at the next Planning Committee meeting on 9 May 2022.</p> <p>The date of the HR Committee Minutes of 20.01.22 were</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Town Clerk</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Town Clerk</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Town Clerk</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Completed</p> <p style="text-align: center;">09.05.22</p> <p style="text-align: center;">19.04.22</p>

	minutes are amended, and that unapproved minutes are approved at the next committee meeting.		corrected at the HR meeting held on 19.04.22. The Minutes of the HR Committee meeting of 25.10.21 were approved at the HR Committee meeting on 19.04.22	Town Clerk	19.04.22
5.1 – Check whether inflationary increases are due on SLA charges 21/22	<p>I checked to see that prices charged agreed with those set by the Council. I noted that the amounts charged under the Verges service level agreement had not increased year on year. A 1% increase had been applied to the original charge in the previous year. I noted that the fees and charges agreed by Finance Committee at their meeting on 20/09/21 includes a provisional 2% increase on the 21/22 charge.</p> <p>I recommend that the SLA is checked to see whether an inflationary increase should have been applied for the 21/22 financial year.</p>	L	The agreement states that “the Fee shall not be revised during the Initial Term but may be varied thereafter at an amount to be agreed by the parties acting reasonably taking into account budget, costs and quantities of work. Each agreed revision shall be valid for a period of 12 months and will be applied, with the agreement of the parties, on each anniversary of the first revision”. The matter will be passed to the Council’s Agreements and Contracts Subcommittee and a recommendation will be made to the Finance and Policy Committee.	Town Clerk	20.06.22
7.1 – Retrospective report and approval of change to staff salary outside of agreed budget	I checked to see that salaries agreed with those approved by Council. I found that salaries agreed to the 21/22 budget for all but one member of staff. The staff member had challenged the 20/21	M	The matter will be reported to the HR Committee scheduled for 16 May and retrospective approval will be sought for the	Town Clerk	16.05.22

	<p>salary and, following an investigation, a late adjustment was made to that salary which was backdated to the start of the 20/21 year. The increment awarded in 21/22 was applied on the basis of the amended salary rather than the budgeted 21/22 figure.</p> <p>The Town Clerk confirmed that the amendment was made after a full investigation, legal advice, and report to Members, but noted that the report and related recommendation had not been formally reported to Finance Committee or Council.</p> <p>I recommend that the matter is reported to the HR Committee and retrospective approval sought for the increments awarded in 20/21 and 21/22.</p>		<p>increments awarded in 20/21 and 21/22.</p>		
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Full Council Meeting – 25 April 2022

Minute no. 755

**Gillingham Town Council
Mayor's Report April 2022**

13th April 2022 – Annual Town Assembly

The Annual Town Assembly took place in the Council Chamber during the evening of 13th April. Committee Chairs submitted their annual reports and the overall Council report was made to the Town. This year it was presented under the headings: People, Strategy, Development of Gillingham, Training, Council Property, Open Spaces, Natural Challenges, Grants, Events, Awards and The Future. The presentation was interspersed at an appropriate point with short talks, and even a video, from four organisations connected to Gillingham Town Council (GTC). The CEO of Dorset Association of Town and Parish Councils provided an overview of his organisation and outlined the help available to Councils, including training. He presented the Council with the three star training award for 2021-22. This recognised that 94% of our Councillors had undergone relevant training during the year. GTC has previously won two stars but this is the first of our three star awards. Let's trust that GTC can continue the trend into the future.

The North Dorset Disability Information Service is a GTC grant recipient and two senior staff outlined their work for the year, thanking the Council for its financial support. The CEO of The Rendezvous Gillingham outlined their work with the youth of Gillingham and took the opportunity to show a video produced by their young people. She also thanked GTC for their financial support throughout the year. The Chair of the William Read Charity gave a short overview of this very old, local charity



Assistant Town Clerk, Deputy Mayor, CEO DAPTC, Mayor, Town Clerk



The Mayor presents Mr Sam Woodcock, Chairman of the Charity of William Read, with a donation from the Mayor's Charity

(established late 1700's) and outlined the financial support it gives to residents of the Parish of Gillingham. I presented the Chair of the charity with the proceeds of my Mayor's charity fund for this civic year.

22nd April 2022 – High Sheriff's Visit to Gillingham

It was a pleasure to receive the newly appointed (2nd April) High Sheriff of Dorset, Sibyl King DL, for her first visit to Gillingham. The intent was to dedicate the final Council provided tree to the Queen's Green Canopy.

After welcoming her to the Town Hall, she met staff and councillors who were accompanying her during the visit. I then escorted her to Shires Gate where the Works Manager and Deputy Works Manager received her at the tree. We also met members of Gillingham Action for Nature (GANG) and Green GANG. GANG members escorted the High Sheriff to the community orchard and explained the work done. GANG members then escorted the High Sheriff around the site, briefing her on other work that they had done and that which was planned. There was an opportunity for photos.



We then travelled to the Head Office of Neal's Yard Remedies where we were met by Head of Production. We were given a guided tour of their facility, including a rare look behind the scenes in their research laboratory. After a brief by their Head Horticulturalist and a look at the herb beds we adjourned to the shop. Neals Yard were extremely kind, presenting each of the ladies in the party with a small "goody" bag of items to mark their visit. Some also took the opportunity to buy additional items!



A short drive to Orchard Park Garden Centre was followed by a visit to the Men’s Shed where the High Sheriff met many of the participants and saw some of the complex machinery for herself.



To round off a busy morning, we had arranged for a light lunch at the Orchard Park café before returning the High Sheriff to the Town Hall. Before we allowed her to leave, she was presented with a rose bush as a reminder of her visit.

24th April 2022 – St George’s Day Parade, Shaftesbury

On Sunday 24th April the North Dorset Scout District held its annual St Georges Day Parade. The parade was led by the Shaftesbury Town Band. It wound its way from Shaftesbury Football Club to Shaftesbury High Street and around and onto Park Walk. Your Mayoress and I joined Councillors from other outlying parishes to watch the parade pass the Town Hall. We then moved to Park Walk to witness the parade members renew their scout promise. Various scouting awards were presented to members. Two members of the District’s Explorer Group based in Gillingham have been selected to attend the next International Scouting Jamboree in South Korea (July/August 2023) and are busy raising the £4000 each that they need to attend. Once the Parade was dismissed, we all retired to the Town Hall where tea, coffee, squash and cakes were served. The parade was excellent and the weather was very kind.

Full Council Meeting – 25 April 2022

Minute no. 756

Gillingham Ward Monthly Report

Cllr Belinda Ridout – March 2022

Ukraine Update – how people can help

Donate money – one of the best ways to help is by donating cash through trusted charities and aid organisations. The Disasters Emergency Committee Ukraine Appeal is made up of 15 leading UK charities which are working together to provide emergency aid in Ukraine. It is recommended to donate cash rather than goods. Cash can be transferred quickly to areas where it is needed, and individuals and aid organisations can use it to buy what is most needed.

Sponsor a Ukrainian person or family – Register with the Government’s Homes for Ukraine scheme if you wish to open your home to those fleeing the war. You can offer a spare room or separate self-contained accommodation. You must be able to provide it for at least 6 months.

If you would like to volunteer in some capacity, please contact the Volunteer Centre Dorset by emailing: info@volunteeringdorset.org.uk.

Do you speak Ukrainian or Russian? Please contact Dorset Council if you can offer interpretation and translation skills: customerservices@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk. A dedicated page on the Dorset Council website is constantly updated with information. Information can also be found at gov.uk. The Dorset Together workgroup, which coordinated shielding and food security throughout the pandemic, has been reconvened in readiness to support Ukrainian refugee programmes, to advise and guide individuals and organisations wishing to pursue sponsorship in Dorset.

De-carbonising public buildings – work to improve energy efficiency and install low carbon technologies has started at over 60 council owned sites using £19m of grant funding. So far, 40 heating management system upgrades have been completed, 15 lighting upgrades finalised and 6 solar panel projects finished. County Hall is the latest site where updates and upgrades are being implemented with solar panels, replacement windows, air source heat pump being installed to one of the annexes and low energy lighting throughout the site. Free air cooling, an approach to lowering air temperature by using naturally cool air, will be installed in the council’s data centre. The changes at County Hall alone are expected to save over 100 tonnes of CO2 emissions each year and provide a financial saving of circa £69,000 per year, based on current energy prices. In total more than 100 council owned buildings will benefit, including leisure centres and local schools and academies.

Queen’s Platinum Jubilee 2-5th June 2022 – Dorset Council is encouraging local communities to start planning local events and parties for the 4-day bank holiday weekend. The Platinum Jubilee website has an interactive map displaying all the events and activities taking place in Dorset and across the UK. You can add details of your own events. To make it easier to host your own street party, Dorset Council is waiving the costs of road closure applications in the area and welcomes residents to apply for a street party road closure. You need to apply 6 weeks in advance. Support is also available for communities via a £22m National Lottery Fund. More information can be found on the National Lottery website. Dorset will be joining the national Beacon lighting programme, with beacons being lit across the county to mark the start of the celebratory weekend on 2nd June. Details will be published near the time.

National Service Remembered – British Armed Forces veterans’ exploits during National Service 60 years ago is at the centre of an innovative UK-wide new heritage project. www.national-service.co.uk. 15 former servicemen from Dorset as well as men from Wales and the Northwest who served in Egypt, Jordan, Singapore and Iraq, tell their stories in a National Lottery-funded project called National Service Remembered. It is exactly 60 years since National Service ended in the UK and the men who completed National Service are now a minimum of 77 years old. The Dorset project has uncovered some rich and wonderful stories from a generation that served their country at a time of need but who do not always consider themselves as Veterans, as they did not volunteer. It is important to recognise and celebrate this generation of people.

Donations to people in fuel poverty – thanks to the generosity of Dorset residents, over £75k has been raised to help older people struggling to stay warm this winter. Dorset Council, working closely with The Dorset Community Foundation and Citizens Advice, launched an appeal earlier this year asking people to donate any winter fuel payments they did not need to help others to afford heating their homes without scrimping on food. An estimated 19,000 people in Dorset are living in fuel poverty, not being able to afford to heat their homes, which is being exacerbated by current energy price increases. The funds have been allocated to Citizens Advice who are distributing Surviving Winter grants to households in fuel poverty. This is in addition to Dorset Council being able to make one-off winter energy grants of £200, allocated to 3,500 households in receipt of Universal Credit or earnings below the free school meals threshold, made possible by a £2m grant from the Government’s Household Support Fund.

Land Charges – the amount of time Dorset Council take to complete land charges search requests has been significantly reduced. Currently the average time to return a search is 26 working days compared to an average of 62 working days last October. Delays previously were mainly due to a record number of searches requested during the Covid pandemic, some staff vacancies and system changes. Six new additional staff have helped to reduce the backlog. Work continues to harmonise the Land Charges registers from the former district and borough councils and the creation of a land charges portal where customers will be able to submit and pay for their search enquiry electronically.

Consultation: School Transport Policies 2022-23 Dorset Council is running a 4-week consultation on School Transport Policies for 2022-23 with effect from Monday, 7th March 2022 to Sunday 3rd April 2022. Details of the consultation (home to school transport policy and post 16 transport support policy) is available to view at: <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/education-and-training/school-transport/consultation-on-school-transport-policies>. All comments (negative and positive) to be submitted by Sunday, 3rd April 2022 either via email to schoolorganisation@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk or by post – school Admissions Team, Dorset Council, County Hall, Dorchester DT1 1XJ. All responses will be considered, and a report presented to Dorset Council’s cabinet meeting on 17th May 2022.

Community Governance Review – the second part of the Community Governance Review public consultation is now underway, open until 23rd May 2022. Residents can view the initial submissions received from town and parish councils as well as other organisations and members of the public on the website. Paper copies available at Dorset Council’s libraries or by calling 01305 251010. The final recommendations will be published and agreed by Full Council in July 2022.

New company to provide Adult Social Care- Dorset Council is creating a new company to provide adult social care for residents. The current contract with Tricuro will end and all adult social care services will be provided by Care Dorset. Dorset Council is responsible for arranging the social care for around 4,000 residents at any one time. The transfer of care service to the Care Dorset will be post October this year. Tricuro will continue to provide care services to residents in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole residents. All residents who currently receive care are being contacted directly about the changes. Members of Tricuro staff who support Dorset Council residents will transfer to the new company without changes to their existing employment contracts. The reason for the change is that social care services will be better provided by a new company which serves just the Dorset Council area, which is large, rural and whose residents have different needs to those of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. Tricuro was set up under the former council structures, to cover the whole of Dorset. Since then, there have been significant changes including the creation of the two new unitary authorities. These councils are very different, geographically and demographically. Spending on adult social care represents around half of all DC expenditure, around £141m in the 2022/23 budget and demand for adult social care is growing year on year. DC has the highest percentage of residents aged 85 and over of any county or unitary authority in the country. Care Dorset will be better placed to tailor social care services to best meet the needs of residents.

Love your Verge – Dorset Council and Litter Free Dorset will once again be encouraging residents and visitors to Dorset to celebrate Dorset’s roadside verges as havens for biodiversity and wildlife with the ‘Love Your Verge’ campaign. Changes to verge management in Dorset include an increase in ‘cut and collect’ mowing – a technique which helps to reduce the soil fertility over time, creating a better environment for wildflowers to grow. The council has also reduced verge cutting throughout the rural road network to once instead of twice per year, where it is safe to do so. This allows more flowers to complete their life cycles before being cut.

Littering causes major issues for plants and wildlife and cleaning up discarded rubbish is costly and time-consuming. Look out for colourful signage installed on verges around the county.

Disability employment – residents with a disability will receive more support to get into work and expand their horizons with a new three-year partnership between the council and national disability employment specialists, Pluss. People with learning or physical disability, autism or mental health needs, will receive bespoke support to search for, secure and retain employment. Assistance ranges from CV creation and work experience to practical help like navigating public transport. The aim is to help 50 people through the partnership.

Climate change - Newly installed solar panels at two Dorset Council waste depots (Crookhill, Chickerell and Poundbury, Dorchester) are already producing over 200,000 kWh of renewable energy each year and providing most of each building's power needs. The Crookhill site produces enough equivalent to power 36 homes and saving around 30 tonnes of carbon emissions. Recent sunny days have seen the whole Crookhill site running purely on solar-generated electricity. The Poundbury panels generate more power than the site needs, the surplus being automatically fed into the national grid and save around 18 tonnes of CO2 annually. Similar panels have already been installed in schools, libraries (Gillingham library has recently had an impressive array of solar panels installed) and leisure centres as part of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, which saw Dorset Council awarded with £19m of central government funding to make publicly owned buildings more energy efficient. The work includes installation of heat pumps, LED lighting and improved building management systems at various Dorset Council sites and buildings across the county.

If you run a business or a public/community sector organisation, Low Carbon Dorset, may be able to help you improve your energy efficiency and increase your use of renewable energy. More information at Lowcarbondorset.org.uk.

Response to the Ukrainian crisis – the Dorset Together network is coordinating and facilitating the support for Ukraine across the county. The network is currently working to prepare a warm welcome for Ukrainian refugees coming to Dorset. Help & Kindness (a local community interest company) is signposting people to local groups supporting refugees and sharing information. The council's role to support Ukrainian refugees ranges from accommodation checks, education provision for children, arranging for payments and job-seeking opportunities.

Dorset Centre of Excellence – opening of Coombe House (formerly known as St Mary's, Shaftesbury) – the Council has been very busy behind the scenes, getting ready for the opening of the new Coombe House School, nr Shaftesbury. The new school will offer facilities tailored to supporting pupils with Special Education Needs & Disabilities (SEND). Work has been underway for many months to adapt the premises to meet SEND requirements and a refresh of the classrooms in anticipation of welcoming the first 50 pupils this term. (The school will ultimately be able to cater for up to 280 pupils.) The next stage will be an inspection by Ofsted which will be

required in order to complete the school's registration with the Department for Education. Its great to think that this excellent facility is right here on our doorstep.

£16m annual road maintenance programme – proactive road maintenance activity intensifies in the spring due to many road treatments needing dry and/or warm weather. The busy tourist areas being worked on first before the start of the summer season. This financial year, the Department for Transport funding dedicated to carriageway maintenance in the council year will be £11.6m. Dorset Council Cabinet awarded a further £6.7m into highway maintenance, with around £4.6m being invested in proactive, planned road repairs. This year in the Dorset Council area, around 1.4million-square-metres of road will be repaired, including roughly 434,000m2 of resurfacing (rebuilding layers to restore strength and shape), 446,000m2 of surface dressing (seals roads from water damage and restores skid resistance), 200,000m2 of micro-surfacing (filling in shallow cracks and holes on minor roads forming part of the National Cycleway Network), 75,000m2 of in-situ recycling (reconstructing minor roads with poor construction but often taking heavy vehicles), 100,000m2 of preservation (preventative treatment for busy, good condition routes, stopping water ingress and surface deterioration) and 60,000m2 of patching.

Road maintenance is all very high tech these days, where images are collected on a mobile device mounted on the windscreen of highway vehicles. These images are downloaded and run through artificial intelligence systems that convert them into defect data and provide an overall condition assessment of the road. Asset management systems then identify schemes for the different treatment options available. The information is used by highways engineers, along with the designation and rural nature of the road, to consider the treatment options and prioritise roads for repair. Programmes of work are then put together to maximise efficiency and secure the best rates. Dorset Highway's maintenance approach – to carryout repairs specific to the damage evidenced in the individual road – enables maintenance to be caried out on more roads, reduce emissions by using less raw material and create less waste compared to solely using resurfacing. I was very impressed with the re-use policy for the Principal Road running through the southern extension of Gillingham. Hardly any raw material was carried off site during construction. Most being re-used on site or used by local farmers, amounting to huge savings in carbon emissions. If anyone is interested there are facts and figures for this site which are impressive.

Cllr. Belinda Ridout,
Councillor for the Gillingham Ward
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