



Parish Council Survey

Introduction and background

Since the general election in 2024 and with the increasingly challenged budgets of our larger councils like Dorset Council; it has become increasingly important to look into the future and consider what local government might look like for the communities we serve. On the horizon too is the prospect of a Strategic Regional Authority which may distance Parish and Town Councils even more than they are now. As your membership body we feel it appropriate to get you and your colleagues thinking about the likely challenges and options ahead. Some of the choices might be challenging and the sooner we start to think about likely change, the easier it will be to manage it and move forward.

We are reaching out to invite your participation in a short survey designed to gather your views and experiences regarding the working relationship between your council and Dorset Council.

This request for feedback follows the publication of the Fresh Start Report (see below), authored by Graham Sansom and Gordon Morris, which highlights the importance of collaborative, transparent, and effective partnerships between principal authorities and local councils. The report offers valuable insights and recommendations that can help shape a more constructive and mutually supportive relationship across all tiers of local government in Dorset.

Your responses will play a vital role in informing ongoing discussions between DAPTC and Dorset Council. By sharing your perspectives, challenges, and suggestions, you will help ensure that future engagement is built on a foundation of shared understanding and continuous improvement. The Fresh Start Report was commissioned and had input from 25 larger parishes and towns and we committed to smaller parishes of which there are around 130 that we would gather your views on some of the same themes. Dorset Council are keen to ensure your thoughts and view deepen the findings in the Fresh Start Report.

The survey should take no more than 10-15 minutes to complete, and your input will be treated with confidentiality and respect where respondents have submitted views personally. If the response is being made by the parish council, it would be helpful to know which council.

Thank you in advance for your time and contribution to this important conversation.

As a DAPTC member you can access the important engagement activity following the publication of the Fresh Start Report [HERE](#).

Neil Wedge



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Guidance

Throughout the survey, questions marked with an asterisk must be answered by ALL respondents, otherwise you will not be able to move to the next section. Some questions are for Clerks only, and are clearly marked as such.

If you get a warning triangle or exclamation mark and a statement that the question 'needs a response', you may have been asked to select the 3 most important issues - in which case, you can only move on with the survey if you select exactly 3. Likewise, where exactly one response is required.

*** 1.0** In what capacity are you completing this survey? Please select **ONE** box

- ☐ Council Clerk (personal views)
- ☐ Chair (personal views)
- ☐ Councillor (personal views)
- ☐ Parish Council Response

1.1 If this is a Parish Council response to the survey, let us know your council name.



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2. Resources

Thinking about your Parish Council, please respond to each of the following statements by selecting ONE box.

2.1 (Clerks only) Please select **one (1) box only** to indicate the population of your Parish Council recorded at the 2021 Census.

- ☐ Under 250
- ☐ 251 to 500
- ☐ 501 to 1,000
- ☐ 1,001 to 1,500
- ☐ Greater than 1,500

2.2 (Clerks only) Please select **one (1) box only** to indicate your council's total expenditure for the year ending 31 March 2025.

- ☐ Under £5,000
- ☐ £5,001 to £10,000
- ☐ £10,001 to £15,000
- ☐ £15,001 to £20,000
- ☐ £20,001 to £25,000
- ☐ £25,001 to £30,000
- ☐ Greater than £30,000

2.3 (Clerks only) Please select **one (1) box only** to indicate your council's Band D Council Tax precept for the year ending 31 March 2025.

- ☐ Under £20 (twenty pounds)
- ☐ £20 to £40
- ☐ £40 to £60
- ☐ £60 to £80
- ☐ Greater than £80

2.4 (Clerks only) Please select **one (1) box only** to indicate your council's total precept income for the year ending 31 March 2025.

- ☐ Under £5,000
- ☐ £5,001 to £10,000
- ☐ £10,001 to £15,000
- ☐ £15,001 to £20,000
- ☐ £20,001 to £25,000
- ☐ £25,001 to £30,000
- ☐ Greater than £30,000

* **2.5** To what extent is the current annual expenditure budget of your council meeting the 'reasonable' needs and expectations of your community?

- ☐ Seriously inadequate
- ☐ Significantly less than desirable
- ☐ Barely sufficient
- ☐ Satisfactory

* **2.6** How great is the need for the budget to grow significantly faster than the consumer price index to meet currently unmet, emerging or increasing community needs?

- ☐ Very great
- ☐ Substantial
- ☐ Marginal
- ☐ No need at all

* **2.7** What is the likelihood that your council and community would support such an increase over the next 5 years, should the need arise?

- ☐ No chance
- ☐ Just possible
- ☐ Quite likely
- ☐ Very likely

* **2.8** How much scope is there to increase the precept by more than the consumer price index without significant adverse impacts on the majority of households' standard of living?

- ☐ None
- ☐ Very little
- ☐ Quite a lot
- ☐ A great deal



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3. Local Democracy

Thinking about your council, please respond to each of the following statements by selecting ONE box.

*** 3.1** A low turnout of voters (less than 25%) in elections undermines our council's democratic and representative role

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not Sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

*** 3.2** Dividing parishes into wards creates unnecessary complications and rivalries

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

*** 3.3** Legislation for the local councils sector should define a stronger leadership role for the Chair of Parish Councils.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

*** 3.4** Most of the community does not engage with our council most of the time

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

* **3.5** We could make better use of formal Annual Parish Meetings to engage the community.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

* **3.6** We need to increase community consultation and report-back more often on current issues and the Parish Council's activities and achievements

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

* **3.7 Please select the appropriate boxes that apply to your council.** What are the **THREE** most significant issues/factors affecting the sustainability of Parish Councils and requires attention going forward?

- ☐ The cost of contested elections for parish councils works against the promotion of local democracy because it is disproportionate for low precepting local councils
- ☐ The short supply of experienced or qualified Clerks
- ☐ The difficulty in attracting a broader age range of residents to become councillors
- ☐ The lack of awareness of what the parish council delivers for the community
- ☐ The parish council is too small and may benefit from greater collaboration with neighbouring parishes or towns
- ☐ The number of seats we have for council is too high and we could operate on fewer numbers of councillors



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4. Services

* **4.1** Please select where appropriate, the boxes to identify your Council's **five (5) most costly** categories of service delivery (bearing in mind staffing, operational and capital costs).

- ☐ Parks and gardens including play areas
- ☐ Community facilities (halls, community centres, other buildings, allotments, cemeteries etc)
- ☐ Sporting facilities (fields, indoor centres etc)
- ☐ Community development and wellbeing (events, grants, transport, social support, youth services, help desk and advice etc)
- ☐ Planning (development applications, control and enforcement, statutory Neighbourhood Plans or similar informal locality plans)
- ☐ Economic advancement (including economic/tourism plans and facilities, business partnerships etc)
- ☐ Streets (maintenance, lighting, cleansing, footpaths, verges etc)
- ☐ Parking areas (including management and enforcement if applicable)
- ☐ Waste management (litter bins, recycling)
- ☐ Public toilets
- ☐ Environmental issues (climate action, countryside)
- ☐ Other (please detail)

* **4.2** Please select the appropriate boxes to identify what you consider to be your council's **five (5) most important** categories of service delivery in terms of their benefit to the local community.

- ☐ Parks and gardens including play areas
- ☐ Community facilities (halls, community centres, other buildings, allotments, cemeteries etc)
- ☐ Sporting facilities (fields, indoor centres etc)
- ☐ Community development and wellbeing (events, grants, transport, social support, youth services, help desk and advice etc)
- ☐ Planning (development applications, control and enforcement, statutory Neighbourhood Plans or similar informal locality plans)
- ☐ Economic advancement (including economic/tourism plans and facilities, business partnerships etc)
- ☐ Streets (maintenance, lighting, cleansing, footpaths, verges etc)
- ☐ Parking areas (including management and enforcement if applicable)
- ☐ Waste management (litter bins, recycling)
- ☐ Public toilets
- ☐ Environmental issues (climate action, countryside)
- ☐ Other (please detail)

4.3 (Clerks only) Please select the appropriate boxes to identify those categories of service delivery by your council for which expenditure has increased significantly more than the consumer price index (CPI) over the past 5 years.

- ☐ Parks and gardens including play areas
- ☐ Community facilities (halls, community centres, other buildings, allotments, cemeteries etc)
- ☐ Sporting facilities (fields, indoor centres etc)
- ☐ Community development and wellbeing (events, grants, transport, social support, youth services, help desk and advice etc)
- ☐ Planning (development applications, control and enforcement, statutory Neighbourhood Plans or similar informal locality plans)
- ☐ Economic advancement (including economic/tourism plans and facilities, business partnerships etc)
- ☐ Streets (maintenance, lighting, cleansing, footpaths, verges etc)
- ☐ Parking areas (including management and enforcement if applicable)
- ☐ Waste management (litter bins, recycling)
- ☐ Public toilets
- ☐ Environmental issues (climate action, countryside)
- ☐ Other (please detail)

4.4 Please select as many boxes as necessary to show any categories of assets and/or service delivery that have been subject to (actual or attempted) 'downloading' or 'cost-shifting' by Dorset Council to your parish or town.

- ☐ Parks and gardens including play areas
- ☐ Community facilities (halls, community centres, other buildings, allotments, cemeteries etc)
- ☐ Sporting facilities (fields, indoor centres etc)
- ☐ Community development and wellbeing (events, grants, transport, social support, youth services, help desk and advice etc)
- ☐ Planning (development applications, control and enforcement, statutory Neighbourhood Plans or similar informal locality plans)
- ☐ Economic advancement (including economic/tourism plans and facilities, business partnerships etc)
- ☐ Streets (maintenance, lighting, cleansing, footpaths, verges etc)
- ☐ Parking areas (including management and enforcement if applicable)
- ☐ Waste management (litter bins, recycling)
- ☐ Public toilets
- ☐ Environmental issues (climate action, countryside)
- ☐ None at all since 2019
- ☐ Other (please detail)

4.5 Please select as many boxes as necessary to show any categories of assets and/or service delivery that in your opinion could reasonably be devolved and could be best delivered locally?

- ☐ Parks and gardens including play areas
- ☐ Community facilities (halls, community centres, other buildings, allotments, cemeteries etc)
- ☐ Sporting facilities (fields, indoor centres etc)
- ☐ Community development and wellbeing (events, grants, transport, social support, youth services, help desk and advice etc)
- ☐ Planning (development applications, control and enforcement, statutory Neighbourhood Plans or similar informal locality plans)
- ☐ Economic advancement (including economic/tourism plans and facilities, business partnerships etc)
- ☐ Streets (maintenance, lighting, cleansing, footpaths, verges etc)
- ☐ Parking areas (including management and enforcement if applicable)
- ☐ Waste management (litter bins, recycling)
- ☐ Public toilets
- ☐ Environmental issues (climate action, countryside)
- ☐ Other (please detail)

*** 4.6** Has your council and/or other local organisations held recent discussions with Dorset Council regarding possible transfer of assets and/or service delivery?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No



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4.7 If you answered 'yes' to 4.6, which types of assets and/or service delivery were discussed? (If the answer was 'no' move on to **question 5.1**).

4.8 From your council's perspective, were those discussions fruitful?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ If you respond 'No' can you explain why not?



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5. Working relations with Dorset Council

Thinking about your council please respond to each of the following statements by selecting ONE box only.

*** 5.1** On the whole, our council has a generally effective working relationship with Dorset Council.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

*** 5.2** On the whole, Dorset Council respects and is supportive of the role played by Parish Councils.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

*** 5.3** All things considered, our council's relationship with Dorset Council is as good as we had with the previous District Council.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

* **5.4** Usually, we know which officer to contact at Dorset Council when we need assistance.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

* **5.5** Access to senior management is usually available within a reasonable timeframe should the circumstances require it.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

* **5.6** Access to Cabinet members is usually available within a reasonable timeframe should the circumstances require it.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

* **5.7** Our council's 'twin hatted' and/or Ward Councillors facilitate effective liaison and awareness with Dorset Council's work in our community, as and when required.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

* **5.8** Parish Councils need to work more closely with neighbouring parishes and towns in areas and/or interest-based groups in order to exert more influence on Dorset Council.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

As part of the Fresh Start Report and a desire by Dorset Council to engage more effectively, they and DAPTC are looking to understand what **mechanisms** would be preferable for Parish and Town Councils. A number of different arrangements exist across England and the next two questions are aimed at identifying what might be preferred by Parish Councils.

Area Boards invariably have some decision making as part of their governance.

*** 5.9 New mechanisms*** are needed to improve the working relationship between Parish Councils and Dorset Council.

*Mechanisms is specifically relating to different means of communication and engagement between your council and Dorset Council.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

*** 5.10** Please specify **ONE** particular *mechanism that would be most helpful

*Mechanisms is specifically relating to different means of communication and engagement between your council and Dorset Council.

- ☐ Area Boards (similar to those in operation in Wiltshire)
- ☐ Local Area Partnerships - groups of parishes / towns with voluntary sector organisations (with no decision making)
- ☐ Community Area Partnerships (similar to those in operation in Cornwall)
- ☐ Other (please detail)

* **5.11** Please select the appropriate boxes to identify the **three (3) categories** of service delivery in which your council has the best working relationship with Dorset Council.

- ☐ Parks and gardens including play areas
- ☐ Community facilities (halls, community centres, other buildings, allotments, cemeteries etc)
- ☐ Sporting facilities (fields, indoor centres etc)
- ☐ Community development and wellbeing (events, grants, transport, social support, youth services, help desk and advice etc)
- ☐ Planning (development applications, control and enforcement, statutory Neighbourhood Plans or similar informal locality plans)
- ☐ Economic advancement (including economic/tourism plans and facilities, business partnerships etc)
- ☐ Streets (maintenance, lighting, cleansing, footpaths, verges etc)
- ☐ Parking areas (including management and enforcement if applicable)
- ☐ Waste management (litter bins, recycling)
- ☐ Public toilets
- ☐ Environmental issues (climate action, countryside)
- ☐ Mobile signal strength and broadband connectivity
- ☐ We do not partner with Dorset Council in terms of service delivery and therefore have no examples of best working relationship
- ☐ Other (please detail)

* **5.12** Please select the appropriate boxes to identify the **three (3) categories** of service delivery in which your council’s working relationship with Dorset Council most needs to improve.

- ☐ Parks and gardens including play areas
- ☐ Community facilities (halls, community centres, other buildings, allotments, cemeteries etc)
- ☐ Sporting facilities (fields, indoor centres etc)
- ☐ Community development and wellbeing (events, grants, transport, social support, youth services, help desk and advice etc)
- ☐ Planning (development applications, control and enforcement, statutory Neighbourhood Plans or similar informal locality plans)
- ☐ Economic advancement (including economic/tourism plans and facilities, business partnerships etc)
- ☐ Streets (maintenance, lighting, cleansing, footpaths, verges etc)
- ☐ Parking areas (including management and enforcement if applicable)
- ☐ Waste management (litter bins, recycling)
- ☐ Public toilets
- ☐ Environmental issues (climate action, countryside)
- ☐ Mobile signal strength and broadband connectivity
- ☐ We do not partner with Dorset Council in terms of service delivery
- ☐ Other (please detail)



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6. Local Planning

6.1 (Clerks only) What, if any, plans has your council completed, or are under way, or may be prepared in the next term? (select relevant boxes depending on which applies)

	Completed	Under Way	Maybe Soon	Most Unlikely
Parish Council Plan (simple plan of priorities for the community)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Statutory Neighbourhood Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please detail)

* **6.2** What are the key areas of concern for local planning in your parish? Please select the appropriate boxes to identify your **three (3) most important** issues.

- ☐ Population growth and new development
- ☐ Redevelopment in village areas
- ☐ Maintaining local character
- ☐ Environmental conservation/climate change
- ☐ Economic development
- ☐ Impacts of tourism
- ☐ Social issues
- ☐ Wellbeing (health, loneliness)
- ☐ Public transport
- ☐ Other (please detail)



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7. Future Role and Prospects

Is there a need for change and if so, what is important to your community?

Please respond to the following questions by selecting ONE box only.

* **7.1** Our council will have to make significant changes to its functions and priorities over the next decade to address local needs and maintain quality of life.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

* **7.2** Our council can and should become a more robust advocate on behalf of the local community.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

* **7.3** Parish Councils generally should establish a broader role in 'place making' and community development.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

*** 7.4** Given that the precept is uncapped currently, Parish Councils have a responsibility to raise precepts in order to do more to fill gaps in service delivery for their community.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

*** 7.5** Both councillors and employees of Parish Councils will need to substantially upgrade their skills to support their community effectively and respond to changing needs in the future.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

*** 7.6** To meet future needs, we should seriously consider amalgamation or a formal shared services agreement with adjoining Town/Parish Councils.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

*** 7.7** To improve their performance, all Dorset Parish and Town Councils must greatly increase exchanges of information and expertise in areas of mutual interest.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

* **7.8** We need a thorough governance review into our council's area, ward boundaries and the number of councillors.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

* **7.9** Over time, the 2019 reorganisation of local government in Dorset will prove to be a success.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

* **7.10** To make the 2019 reorganisation a success, there will need to be a marked shift in the balance of roles, responsibilities and funding from Dorset Council towards larger Towns and Parish Councils, if the delivery of assets and some services are discussed with our council.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree



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8. Further comments

Please add any further comments you may have on any issue raised in this survey

Comments

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete and submit this survey.