

Recent achievements by Christchurch Borough Council

Housing

A new Joint Housing Allocations Policy with East Dorset District Council was agreed at the end of 2013. The policy introduced new qualifying criteria, including two-year local residency, local housing needs and specific provision for service personnel.

This new policy ensures that those households with greatest need for housing are prioritised for the limited vacancies available.

The council's homeless prevention service has faced unprecedented demand for their services recently, seeing more than double the amount of people they would normally see. However, they have had a number of successes in securing accommodation for families faced with eviction by working with the individuals, their landlords, engaging support providers and representing them through the court process.

Our housing team have also been working to try to keep their clients out of bed and breakfast accommodation. We have had high expenditure on B&B in recent years and the reduction has been achieved, amongst other things, through the hard work of the Prevention team to find more suitable solutions to homelessness, the introduction of new robust case management measures as well as the introduction of a flexible joint policy across both Christchurch and East Dorset to move clients on from B&B accommodation.

They have also helped four vulnerable women remove themselves from the threat of domestic violence by assisting them in accessing multi-agency help and support, personal and home protection and rehousing where appropriate.

Two new developments of affordable homes have been opened in Christchurch. With a large number of families on the housing waiting list the new properties are an important addition to meeting local families' need for accommodation. Radian has provided seven two-bedroom apartments at Hyde Mews, in Clarendon Road. The affordable homes have been allocated by Christchurch Council to local people.

17 affordable homes have also been opened at Parsonage Close and Bronte Avenue. The affordable homes, 11 for shared ownership and six for affordable rent, form part of a new mixed housing development of 38 homes promoted by Raglan Housing. Raglan financed the affordable housing scheme with additional funding support from Christchurch Council and the Homes and Community Agency. The council's contribution of £123,000 from housing monies allowed Raglan to secure an additional six affordable homes.

Core Strategy

After a number of public consultations, the Christchurch and East Dorset Core Strategy was submitted to the government planning inspectorate in March 2014 and an inspector held examination hearings in September 2013. In March 2014 the Core Strategy was declared to be sound and it was adopted by both councils in April 2014. The adoption of the Core Strategy will be our primary opportunity for many years to provide new and affordable housing in sufficient numbers to meet our wider vision of thriving, sustainable communities.

Recycling

The recycling rate in Christchurch had almost doubled a year after the Dorset Waste Partnership (DWP) introduced the 'recycle for Dorset' collection service. The borough saw its kerbside recycling rate increase from 34 per cent in the period from October 2011 to September 2012 to 61 per cent in the same period of 2012/13. At the same time, the amount of non-recyclable rubbish collected in Christchurch went down by 42 per cent.

Recycling rates across the whole of Dorset have continued to rise, reaching 62% in the first quarter of 2014 and also avoiding £500,000 of landfill costs.

Health & fitness

The Christchurch and East Dorset Partnership was given a £221,000 'Community Sport Activation Fund Award' from Sport England for a three-year project aimed at improving the fitness and health of residents in the area.

The 'Activate Coast & Countryside' project encourages regular participation in informal sport through a range of taster and beginner opportunities across Christchurch and East Dorset. Activities are being delivered from three high profile sites - Highcliffe Castle, Moors Valley Country Park and Kingston Lacy National Trust as well as key community locations.

Activities for adults and families are based around cycling, running, golf, petanque, angling, rounders, canoeing, surfing, orienteering and health walks and incorporate a number of 'community games' to promote opportunities. Each activity has a strong progression pathway to ensure people continue to participate regularly. The project aims to engage with approximately 1,800 new people each year.

This September saw the seventh anniversary of the Fit Christchurch Family Fun Day, planned as part of the Christchurch and East Dorset Partnership Health and Well-being programme. As in previous years the event was organised and managed by the Fit Christchurch Team with support from the public, private and local community and voluntary sector partners.

The aim of the Family Fun Day is to exhibit and promote healthy lifestyle choices and enable residents and visitors to trial a wide range of activities and learn the importance of food and nutrition in maintaining a healthy body mass.

Three sites in Christchurch have benefitted from improvements which increase access for children of all abilities and disabilities thanks to the Dorset Short Break Capital Grant Scheme. Barrack Road Recreation Ground Play Area and the Endfield Road Play Area have received replacement equipment while in Burnham Road, Burton a new inclusive multi-activity climber with slides has been installed in addition to the existing play equipment.

Parking

In order to support local businesses in Highcliffe, the Council offered free parking for a two-hour period during the day at Wortley Road car park. The free period was from 1pm to 3pm each day, having been identified by local businesses as the best time. The initiative launched in December 2013 and ran until 31 March 2014.

Following work in partnership with Christchurch Chamber of Trade, a new £1 for two hours town centre parking charge was launched from April 2014. It is being recommended that this charge continues throughout 2014/15.

Flooding

Many of our officers helped during the extreme weather we experienced last Christmas and in February. One of our Housing team spent Christmas Day dealing with emergency accommodation for residents of a caravan park in East Dorset who had been evacuated.

On the night of the worst weather in February many officers were out delivering sandbags to properties most at danger of flooding. The following day our coastal engineering team were at Avon Beach helping the owners to clear up the devastation which they had suffered. Two representatives of the officers who had been involved in these activities were invited to Downing Street to be thanked by the Prime Minister.

More than 100 residents attended a flood advice drop-in session at the Civic Offices jointly hosted by the Environment Agency and Christchurch Council in March. Officers were on hand to provide advice and guidance on flooding issues and also make people aware of the government grants available if their properties were flooded and government loans for preventative measures.

Following the storms of Christmas 2013 and February 2014, more than £1.4 million has been pledged for coastal repairs in Christchurch. Around £1.2 million of this is coming from the Environment Agency after Christchurch Council put in bids for work to repair damaged groynes and promenades and for beach replenishment. Christchurch Council will also be contributing £220,000 to the work.

Some £188,000 has already been spent on schemes to repair groynes at Friars Cliff beach, promenades at Avon Beach and on flood defences at Mudeford Quay. Work on coastal protection measures at Highcliffe beach and groyne repairs at Avon beach and Gundimore beach have started. A larger piece of work on a beach replenishment scheme along the Christchurch coast will take place later next year following environmental assessments.

The environment

In partnership with the Dorset Waste Partnership, Christchurch Police and the Christchurch Chamber of Trade, we launched the Care for Christchurch campaign asking everyone in Christchurch to care for their town to keep it clean and tidy. As part of this campaign, residents, councillors and officers from Christchurch Council and Dorset Police gathered to pick up litter and clean graffiti in Purewell as part of the Care for Christchurch campaign. More than 30 volunteers gave up their time on Bank Holiday Saturday to cover the area round Purewell Common and collected 36 bags of rubbish.

Following an outbreak of graffiti in Christchurch, the council teamed up with local police to devise and produce an anti-graffiti film to be shown at schools in the borough. The film includes an interview with a resident in an older persons' housing complex. She tells how people there are frightened when they see graffiti near their homes as they feel it could lead to more anti-social behaviour. Also included is an emotional interview from the mother of a young man who was arrested for graffiti spraying.

A man who threw away his cigarette butt in Christchurch High Street has been fined £400 and ordered to pay £339 costs and £40 victim's surcharge. He had discarded the butt while standing some seven metres from a waste bin and was handed a fixed penalty notice by a Christchurch Civil Enforcement Officer. He could have paid the penalty notice within 14 days which would have cost him £50 but, despite two reminder letters, he failed to pay the fine and the case was brought to court costing him nearly £800.

Officers from Christchurch and East Dorset Councils' car parking team are now driving two electric cars. The two Nissan Leaf cars have attracted a £21,000 grant from Dorset County Council under their Local Sustainable Transport Fund project. The full life cost over five years of the two electric vehicles will be £36,000 less than two diesel-engined vans. The new electric vehicles will reduce the carbon impact of council services, reduce air pollution and save money.

Our countryside team received many congratulations on the wild flowers which had been planted at various sites in the borough. They not only provided colourful displays but also meant that less regular maintenance work was needed at these sites.

Three beaches in Christchurch again gained Seaside Awards for achieving the highest standards of beach management. Avon Beach, Friars Cliff Beach and Highcliffe Beach are the winners of the Awards, which are judged and presented by the charity Keep Britain Tidy. The Award recognises and rewards beaches in England that achieve the highest standards of beach management and, in the case of bathing beaches, meet guideline water quality.

Christchurch Quay has been awarded a Green Flag for the third year running. The award means that Christchurch Quay has again been judged to meet the national quality standard for parks and green spaces. A Green Flag flying overhead is a sign to visitors that the space boasts the highest possible standards, is beautifully maintained and has excellent facilities.

Nature reserves

A new interpretation and educational display was unveiled at the Stanpit Marsh Nature Reserve Information Centre, focusing on the nature reserve's wildlife and history. The main display is an art gallery style collection of original 'shadowboxes' painted by experienced natural history illustrator Lisa Berkshire. Each of the beautiful illustrations features an aspect of the marsh, including tidal mudflats, reedbeds, saltmarsh, freshwater marsh, smuggling, archaeology and bird migration.

A range of improvements have taken place at Chewton Bunny nature reserve. The installation of a new interpretation panel showing a map of the nature reserve was the culmination of a series of enhancements put in place by the council's countryside team. The improvements, made possible through Heathland Mitigation funds, have included the resurfacing of footpaths, fencing, signage and new steps.

Visitors to St Catherine's Hill will now be better able to identify surrounding local landmarks, thanks to the installation of a new orientation panel. The panel, which incorporates a map etched into black granite showing points of interest, is located towards the south end of the site, adjacent to an existing trig point. As part of the implementation of the site management plan and to celebrate their successful collaboration, the panel was equally funded through a partnership of five local organisations: Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust (ARC), Christchurch Borough Council, the Friends of St Catherine's Hill (FSCH), Sembcorp Bournemouth Water Ltd and West Christchurch Residents Association (WCRA).

A Bioblitz held over 24 hours at Stanpit Marsh Nature Reserve in Christchurch has recorded 492 species of flora and fauna. The event was organised by Christchurch Council's Countryside Service in collaboration with the Friends of Stanpit Marsh, Christchurch Harbour Ornithological Group, RSPB, Dorset Bat Group, Christchurch History Society, Christchurch Monday Camera Club and numerous naturalists and experts. The aim of the Bioblitz was to provide up-to-date records of the wildlife on the marsh which can be used to inform the management of nature reserves, ensuring the effective protection and safeguarding of habitats and wildlife for the future.

Revenues & Benefits

The Stour Valley Partnership - the Revenues & Benefits service for Christchurch Borough Council, East Dorset District Council and North Dorset District Council - won an Excellence Award at the annual Institute of Revenues Rating & Valuation (IRRV) Performance Awards. The IRRV is the largest professional institution operating in the field of revenues, benefits and valuation. Its annual awards scheme recognises the work of local authorities in this sector and related private sector organisations. The Stour Valley Partnership won the Gold Award for Excellence in Partnership Working (Shared Services).

The Stour Valley Partnership is now working in partnership with the Borough of Poole to create the Stour Valley & Poole Partnership. The management team in Revenues & Benefits services across all four authorities is now in place with the rest of the staff coming together in early 2015.

Highcliffe Castle

The council has received initial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a £2.86 million bid for The Phoenix Flies Project at Highcliffe Castle. Development funding of £233,100 has also been awarded to help the council progress plans to apply for a full grant at a later date. The project aims to repair and reopen a full wing of the castle which is currently derelict inside, and create a dynamic Heritage Centre for visitors to discover the fascinating story of this magnificent building.

Christchurch town centre

The council provided £200,000 for the refurbishment of Saxon Square which was completed this summer.

An exhibition of possible enhancements to the town centre was held to canvass residents' views on some initial ideas. People's opinions will now be used to refine the proposals to come up with further ideas which can go out to consultation.