StateofDorset

2025

Diversity

Economy

Children

Leisure and Culture

Health and Wellbeing

Natural and Historic Environment

Deprivation

Older People

Population

Crime

Housing

Produced by Policy, Intelligence and Performance

Dorset Council

State of Dorset 2025

Dorset is an attractive place to live, work, and holiday, offering a unique natural environment, a rich cultural heritage, and a mix of seaside, rural, and urban settings.

An above-average proportion of Dorset residents aged 16 and over report high life satisfaction and feel that the things they do in life are worthwhile. The natural environment, along with cultural and recreational activities, plays an important role in this and helps make communities feel safer and stronger.

There are approximately 390,000 people living in the Dorset Council area, with a significant proportion (31%) aged 65 and over - the highest of any unitary authority in England. Among the workforce (aged 16 to 64), 44% are aged 50 and over. While older workers bring valuable experience and skills, these will need to be replaced as they retire. The growing number of older people will also increase demand for health and social care services.

At the other end of the age spectrum, experiences in a child's early years lay the foundation for lifelong health and wellbeing. In 2024, 67% of pupils achieved a 'Good Level of Development' at the end of Reception year - a decrease of 4% compared to 2019, but very similar to the national average.

December 2025

StateofDorset
Population

Dorset Council

Population projections and changes in Dorset's demographic profile support planning by indicating how service demands and provision, housing demand, and business needs may evolve. Population change is influenced by natural change (births and deaths) and by migration into and out of the area.

Big Numbers Box

5.1%
projected population change 2025-2035

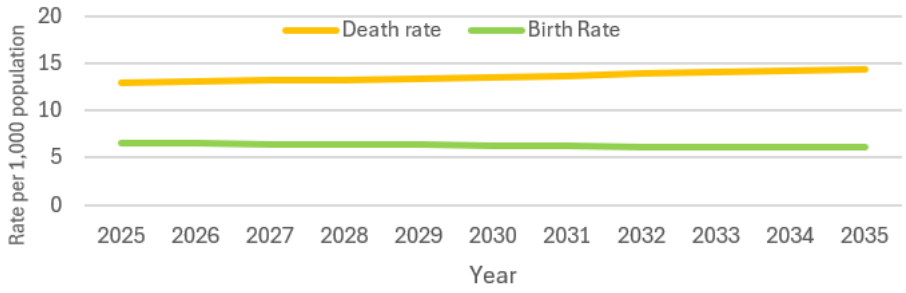
389,950 **total est. population in 2024**

2.3% per year 65+ projected population change 2025-2035

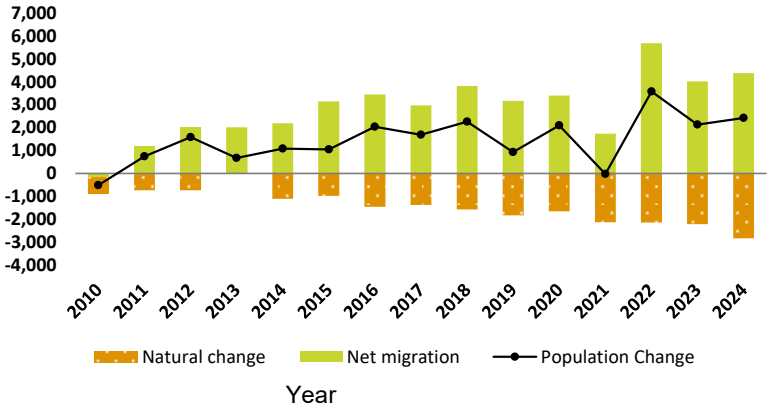
27,700 Total increase in +65 2025-2035, an increase of 2.3%pa

6,540 **decrease** in 0 to 15 yrs age group 2025-2035

Box 1: Population Change



The birth rate in Dorset is projected to fall from 6.6 per 1,000 population in 2025 to 6.1 per 1,000 population in ten years' time. Total number of births in the year 2024/25 were 2,660, total deaths were 4,877.
Due to the net decline in natural change (births minus deaths), population growth is driven by migration into the area. The graph below shows the contribution that net migration makes to population growth. Net migration in the year 2023-2024 was 5,100. Mostly internal migration.



The figure above shows the components of change for each year. Note: from 2022 onwards, figures are projected.
Over the period 2011-2021, Dorset's population grew by 14,400, a growth of 4% compared with 7% nationally. Over the period 2025 to 2035, the population is projected to grow by another 5% which is the same as the national population.

Population

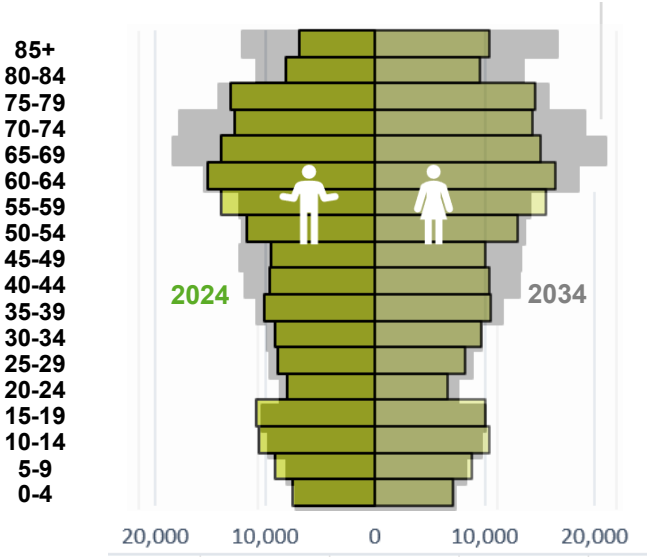
Box 2: Age breakdown of population

	2013	2023	2033
0-15 yrs	59,600	57,600	50,400
16-64 yrs	211,700	210,300	211,000
65+ yrs	97,200	117,000	145,400
Total	368,600	384,800	406,800

The median age of the Dorset Council area was 46 in 2011. This is estimated to increase to 52 in 2025 and is projected to be 54 by 2035. For comparison, the median age for England in 2025 is estimated to be 40.

Between 2013 and 2023, Dorset's 65+ population grew by 19,800 (20%) and is projected to rise by 28,400 (24%) by 2033. Its share of the total population is increasing—from 26% in 2013 to 30% in 2023, and an estimated 36% by 2033.

Dorset's working-age population (16–64) has remained almost static—down 1,400 between 2013 and 2023, and projected to rise by just 700 by 2033. Meanwhile, the 0–15 age group is expected to fall by 9,200 over the same period.



The population pyramid remains top-heavy and has changed little over the past decade, with further expansion projected by 2034 (grey bars) compared to 2024 (coloured bars).

The aging of early-1960s baby boomers creates a bulge between ages 55–74, amplified by high net internal migration among 60–69-year -olds.

Out-migration of young adults is also evident. From age 85+, the chart groups more than five years, making the pyramid appear wider at the top.

Box 3: Census 2021

- Much of our data and therefore, how we understand the experiences and issues affecting people in Dorset, comes from the Census.
- The Census is carried out every 10 years and Census Day was on 21st March 2021.
- As the Census only happens every 10 years, there is likely to be considerable change in our understanding of the population.
- Census 2021 reflected shifting language and will help with our understanding of marginalised communities, for example asking about Armed Forces service, sexual orientation and gender identity.
- The Census is vital for understanding communities and directing funding where it's needed. Organisations use Census data to plan, predict, and develop services based on population characteristics.

Sources

The following datasets have been used throughout the bulletin:
2024 Mid-year estimates, Office for National Statistics
2021 Components of Population Change, Office for National Statistics
2022 based Dorset Council Continuity projections, Experimental, Dorset Council

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December 2025

StateofDorset Children

Dorset Council

According to the latest estimates from the ONS there are 67,150 0 to 17 year olds living in Dorset. As a proportion of our total population this has remained relatively stable since 2020 at around 17% of the population compared to a figure of 21% for England and Wales.

Between 2025 and 2035 the number of 0-4 year olds is expected to decrease by about 800 while the number of 5-15 year olds is projected to decrease by about 5,800.

Big Numbers Box

Sources 2 and 3

67,150 total children

63% Pupils with an EHC Plan educated in mainstream schools

419* Children and young people **in care** in Dorset

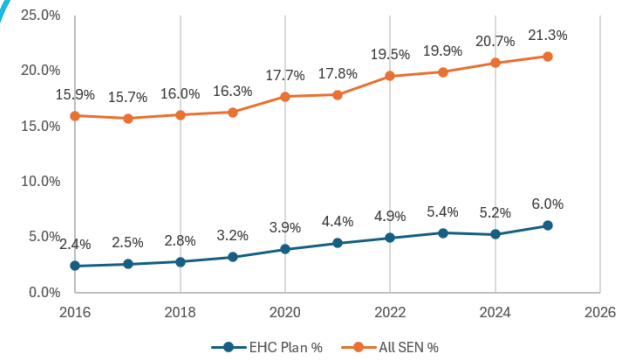
69 Looked after children in every 10,000 in Dorset

Primary school children with an EHC SEN plan **3.7%**

25% Percentage of pupils achieving 9-5 in English and Maths (Free School Meals Gap)

Box 1: Special Educational Need[3]

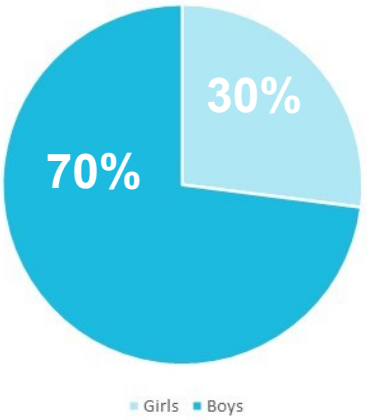
SEN Pupils in Dorset Council Schools



The percentage of children with Special Educational Need has increased in Dorset each year since 2017. The figure has increased from 17.8% in 2021 to 21.3% in 2025. The percentage with either a statement or an EHC Plan has more than doubled over the past ten years, from 2.4% to 6.0%.

- One in four pupils with an EHC plan has an Autistic Spectrum Condition and just over one in five have speech language and communication needs.
- It is likely that a pupil may have more than one special educational need.
- 63% of pupils with an EHC Plan are educated in Mainstream Schools in Dorset.
- 70% of Dorset Council school pupils with an EHC are boys and 57% with SEN Support are boys. This is very similar to the national picture. The proportion of girls with SEN is increasing.

Dorset Council School Pupils Education, Health and Care (EHC Plan)



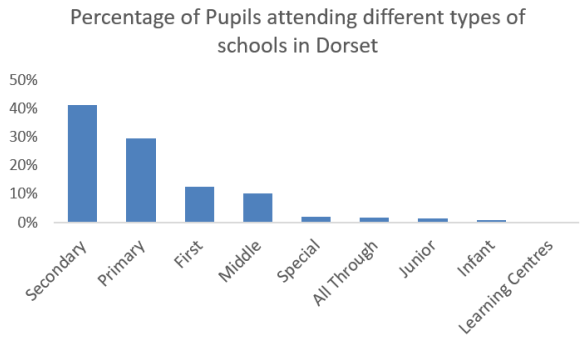
Acronyms

EHC = Education, Health and Care Plan
FSM = Free School Meals
SEN = Special Educational Needs
* Doesn't include unaccompanied asylum seeking children

Children

Box 2: Education

- We currently have just over 46,300 pupils attending schools in Dorset.
- There are 158 schools in Dorset with a small number operating in more than one location across the Council area.
- Different areas of Dorset have either a two-tier system which have a Primary (including Junior and Infant) and Secondary and other areas have a three-tier system which includes Primary, Middle and Secondary. Also some Secondary schools run from 11 to 18 including a sixth form whilst others are from 11 to 16. There are no grammar schools in the Dorset Council area.
- Just over 40% of Dorset Council's school pupils attend Secondary Schools and 10% attend Middle Schools. 45% attend Primary Schools including infants and Juniors. Approximately 2% attend Special Schools and less than 1% attend Learning Centres.
  School sizes vary dramatically from the biggest Secondary School with just over 2,000 pupils to small rural schools with less than 50 pupils.



Box 3: Post-16 opportunities[4]

- The percentage of 16 and 17 year olds in Dorset in education or training in 2024 was 91.6% - a bit higher than the South West at 90.7% and very similar to England 92.1%.
- Accessing services is a considerable issue in rural Dorset. Approximately 44% of Dorset residents fall within the top 20% most geographically deprived in England for access to a range of services, including schools.
- Travel time to the nearest further education college by public transport/walking in Dorset is 31 minutes—one of the 10 highest of any Unitary Authority in England. This compares to 21 minutes for England and 25 minutes for the South West.
- However, Dorset has strong participation in 'Higher' level apprenticeships, with 3,333 participants aged 16 and over per 100,000 population. This compares to 2,369 in the South West and 2,031 nationally, making Dorset one of the highest-ranking Unitary Authorities in England.
- There are two levels of a 'Higher' apprenticeship Level 4 and Level 5:
  - Level 4 apprenticeships are equivalent to the first year of an undergraduate degree, or a Higher National Certificate.
  - Level 5 apprenticeships are equivalent to a foundation degree, or a Higher National Diploma.

Sources

1 2022-trend based ONS population projections
2 2024 MYE, 0-17 year-olds, ONS
3 Dorset Council, Children's Services October 31 2025
4 Local Government Inform 2024/25

Produced by Policy, Intelligence & Performance performanceandresearch@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

December 2025

State of Dorset Crime

Dorset Council

In a national context, recorded crime in the Dorset Council area remains low compared to other police authority areas in England.

Data relates to the 2024/25 fiscal year unless stated otherwise.

Total recorded crime has risen by 2% this year.[1] However, reported anti-social behaviour incidents have decreased by 12% while the number of domestic abuse incidents has increased by 12%.

Big Numbers Box

773 Serious sexual offences in Dorset last year

80% of sexual assaults are committed against women

anti-social behaviour incidents **4,771**

1 in 7 of all anti-social behaviour incidents in Dorset occur in Melcombe Regis

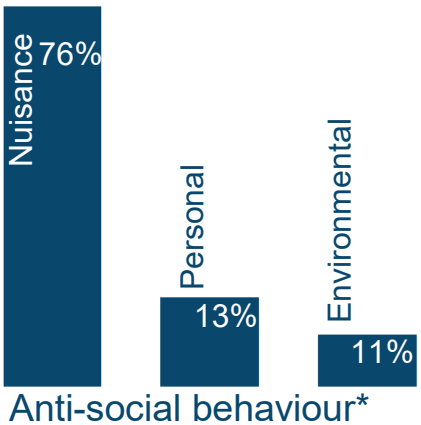
4,328 domestic abuse incidents

Total crime up by **2%**

Box 1: Dorset Community Safety Partnership Priorities[1]

- **Sexual Offences**
- **Domestic Abuse and Stalking**
- **Serious and Public Place Violence**
- **Anti-Social Behaviour**
- **Rural Crime**

- In 2024-25 there were 4,771 incidents of **anti-social behaviour** in the Dorset Council area.
- 76% of these were classified as nuisance, 13% personal and 11% environmental.
- Weymouth has the highest rate of anti-social behaviour across the Dorset Council area.
- There were 773 serious **sexual offences** in the Dorset Council area last year.
- There were 4,328 **domestic abuse** incidents in the Dorset Council area last year.



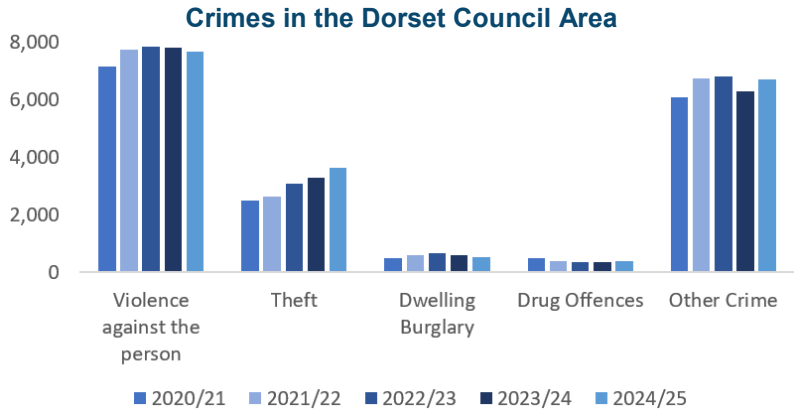
* 'Nuisance: directed towards a community', Personal: 'directed towards a person', Environmental: 'directed at the local area'.

Sources

1 Community Safety Partnership Performance Reporting, 2025

Crime

Box 2: Other Crime





- Total crimes were slightly higher this year than in the previous year.
- East Dorset is the area with the lowest crime rate in Dorset and Weymouth and Portland has the highest.
- Crime is highest in Dorset between May and October each year.
- In 2023 68% of residents surveyed across Dorset said that they felt safe in their local area after dark.
- In the past year, residential burglary accounted for 87% of acquisitive crimes, while robbery made up 13%.
- The highest number of robberies occurred in Weymouth & Portland, whereas the highest burglary rate per household was in West Dorset.
- Compared to other areas, crime in the Dorset Council area remains low.

Box 3: Hate Crime[4]

- A hate crime or incident is any criminal offence or non-criminal incidence, perceived by the victim or any other person, as being motivated by prejudice or hate towards a person's protected characteristic. There were 75 Hate crime and incidents in 2024/25 up from 27 last year - a 177% increase.
- The number of religious or racially aggravated crimes has risen in the last three years. There were 132 recorded cases in 2024/25, up from 85 in the last year - a 55% increase.
- A key focus of local policing on hate crimes is building trust and confidence in reporting, and ensuring that everyone knows how to report a hate crime or incident. Third-party reporting centres and trusted community partners play an important role in this.
- The council is a member of Prejudice Free Dorset, a partnership group made up of local agencies that seeks to promote inclusive communities and challenge prejudice across Dorset, so everyone can go about their daily lives safely and with confidence[5].

Sources

3 Compare your area Police.uk (www.police.uk)
4 Dorset Police, 2024/25
5 https://www.prejudicefreedorset.co.uk/

December 2025

StateofDorset Deprivation

Dorset Council

Patterns of deprivation vary across Dorset. Areas identified as having higher levels of deprivation are mainly located in urban centres such as Weymouth and Portland, while some rural communities experience deprivation related to housing and access to essential services. The English Indices of Deprivation divide the Dorset Council area into 223 geographic units.

Data from the Indices should not be compared over time. Because they are based on relative rankings, a rise or fall in an area's position does not necessarily indicate improvement or decline; it may instead reflect changes in how other areas are performing.

Big Numbers Box

9 areas of Dorset in most deprived nationally*

Dorset population living in rural areas **47%**

Average house prices

10 **times higher than average earnings**

88 areas in the most deprived nationally for **access to housing and services**

19 areas in the most deprived nationally for **education**

7 areas in the most deprived nationally for **income**

14,800 workless households

13.5% workless households

Box 1: Social deprivation

- There are 9 areas (out of a total of 223) in Dorset within the top 20% most deprived nationally for multiple deprivation.[1]
- 7 of these are within Weymouth and Portland, one is in Bridport and one in Ferndown.

Life expectancy gap for males in Dorset



9 areas in Dorset suffer high deprivation



Most deprived area **Least deprived area**

- The gap in life expectancy between the most deprived and least deprived areas of Dorset is 4.9 years for men and 3.2 years for women.[2]
- As indicators of social mobility, children on Free School Meals in Dorset achieve below regional and national education standards, and South Dorset ranks third highest in the region for 25–34-year-olds in unskilled employment.[4]

- 47% of Dorset's population live in rural areas[3]. Barriers to housing and essential services are significant in Dorset reflecting rurality and distance from services. 88 Dorset neighbourhoods fall in the 20% most deprived nationally for this measure: 30 in West Dorset, 20 in North Dorset, 18 in East Dorset, 10 in Purbeck and 10 in Weymouth & Portland.[1]

Sources

1 English Indices of Deprivation (2025), MHCLG
2 Office for Health Improvement and disparity, Public Health England,2023
3 Census of Population, 2021
4 South-West_Social_Mobility_Commission_2023_Report.pdf (exeter.ac.uk)

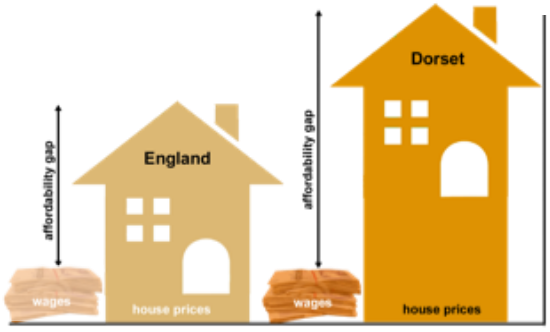
*Most deprived = areas fall within the top 20% nationally

Deprivation

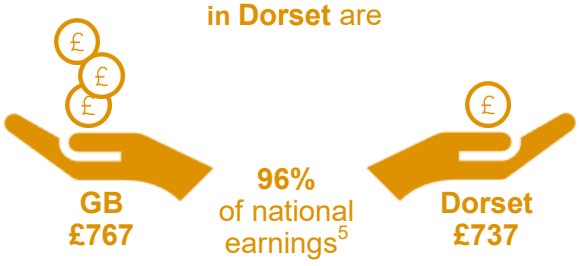
Box 2: Economic deprivation

- 7 neighbourhoods in Dorset fall into the top 20% nationally for income deprivation—5 of these are in Weymouth and Portland.[1]
- In Dorset, about 17,200 people aged 16-64, plus 4,800 children live in 14,800 workless households. 13.5% of Dorset households were workless, very similar to the national figure.[6]

Average house prices are 10x more than average earnings[7]

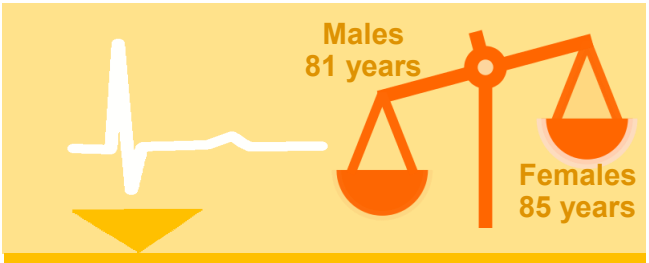


Weekly earnings for people living in Dorset are



Box 3: Health inequalities

- Health inequalities include differences in health status (such as life expectancy and prevalence of conditions), access to and experience of care, patient satisfaction, health-related behaviours, and wider determinants like housing quality.
- Nine areas in Dorset are within the top 20% most deprived for Health Deprivation in the latest Indices of Deprivation 2025, seven are in Weymouth and Portland, one in Dorchester and one in Bridport.
- In the last 10 years, female life expectancy at birth has fallen from 85.0 to 84.8 years, while for men it has remained at 80.8 years.
- The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to increased mortality in 2020 and 2021. The impact of this is seen in the regional and local area life expectancy estimates[8]



Female life expectancy at birth decreased by 0.2 years between 2012 and 2022

Sources

5 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (2025), ONS (full time gross weekly earnings)
6 Annual Population Survey (2023), Households by combined economic activity status, ONS
7 Housing affordability in England and Wales QMI - Office for National Statistics
8 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/bulletins/lifeexpectancyforlocalareasoftheuk/between2001to2003and2020to2022#main-points

December 2025

State of Dorset
Diversity

There are many definitions available for the term ‘diversity’ but they all cover the same fundamental issues. These include the recognition of differences, respecting those differences and appreciating the fact that different perspectives are valuable and can bring real benefits to society in general.

There are nine protected characteristics to which the general public sector equality duty apply:

- *age*
- *disability*
- *sex*
- *religion & belief*
- *gender reassignment*
- *sexual orientation*
- *marriage & civil partnership*
- *pregnancy & maternity*
- *race*

Big Numbers Box

31% aged 65+

20% disabled

2.2% LGBQ+

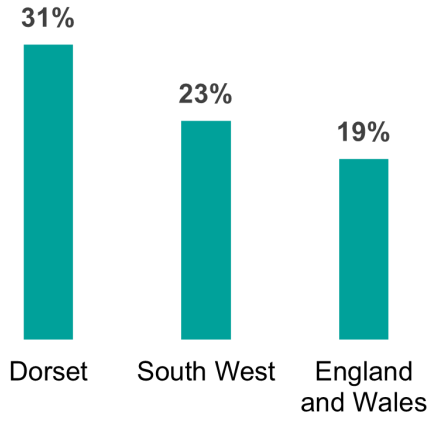
0.3%* gender diverse

6.1% ethnic minority

6,820 non-Christian religion

Box 1: Age & religion

31% of people in Dorset are 65 or older — much higher than the 19% national average[1]



- Dorset has a much smaller working age population at 55% compared to 63% in England and Wales.[1]
- The five major non–Christian world religions Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism and Sikhism make up 1% of Dorset’s population.[2]
- Dorset’s main non-Christian religious groups are mostly found in the county’s towns.[2]

Sources

1 Mid–year population estimates (2024), ONS
2 Census 2021, ONS
* Please note this data has been reclassified by the ONS as Official Statistics in development

Diversity

Box 2: Ethnic Minorities[2]

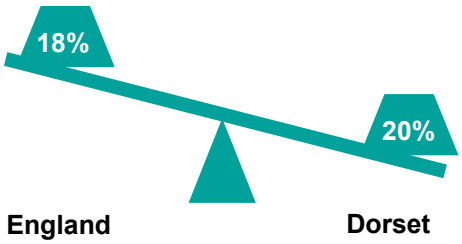
6% of Dorset's residents are from an ethnic minority compared to 20% nationally



- 40% of Dorset's ethnic minority population are 'White Other'—people who identify as white but not as British (for example, Polish or Bulgarian).
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups make up 19% of Dorset's ethnic minorities.
- Asian or Asian British groups account for 18% of the ethnic minority population in the Dorset Council area.

Box 3: Disability

20% of Dorset residents have a long-term health problem or disability[2]



- 11% of Dorset residents claim a disability benefit—the same as England.[3]
- The number of disabled people varies greatly by neighbourhood.[3]
- Some areas have up to 10 times as many disabled residents as others.[3]

Box 4: Gender and sexuality[2]

- The 2021 Census included new questions about sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Under the Equality Act 2010, the protected characteristic is gender reassignment, not gender identity. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) collects gender identity data for insight, but classifies it as "statistics in development," advising cautious interpretation.
- 2.2% of Dorset residents (about 7,000 people) identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or another non-heterosexual orientation. This is lower than the national and South West average (3.1%).
- 0.3% of Dorset residents said their gender identity was different from the sex assigned at birth, similar to the national average.
- Both questions were voluntary and only asked of people aged 16 and over.

Sources

3 Stat-Xplore, Department of Work and Pensions, February & July 2025

December 2025

StateofDorset Economy

Dorset Council

The UK grapples with a productivity gap, trailing behind G7 counterparts like the US, France and Germany in output per hour.[14] In Dorset, our local productivity lags, producing 15.5% less per hour compared to the national average.[3]

Big Numbers Box

149,000 employees

21,000 businesses

£709 weekly earnings

£1.5bn Dorset's productivity gap[3]

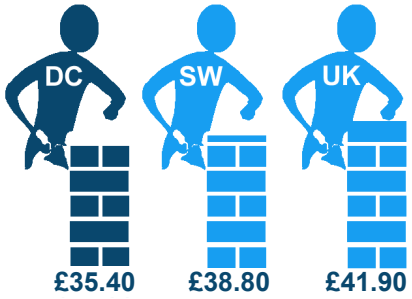
44% of workforce aged 50+

-1,400 Decline in working-age population by 2035

Box 1: Businesses

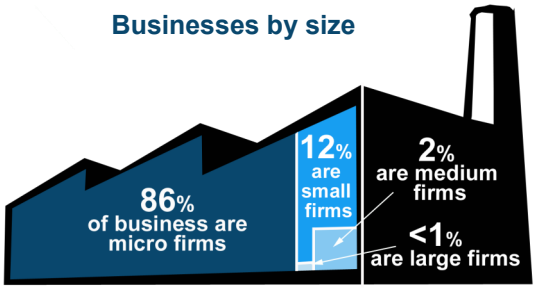
- Although business survival is good, we have fewer than average new business startups, with 73 to every 10,000 residents aged 16-64 compared with 77 in England.[1]
- And we have smaller business units: just 7 employees per unit compared with 10 in England.[2]
- Large firms make up less than 1% of Dorset's businesses but employ around 20% of the workforce. Providing sites like Dorset Innovation Park supports local business growth, helps retain firms, attracts new ones, and creates jobs.

GVA per hour worked[3]



- Dorset's competitiveness, though improving, currently ranks 209 out of 362 local authorities. This marks an advance from 2019 when the ranking stood at 222.[4]
- While Dorset boasts above-average representation in advanced engineering and manufacturing, it lags behind in businesses associated with high productivity[5] and high R&D spending sectors.[6]
- Self-employment among economically active residents has risen to 20%, up from 13% in 2011, compared to 16% in England.[7]

Businesses by size



Sources

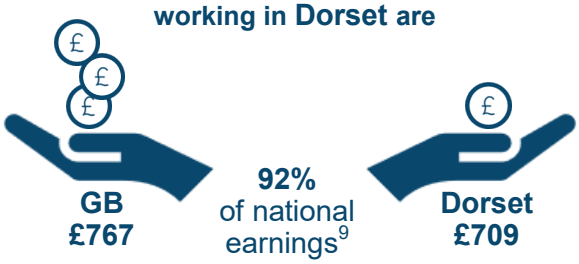
1 Business Demography 2024, ONS
2 UK Businesses 2025 and BRES 2024, ONS
3 Gross Value Added - GVA per hour worked (provisional) 2023, ONS
4 UK Competitiveness Index 2023, Centre for International Competitiveness
5 UK Businesses 2024
6 As defined in UK Gross domestic expenditure on research and development: 2017, ONS
7 Census 2011 & 2021, ONS

Economy

Box 2: People

- Manufacturing, health, retail, education and hospitality are all big employers in Dorset.[10]
- 12 neighbourhoods in Dorset rank among the 20% most deprived areas in England for employment - 8 of these are in the Weymouth & Portland area.[8]

Weekly earnings for people working in Dorset are



- 44% of the Dorset workforce is aged over 50 compared with 34% in England.[10] This is an increase of 22% in ten years. Older workers have experience and skills and, as more people retire, other workers need training to fill the gaps.



- Over the next decade, Dorset's working-age population (16–64) is projected to decline by 1,400 people (1%), while the number of residents aged 65 and over is expected to grow by 23%. As a result, the old-age dependency ratio is set to rise from 580 to 710 per 1,000 between 2025 and 2035.[11]
- Around 2,620 apprenticeships were started in Dorset in 2024/25.[12] Each £1 of public investment in apprenticeships generates £21 in economic benefit.[13]

Box 3: The national economy

- The economy experienced a modest growth of 1.3% in year-on-year to Q1 2025, driven by services and production.[15]
- Inflation increased to 3.8% in July 2025—well above the Bank of England's target of 2%. The Bank cut interest rates to 4.0%, aiming to support growth while managing inflation.[16]
- Employment rose to 75.3%, but unemployment also increased to 4.7%. Wage growth remains strong but is slowing.[16]
- Retail sales and house prices saw modest increases, while consumer confidence remains subdued.[16]

Sources

8 English Indices of Deprivation (2025), DCLG
9 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (2025), ONS
10 Census of Population (2021), workplace statistics
11 2022-based experimental continuity population projections, 2025-2035, Dorset Council
12 Apprenticeship starts 2024-25, The Department for Education
13 The Economic Impact of Apprenticeships, 2014, Centre for Economic and Business Research
14 Productivity: Economic indicators, House of Commons Library, 14/08/25
15 GDP quarterly national accounts, UK: January to March 2025, ONS
16 Economic indicators: Key statistics for the UK economy, House of Commons Library, 27/08/25

December 2025

StateofDorset
Health and Wellbeing

Dorset Council

Healthy life expectancy varies across the county. Health and wellbeing are influenced by a range of factors, including where people live, how they travel, diet, employment, and use of leisure time. These behaviours affect both physical and mental health and are often interconnected.

Nine areas in Dorset are within the top 20% most deprived for Health Deprivation in the latest Indices of Deprivation 2025, seven are in Weymouth and Portland, one in Dorchester and one in Bridport.

Big Numbers Box

12,000 residents living with dementia by 2035

4,328 domestic abuse incidents last year

12x LiveWell Dorset's return on prevention

32% Year 6 children over-weight or obese

62% adults over-weight or obese

17 years difference between male healthy and overall life expectancy

Box 1: Health

- Healthy life expectancy shows how long people live in good health. In Dorset, there is a difference of 17 years between healthy life expectancy and overall life expectancy for men and 21 years for women.[1]
- 62% of Dorset adults are overweight or obese—slightly better than the national average (65%), but still a major health concern.[2]
- 1 in 10 Dorset residents are unpaid carers—more than the national average.[3] That's around 35,500 people providing vital support without pay.
- On average, 10% of adults in Dorset smoke; however the rate rises to over 20% for certain social groups. This compares to 12% across England.[2]

Adults in Dorset are increasingly inactive—22%, which is similar to England[2]



Sources

1 Healthy life expectancy & life expectancy at birth, Public Health Fingertips 2023
2 Public Health Fingertips 2023/2024 (3 year range)
3 2021 Census, TS039

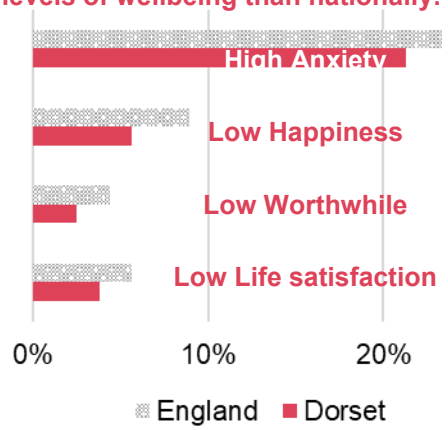
Health and Wellbeing

Dorset Council

Box 2: Mental health

- The suicide rate in the Dorset area is currently similar to England at 12.8 per 100,000. The suicide rate is higher for males (20.1 per 100,000) than females (6 per 100,000).[15]
- National rates of probable mental health conditions have stabilised, affecting roughly 20% of children[7].
- A similar stabilising picture has been seen in national armed forces personnel, with 1 in 8 being seen in military healthcare for a mental health reason[8].
- In 2022-3, almost 5 million people were receiving talking therapies or secondary mental health services[9].

Fewer Dorset residents report low levels of wellbeing than nationally:[2]



Box 3: Major Health Conditions[14]

- Cancer is a major cause of premature death. Early cancer diagnosis rates are lower in the most deprived areas, and cancer mortality in turn is significantly higher in the most deprived areas at 63 per 100,000 compared to 36 per 100,000.
- Of Dorset's 60+ population, 10% are frail (15,034), with 59% of these classed as having very high frailty. The rate of hip fractures in ages 65+ are significantly higher in the most deprived areas compared to the least at 593 per 100,000 compared to 502 per 100,000.
- The number of people living with long-term conditions (LTCs) in Dorset is rising. In 2025, around 73,300 residents had one LTC, and over 150,000 were living with two or more.

Box 4: Improving outcomes

- A Movement for Movement - is a new social movement to help people living in Dorset to 'sit a little less and move a little more'. Managed by Active Dorset - one of 42 regional Active Partnerships in England[13].
- NHS Health Checks are free midlife assessments for adults aged 40–74 that screen for risks like heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease, and stroke, helping identify problems early and support lifestyle changes to improve long-term health outcomes.
- Neighbourhood health approaches are important because they tailor support to local needs, reduce health inequalities, and bring services closer to communities—making prevention and care more effective and accessible.

Sources

5 POPPI, 2024
6 2023 Dementia Carers Count
7 Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2023 - wave 4 follow up to the 2017 survey, NHS Digital
8 UK armed forces mental health annual statistics: financial year 2023/24, Gov.UK
9 Mental health statistics: prevalence, services and funding in England, UK Parliament, 2024
10 Admission episodes for alcohol-specific conditions (under 18 years) (Persons)2021/22 - 2023/24, Crude rate - per 100,000, Public Health Fingertips
11 Alcohol and drugs prevention, treatment and recovery: why invest?, Public Health England, 12/02/18
12 Dorset Community Safety Partnership Performance Reporting, 2025
13 https://www.activedorset.org/
14 Dorset Joint Strategic Needs Assessment November 2025, Public Health Dorset

December 2025

State of Dorset
Housing

Dorset Council

Decent homes can result in a better quality of life. Good housing can improve health and financial well-being, helping residents feel safe and secure. It helps to support thriving communities and access to a safe and suitable home provides children with the best start in life.

Housing plays a key role in economic growth and employment opportunities for individuals and businesses.

Big Numbers Box

70.4% of Dorset homes are owner-occupied.

£340,000 Average house price

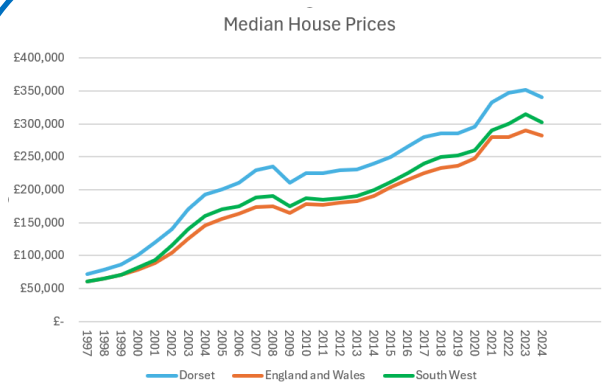
16.3% Private rent

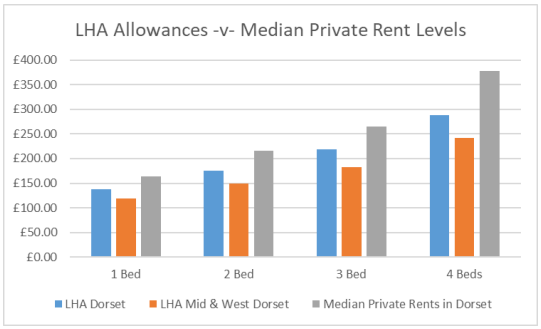
Shared Ownership: 1%

23,414 Units of social housing

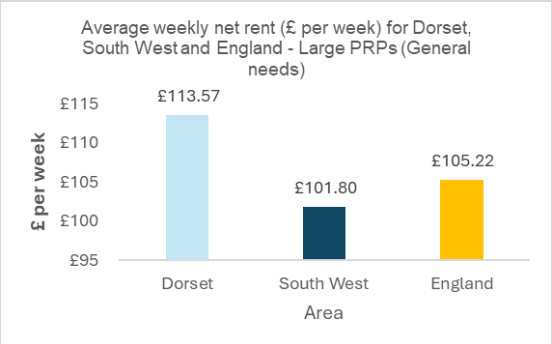
12.3% Social Housing

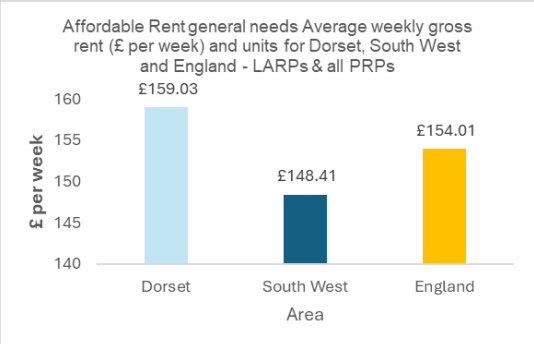
Box 1: Housing Costs





In the last twenty years, annual house prices have, in general, been on the rise, apart from a significant drop during the economic crash of 2008 and recent economic uncertainty. Dorset prices are higher than both the national and regional prices. Whilst median private rental costs are on par with the national rents, the gap between local housing allowance and rents has widened. Local Housing Allowance is used to calculate the maximum amount that people renting from a private landlord can claim in Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.





The figures above show the average cost to rent a housing association property at either a social rent or an affordable rent. Affordable rents are calculated based on 80% of the market rent in our area. As market rent increases, so does the affordable rent cost.

Housing

Box 2: Housing Needs

Housing Register	2025
Band A Emergency Need	201
Band B High Need	1,057
Band C Medium Need	1,587
Band D Low Need	3,854

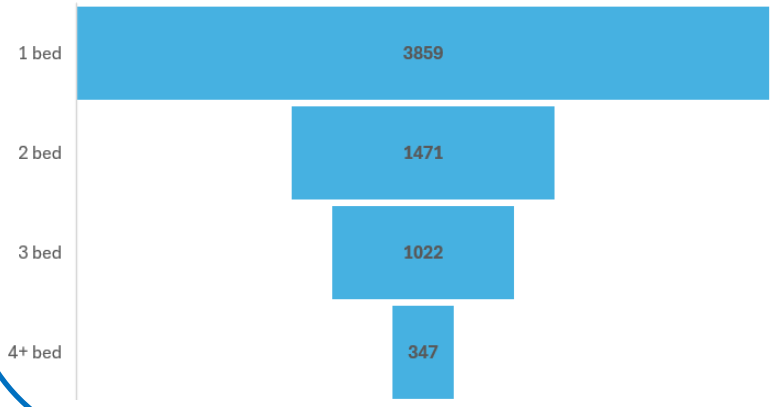
As at 26 October 2025 6,699 households were registered for housing through Homechoice Dorset, the register for those people seeking a move to social housing.

Across Dorset, 77.9% of homes are under-occupied by one or more bedrooms, with 64.2% of Dorset homes having 3 or more bedrooms.

The census says that 3,496 households with dependent children live in overcrowded conditions. 970 of these have applied to join the waiting list for social housing.

Although the greatest demand is for smaller homes, families needing larger properties often face longer waits because these rarely become available. In the 12 months to September 2025, only 14 homes with four or more bedrooms were let through Homechoice Dorset.

Top-heavy demand for smaller properties:



The housing register shows a top-heavy need for smaller properties, which is mirrored in homeless approaches to the Council. Over half of emergency homeless households require a one-bedroom home, while around a quarter need two bedrooms.

Box 3: Homelessness Demand

There was a very similar number of homeless approaches in the year to March 2023.

The service receives[1]:

- Average 588 calls per month. Each call lasting up to 30 minutes.
- Average of 2,410 emails each month
- More than 4,190 contacts from the online portal
- Initial enquiries resulted in 2,911 homeless assessments

Main reasons given for Homelessness:

- End of private rented accommodation
- Family no longer willing or able to accommodate
- Victim of domestic abuse
- Relationship breakdown
- Departure from institutional custody
- End of social rented tenancy
- Domestic abuse perpetrator evicted

Sources

The following datasets have been used throughout the bulletin:
Regulator of Social Housing—RP Social Housing by Local Authority Area 2023-2024
Huume Housing Register Data
Office for National Statistics Housing Data
1 November 2025

December 2025

State of Dorset
Leisure and Culture

Dorset Council

Recent data reveals that nearly 9 out of 10 adults engaged in the arts at least once in the past year, highlighting the widespread appeal and importance of cultural activities. Additionally, two-thirds of people visited a heritage site, and a third visited a museum or gallery.[0]

While activity rates among Dorset's young people have improved in recent years, challenges remain. Almost half of Dorset's children and teens are still not active enough, and nearly a third are overweight. Staying active isn't just about physical health; it's also linked to better mental wellbeing and a lower risk of many health problems.[3]

Big Numbers Box

£47m Value of the arts to our economy[4]

£4m Funding from ACE 2024/25

3,000 Dorset Youth Football League players

62% adults over-weight or obese[3]

68% adults are physically active[3]

76% say arts and culture make them happy

Box 1: Health and wellbeing value

- Arts and cultural interventions can have a positive impact on specific health conditions such as dementia, Parkinson's and depression[1]. The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and 'Arts in Hospitals' partnership saw the BSO performing live for patients living with dementia to increase their wellbeing. The project found that dementia patients benefited through fewer falls, reduced medication, and reduced hospital stays.[7]
- Nearly half of older people (43%) say that accessibility is an important factor when they choose arts venues to attend.[2]
- Overall 76% of people aged 65+ say that arts & culture are important to making them feel happy. And nearly as many (69%) say that arts and culture are important in improving their overall quality of life.[2]

76% of older people say arts & culture makes them feel happy



Sources

0 Participation in the arts, culture and heritage, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 23/02/24
1 Create, Arts Council England, December 2015
2 http://www.comresglobal.com/polls/arts-council-england-older-people-poll/ [Accessed 03/07/18]
3 Public Health Fingertips 2023/2024 (3 year range)
4 Regional gva (balanced) by industry in current prices, SIC 90-91, Table 3b, ONS, 2022
5 BRES Employment, Office for National Statistics, 2023

Leisure and Culture

Box 2: Engagement & Economic Value

- Research has shown that Artsreach, a Dorset-based arts organisation, enhances public funding by an estimated 93%. This significant impact is largely due to the 'volunteer multiple,' which brings additional time, commitment, and expertise to arts administration in Dorset.[6]
- There are 11 competitive youth football leagues operating across Dorset as well as hundreds of youngsters playing in non-competitive leagues.[9]
- Dorset was awarded just under £4m across 28 awards from Arts Council England for 2024/25.[8]
- Creative Industries employment in Dorset grew by over 14% between 2015 and 2023—far outpacing the 3% growth seen across all industries.[5]
- For every £1 invested in the Arts Development Company by the council, there is a return of £4 secured in external investment into the area.[7]
- Dorset Art Weeks is one of the longest-established art events, having first started in 1992. Last year saw over 260 venues featured, celebrating fine art, craft, and making.[10] From 2026, the event will take place annually.[11]

Every £1 spent locally is matched four times over in external benefit to Dorset



Box 3: Play matters[12]

- In 2025/26 Dorset Council will be working closely with residents and communities to produce a Play Strategy.
- Play matters because it's proven to support children's health, learning, and wellbeing. When children play, they're more active, happier, and better prepared for school.
- Research from the national Everything to Play For report[13] shows outdoor play has declined by 50% in a generation, and this decline links to rising childhood obesity and mental health issues.
- Investing in play now can reduce future costs in health and social care, improve school readiness, and create stronger, safer communities. It's about making the most of our spaces and ensuring every child has the time and freedom to enjoy being a child.
- Dorset Council's 'Children, Young People and Families Plan' wants every child to have safe spaces to play, welcoming communities, and the freedom to enjoy childhood.

Sources

6 Artsreach
7 The Arts Development Company
8 National Investment Dashboard, Arts council England, (Accessed 23/09/25)
9 https://www.dorsetyouthfootballleague.co.uk/ (Accessed 23/09/25)
10 https://dorsetvisualarts.org/about-us/daw and https://dorsetvisualarts.org/about-us (Accessed 02/10/24)
11 https://dorsetartweeks.co.uk/ (Accessed 23/09/25)
12 https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/news/play-matters-building-a-brighter-future-for-dorset-s-children (Accessed 24/09/25)
13 Everything to Play For, Centre For Young Lives, June 2025

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December 2025

StateofDorset

Natural and Historic Environment

Dorset Council

Dorset's natural and historic environment plays a vital role in supporting health, wellbeing, and the local economy.

Natural systems provide essential goods—such as food, fuel, clean air and water, and productive soil—and deliver valuable services including pollination, flood protection, climate regulation, and tranquillity.

Big Numbers Box

2.4% of waste is sent to landfill

20% of electricity from local renewables[12]

5% of England's ancient monuments

56% of Dorset is designated National Landscape

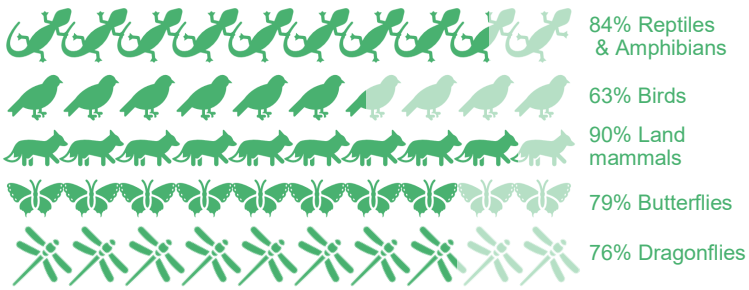
9,217 Listed Buildings

90% chose Dorset for its environment

Box 1: Landmarks & Landscapes

- 90% of Dorset's* residents surveyed said the environment was an important, very important or crucial factor in their decision to live in Dorset. In addition, businesses report a demonstrable positive impact from both the Jurassic Coast and the National Landscape.[1]
- Dorset contains part of England's only natural World Heritage Site and two National Landscapes, covering 56% of the Dorset Council area.[2]
- Dorset is home to 9,217 Listed Buildings of which 245 are Grade I.[3] 5% of England's national protected monuments are in Dorset.
- Dorset's coast is recognised in national and international designations for its unique landscape, scenic quality, wildlife and geological formations.[2]

Dorset is home to...



*includes Christchurch

Sources

1 'Dorset's Environmental Economy', Ash Futures for Dorset County Council, Dorset AONB, Jurassic Coast WHS, Dorset LNP, 2015 (adjusted to 2025 prices)
2 Dorset Databook 2011, Dorset County Council (recalculated)
3 The National Heritage List for England (NHLE), Historic England, 17/09/2025
4 The Clean Growth Strategy, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 12/10/2017
5 Public Health and Landscape, Creating healthy places, Landscape Institute, November 2013

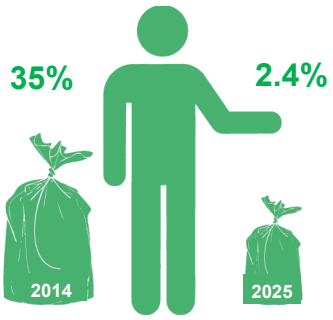
Natural and Historic Environment

Dorset Council

Box 2: Economy and wellbeing

- Dorset's* environmental economy is worth between £1.3bn and £3.5bn per annum. It also supports between 17,000 and 61,000 jobs in the economy.[1]
- The low carbon economy could grow by 11% per year between 2015 and 2030 - four times faster than the rest of the economy.[4]
- Access to nature supports physical and mental health, yet people in deprived areas are significantly less likely to live near green spaces—highlighting the importance of improving access to reduce environmental inequality.[7]
- The landscape can reduce the need for expensive public health interventions. Local public health spending on the landscape can be 27 times more cost-effective than clinical interventions.[5]

% of waste sent to landfill[6]



In 2014, 35% of all waste went to landfill. By 2025, this dropped to just 2.4%

Box 3: Land Use

- Dorset's agricultural land area represents 199,534 ha, just over three quarters of Dorset's total land area. There are just over 2,200 farms in the county.[8]
- Dorset has just over 30,000 ha[7] of woodland cover, which represents 12.1% of Dorset's land area. This is higher than the national average of 10.3%.[8]
- There are over 200 national and local environmental designated areas across Dorset.[8]
- Dorset has 142 km of coastline, much of it designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.[9]







Sources

*includes Christchurch

6 Dorset Council Recycling Team
7 Included outside: Engaging people living in low-income areas in nature, Natural England, Sept 2022
8 Rural regions and sustainable development in England, University of Exeter 2025
9 Dorset Council

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December 2025

StateofDorset
Older People

Dorset Council

The population of Dorset, like the rest of the UK, is ageing. This trend is more pronounced in Dorset due to its larger older population and declining birth rate. The median age in Dorset is now 52, an increase of 5 years since 2011. In comparison, the median age for England and Wales is 40, up by one year.[1]

Typically, 'Older People' refers to those who are no longer of working age, traditionally 65 and older. However, with increased life expectancy, more people are either having to work or choosing to work beyond the traditional retirement age.

Big Numbers Box

34,926 Population of 80+ year olds in 2024

Aged 65+ in Dorset 31%

In England & Wales 19%

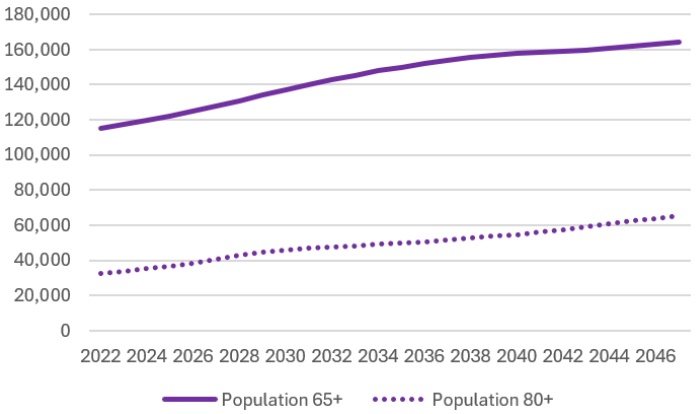
2.2% pa Growth in those aged 65+ over next decade

81 years Life expectancy males

85 years Life expectancy females

Box 1: Population

Population projection of older people



The population 65+ is projected to grow by 22% between 2025 and 2035 and is projected to increase by 32% by 2045.

The population aged 80 and older is expected to grow by 36% from 2025 to 2035, and by 71% by 2045.[2]

Nationwide migration of older people is driven by movement out of urban areas to rural and coastal areas. Net migration figures in Dorset are highest for the 60-64 yr old age group[3].

The Old Age Dependency Ratio (OADR) measures the number of people over 65 per 1,000 people aged 16 to 64. In England and Wales, the OADR is 297, while in Dorset, it is 537[1].

Nationally, 54% of household growth between 2023 and 2033 will be in homes where the main householder is aged 75 or over. In Dorset, this figure is 87%.

The population of those 75+ living in care homes or nursing homes is projected to grow by 28% in Dorset, slightly above the average for England of 26%[4].

Older People

Box 2: Life expectancy & work

Life expectancy has been increasing at a slower rate in recent years. People aged 65 in Dorset can expect to live for a further 22.5 years for women and 19.8 years for men.[5]

People are living longer and healthier lives. In Dorset, healthy life expectancy at 65 is above average. Women can expect 12.8 more years in good/fairly good health, and men 11.6 years. This compares to 11.3 and 10.5 years respectively for England.[6]

The life expectancy gap between Dorset's most and least deprived areas is 4.9 years for males and 3.2 years for females.[7] This has decreased since 2020, by two years for females and males.

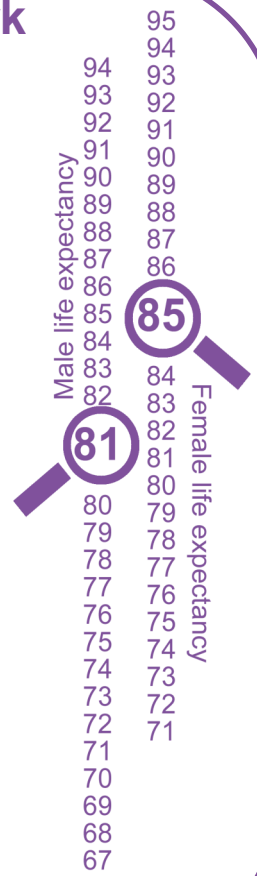


In Dorset, around 12,000 people aged 65+ are economically active and employed. This represents nearly 11% of this age group, indicating later retirement trends.

Additionally, 7% of the economically active population in Dorset are 65 or older, compared to 4% in England and Wales. This highlights a growing reliance on older individuals within the workforce.[8]



According to Census 2021, 32% of the 35,500 unpaid carers were aged 65 and over compared to 23% for England & Wales. As the population ages, there will be increased need for informal care.



Box 3: Living well[9]

- As the population ages in Dorset, older people are more likely to need adaptations to enable them to live independently for longer. With the increase in the cost of living over the past five years, the cost of raw materials and labour has also increased, meaning that alterations and additions to properties are becoming more expensive.
- Dorset's older people account for almost one third of its population. Levels of internal net migration are highest in older age groups, particularly those aged 55 to 69 years, while levels of net out migration are particularly high for 18 to 29 year olds. This means there will be fewer people to work in the economy and care for our ageing population.
- As the population ages and more older people experience disabilities and health issues, the need for specialist housing will increase. It's estimated that 20% of all housing will need to be for older people. By 2038, there will be a projected shortfall of 2,800 specialist bedspaces in the community[10].

Sources

1. 2024 Mid-year estimates, Office for National Statistics
2. 2022-ONS based trend population projections
3. 2021 MYE Internal Migration Estimates, ONS
4. 2018 based Household Projections, ONS
5. Life expectancy at 65 (3 year range 2020-2022), ONS /PH
6. Healthy Life Expectancy (2018-20), ONS/PH
7. Office for Health Improvement and disparity (2023), Public Health England
8. Census 2021
9. Dorset and BCP Local Housing Needs Assessment, 2021
10. Ibid.

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