

Dorchester Town Council

Policy Committee

20 January 2025

Present: The Mayor (Councillor R. Potter) and Councillors R. Biggs, S. Biles (Chair), J. Germodo, G. Jones, K. Reid and R. Ricardo.

In Attendance

Councillors J. Hewitt, W. Gibbons, D. Leaper and M. Rennie.

Apologies: Councillors V. Lloyd-Jones and D. Taylor.

42. **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 18 November 2024, adopted by Council on 25 November 2024, were taken as read and were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

43. **Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

44. **Finance Update**

Members considered a report by the Finance Officer which updated them on the financial position of the Council as at end of December 2024, the level of debt over 30 days and gave details of the payments list from 1 November 2024 to 31 December 2024.

Resolved

- (1) That the payments list, totalling £539,647.08 be approved.
- (2) That the report as a whole be noted.

45. **Medium Term Financial Strategy and Revenue Budget 2025-26**

The Committee considered a report of the Finance Officer covering the draft budget for the Policy Committee, the overall Revenue Budget, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and levels of Reserves.

The Finance Officer responded to Members detailed questions.

Recommended

That the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Revenue Budget 2025-26, as set out in the Appendices 1 to 4 of these Minutes, be adopted, to include: -

- A Council Tax Band D charge of £214.54, an increase of £4.21 (2%)
- A precept of £1,822,939, an increase of 5.5%

46. **Council Terminology**

The Committee agreed that in the interest of equality and to encompass gender nonconformity, the Council move to using the terms Chair and Vice Chair instead of Chairman and Vice Chairman on Council policies, documents and correspondence.

Recommended

That, the Council move to using the terms Chair and Vice Chair instead of Chairman and Vice Chairman on Council policies, documents and correspondence.

47. **Calendar of Meetings 2025-26**

The Town Clerk presented a draft calendar of meetings for 2025-26.

The Committee discussed the format of the informal Annual Town Meeting and agreed that it should be arranged in the same format as the 2024 meeting for one more year. It was suggested that the new boxing club and grant recipients be invited.

Recommended

- (1) That the Calendar of Meetings 2025-26, as set out in Appendix 5 to these Minutes, be agreed.
- (2) That an informal Annual Town Meeting be held in the Corn Exchange on a date to be agreed in May 2025.

48. **Discretionary Annual Core Grants – Citizens Advice Central Dorset**

Further to Minute No. 22/2024 the Committee considered a three year annual core grant application from Citizens Advice Central Dorset.

Resolved

That the annual grant to Citizens Advice Central Dorset continue at the existing level for a further three years, CPI linked.

49. **Dorchester Literary Festival – 18 – 25 October 2025**

The Committee gave consideration to sponsoring the eleventh annual Dorchester Literary Festival. It was noted that other sponsors included Dorchester BID, Thomas Hardy Society and the Duchy of Cornwall.

Members felt that the event should be supported and that the Council be a 'Headline Sponsor' at a cost of £500. It was felt that the Town Clerk should agree the event that the Council was sponsoring so as to ensure it aligned with the Council's general philosophy.

Resolved

That the Council become an 'Headline Event Sponsor' of the Dorchester 2025 Dorchester Literary Festival at a cost of £500.

50. **Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework - Consultation**

The Town Clerk reported that the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government had published a consultation document entitled Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England.

The consultation sought views on introducing measures to strengthen the standards and conduct regime in England and ensure consistency of approach amongst councils investigating serious breaches of their member codes of conduct, including the introduction of the power of suspension.

Specific proposals being consulted upon for legislative change included:

- the introduction of a mandatory minimum code of conduct for local authorities in England
- a requirement that all principal authorities convene formal standards committees to make decisions on code of conduct breaches, and publish the outcomes of all formal investigations
- the introduction of the power for all local authorities (including combined authorities) to suspend councillors or mayors found in serious breach of their code of conduct and, as appropriate, interim suspension for the most serious and complex cases that may involve police investigations
- a new category of disqualification for gross misconduct and those subject to a sanction of suspension more than once in a 5-year period
- a role for a national body to deal with appeals

In addition, the consultation sought views on how to empower victims affected by councillor misconduct to come forward and what additional support would be appropriate to consider.

Members were generally supportive of the proposals and agreed that the Town Clerk should respond on behalf of the Council subject to consultation with the Mayor, Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee.

If Members had any specific comments they wanted included in the response they should email them to the Town Clerk.

Resolved

That the Town Clerk respond to the consultation on behalf of the Council subject to consultation with the Mayor, Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee.

51. **Dorset Council Draft Street Trading Policy**

Members had before them a draft Dorset Council Street Trading Policy.

The Committee was pleased to note that formal markets established by charter or order were exempt but felt it important that community activities such as jumble trails and community events generally were not included within the policy. Clarification regarding whether a community event that charged a pitch fee to help cover the cost of putting on the event was also required.

Resolved

That the comments set out above be forwarded to Dorset Council.

Chairman.....

APPENDIX 1

	2023/24	2024/25	2024/25	2025/26
	Actual	Budget	6 Months	Budget
	£	£	£	£
CORPORATE & DEMOCRATIC				
Members Allowance	23,412	24,440	11,748	24,440
Members Training & Travel	27	2,500	470	500
Civic & Ceremonial Expenses	1,246	1,000	1,260	1,500
Mayoral Expenses	10,365	13,107	4,313	13,369
Town Crier	600	600	300	600
New Town Crier Expenses		5,000	4,598	0
Election Costs	6,353	15,000		0
Entertaining & Gifts	17	420	307	428
Youth Council & Democracy Day	629	1,000	1,838	1,000
Office Team	219,462	244,257	118,139	257,365
Met by Precept on Taxpayer	262,111	307,324	142,973	299,202
OTHER SERVICES				
Tourism Development	8,618	8,000	5,410	8,160
Sawmills rent	8,600	8,600	4,300	8,600
To Public Realm Reserve	10,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
To Arts & Cultural Reserve - DBC	20,000	0		0
Dorchester Heritage Joint Committee	3,130	3,000	3,000	3,000
Citizens Advice	8,471	9,065	8,793	9,246
Dorchester Youth & Community Centre	21,200	21,200	10,600	28,000
Dorchester Ballet Club	0	0	10,894	
Apprenticeships	14,807	12,000	3,708	0
Videographer	551	5,500	1,335	2,000
Footfall Counter				3,400
Debt Charges	16,752	16,104	7,000	15,457
Staff - Tourism/Community/Assistant	108,956	126,068	60,975	160,780
Total Expenditure	221,084	214,537	121,015	243,643
Treasury Interest	-94,005	-50,000	-50,305	-65,000
Sawmills rent recharged	-4,300	-4,300	0	-4,300
Market Income	-25,978	-25,000	-25,698	-26,000
Total Income	-124,283	-79,300	-76,003	-95,300
Met by Precept on Taxpayer	96,801	135,237	45,012	148,343

APPENDIX 1 (Continued)

	2023/24	2024/25	2024/25	2025/26
	Actual	Budget	6 Months	Budget
	£	£	£	£
OFFICES TEAM				
Salaries	291,564	318,853	147,615	356,773
Employers National Insurance	28,323	32,523	14,264	45,266
Employers Superannuation	64,144	70,148	32,647	78,490
Training Courses	8,309	8,000	6,283	9,000
Travel & Subsistence	1,356	3,000	1,189	3,000
Subscriptions (Professional Bodies)	3,155	3,800	2,298	3,800
Cleaning Materials	564	750	101	500
Rates	5,614	5,614	5,614	5,614
Electricity	4,404	4,500	2,056	4,500
Gas			-227	0
Water	381	550	336	600
Repairs & Maintenance	4,531	3,400	906	3,400
Financial Services inc Audit, Bank & Sage	7,921	8,843	6,170	9,020
Employment Law and H & S	3,701	3,800	3,907	4,000
Legal & Professional Fees, Advertising	1,279	500	656	500
Insurance	32,466	35,000	21,321	40,000
Stationery & Equipment	1,156	1,000	1,385	1,200
Newsletter	4,804	5,415	2,218	5,415
IT, Printing & Copying	9,627	12,000	632	12,000
New Website	3,000	0	0	0
Mobile Phones	1,925	2,000	793	600
Photocopier Charges	907	600	501	0
Postage	950	600	402	600
Total Expenditure	480,082	520,896	251,069	584,278
Recharge to Dorchester Markets Panel	-1,688	-1,800	0	-1,800
Net Expenditure recharged to Services	478,394	519,096	251,069	582,478
Recharged to				
Corporate & Democratic Management	219,462	244,257	118,139	257,365
Allotments	11,878	12,924	6,251	16,307
Development	108,956	126,068	60,975	160,780
Cemeteries	42,521	45,654	22,081	50,477
Parks & Open Spaces	61,111	56,156	27,161	60,117
Municipal Buildings	19,319	17,565	8,496	19,252
Cultural Activity & Twinning	15,154	16,472	7,967	18,181
	478,401	519,096	251,069	582,478

APPENDIX 2

REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26	2023/24	2024/25	2024/25	2025/26
	Actual	Budget	6 Month	Budget
	£	£	£	£
Parks & Open Spaces	665,348	724,429	406,908	807,390
Allotments	17,492	22,598	17,760	28,477
Municipal Buildings	427,558	400,308	345,617	382,509
Cemeteries	44,555	55,855	39,074	67,898
Cultural & Twinning Activities	77,328	80,019	44,142	89,029
Corporate & Democratic	262,111	307,324	142,973	299,202
Other Services	96,801	135,237	45,012	148,343
Operational Budget	1,591,193	1,725,770	1,041,487	1,822,848
Precept	1,668,507	1,726,115	1,726,115	1,822,939
Transfer to General Reserves	77,314	345	684,628	91
 Subjective Analysis of Revenue				
Employees	893,690	965,728		1,069,658
External Payments	549,695	597,503		610,536
Transfers to Earmarked	365,100	345,600		343,582
Capital Financing Costs	16,752	16,104		15,457
Income	-234,045	-199,166		-216,385
Transfer from Earmarked	0	0		0
Operational Budget	1,591,193	1,725,769	0	1,822,848
 General Reserve				
Opening Balance at 1 April	132,065	177,000		100,000
Transfer from Ops Budget	77,000	345		91
To Corporate Projects Reserve	32,065	77,000		0
Closing Balance at 31 March	177,000	100,345		100,091
 Earmarked Reserves				
Opening Balance at 1 April	1,304,510	1,379,688		1,157,365
Transfer from Revenue	434,165	345,600		343,582
Other Income & Transfers	35,371	0		0
Expenditure from Reserves	285,661	386,087		512,422
Closing Balance 31 March	1,488,384	1,339,201		988,525
All Reserves held at year end	1,665,383	1,439,546		1,088,615
 Tax Base				
Tax Base	8,091.30	8,206.70		8,497.10
Band D Charge	206.21	210.33		214.54
O/s PWLB Debt at 31 March	70,000	42,000		28,000

APPENDIX 3

Medium Term Financial Strategy	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
	Actual	Budget	Budget	Forecast	Forecast
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Revenue Budget					
Employees	894	966	1,070	1,091	1,113
External Payments	550	598	611	623	635
Transfers to Earmarked	365	346	344	353	360
Capital Financing Costs	17	16	15	15	16
Income	-234	-199	-216	-221	-225
Operational Budget	1,591	1,726	1,823	1,862	1,899
Precept	1,669	1,726	1,823	1,859	1,897
Transfer to General Reserves	77	0	0	-2	-2
General Reserve					
Opening Balance at 1 April	132	177	100	100	100
Transfer from/to Operational Budget	0	0	0	0	0
Transfer to Corporate Projects Reserve	32	77	0	0	0
Closing Balance at 31 March	100	100	100	100	100
Earmarked Reserves					
Opening Balance at 1 April	1,305	1,488	1,157	989	1,042
Transfers/Payments in to Reserves	470	1,068	344	353	360
Payments/Transfers out from Reserves	286	1,399	512	400	200
Closing Balance 31 March	1,488	1,157	989	942	1,202
All Reserves held at year end	1,588	1,257	1,089	1,042	1,302
Corporate Project Unallocated at Year End	755	755	505	255	255
Outstanding Debt at Year End	£k	56	42	28	14
Council Tax	£k	206	210	215	219
Tax Base		8,091	8,207	8,497	8,497

Notes

1. Precept assumes Council Tax rises @ 2.00% from 2026/27, no Tax Base growth
2. Any operational surplus and CIL receipts credited to Corporate Projects Reserve to pay for the front of house works.
3. 26/27 includes a contribution to a new earmarked reserve for Election Costs, £3k a year.
4. Best estimate of new or transferred services, driven by cuts in other tiers
5. Earmarked Reserves expenditure reflects best available knowledge
6. General Reserve set at £100k
7. Further limited savings may be identified in budgets during review processes

RESERVES	Cttee	Balance Mar 24	Paid In 24/25	Spend 24/25	Balance Mar 25	Paid In 25/26	Spend 25/26	Balance Mar 26	Reason for holding Reserve
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	
Earmarked Reserves									
Infrastructure & Equipment									
Cemeteries	Man	87,326	6,100	93,000	426	10,000	0	10,426	Buildings/infrastructure
MB Repairs & Maintenance	Man	49,653	12,500	50,192	11,961	20,000	0	31,961	Building works/refurb
MB Front of House works	Man	238,167	587,000	825,167	0	0	0	0	
Parks Premises	Man	12,789	9,000	11,735	10,054	19,000	0	29,054	Buildings/infrastructure refurb.
Play Equipment	Man	18,715	11,000	0	29,715	1,000	0	30,715	Equipment replacement
Great Field Reserve	Man	0	2,000	0	2,000	2,500	0	4,500	
Tree Reserve	Man	8,598	20,000	20,000	8,598	20,000	10,000	18,598	Tree Works
Tennis Courts Reserve	Man	7,000	0	0	7,000	0	0	7,000	
19 North Square Refurb	Pol	11,000	0	0	11,000	0	11,000	0	
Public Realm	Pol	435,310	5,000	5,000	435,310	5,000	200,000	240,310	Infrastructure refurb
Vehicles & Equipment	Man	97,007	20,000	60,000	57,007	22,000	40,000	39,007	Fleet & equipment replacement
Cultural									
Arts & Culture	Man	42,933	11,335	54,268	0	0	0	0	
Christmas Lights	Man	4,420	0	0	4,420	0	0	4,420	Replace lights
DTC Website & IT	Man	10,000	0	10,000	0	0	0	0	£3k DTC Website, £4,651.87 IT
Tourist Information	Pol	5,599	0	4,207	1,392	0	1,392	0	TIC Replacement Projects
Miscellaneous Reserves									
Corporate Projects	Pol	385,165	369,794	239,000	515,958	244,082	250,000	510,040	Own or partner capital projects

Apprenticeship Reserve	Pol	16,565	0	0	16,565	0	0	0	16,565	
Planning Advice Reserve	Pol	18,499	0	20	18,479	0	0	0	18,479	Local Plan & other advice
Climate Emergency Reserve	Pol	25,609	13,790	25,909	13,490	0	0	0	13,490	Own or partner Climate projects
Graves In Perpetuity	Man	14,019	0	30	13,989	0	30	13,959	13,959	Maint. and flowers on 6 graves
Total Earmarked Reserves		1,488,374	1,067,519	1,398,528	1,157,365	343,582	512,422	988,525	988,525	
General Reserve	Pol	177,314	0	77,314	100,000	0	0	0	100,000	General Emergency Fund
Total Reserves		1,665,688	1,067,519	1,475,842	1,257,365	343,582	512,422	1,088,525	1,088,525	

CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2025-26

	2025												2026				
	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY				
COUNCIL	19 MM 20 (Tu)		28		29		24		26		30		18 MM 19 (Tu)				
POLICY	12		21		22		17		19		23 MS@ 1830		11				
MANAGEMENT	6 (Tu)		14		15		10		12		16		5 (Tu)				
PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT	28 April	2	7	4	1	6	3	1	7 (Wed)	2	2	7 (Tu) & 27	-				
MARKETS JOINT PANEL	29 1400																
HERITAGE JOINT			22 (Tu) 17.30			14 (Tu) 17.30			20 (Tu) 17.30			14 (Tu) 17.30					
SITE VISITS		3 (Tu) 09.30			2 (Tu)												
CIVIC EVENTS	20 ATM 31 (Sat) Hardy 17.00						Remem Sunday 9						19 ATM				
BANK HOLIDAYS	5, 26			25				25, 26	1			3, 6	4, 25				

MM Mayor Making MS Mayoral Selection Committee
 ATM Formal Annual Town Meeting (it is proposed to hold an 'informal' ATM on a date to be agreed prior to the formal ATM)
 Meetings will ordinarily take place at 19.00 in the Council Chamber, Municipal Buildings.
 * The dates and timing of Markets Joint Panel meetings are still to be agreed.