

At the **MEETING** of the **DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL** held in the Council Chamber, Municipal Buildings, Dorchester on Tuesday, 27th January, 2009:

PRESENT The Mayor (Councillor C.M. Hebditch) in the Chair.

Councillors M.A. Allwood, D.J. Barrett, R.M. Biggs, V. Black, A.J. Canning, T.C.N. Harries, L.E. Heath, S. Hosford, T. James, E.S. Jones, Trevor Jones, F.E. Kent-Ledger, A.J. Lyall, P.G. Mann, L.M. Phillips and M.E. Rennie.

In attendance:

Father J. Rice, Mayor's Chaplain

Inspector L. Fry, Dorset Police

S. Raynes, Chair of Dorset Strategic Partnership

APOLOGIES for absence were received from Councillors C.S. Biggs, A. Harries and R.B. Potter.

47. **PRAYERS**

The Mayor's Chaplain opened the Meeting with a short prayer.

48. **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 25th November, 2008, copies of which had been circulated to all Members of the Council, were taken as read and were confirmed and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

Minute 42 (40) – Alleyways The Council was informed that the alleyway between Dorchester Arts Centre and West Mills Road was scheduled to be cleaned this week. The Town Clerk reported that no response had been received from West Dorset District Council with regard to other alleys and footpaths around the Town and agreed to pursue the matter with them.

49. **COMMUNICATIONS**

(a) **Post Box – South Street**

The Council was circulated with correspondence from Royal Mail explaining that because of the further pedestrianisation of South Street and New Street Royal Mail would not be installing a post box on South Street. The correspondence also noted that the current density of post boxes in the area was more than adequate and well within Royal Mail's licence conditions and that there was already a post box at either end of South Street. Members expressed great disappointment at this outcome and agreed that the Town Clerk should express this disappointment to Royal Mail and point out that there was not a post box at either end of South Street. Members also felt that the Planning and Environment Committee should consider requesting Dorset County Council to install some form of pedestrian crossing in Trinity Street so as to help elderly people and others cross the road safely to use the new post box and access the bus stops.

In considering this matter Members also expressed concerns regarding the unsatisfactory service received from the new main Post Office in Trinity Street. It was

agreed that a representative from Post Office Counters should be invited to attend a future meeting of the Planning and Environment Committee to discuss this matter.

(b) BBC Sport National Unsung Hero – Mr. B. Geysler

The Mayor informed the Council that Dorchester Amateur Boxing Club coach Mr. Ben Geysler had won the BBC Sport National Unsung Hero Award for his services to boxing over the past sixty years. Mr. Geysler had attended the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Awards ceremony in December 2008 where he had been presented with his award.

Mr. Geysler addressed the Council regarding the award and on his plans for the Dorchester Amateur Boxing Club which was presently looking for new accommodation.

(c) Christmas Carol Street Collection – South Street

The Mayor thanked all of those Members who had helped with the collection in South Street which had raised approximately £400 for the Mayor's Charity.

50. **QUESTIONS**

No questions had been received in accordance with Standing Order 12(3).

51. **PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE – 1st DECEMBER, 2008**

It was proposed and seconded that the Minutes of the Planning and Environment Committee held on 1st December, 2008 be adopted.

Minute 54(a) – Residents Parking Scheme – Possible Extension to include the residents of Cambridge Road between Alice Road and Marie Road A Member informed the Council that the residents of Cambridge Road between Alice Road and Marie Road did not wish to be included in the proposed extension to the Victoria Park Residents Parking Scheme.

Minute 55 – Taxi Rank – Charles Street A Member requested that consideration be given to locating an additional single taxi rank at the junction of Trinity Street and New Street. The Town Clerk confirmed that the issue of taxi ranks was to be considered at the next meeting of the Planning and Environment Committee.

(Councillor T.C.N. Harries declared a personal interest and did not speak in respect of the above matter as he was a taxi driver.)

It was

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Planning and Environment Committee held on 1st December, 2008 be adopted.

52. **PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE – 5th JANUARY, 2009**

It was proposed and seconded that the Minutes of the Planning and Environment Committee held on 5th January, 2009 be adopted.

Minute 61(b) – Fordington Green Arising from this Minute the Council was informed that the verge enhancement works at Fordington Green had now been completed. Regrettably some people had now taken to parking on the other side of the Green and it was agreed that the Management Committee, at its next meeting, should consider what action could be taken to prevent this from happening.

Minute 62(b) – Identification of New Sites for Housing In response to a question the Town Clerk confirmed that this matter was to be considered at the next meeting of the Planning and Environment Committee.

It was

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Planning and Environment Committee held on 5th January, 2009 be adopted.

53. **MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – 13th JANUARY, 2009**

It was proposed and seconded that the Minutes of the Management Committee held on 13th January, 2009 be adopted.

Minute 51 – Dorchester Arts Review Members expressed their support for the proposed youth event at Maumbury Rings to be held on Sunday, 30th August, 2009 and noted that it would be necessary to get schools involved in the planning process as early as possible.

It was

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Management Committee held on 13th January, 2009 be adopted.

54. **MAYORAL SELECTION COMMITTEE – 20th JANUARY, 2009**

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Mayoral Selection Committee held on 20th January, 2009 be adopted.

55. **POLICY COMMITTEE – 20th JANUARY, 2009**

It was proposed and seconded that the Minutes of the Policy Committee held on 20th January, 2009 be adopted.

Minute 38 – Internal Audit The Town Clerk reported that the bar franchise agreement for the Municipal Buildings had now been completed.

Minute 42(d) – Draft Budget and Estimates 2009-10 – Budget for 2009-10 – The Chairman of the Policy Committee addressed the Council in support of the Budget for 2009-10 in the terms set out in Appendix I. The Estimates had previously been considered by all appropriate bodies and what was now proposed would enable the Council to proceed to achieve the objectives it had agreed during the course of the last financial year.

An amendment to change the recommended precept sum of £1,068,568 contained within Policy Committee Minute No 42(d)(2) to £1,060,875 was proposed and seconded and a recorded vote on the amendment was ordered in accordance with Standing Order 18.

Those voting in favour of the amendment were Councillors D.J. Barrett, L.E. Heath and L.M. Phillips.

Those voting against the amendment were The Mayor (Councillor C.M. Hebditch) and Councillors M.A. Allwood, R.M. Biggs, V. Black, A.J. Canning, T.C.N. Harries, S. Hosford, T. James, E.S. Jones, Trevor Jones, F.E. Kent-Ledger, A.J. Lyall, P.G. Mann and M.E. Rennie.

The amendment was therefore **LOST** and it was

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Revised Estimates for 2008-09 and the Estimates for 2009-10 be approved.
- (2) That a Precept in the sum of £1,068,568 be levied on the West Dorset District Council in respect of the financial year 2009-10, requesting that payment be made in two equal instalments on 1st April and 1st October, 2009.

It was also

RESOLVED

- (3) That the Minutes of the Policy Committee held on 20th January, 2009 be adopted.

56. **POLICE MATTERS**

Inspector Fry informed Members of crime statistics for Dorchester over the last two months and responded to Members' questions on them and other matters raised by the Council.

(Councillor Trevor Jones left the meeting at this point.)

57. **DORSET STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP**

The Mayor introduced Simon Raynes, Chair of the Dorset Strategic Partnership, who made a presentation to the Council on the structure and work of the Partnership and the implementation of the Local Area Agreement and responded to Members' detailed questions.

Whilst noting the aims of the Partnership Members expressed concerns regarding the fact that representatives were not directly elected to the Partnership and were therefore not accountable to the electors. It was also felt that the Partnership was undertaking duties which should be exercised by Councils.

Members thanked Mr. Raynes for addressing the Council.

The Council rose at 8.41pm.

Mayor

Speech by Councillor Trevor Jones to Council – 27 January 2009

I am pleased to present to the Council the Budget Recommendation that we levy a precept of £1,068,568 on West Dorset District Council for them to collect on our behalf. This amounts, as nearly as makes no difference, to a Council Tax increase of 4.25%.

Of course, there will be those who wish it was lower, there are every year, but public services have to be paid for.

Down the years we have delivered –

- massive improvements to these Buildings;
- massive improvements in the quality and safety of all our children's play areas;
- significant improvements to Weymouth Avenue Recreation Ground, including a new Pavilion;
- a new cemetery at Poundbury to make sure that the people of Dorchester can continue to bury their dead here when Weymouth Avenue is full which will not be long;
- excellent indoor and outdoor bowls facilities at Sandringham Sports Centre in a ground-breaking partnership with Dorchester Bowling Club;
- and, of course, the hugely successful refurbishment of the Borough Gardens.

And that is not a complete list but nonetheless impressive for that. As Members know we are currently working on a new, state-of-the-art skatepark at Little Fairfield and progressing projects to improve Maumbury Rings and the River Walk, both of which should be advanced this Summer.

Every now and then we make the mistake of thinking that we have done everything that needs doing. But we never have, and now the Council wants to spend approaching £300,000 attending to the structural concerns about the staircase outside this room, installing a lift to give disabled people full and dignified access to the Town Hall and Council Chamber for the first time, removing the unsatisfactory upstairs toilets and completely refurbishing the ones downstairs. As I say, this is all costing a pretty penny and, furthermore, there will be a loss of income from the Buildings as the first floor will be out-of-bounds for several months this time next year while the work is carried out.

We could finance the project by borrowing and the Policy Committee is looking into this possibility. At the same time we shall be reviewing existing borrowings to see if there is merit in redeeming some or all of them, given that that the interest rate applying in each case is considerably higher than those which are current after the global financial turbulence of recent months.

A decision to borrow will not be all that straightforward though, because we already have borrowings of around £750,000 and we shall need to consider carefully whether it is wise to take them towards – or above – the £1 million mark. As all-too-many private sector companies – and many private householders – are sadly discovering large borrowing can bring their own perils.

In my view, therefore, and that of the majority of the Policy Committee, it would be prudent at this time to assume that the £300,000 bill which will have to be paid within the next 18 months will be met from revenue and the budget as presented to you incorporates this assumption. In the event of us subsequently deciding to borrow to meet some or all of the bill future Council Tax

increases may well be lower than the 4.25% predicted in the Medium Term Financial Strategy before you at Minute 41.

Before I finish I should say a word about balances. The Medium Term Financial Strategy predicts earmarked reserves at the end of the 2011-12 financial year of £436,961. It would be a serious folly to raid these earmarked reserves because they are, in effect, a number of piggy banks that we have maintained for very many years to spread the costs of essential maintenance, repairs and improvements to the facilities we run on behalf of the people of Dorchester thus enabling us to avoid massive swings in our precept. Maintaining earmarked reserves has stood us in very good stead indeed. The various 'piggy banks' are listed on page 4 of the Estimates booklet – we touch them at our peril!

That leaves general reserves. These are predicted to be £469,463 at 31 March this year but the Medium Term Financial Strategy shows them falling to £211,948 by 31 March 2012 – in my view the absolute bare minimum the Auditor will regard as acceptable. Raiding them further could result in us – members and officers – being reprimanded or worse.

So, pending a decision on whether or not to borrow, we need a precept of £1,068,568 as recommended. Reducing it as proposed by some members at Policy Committee is simply not wise and our advisers tell us would save a Band D Council Tax payer little more than £1 a year, or 2p a week

I commend the Budget to the Council. We have run this Council well for years, providing services and improving facilities from a healthy financial base. Let's carry on!