

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

19TH NOVEMBER 2013

At a Meeting of the Policy Committee held on 19th November 2013:

PRESENT The Mayor (Councillor E.S. Jones) and Councillors V.J. Allan, R.M. Biggs, T.C.N. Harries, G.M. Jones, Trevor Jones (Chairman), P.G. Mann and D.S. Roberts.

18. MINUTES & MINUTE UPDATE

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 17th September 2013, having been adopted by Council on 24th September 2013, were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The Town Clerk highlighted progress since the last meeting on Minutes 13 Town Youth Council, 15 Community Justice Panel, and 16 CCTV Scrutiny.

19. MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

The Committee received and noted the Council's Management Accounts for the period 1st April to 31st October 2013.

In response to questions from Members the Financial Services Provider explained the background to the most recent budget variances. The Committee voiced their disappointment regarding the actions of the previous Financial Services Provider in relation to the lack of prior year accruals for electricity bills totalling £12,000.

The Committee sought reassurance that the issue relating to the lack of accounts for the Dorchester Market for 2012/13 was being addressed. The Town Clerk confirmed that the Property Officer at West Dorset District Council was actively pursuing the issue with the market operator, Ensors.

The Committee noted the cash position, and that the current position regarding Reserves and Balances was in line with the Medium Term Financial Strategy. On being asked a question by a Member the Chairman noted that a review of the number of reviews would take place as part of the budget process for 2014/15.

Issues relating to outstanding debtors and accumulated staff hours would be considered in private session at the end of the meeting.

20. SHIRE HALL DORCHESTER – REQUEST FOR SUPPORT FROM THE TOWN COUNCIL

The Committee noted the requests of the District Council. The Town Clerk was instructed to respond with a positive letter of support for the project, which should emphasise the need to integrate the site into a clear strategy for a heritage quarter in the town. The Town Council would also ensure that Shire Hall was integrated into the Town Trails network.

The Committee considered whether to make a financial contribution to the scheme. A Member made a proposal that a token grant should be made, but on being put to the vote this was rejected for the present time and it was

RESOLVED

That no financial contribution be made towards the Shire Hall project at the present time.

21. **PANEL MINUTES**

(a) **Risk Management Panel**

The Committee considered the Minutes of the Risk Management Panel held on 29th October 2013 (Appendix I) and it was

RECOMMENDED

(1) That the strategic and operational risk registers, as amended, be forwarded to Council for approval.

(2) That the opportunities section of the risk registers, as amended, be forwarded to Council for approval.

(b) **Resources Panel**

The Committee considered the Minutes of the Resources Panel held on 6th November 2013 (Appendix II).

A member of the public asked for clarification on the role of and remuneration of any apprentices employed by the Town Council. The Town Clerk confirmed that any appointment would be fixed in nature and would not lead on to employment with the Council, that the national apprenticeship rate would be used, but would be supernumerary and not as a replacement for existing staff. Consideration would be given to any travel costs of the apprentice. The Chairman identified that a report would be brought to Committee if the Council's expression of interest was accepted by the District Council.

It was

RESOLVED

That the Minutes be approved so far as this Committee is concerned, and that progress on the creation of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, Revenue Budget 2014/15, and the Corporate Plan, be noted.

22. **ANNUAL RETURN FOR YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2013: ISSUES ARISING REPORT OF THE EXTERNAL AUDITOR**

The Committee noted the report of the External Auditor and the response prepared to manage the issues raised.

23. **REVIEW OF PRACTICES RELATING TO NOTICE FOR COUNCIL MEETINGS**

The Chairman identified the importance of the report in clarifying and confirming the rules under which the Council published its notice of Council and Committee meetings.

Following a question by a Member the Town Clerk agreed to include the dates of future Council meetings in "Dorchester News" and to seek other cost effective opportunities to promote attendance by the public at meetings. It was

RESOLVED

That the process of placing public notices in the press is suspended for a period of six months

24. **PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSION TO MEETINGS) ACT 1960**

It was

RESOLVED

That in view of the fact that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the following matter the public and representatives of the press be excluded from this meeting during its discussion.

25. **REPORT OF THE FINANCIAL SERVICES PROVIDER**

The Committee considered, and raised questions regarding a list of outstanding debtors provided by the Town Clerk. It was

RESOLVED

That the report be noted, and repeated every second Committee cycle

The Committee considered how to manage the future accumulation and use of Time Off in Lieu (TOIL) hours by staff. The Town Clerk would give further consideration to a scheme which ensured that hours accumulated were correctly authorised and properly recorded, and how a reduction in the current level of hours would be managed.

Chairman

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

RISK MANAGEMENT PANEL

29th OCTOBER, 2013

At a Meeting of the Risk Management Panel held on Tuesday, 29th October, 2013:

PRESENT Councillors K.E. Armitage, S.C. Hosford, G.M. Jones (Chairman), Trevor Jones, F.E. Kent-Ledger and R.B. Potter.

APOLOGY for absence were received from The Mayor (Councillor E.S. Jones).

1. STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL RISK REGISTERS

(a) Review of the Strategic Risk Register

The Panel reviewed the strategic and operational risk registers which identified the risks faced by the Council as follows:-

SO1 - Failure to have clear priorities / conflicts with national or local needs - It was noted that a more targeted and concise Corporate Plan, to include SMART targets and Council vision was being prepared for initial consideration by Resources Panel in November 2013.

SO4 - Members not fully engaged with Committee/Panel process - It was noted that there would be a review of Panels over the next year so as to ensure that all Members were fully engaged.

SO6 - Adequacy of financial resources to meet identified needs / Council priorities - It was agreed to increase the probability of this risk to '2' due to the uncertainties surrounding the impact of localising council tax support.

SO10 - Over reliance and / or too demanding of key officers, taking on too many responsibilities - Members considered reducing this risk but felt that it should remain as it was for another year by which time the new Town Clerk and Deputy job roles would have bedded in and that of the other new and existing staff who had new responsibilities. Control wording to be amended to reflect the new staffing and monitoring arrangements.

SO30 - Significant increase in pension fund deficit - The Panel felt that there was a possibility that the contributions to the pension fund would not increase significantly considering that average salary pensions had now been agreed and that the stock market had recovered significantly, however it was felt that the risk should remain as it was until the Actuary had reported.

SO36 - Significant fire in Council owned buildings - It was noted that an independent reinstatement valuation had been completed on all property and the Council's insurance policy amended accordingly with the exception of Weymouth Avenue Chapels. The original valuation on the Chapels was £370,000 and the revised valuation was £1.5 million which would increase the insurance premiums by

approximately £1,500 per year. Members felt that the risk should remain as it was on the register but that the Management Committee consider how best to proceed with the Chapel insurance.

SO37 - Pressure to fund 'top-ups' - Members agreed that the pressure to fund 'top ups' would only increase and it was agreed to increase the probability of this happening to '4'.

SO46 - Lack of financial oversight/scrutiny - It was noted that the Town Clerk was reviewing budget presentation and would be offering financial training to Members.

SO47 - No formal job evaluation process undertaken - It was agreed to remove this risk from the register now that all jobs had been reviewed following the retirement of two senior members of staff and the process undertaken to work towards implementing the Living Wage.

In respect of 'Special Projects' it was agreed that projects related to the conversion of the Borough Gardens Bowls Pavilion to public toilets and Maumbury Rings could be removed as these projects had been satisfactorily completed.

(b) Review of the Operational Risk Registers

Bonfires - It was noted that the partnership that organised the bonfire at Elizabeth Place had dissolved so there would be no organised event in 2013. The Council would therefore designate an area for the bonfire, check and remove dangerous items, inform police and fire authority and clear up afterwards – all risks related to this issue were increased.

Municipal Buildings - It was noted that the bookings system had now been computerised and was working well (MB7), that the charges and charge structure was to be reviewed in the near future (MB9) and that the lift was now working satisfactorily so this risk could be removed (MB14).

Open Spaces - The Panel agreed that dog fouling on the Council's playing pitches was still an issue (OS8), particularly at the Great Field and that Management Committee was to give some consideration as to what could be done to solve the problem. It was noted that Ash die back and tree spreading tree roots were a potential issue (OS11) at Sandringham Playing Fields. The Management Committee would be considering this matter at its next meeting.

Borough Gardens - It was noted that the booking system had now been computerised and was working well (BG2). Members were also informed of the arrangements that had been put in place at the Borough Gardens in respect of the difficulties experienced this past summer in respect of anti-social behaviour (BG4 and 14).

Cemeteries - Members agreed that the risk relating to a significant increase in Cemetery Rates (CEM13) could now be removed following the revaluation being completed and Weymouth Avenue Cemetery being formally closed. It was also agreed that a new risk should be added related to the impact of a significant increase in contract price for grass cutting.

Other - It was noted that a valuation of civic regalia had been completed and insurances adjusted accordingly (OTH7) and that the Christmas lights contract has ceased (OTH9) with the Council making the arrangements for erection in 2013 with financial support from the BID and West Dorset District Council.

(c) Review of the Opportunities

It was noted that the opportunities previously identified in relation to the retirements of staff (OPP1,3 and 4) had been achieved.

Members identified new opportunities in respect of reviewing the Financial Services Provider contract, a property review and the old bowling green area at the Borough Gardens.

It was

RECOMMENDED

- (1) That the strategic and operational risk registers, as amended, be approved.
- (2) That the opportunities section of the risk registers, as amended, be approved.

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

RESOURCES PANEL

6TH NOVEMBER, 2013

PRESENT Councillors S.C. Hosford, G.M. Jones, Trevor Jones (Chairman), R.B. Potter and The Mayor (Councillor E.S. Jones).

In Attendance: Councillor V.J. Allan

APOLOGY for absence was received from Cllr R.M. Biggs

1. **INTERNAL AUDIT PROVISION**

The Panel noted the Town Clerks report of progress on the procurement of new auditors for the 2014/15 financial year, and confirmed that at least one councillor should have a role in the final selection process.

2. **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND REVENUE BUDGET 2014/15**

The Panel received the report of the Town Clerk which identified a number of presentational changes to the budget document.

Councillors considered and supported the assumptions made regarding the financial issues including in the report. In particular they confirmed the need for a budget consistent with the Local Government employers most recent pay offer.

The process for considering Special Items, valued at this stage at £17,500, through the January cycle of Committee meetings, to be recommended by Policy Committee to Council on 28 January 2014, was confirmed.

It was noted that the financial pressure on the budget for 2014/15 came not from the Council's own operational services, but from strategic issues affecting other Councils, in particular changes to Council Tax Subsidy Grant and the ability of upper tier authorities to maintain their current levels of service provision. A Medium Term Financial Strategy should be prepared that takes account of these risks.

Further reports would be prepared on the levels of Specific and General Reserves considered appropriate for the Council in the medium term, and on the role that income generation should play in the medium term.

In concluding discussions it was noted that a natural tension existed in relation to financial management at the Town Council, typical of most small organisations. While the need for accurate and timely information and a service which could adapt to the changing needs of the Council might be better delivered in house the risk of placing too great a reliance on one person to provide such a service exposed the Council to potential financial risks. The alternative solution of contracting out some elements of the financial service had significantly reduced that risk, but was struggling

to adapt to the changing needs of the Town Council. It was agreed that this issue would be revisited at a future date.

It was

RECOMMENDED

That in preparing the Medium Term Financial Statement and Revenue Budget the views of the Panel as expressed above are taken into account

4. DEVELOPING A NEW CORPORATE PLAN

The Town Clerk's report identified work being undertaken to develop a new style Corporate Plan, which would be linked to the Financial cycle. It would also identify the Council's strategic vision for the town relating to issues delivered by other bodies, for example housing, health and the local economy. The time focus of the plan would cover short term operations through medium term project planning and on to long term vision.

The Panel supported the timetable proposed by the Town Clerk, which would start with a short briefing about the Council's finances at Council on 26 November. This would be followed by the formal adoption of the budget at Council on 28 January 2014, and at the same meeting a short briefing regarding the Corporate Plan would be presented. Following a series of strategic workshops for members during February the Corporate Plan would then be adopted through the March 2013 cycle of meetings.

In the absence of the old style Corporate Plan the Panel noted the 16 operational and governance indicators against which the Management Team were seeking to deliver during the period to March 2014, and that these would be reported on during the January and May 2014 cycles.

The Panel considered the views of those officers and councillors involved in the monthly Management Team Development meetings and endorsed their view that the meetings had achieved their aims, and would cease.

Further discussion would take place regarding the appraisal of the Town Clerk and his Deputy by the Chairman of Policy Committee and a second Chairman or Vice-Chairman.

Finally the Town Clerk requested that two informal meetings take place with Committee Chairman and the Mayor to consider standardising a number of minor changes to Committee documentation and procedures. This was agreed.

It was

RECOMMENDED

That the preparation of a new Corporate Plan be progressed according to the timetable identified in the Town Clerk's report

5. **APPRENTICESHIP SUPPORTED BY GRANT FROM WEST DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL**

On receipt of a verbal update from the Town Clerk regarding an offer of financial support the Panel considered and appreciated the positive benefits, both to a young person and to the Council as host, which result from an apprenticeship.

If successful with the grant request the Town Clerk will report back to an appropriate Committee regarding how an apprentice might best be utilised and supported, and how any costs from an appointment would be funded.