



# DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL - ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

## **INTRODUCTION BY THE TOWN MAYOR – Councillor Robin Potter**

Welcome to our Annual Report. The Town Council is the parish authority for Dorchester (pop. 20,000). We are the most local tier of government and work closely with many local organisations as well as with the unitary Dorset Council. We provide a range of social and recreational facilities, while also promoting and representing the town with other national and statutory bodies. We provide most of the public open spaces and sports grounds in the town, three cemeteries and over 300 allotments. We own the Municipal Buildings (Corn Exchange and Town Hall) and support many of the town's community and civic events.

There are 20 Members on the Town Council representing the town's five wards (North, South, East, West, and Poundbury). Members are usually elected for a four-year term. The Mayor is elected by the Council every year in May and acts as the Chair of the Council.

This Council operates a committee structure with each committee having specific functions. We have three committees: Management, Planning and Environment, and Policy. Reports from the Chairs of these Committees make up this Annual Report.

Agendas for meetings of the Full Council, and its 3 Committees, are available online ([www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk](http://www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk)) three clear days before the meetings which are held in the Council Chamber (upstairs in the Corn Exchange).

***Residents are welcome to attend and speak at any of these Town Council meetings and we would appreciate your responses and comments on this Annual Report.***

## **REPORT BY THE CHAIR OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE - Councillor David Leaper**

Management Committee has met in the Council Chamber for most of its meetings this year and conducted several site visits to enable councillors to familiarise themselves with the recreational facilities that the Committee is responsible for.

This has been my first year as Chair of the Management Committee. I owe much gratitude to my mentor Councillor Fiona Kent-Ledger, who has acted as Vice-Chair; Tony Hurley, Assistant Town Clerk (Corporate), in particular for his guidance and drawing up of committee agendas and minutes, and all our other outstanding Town Council Officers and staff who have been so generous with their energy, expertise and time.

Outdoor services report to the Management Committee through Carl Dallison, Assistant Town Clerk (Outdoor Services), who is a horticultural encyclopaedia and with whom we have regular site visits to monitor our facilities. Carl and his team have been busy over the last 12 months: exceptional seasonal management of Borough Gardens to give beautiful flower beds and maintenance; completion of the planned mess facility for the outdoor services staff and the reopening of Borough Gardens House for functions; and the tennis courts resurfaced. Many events have been hosted without disruption to the Gardens including: musical events,

Anonymous and One World Festivals, Ukrainian and Palestinian celebration days. Thank you also Emma Scott and colleagues for your skills (and KeeP 106!). Future management of the Kiosk has been awarded to Chris Puxley and Zoe Wood of the Temple of Refreshment.

The Town Council has adopted The Great Field where changes continue to be made with new facilities, management of planting and play equipment, and hosting of many events in association with Talk about Trust (PiPs), Rotary, Lions, weekly Park Runs, Dorset Food and Arts Festival and private events. Thank you, Emma Scott (again).

Adoption of Centenary Fields and Duke of Edinburgh Gardens is under discussion with the Duchy of Cornwall which we hope will come soon. Play equipment elsewhere in Dorchester has also been maintained and refurbished including the Beacon on Salisbury Fields, which is now being used for important national event days; Kings Road with its maturing plantation; and new fencing for the play area at Holmead Walk. Matters related to our cemeteries and their outstanding maintenance must be highlighted, including management of the collapse of the wall adjacent to the German Prisoner of War Memorial at Fordington Cemetery.

Management Committee continues to support many societies, artistic and social support groups through small grants (one of my favourite tasks). We have seen many other developments enacted: servicing of our allotments; appointment of Launchpad Dorset's David Baird and Kate Parkman with the reopening of the boxing club at the Weymouth Avenue pavilion; strong relations with Dorchester Arts and the refurbishment of the Municipal Buildings and restoration of the front of house planned for early May; a task and finish group for a new Town Council website; to name just a few.

It has been an exciting year for me on my learning curve of the extent of facilities that the Management Committee manages and maintains. I hope the efforts of the Councillors on the Management Committee, with Town Council Officers and staff working with members of the Community, continue to meet and hopefully exceed Dorchester's expectations.

#### **REPORT BY THE CHAIR OF THE PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE - Councillor Ralph Ricardo**

As is often the case, a change in government brings with it adjustments to planning legislation. With various reviews currently underway, we await to see how these may influence the proposed development to the north of Dorchester. Our position remains unchanged: any significant development in that area would have an unsustainable impact without the delivery of essential infrastructure.

Looking ahead, several key planning applications—either in progress or anticipated over the coming year—will continue to shape our town. These include the ongoing redevelopment of Dorset County Hospital, the future rebuild of properties affected by the tragic fire at the Gorge Café (which we hope will ultimately benefit our high street), the challenging redevelopment of the old prison site, and the transformation of the former Marks & Spencer building into a Premier Inn.

Additionally, with a county-wide review of parking in progress, we remain committed to ensuring that any changes reflect the needs of Dorchester. We will continue to work closely with fellow councillors to ensure local impacts are carefully considered.

At our monthly committee meetings, we regularly review a steady flow of applications, including property alterations, changes of use, and small-scale developments. Once our comments are passed to Dorset Council or other relevant authorities, we continue to monitor these applications as they progress.

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my Vice-Chair, Robin Potter, for his continued support—especially while balancing his duties as Mayor—and to Gina Wakely for her dedicated work in providing the committee with the detailed information behind each application.

## REPORT BY THE CHAIR OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE - Councillor Sue Biles

The new Council was elected in May 2024, since then a major part of the work of the Policy Committee is the preparing and implementation of the new Corporate Plan for 2025-2029. Following a period of consultation which ends with the informal Annual Town Meeting, the Plan will be submitted to the Full Council at its July meeting following a review of all the comments received via the consultation.

The January Council agreed a 2% increase to the Council Tax for 25/26 in line with the policy of “a little regularly” rather than large increases. The Town Council remains in a solid position financially. The debt on the Corporate Project Reserve for the Corn Exchange Project will be repaid during 25/26.

One of the large projects during the past 5 years has been the upgrading and refurbishment of the Municipal Buildings. The work has included improving the main hall, repairing the roof, creating a new reception and community area and bar/café. The work is now completed, and all the new facilities will be in use this month.

A major change to the responsibilities of the Town Council in the next 12 months will be responsibility for the Town Markets from Dorset Council and the 2025-6 budget reflects the extra staffing requirements.

This year work is being carried out to achieve the status of a Wessex Water Watermark Town Council with plans to coordinate this with the Town Centre improvements around the Town Pump and the Civic Society project to have water reinstalled to the pump.

At Dorchester Town Council we are very lucky to be supported by an excellent small staff team. Their dedicated work ensures that the Town has many facilities for residents for example the Borough Gardens and the play areas. They also plan, organise and facilitate the many events held during the year such as the recent Roman Festival and the summer events in the Borough Gardens. Working with the town businesses and community groups, they provide support and a vehicle for communication. The team also coordinate the Youth Council and work with the local schools on education programmes to understand local democracy. Councillors have undertaken training during the past year and the Council has been awarded a DAPTC star award for training.

The Policy Committee can support Not for Profit Organisations with special grants. During the past year we have continued to support Keep 106 and the Youth Club in recognition of their roles in the community. The Town Council is also one of the sponsors of the Dorchester Business Awards and the Dorchester Literary Festival.

### DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL - OPERATIONAL BUDGET SUMMARY

	2023-24 Actual	2024-25 Budget	24-25 Actual	Under/ -over Budget
Parks & Open Spaces	665,347	724,430	731,485	-7,055
Allotments	17,492	22,598	19,877	2,721
Municipal Buildings	427,558	400,308	393,006	7,302
Cemeteries	44,554	55,855	69,859	-14,004
Cultural & Twinning Activities	77,328	80,019	77,242	2,777
Corporate & Democratic Management	262,111	307,324	294,531	12,793
Other Services	96,801	135,237	83,047	52,190
<b>Operational Budget</b>	<b>1,591,191</b>	<b>1,725,771</b>	<b>1,669,047</b>	<b>56,724</b>
Precept	1,668,507	1,726,115	1,726,115	0
<b>Transfer to General Reserve</b>	<b>77,316</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>57,068</b>	<b>57,412</b>

Our draft Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2024-25 will be available at [www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk](http://www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk)

**DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCILLORS TO 1<sup>st</sup> MAY 2025**

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