

Dorchester Town Council

Policy Committee

12 May 2025

Present: The Mayor (Councillor R. Potter) and Councillors S. Biles (Chair), G. Jones, V. Lloyd-Jones, K. Reid and D. Taylor.

In Attendance

Councillors L. Fry, W. Gibbons, J. Hewitt, F. Kent-Ledger, D. Leaper and M. Rennie.

Apologies: Councillors R. Biggs and R. Ricardo.

64. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 24 March 2025, adopted by Council on 31 March 2025, were taken as read and were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

65. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

66. Finance Update

Members considered a report by the Finance Officer which updated them on the financial position of the Council as at end of April 2025, the amount of earmarked reserves as at the end of March 2025, the annual review of the fixed asset register, the level of debt over 30 days and gave details of the payments list from 1 March 2025 to 30 April 2025.

In regard to the fixed asset register it was noted that the proposed Sylvia Townsend Warner statue would be added to the register once it had been gifted to the Council. Officers would also investigate the possibility of adding data trackers to that statue and the Frink statues.

The report also set out the outcome of the internal auditor's third and final audit held in April 2025. The recommendations of the internal auditor and officers responses to them were noted.

Additionally the report presented the 2024-25 Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) Annual Internal Audit Report, Annual Governance Statement and Accounting Statements.

Members noted that in November 2023 the Council had reappointed Darkin Miller Ltd as the Council's Internal Auditor for a period of three years and that BDO LLP would continue as external auditor. The Committee was asked to confirm that the Council had no conflicts of interest with BDO LLP.

Resolved

- (1) That the payments list, totalling £655,378.07 be approved.
- (2) That the fixed asset register as at 31 March 2025 be agreed.
- (3) That the report of the internal auditor and the officer responses to them be noted.

It is also

Recommended

- (4) That the Council approves the Annual Governance Statement for 2024-25.
- (5) That the Council approves the Accounting Statement for 2024-25.
- (6) That the Council confirms the appointment of Darkin Miller Ltd as the Council's Internal Auditor for the 2025-26 Council Year.
- (7) That the Council has no conflict of interest with BDO LLP.

67. Community Implementation Plan Update

The Committee received a report and a presentation by the Council's Community Development Officer in respect of the progress made in implementing ideas for action which were set out in the 2023-28 Community Implementation Plan which had previously been agreed by Council.

The Community Development Officer responded to Members detailed questions. It was noted that First Buses was proposing to move to digital only bus timetables. The Committee felt that this was a retrograde move which could disadvantage those in digital poverty, children, the elderly and more. It was agreed that the Mayor should write to First Buses and Dorset Council expressing this Council's view that printed bus timetables should continue to be produced.

Resolved

- (1) That, as a matter of urgency, the Mayor write to First Bus and Dorset Council expressing this Council's strong view that printed bus timetables should continue to be produced.
- (2) That the Implementation Plan update be noted.

68. Review of Staff Handbook

Members were informed that following a 'light touch' review of the Council's staffing policies in 2020, officers had sought the advice of the Council's external legal advisors,

WorkNest, and undertaken a thorough review of all existing policies and created new policies in order to address recent legislation.

As a result, a new suite of policies had been brought together to form a single staff handbook – which would be an easier way for existing and prospective staff to understand the Council’s approach to the employment of staff. The draft handbook had been circulated to all Members.

The new policies that had been drafted by WorkNest for the Council included:

- Carer’s Leave policy
- Flexible Working policy
- Paternity policy
- Personal Relationships at Work policy
- Social Media policy
- Wellbeing Statement
- Working from Home policy.

Of the existing policies, the policy on Harassment and Bullying had been significantly updated to take account of the new Duty to Prevent Sexual Harassment arising from the *Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023* which came into effect in October 2024. WorkNest had provided the Council with guidance on how to address this new duty which introduced a new positive obligation on employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment where the unwanted conduct is of a sexual nature.

It was noted that all staff had been consulted on the new or updated policies.

Recommended

That the staff handbook, as previously circulated to all Members, be agreed.

69. Corn Exchange Clock Tower

The Committee considered a report by the Town Clerk on work that may be required to the clock tower following an internal structural inspection. Generally, the tower roof timber structure was in good condition considering its age, however there were some areas of concern, in particular the bell chamber floor and various corroded straps and metal work. The report also indicated ongoing water ingress along the south façade of the tower.

It was therefore necessary to ascertain the cause of this water ingress with a drone survey. This survey would determine if scaffolding was needed to carry out any repairs. If this was required it would be sensible to take the opportunity to undertake various external stone repairs and repointing to the tower as there had been, over the past couple of years, some instances of failure resulting in small pieces of falling masonry.

The drone survey would confirm the extent of the work required and it was proposed that this survey be carried out as soon as possible with the aim of seeking tenders for the work required during June with a view to commencing work by the end of September subject to the availability of the Town Hall.

Resolved

- (1) Agree that a drone survey be carried out as soon as possible.
- (2) That Crickmay Stark Architects be appointed to draw up and issue tenders for the work identified by the survey with the outcome being presented to the next meeting of the Committee for consideration.

70. **Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960**

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 matters the public and press representatives be excluded from this meeting during their discussion.

71. **Appointment of Temporary Markets Officer**

The Committee considered a report by the Town Clerk on the appointment of a temporary Markets Officer. It was confirmed that the permanent position of Markets Assistant would be advertised and the appointment made following an interview process. Some additions to the proposed Job Description of the Markets Officer were also agreed in respect of attending Markets Panel meetings and organising other appropriate events to compliment the markets offer.

Resolved

- (1) That the part time (up to 18.5 hours per week) post of Markets Officer be offered to the candidate now named in accordance with SCP25, to be appointed from September 2025.
- (2) That the report as a whole will be agreed.

Chair.....