

Dorchester Town Council

POLICY COMMITTEE

20 July 2026

Present: The Mayor (Councillor L. Fry) and Councillors R. Biggs, S. Biles (Chair), F. Hogwood, G. Jones, V. Lloyd-Jones and K. Reid.

In Attendance

S.Jones, D. Leaper, R. Potter, W.Gibbons and M. Rennie.

Apologies: Councillor R.Ricardo.

01. Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest were declared. Councillor R. Biggs reported that he was a Dorset Council Cabinet Member. Dorset Council was the freehold owner of both the Dorset History Centre and Fairfield Car Park.

02. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 11 May 2026, adopted by Council on 19th May, were taken as read and were confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

03. Dorset History Centre

The Committee had before it a report by the Town Clerk. Sam Johnson from Dorset History Centre Service Manager at Dorset Council for Archives and Records presented to the Committee the Centres Capital project proposals; along with details of their National Lottery Heritage Fund application.

Resolved

(1) That the Dorset History Centre Past Lives Future Proofed project be supported.

(2) That the Council pledge £10,000 towards the project.

04. Financial Update

Members considered a report by the Finance Officer which updated them on the financial and cash position of the Council as at end of June 2026, the amount of earmarked reserves as at the end of March 2026, the level of debt over 30 days and gave details of the payments list from 1 May 2026 to 30 June 2026.

The report also set out the Terms of Engagement and Programme of Works for the proposed Internal Auditor.

Members noted that the temporary Markets Officer was undertaking the majority of the Markets work whilst training the Markets and Communications Officer so as to allow that person to take over the markets function once the temporary contract ended in just over two years' time and proposed that the 18.5 hours worked by the Markets and Communications Officer be charged to the Council's salary costs rather than to the markets budget.

Resolved

- (1) That the payments list, totalling £337,814.23 be approved.
- (2) That the Internal Auditors Terms of Engagement and Programme of Works be approved.
- (3) That 18.5 hours worked by the Markets and Communications Officer be charged to the Council's salary costs rather than to the markets budget.

05. Updates to Staff Handbook

Members considered a report by the Assistant Town Clerk (Corporate) on recommended updates to the staff handbook.

In addition, the Committee also considered a draft Bereaved Partner's Paternity Leave policy.

Recommended

- (1) That the proposed amendments to the staff handbook be approved.
- (2) That the proposed new Bereaved Partner's Paternity Leave Policy be approved for inclusion in the staff handbook.

06. Dorchester Markets

Members received the minutes from the last Market Panels meeting and gave consideration to joint funding, with the Markets Panel, improvements to the indoor market at Fairfield. Members expressed very positively on the improvements that have been made so far and that are proposed. The total cost of the works was £70,000. It was noted that the provision of solar panels on the roof and battery storage was being investigated.

Resolved

That a contribute of £35,000, from the Public Realm Reserve, be made towards the Fairfield indoor market improvements.

07. Cornhill Enhancement Scheme

The Committee had before it a proposed design for the enhancement of Cornhill. The designs had previously been discussed via a site meeting with some members of the original Cornhill task and finish group established by the Policy Committee.

The Committee was asked to review and approve the draft design as detailed in Appendix A of the report and to instruct officers to secure both the necessary permissions from Dorset Council, along with indicative costings for the scheme for consideration at a future meeting of Policy Committee.

Members requested that the membership of the Cornhill Working Group be reviewed, and also for the statue currently included in the designs be removed, as this could be a separate project funded by a third party.

Resolved

- (1) That the draft designs for the enhancement of Cornhill be approved.
- (2) That officers seek to secure the necessary consents for the scheme from Dorset Council.
- (3) That officers obtain indicative costings for the scheme to present to a future meeting of the Committee in order that an appropriate budget can be allocated from reserves.

08. Climate Emergency Action Plan

The Committee was asked to consider re-establishing the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group. A discussion around various climate based workstreams was had, and it was felt that these items were best to be discussed by the Task and Finish Group when they reconvene.

Resolved

That the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group be re-established to consist of five Members, preferably to include a Member from both the Management and Planning and Environment Committees, plus the Mayor ex-officio. Membership to be agreed at the next Council meeting.

09. **Corn Exchange – Additional Solar Panels**

Members considered a report by the Town Clerk proposing the installation of additional solar panels on the Corn Exchange roof. Previously solar panels had been installed to the lower level roof of the Corn Exchange. Due to an increase in energy consumption Members were presented with details on the installation of solar panels to the higher roof level, and asked that up to £19,920 be made available from the Climate Emergency Reserve to fund the installation of these solar panels. Planning permission had been previously agreed.

Officers clarified that although the Corn Exchange is a Council asset, Dorchester Arts was responsible for the utility bills.

Resolved

- (1) That up to £19,920 be made available from the Climate Emergency Reserve to fund the installation of additional solar panels on the Corn Exchange roof in accordance with the planning permission and that Dorchester Arts be required to seek grant funding towards the costs.
- (2) That the same company that was previously used to install the lower level solar panels also install the higher level solar panels.
- (3) That battery storage options are considered as part of this project.

10. **Dorchester Business Awards**

The Committee considered whether to sponsor the Dorchester Business awards 2027. Members expressed a preference to sponsor the 'excellence in customer service' category.

Resolved

That the 2027 Dorchester Business Awards be sponsored in the sum of £345.

11. **Councillors Code of Conduct Review**

Dorchester Town Council adopted the Local Government Associations Model Councillor Code of Conduct in July 2021.

A member of the public spoke to this item and detailed how, although these were a model produced by the LGA, they could be developed and improved. It was stated that as the question submitted was late, a written response would be sent and circulated to Councillors.

Resolved

That Members review the Town Clerks response once circulated and bring the item back to a future meeting of the Committee.

12. Information Governance Update

Members were presented with a revised Data Protection Policy and a new Privacy Policy.

As detailed within the report it was best practice for both Councillors and officers to undertake Data Protection training.

Recommended

- (1) That the Data Protection policy be adopted.
- (2) That the draft Privacy Notice be adopted.
- (3) That all Councillors and staff undertake data protection training by 31st October 2026 and then periodic refresher training following this.

13. Councillor E-mail Addresses

Both the benefits and disadvantages of Councillors having Council email addresses for Council business were presented to Members.

The costs associated with Councillors having their own Council email addresses was detailed.

Members discussed at length both their feelings of support and concern to the introduction of .gov email addresses. It was noted that officers would provide training and additional support to those councillors that may need it.

Resolved

- (1) That the provision of .gov emails for Councillors be agreed in principle.
- (2) That officers investigate and discuss with Members any additional needs and support they may need with implementing this proposal with a further costed report being presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

14. 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.

15. **Request for Partial Flexible Retirement**

The Committee considered a report by the Town Clerk on a partial flexible retirement request received from a member of staff.

Resolved

That the Town Clerk be given delegated authority to implement the recommendations as set out in the confidential report.

Chair.....