



DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2025-26

INTRODUCTION BY THE TOWN MAYOR – *Councillor Andy Canning*

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) 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*

This has been my second year as Chair of the Management Committee. I continue to be grateful to Councillor Fiona Kent-Ledger, who has acted as Vice-Chair, and to our exceptional Town Council staff.

Outdoor Services report to the Management Committee through Carl Dallison, Assistant Town Clerk (Outdoor Services), who is a horticultural encyclopaedia, and his team have been busy over the last 12-months: exceptional seasonal management of Borough Gardens to give beautiful flower beds with tree and shrub maintenance and completion of repairs. Borough Gardens House remains open for functions; the gates and pillars at the Princes Street entrance have been refurbished and donated Japanese Maples have been planted. Events in the Garden include the Cider Festival, Anonymous and One World festivals. Thank you also Emma Scott and team for your skills (and KeeP 106). We have also agreed new management of the Garden's refreshment kiosk for 2026.

The Town Council has adopted The Great Field where changes continue – including new planting, dedicated new benches (one adjacent to the bus stop on Mansell Square) and play equipment, and hosting of many events in association with Talk about Trust (PiP), Lions Summerfest, weekly Park Runs, Dorset Food and Arts

Festival and popular bouncy castle attractions. Attention to biodiversity continues at all our sites. We should also like to thank Miles King for his help managing the Swale on the Great Field.

Adoption of Centenary Fields and Duke of Edinburgh Gardens from the Duchy of Cornwall is expected this year. Play equipment elsewhere in Dorchester has also been maintained and refurbished with management of Kings Road and its maturing plantation and biodiversity. Repair of the collapsed retaining wall at Fordington Cemetery will be going ahead with the co-operation with Mill Street Housing Society.

Management Committee continues to support many local groups through small grants. We have seen many other developments enacted: servicing of our allotments; strong relations with Dorchester Arts and continued refurbishment of the Municipal Buildings. Through the benefaction of a local resident, a *Susie the Cat* sculpture is coming to South Street to complement our Sylvia Townsend-Warner statue.

It has been another exciting year for the Management Committee and the facilities it 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*

The Committee has met regularly to consider planning applications referred by Dorset Council, ensuring that local views are represented and that proposals are considered in terms of their scale, design, impact, highway implications and effect on the character of Dorchester. Members have taken a balanced approach, supporting suitable development while raising concerns or objections where necessary.

In addition to planning consultations, the Committee has contributed to strategic policy matters affecting the town. This included consideration and approval of Dorchester Town Council's response to the Dorset Council Local Plan Options Consultation, as well as comments on the emerging Local Transport Plan. The Committee also agreed that the Council's Local Plan response should be strengthened in relation to flooding, drainage and surface water management following recent flooding in the town.

The Committee has addressed a range of local highway and traffic matters, including parking, pedestrian safety, junction improvements and requests for improved crossing facilities. Particular issues considered included pedestrian safety at Bitter End, speed reduction measures near Alington Avenue, and wider traffic and parking concerns. A task & finish group was established to explore the introduction of 20mph speed limits in appropriate areas, and the Committee supported commissioning traffic speed surveys to inform this work.

Environmental considerations have remained central to the Committee's work, including sustainable development, flood mitigation, active travel, public realm issues and the protection of Dorchester's historic character. The Committee has also considered significant development proposals, including the Crown Gate proposals at Poundbury.

I would like to thank all Committee members for their commitment and constructive contributions, and the Town Clerk and officers for their continued support.

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

Dorchester has been a market town since Roman Times, and it is very proud of that status. Following a long period of negotiations with the responsible authorities since April 1st the Town Council is again responsible for the management of the town's markets. The Council has appointed a Markets Officer who will lead a team responsible for the Wednesday market and Sunday car boot sale at Fairfield, and the daily market at Cornhill.

In January, the land known as the Old Tennis Courts was transferred to the Dorchester Community Land Trust. Work has now begun on the development to be known as *Roman Corner* providing fifteen 1-bedroom flats available at an affordable rent for people under the age of 35 working in Dorchester.

In January, Council agreed a 2% increase to the Council Tax for 26/27 in line with the policy of “a little regularly” rather than large increases. As a result of this policy this year’s Town Council’s precept increase was below inflation. The Town Council remains in a solid position financially. Wessex Water are attending the Annual Town Meeting in recognition of Dorchester Town Council achieving their *Watermark* status.

The Policy Committee can support Not for Profit Organisations with special grants. During the past year we have continued to support the CAB, KeeP 106 and the Dorchester Youth & Community Centre in recognition of their roles in the community.

This year the Town Council also partnered with Dorchester Arts to bring Luke Jerram’s *Helios* (an illuminated artwork of the sun) to the Corn Exchange for 10 days over Easter and attracted over 8,000 visitors. The Council had also agreed to partner with Dorset Climate Action Network to facilitate a community screening of *The People’s Briefing* - a documentary film on the implications of climate and nature breakdown. The Town Council is also one of the sponsors of the Dorchester Business Awards and the Dorchester Literary Festival.

Dorchester Town Council benefits from a skilled staff team whose dedication maintains facilities open spaces, organises events, supports local businesses and community groups, coordinates the Youth Council, and collaborates with schools on programs about local democracy. Training is important to the Council with staff attending external and in-house courses. The Council also employs two apprentices one in Finance and the other working in Outdoor Services.

The current Town Clerk, Steve Newman, will retire at the end of July. Steve has worked for the council since 2002 - after serving as the Deputy Town Clerk for 20 years he was appointed as the Town Clerk in 2022. Since then, Steve has led the Council through many civic events including the ceremonies following the death of the late Queen and the Proclamation and Coronation of King Charles III. He has also overseen the major refurbishment of the Municipal Buildings, the negotiations to take over the management of the Markets and worked with many organisations to deliver the best possible services and facilities for the town. The support that Steve has given current and previous councillors is immeasurable. The Council has appointed Charmaine Denny as the new Town Clerk.

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL - OPERATIONAL BUDGET SUMMARY

	2024-2025 Actual	2025-26 Budget	25-26 Actual	Under/ -over Budget
Parks & Open Spaces	731,485	807,390	762,195	45,195
Allotments	19,877	28,477	28,566	-89
Municipal Buildings	393,006	382,509	405,159	-22,650
Cemeteries	69,859	67,898	77,579	-9,681
Cultural & Twinning Activities	77,242	89,029	96,589	-7,560
Corporate & Democratic Management	294,531	299,202	295,418	3,784
Other Services	83,047	148,343	136,628	11,715
Operational Budget	1,669,047	1,822,848	1,802,134	20,714
Precept	1,726,115	1,822,939	1,822,939	0
Transfer to General Reserve	57,068	91	20,805	20,896

Our draft Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2025-26 will be available at www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCILLORS TO 1st MAY 2026

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