

Dorchester Town Council

POLICY COMMITTEE

21 September 2026

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

Officers: Charmaine Denny (Town Clerk), Tony Hurley (Assistant Town Clerk – Corporate) and Nigel Hayes (Responsible Finance Officer).

One member of the public.

Apologies: Councillors R.Ricardo, F.Hogwood, G.Jones and J.Germodo

16. Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest were declared.

17. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 20th July, adopted by Council on 27th July 2026, were taken as read and were confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

18. Public Participation

The following questions were asked by a member of the public, and the Town Clerk responses were given (in bold):

Dorchester Town Council's Member Development and Training Strategy states that elected-member development applies to all councillors and should be embedded throughout a councillor's term of office. The Council's earlier governance reporting, including work published by the then Town Clerk, Dennis Holmes, also emphasised member development and appropriate training. Could the Policy Committee clarify whether the Council still considers the Member Development and Training Strategy to be an active policy; how compliance with it is currently monitored; what record is maintained of training and development undertaken by individual councillors; and, in the interests of transparency and good governance, when that record will be made publicly available?

The Member Development and Training Strategy is no longer an active Council policy and has therefore been removed from the Council's website. The Council's current governance arrangements and member training requirements are kept under review, and councillors are advised of relevant training opportunities as appropriate

The Council's Standing Orders state that the terms of reference and membership of a Task and Finish Group should be determined by the appointing committee, and provide for the Council to determine matters including quorum, public and press attendance and advance public notice. The Corporate Plan also states that members of the press and public are welcome to attend Panels and Task and Finish Groups unless confidential matters need to be considered. Given that residents attending Council meetings are expected to comply with the Council's Standing Orders, could the Policy Committee explain how the Council is ensuring that its own Task and Finish Groups comply with those Standing Orders; where the terms of reference, membership, meeting dates and public-access arrangements for each current Task and Finish Group are published; and, if they are not currently published, how residents can exercise the public attendance envisaged by the Corporate Plan?

The Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations are currently under review and will be presented to the November Policy Committee for consideration. The Corporate Plan will also be reviewed in the coming months. The operation and governance arrangements for Task and Finish Groups will be considered as part of these reviews, including their terms of reference, membership and arrangements for public and press attendance.

The public Register of Interests currently states that some registers are not yet available and that they will be published as councillors submit them through Dorset Council's new system. Given the importance of transparency and public confidence in the Council's decision-making, could the Policy Committee confirm whether all Dorchester Town Councillors have now submitted an up-to-date Register of Interests, and when residents can expect the published register to be complete and up to date?

19 of the Council's 20 councillors have completed their Register of Interests on the new system. Councillors are reminded periodically by the Town Clerk to complete or update their register as appropriate. Responsibility for completing and maintaining an individual Register of Interests rests with the councillor concerned. Consequently, the Council cannot provide a date by which the outstanding register will be completed

In considering the Council's policy for recognising long service and contribution to Dorchester, will the Policy Committee consider whether the Honorary Citizen Award should form part of the same coherent recognition framework, so that the Council has clear and transparent criteria distinguishing recognition for length of service from recognition for exceptional contribution to the town; and, if Honorary Citizen Awards are to remain outside that policy, could the Committee explain the rationale for treating the two forms of civic recognition separately?

Honorary Citizen status can be conferred (for life) on any individual who has made a significant difference over a long period of time to the community of Dorchester. Recipients do not need to have been either a councillor or member of staff of the Town Council. The two recognition schemes are, therefore, very different and, in addition, there can only be a maximum of five living honorary citizens at any one time – whereas the staff/member recognition scheme has no ‘cap’ on the number of beneficiaries. There would not, therefore, appear to be any benefits in aligning the schemes

19. Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools

Members considered a report by the Assistant Town Clerk (corporate) which detailed how Cllr Poppy Farmer had submitted a proposal to develop a policy on the use of artificial intelligence (AI)

Members commented on how they felt that this proposal was timely and that a policy was needed.

Resolved

The Committee resolved for officers to develop a draft policy on the use of AI tools following research and stakeholder engagement and for the draft to be presented to Committee early in 2027.

20. Draft Policy – Recognition of Long Service

Members considered a report by the Assistant Town Clerk (Corporate) on a draft Policy for Recognition of Long Service.

Members asked for members to amend the policy so that the voucher had a focus on being spent locally, and any voucher to be accompanied by an appropriate certificate.

Resolved

Members approved the draft Long -Service Recognition Policy (to include the amends detailed) and for it to be included within the council’s Staff Handbook.

21. Financial Update

Members received a financial update from the Responsible Finance Officer which updated them on the financial and cash position of the Council as at end of August 2026. The amount of earmarked reserves at the end of August 2026, debtors over 30 days and gave details of the payment list for the period 1 July to 31 August.

Information was also given relating to the recent procurement exercise for an insurance provider.

Resolved

a) That the payments list, totalling £326,901.00 be resolved

b) That Clear Insurance Group be appointed as the Council's insurance provider for an initial three-year term commencing 1 December 2026, with options to extend for a further one year and subsequent additional one year (3+1+1), at an estimated annual cost of approximately £44,600.

22. Sub Group – Neighbouring Parish Councils

The Committee were presented a report by the Town Clerk that requested that two councillors along with the Town Clerk meet and form a sub group with the clerks and two councillors each from Bradford Peverell, Charminster and Stinsford Parish Councils.

Resolved

That the Committee appoint Cllr Leaper and Cllr Potter of the Local Plan/Future Direction Task and Finish Group to sit on the Sub Group (name to be confirmed) with neighbouring Parish Councils.

23. Budget Working Group

The Committee was asked to consider establishing a budget working group for the forthcoming financial year.

Resolved

That the Committee appoint up to five Members; to include the Chair and Vice Chair of the Policy Committee; Chair and or Vice Chair of the Management Committee and one other member. The Town Clerk is to email and ask all members.

24. Consultation – Electoral Review of Dorset Council

Members considered a report by the Town Clerk regarding the recent proposals that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England have published.

It was detailed how the only proposed impact to Dorchester has only been a slight change to the Dorset Council ward boundaries between Dorchester East and Dorchester West ward boundaries.

Resolved

Members agreed that their written response to the Electoral Review of Dorset Council Consultation would be that they agree with the current proposals from the Boundary Commission to make a slight change to the boundary between Dorchester East and West Wards, and that they would *not* support a North/South ward. The committee also supported the Dorchester Town Council boundaries remaining exactly the same.

The meeting ended at 19:52

Chair.....