



DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL - ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

INTRODUCTION BY THE TOWN MAYOR – Councillor Gareth Jones

Welcome to our Annual report. The Town Council is the parish authority for Dorchester. We are the most local tier of government, and work closely with the unitary Dorset Council. With a population at around 20,000 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 space and sports grounds in the town, three cemeteries, over 300 allotments, we own the Municipal Buildings and support many of the town's community and civic events.

There are 20 Members on the Council who are usually elected for a four year term, the most recent period starting in May 2019 was for a five year period to bring our elections in line with the newly formed Dorset Council. The Mayor is elected by the Council every year in May and also acts as Chairman to the Council.

This Council operates a Committee structure with each Committee having specific functions. We have three Committees; Management, Planning and Environment and Policy, and reports from the chairmen on the work of these Committees are set out in this report. In non-covid times Agenda for the Council and its Committees are available online three clear days before meetings, which are held in the Council Chamber (upstairs in the Corn Exchange building) and residents are welcome to attend and speak at any of these meetings. During this past year the Council has had to move to a mix of online meetings via Zoom and face to face meetings at Weymouth Avenue Cricket Pavilion due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the fact that the Corn Exchange Building has been undergoing extensive refurbishment. Details of meetings and the Agenda for them are posted on the Council website and we are still welcoming members of the public to our meetings.

It is important for us to receive your comments, queries and complaints about the services provided by the Town Council so that we can improve our endeavours to serve you well. The Council also welcomes your help in highlighting any issues, opportunities or problems around the town – whether the responsibility of this Council or not - let us know. If it falls within our direct responsibility we will endeavour to deal with it ourselves, and if it's not we will contact the appropriate authority on your behalf.

Thank you for your time in receiving and reading this report and we would welcome any response you might make.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE - Councillor Fiona Kent-Ledger

Throughout the year 2021 /2022 the Council has continued to work hard to ensure that things run as smoothly as they could. Covid 19 was still very prevalent with high infection rates affecting how we could operate and Staff sickness. All the council staff worked hard under quite trying circumstances and the Committee would like to thank them all for their efforts.

The Management Committee has continued to do its duties and conducted its meetings in public online via the Zoom platform for most of the year. When safety measures started to ease a little, we endeavoured to meet in person wherever it was safe to do so. The meetings have been held every other month with the Chairman and Deputy Clerk arranging adhoc meetings whenever the need has arisen. At every meeting the Committee received reports from the Deputy Clerk Steve Newman these included the monitoring reports for the Municipal Buildings and the Town Council's three cemeteries.

We received a detailed reports at every meeting from the Outdoor Service Manager Carl Dallison, who answered any questions arising from the report or in general that the councillors may had.

The Committee ensures that at least two site visits are made to all the Council run properties and facilities, these are normal conducted around in Spring and Autumn, however this year Covid 19 meant we were only able to do one round of visits.

It is impossible to mention in depth all the work the committee has undertaken this year but there are two pieces of work that require mention both for the sheer amount of work involved but also for the progressive nature of the partnership working undertaken and the benefit they will bring to the town.

The first of these being the Partnership with Dorchester Arts for them to undertake the operation of community arts provision in the Town and the use of the Corn exchange as full time venue for the Arts in the Town. This Partnership has galvanised much needed remedial repair works to the building, both inside and out. It has enabled the Town Council to address its desires to move towards more sustainable and greener heating and lighting options with the installation of the Biomass boiler, solar panels and Cells and LED lighting. It has bought the opportunity to replace old outdated technology with more efficient equipment within the building which makes for a better experience for the people of the Town.

The Duchy and ourselves have signed the agreement that means the Great Field is now part of the Community facilities managed by the Town Council for the People of Dorchester, The Duchy will remain responsible for certain repairs and "snagging" issues for a period of time. It is a fantastic asset for the whole town to enjoy, look out for more community activities and event being held there this summer. Prince Charles officially opened the Play area in Early May, the event was attended by several MPs and oddly the Mayor of Athens!

This year The Towns digital presence was increased with a greater use of our social media presence to promote activities, events and Partnerships and in some residents eyes bring us further into the 21st Century, watch this space I think is the buzz word and hints at more exciting work to come.

As ever the outdoor staff have been working hard in the Borough gardens and there have been some changes to bed placement, this was for both safety and aesthetic reasons - but as a bonus it allows for more seating on a flat grassed area near the bandstand. The outdoor gym equipment was replaced and a new safety surface that blends in more sympathetically with the area installed, this is all now in use again and proves to be as popular as ever.

The very popular King's Road play area and open space went through a bit of a transformation this year with the creation of a small woodland area with walkways created to aid mindfulness and help people to connect to nature. Many local community groups and members of the public have been involved in tree planting and even in its first year the Blossoms attracted a lot of people to the area.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE - *Councillor Robin Potter*

I had hoped to write by now that the effects of Covid would have receded and we would be back to our Council Chamber. We did manage one month there, but rising case numbers drove us back to the cricket pavilion where the advantages of more space are countered by the need to wrap up warm! However, councillors have been most co-operative with the need for care and have loyally turned up to discuss our business.

Our bread-and-butter work of assessing planning applications submitted within Dorchester continues and we have been active in commenting on the many applications for development, ranging from re-rendering walls up to proposals for groups of housing such as those on Four Paddocks near the end of St Georges Road. Our comments are passed to planning officers at Dorset Council and we do know from times when proposals are amended that they are taken account of, even when there is not always agreement. Councillors are becoming concerned, however, that service to the public from Dorset Council is not always as good as could be hoped. Neighbours are not routinely informed of proposals and site notices are occasionally difficult to find in time for comments to be made. There are also worries that the scheme of delegation now being used at Dorset Council does not always give sufficient weight to local concerns.

One big area during last year has been proposed developments at the Hospital, where we were pleased to hear a most useful presentation from them about future improvements.

I wrote last year that the hope was for a little more work on the environment part of our label, and there has been some success with reducing flooding on the by-pass. Thanks are particularly due here to Dorset Councillor Roland

Tarr. The ramp allowing disabled access to Dorchester West station has finally arrived after more years than I care to say and praise is due to all those who campaigned tirelessly for this vital transport link. Bridges across the railway have recently been returned to green instead of rust after intervention from our MP and there is talk about the surroundings of Dorchester South station.

The need for a better experience for cyclists and walkers in and around the town has been taken on board by many others including some officers at Dorset Council and this is grounds for hope, though far too little has yet materialised in actions. I welcome the setting up of the Dorchester Transport Action Group who will press their ideas for improvements in this area. Comment was also made on Dorset's *Bus Back Better* strategy which has now been turned down for funding from central government. Again, disappointing lack of action.

We have, of course, made our comments on the draft Local Plan proposals from Dorset Council. To say we have serious reservations would be an understatement, particularly with the proposed policy DOR13 for North of Dorchester. A large part of our effort recently has been to make progress with the process of forming a masterplan for the centre of our town that will be an improvement on that suggested by Dorset Council. Our Town Councillors met, discussed and have produced a draft 'Vision for Dorchester' which has been shared with several organisations in the town, including for example Dorchester Civic Society, Transition Towns Dorchester and students from Thomas Hardy School. An updated version will be available for any member of the public to comment on at the Informal Annual Town Meeting on Friday 20th May where this report will also be available for comment.

As I said at the beginning, the work of town councillors on this committee cannot be overstated. Whether in the cold at Weymouth Avenue, back in our council chamber, by zoom or email and/or person-to-person contact, they make it very clear how concerned they are about Dorchester now and Dorchester in the future. With our clerk Gina Wakely always ready and able to note planning applications for our consideration and forward our responses we are well served. Thank you!

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE - *Councillor Susie Hosford*

The work of the Committee and the Council has again been impacted over the past year by the coronavirus pandemic and various Government imposed restrictions. With the final lifting of restrictions in February we were pleased to be able to return to the Council Chamber for our final meeting of the year and to see more normal levels of activity returning throughout the Town. We are very grateful to our entire Staff Team who have always risen to the challenges of the pandemic and have worked flexibly to ensure that the work of the Council continues. We are extremely proud of their dedication and commitment to delivering Council services and supporting our Community throughout the difficulties of the past two years.

Throughout the year, the Committee has again looked for opportunities to expand the work of the Council through continued working with partner organisations. Following a major programme of maintenance and refurbishment, the Municipal Buildings was reopened in October and the management of the building has now been handed over to Dorchester Arts. We have also continued to support locally valued services, some of which have experienced funding cuts following Dorset Council's review of its discretionary services and grants. For example, in January the Committee recommended grant funding to Citizen's Advice Central Dorset for three years from 1 April 2022.

The Council is currently working on a masterplan for the town centre which we hope will be incorporated into the Dorset Council Local Plan and we continue to work with Dorset Council on joint projects such as the enhancement of the public realm in Cornhill and the future strategy for Dorchester Markets. The Committee has also recognised the economic importance of promoting the Town's heritage through supporting the development of heritage events and of raising awareness of all that the Town has to offer through the successful implementation of the Tourism Strategy.

The Committee has continued to monitor the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and budgets, together with the delivery of the Corporate Plan, including the Council's response to the Climate Emergency. In January the Council adopted the Committee's recommendation for a 2% rise in Council Tax which will enable the Council to maintain its existing services whilst allowing flexibility to develop new areas of work and will also help us to continue supporting valued partner organisations.

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL OPERATIONAL BUDGET SUMMARY

	2020-21 Actual	2021-22 Budget	21-22 Actual	Under/ -over Budget
Parks & Open Spaces	537,307	546,125	533,057	13,068
Allotments	2,481	3,177	4,131	-954
Municipal Buildings	331,446	308,839	318,606	-9,767
Cemeteries	40,453	66,536	65,122	1,414
Cultural & Twinning Activities	40,209	84,564	74,400	10,164
Corporate & Democratic Management	226,026	231,279	235,279	-4,000
Other Services	276,005	275,741	267,394	8,347
Operational Budget	1,453,927	1,516,261	1,497,989	18,272
Precept	1,503,515	1,516,277	1,516,277	0
Transfer to General Reserves	49,588	16	18,288	18,304

Our draft Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2021-22 will be available at www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk.

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCILLORS TO MAY 2024

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Stella Jones MBE Syward Cottage, Syward Road DT1 2AJ	01305 264335	Tony Lyall 13 St Georges Road DT1 1PA	01305 266254
Rory Major 15 Orchard Street DT1 1JH	07758 914767		
NORTH WARD			
Sue Biles scbiles@aol.com		Andy Canning 11 Alfred Road DT1 2DW	01305 261592
Alistair Chisholm 9 Orchard St DT1 1JH	07419 589005	David Taylor	
POUNDBURY WARD			
Richard Biggs 20 Bridport Road DT1 1RS	01305 260156	Frances Hogwood 8 Hintock Street DT1 3FB	fmhog@onetel.com
Susie Hosford 1 Meadow Cottages, Martinstown DT2 9JL	01305 880102	David Leaper 33 Peverell Ave East DT1 3RH	01305 757047
SOUTH WARD			
Gareth Jones 21 Martel Close, Broadmayne DT2 8PL	01305 854915	Robin Potter 22 D'Urberville Close DT1 2JT	01305 264416
Molly Rennie MBE 13 Alington Road DT1 1NS	01305 268572		
WEST WARD			
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Janet Hewitt 6 Garfield Avenue DT1 2EX	01305 266175	Ralph Ricardo 25 Shaston Crescent DT1 2EB	01305 584878

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