



# DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL - ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

## **INTRODUCTION BY THE TOWN MAYOR – Councillor Alistair Chisholm**

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 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](http://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 CHAIRMAN OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE - Councillor Fiona Kent-Ledger**

Management Committee has met in the Council Chamber for most of its meetings this year and conducted several site visits to enable councillors to familiarise themselves with the recreational facilities that the Committee is responsible for.

Twinning links have been high on the agenda this year as the Twinning societies are both supported by this committee with Councillors representing the committee on each society. 2023 was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of twinning with Lübbecke in Germany and a delegation was received from both members of the society and the Mayor and Councillors of Lübbecke.

This year the Bayeux Society is gearing up for the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of twinning with Dorchester and the committee's Twining & Cultural Activities Panel will be involved in any discussions on events to be held in Dorchester.

We moved further forward with efforts to reduce the Town Council's carbon footprint by looking at different ways to heat the Borough Gardens glass houses and the Borough Gardens House. We worked closely with Low Carbon Dorset to investigate the best options and feel we have chosen the most suitable option currently available.

This work tied in with the long overdue provision of a new mess room for the grounds staff in the Borough Gardens by converting and extending the existing mess room which is no longer fit for purpose. During the Covid pandemic staff were decamped to the Borough Gardens House which has taken it out of use as a community facility. It is hoped that during this year the community room can be redecorated and once again provide opportunities for local community groups.

Outdoor Services staff have carried out repair work and routine maintenance at several of the play areas and they have also redecorated the play equipment in Salisbury Field and replaced the safety surfaces. Outdoor Services undertake routine inspections of all the play areas and endeavour to keep the equipment in the best condition they can. They have reacted quickly and discreetly to remove recent incidents of damage and graffiti on several notice boards, litter bins and benches on The Great Field and elsewhere in the town.

This will be my last annual report as the chairman of Management Committee. I have served in this role for 5 years and what an interesting, varied and sometimes challenging experience it has been.

There have been complex issues this year to get my head around such as understanding how we sublease premises to community groups enabling them to achieve their aspirations and dreams for their members whilst working in partnership with neighbouring groups clubs and activities.

I have learnt so much about the Town Council, the way it operates and manages the property and land it owns or leases. How we have a duty to move forward so this Town remains a vibrant and relevant place people want to live in. We need to ensure we embrace and learn from the past, but not get stuck in it.

#### **REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE - *Councillor Ralph Ricardo***

As we go forward with another year, the key issue of the Dorset Local Plan (2026-2041) remains undecided with the adoption date moved to 2026. With county elections in May and a general election to follow, this potentially leaves the Local Plan in limbo for the next few months. The council is still against the potential North of Dorchester site, due to the negative impact it would have on the surrounding area and the deliverability of the necessary infrastructure.

Working with Dorset Council on the works on Fairfield Road improvements, the Town council has committed funding to help finish the aesthetics of the site to benefit the town.

We have continued to show our support regarding roads and travel, with requests and ultimately commissioning surveys regarding traffic in the town to try and prove a need to adopt 20mph limits in parts of the town, as well as joining the A35 parishes group trying to work with transport providers to “trial” more rural routes between Dorchester and Bridport.

The council continues to have a close relationship with Dorset County Hospital with presentations from their staff to help shape the future of the facilities at Damers Road and South Walks. We have also voiced our concerns over the proposed redevelopment of the Prison site.

At the monthly meetings we consider applications for alterations to existing properties in Dorchester and various changes of use, as well as smaller proposed developments. Our comments on these are passed to Dorset Council and any other relevant authority. Once submitted we continue to monitor these.

I wish to thank my Vice-chair Robin Potter for his continued support and Gina Wakely for the dedicated hard work providing the committee with the detail behind the applications we receive.

## REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE - Councillor Richard Biggs

I like to think that the Policy Committee is very much the glue that holds everything together in our council. It has an important role in overseeing the Audit function, the governance arrangements, recommending budgets and precept levels, setting, and monitoring the Corporate Plan, reviewing all policies and protocols, Corporate and Operational Risk Management, tourism strategy and, when the time comes, recommending the appointment of the Town Clerk following a recruitment process.

The year has seen the committee busy as usual. The council finances I'm pleased to report are still in good shape and significant but prudent reserves are earmarked for future key projects (typically to be used within 5 years) to deliver the Corporate Plan and business as usual lifecycle replacement. Examples of budgets held are carbon reduction, cemetery building refurbishment and maintenance, vehicle replacement, town hall refurbishment project, and play equipment to name a few. While the scope and size of projects are agreed by the appropriate committees, it is the Policy Committee that gives them real financial challenge before approving. We have reviewed our investments and debt, and it is pleasing that the one remaining loan will be paid off by the end of the next electoral cycle.

The Policy Committee oversees a number of special annual grants to some not-for-profit organisations deemed particularly important who would struggle to exist without our support. For example, the committee was pleased to double the annual grant to Keep 106 in view of their excellent community service and increased overheads. The committee also agreed to continue to be a sponsor for the Dorchester Business Awards and to remain committed to the work of Dorchester BID (Business Improvement District).

A key annual role is to agree a level of precept for the following year and we were pleased to be able to keep the rise at 2% when inflation (Consumer Price Index rate) was significantly higher. The work of looking after our parks and gardens and the support we can give to the wider community is impacted by inflation. Our ability to ensure that the council remains an efficient and lean organisation fit to move on to the next set of corporate objectives is dependent on sound financial management. All of this could not be achieved without first-class dedicated council staff and a keen and diligent group of councillors working for the good of all Dorchester tax-payers.

### DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL - OPERATIONAL BUDGET SUMMARY

	2022-23 Actual	2023-24 Budget	23-24 Actual	Under/ -over Budget
Parks & Open Spaces	603,813	654,307	665,347	-11,040
Allotments	4,704	15,045	17,492	-2,447
Municipal Buildings	447,864	406,996	427,558	-20,562
Cemeteries	33,086	68,006	44,554	23,452
Cultural & Twinning Activities	70,179	83,330	77,328	6,002
Corporate & Democratic Management	250,897	268,607	262,111	6,496
Other Services	139,062	171,452	96,801	74,651
<b>Operational Budget</b>	<b>1,549,605</b>	<b>1,667,743</b>	<b>1,591,192</b>	<b>76,551</b>
Precept	1,581,669	1,668,507	1,668,507	0
<b>Transfer to General Reserve</b>	<b>32,064</b>	<b>764</b>	<b>77,315</b>	<b>76,551</b>

Our draft Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2023-24 will be available at [www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk](http://www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk)

## DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCILLORS TO 1 MAY 2024

Note Elections were held On 2 May 2024 so come Councillors will have changed. For an up to date list of Councillors visit [www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk](http://www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk)

<b>EAST WARD</b>			
Tim Harries 8 Fordington Hill House DT1 1LZ	07970 653796	Fiona Kent-Ledger 78 Casterbridge Road DT1 2AG	01305 250253
Stella Jones MBE Syward Cottage, Syward Road DT1 2AJ	01305 264335	Kate Reid	reidkate@hotmail.co.uk
Rory Major 15 Orchard Street, Dorchester	07758 914767		
<b>NORTH WARD</b>			
Sue Biles susanbiles@outlook.com		Andy Canning 11 Alfred Road DT1 2DW	01305 261592
Alistair Chisholm 9 Orchard St DT1 1JH	07419 589005	David Taylor	david.dorcheser@gmail.com
<b>POUNDBURY WARD</b>			
Richard Biggs 20 Bridport Road DT1 1RS	07810503457	Frances Hogwood f.hogwood978@btinternet.com 8 Hintock Street DT1 3FB	
Susie Hosford 1 Meadow Cottages, Martinstown DT2 9JL	01305 880102	David Leaper 33 Peverell Ave East DT1 3RH	01305 757047
<b>SOUTH WARD</b>			
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		
<b>WEST WARD</b>			
Barry Armstrong-Marshall 20 Fordington Dairy, Athelstan Rd DT1 1FD	01305 269921	Les Fry BEM lesfry.lf@gmail.com	
Janet Hewitt 6 Garfield Avenue DT1 2EX	01305 266175	Ralph Ricardo rj-ricardo@yahoo.com	07722 180189

**Steve Newman – Town Clerk, 19 North Square, Dorchester DT1 1JF**  
**Telephone: 01305 266861 ~ Email [admin@dorchester-tc.gov.uk](mailto:admin@dorchester-tc.gov.uk) ~ [www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk](http://www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk)**