

# Dorchester Town Council

## Policy Committee

18 November 2019

**Present:** Councillors B. Armstrong-Marshall, R. Biggs, A. Chisholm, T. Harries, F. Hogwood, S. Hosford (Chair) and G. Jones

**Attending:** Councillor J. Hewitt

### 15. Minutes

The Minutes of the Committee of 16 September 2019, adopted by Council on 30 September 2019, were taken as read and confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### 16. Finance Update at 31 October 2019

The Committee noted the Town Clerk's update covering the Council's Month 7 budget, cash, debtors and payments position.

The Committee received the first Internal Audit report for 2019/20 activity, along with a short paper considering a response to a recent audit recommendation regarding the procurement of corporate supplies and services.

A Member asked a question regarding the retention and filing of timesheets. Members discussed the approach to reviewing the procurement processes for a list of regular corporate suppliers that had been identified.

#### **Resolved**

- a) That the Payments list, totalling £349,108.73 is approved.
- b) That the Internal Audit report, including the officer response, is noted
- c) That the suppliers listed are given a 12 month temporary exemption, during which time either further work is undertaken to justify a permanent exemption or the supply is subjected to a procurement process

The Committee noted an update related to the provision of free parking at Christmas by the Dorset Council

### 17. Corporate Plan 2019 - 2024

The Town Clerk provided an overview on the development of the Corporate Plan. Members agreed a process for reviewing the draft High Level Focus for the Plan in order to agree a final list at the January 2020 Committee. They also noted the consultation being undertaken by Dorset Council regarding the future of discretionary grant support and the approach that the Council would take to responding to the exercise.

The Committee gave attention to key factors influencing the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, including assumptions for Council Tax increases, property growth, General Reserve levels and new debt, discussing each of the issues at length.

A Member raised a concern regarding whether it was appropriate to consider issues related to the Medium Term Financial Strategy without having a fuller understanding of the priorities the Council wished to include in its Corporate Plan. Members recognised that any recommendations would be used as working assumptions and would still be considered during the setting of the Budget each January.

### **Recommended to Council**

That the Medium Term Financial Strategy that underpins the new Corporate Plan should be built on the assumption that

- a) The Council Tax charge will rise broadly in line with the annual inflation level affecting the Council's expenditure
- b) That no assumption is made for an increase in the tax base due to the increase in taxable properties in the town, nor for the general impacts that arise from such growth
- c) That the Town Council is open to the idea of taking on new debt for specific projects, either to improve its own service infrastructure, or to assist a partner to improve its infrastructure, or to secure an asset that might support the delivery of objectives included in the Corporate Plan, but would investigate and consider each project on its merits
- d) That, due to its continued maintenance of a number of alternative risk mitigation mechanisms the Town Council will operate with a General Reserve level of £100,000

### **18. Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair**

The Committee considered a request from the Chairman of Dorchester Heritage Joint Committee for funding towards the staging of the Fair in 2020.

The Committee discussed the process for recruiting an event co-ordinator, noting the need for a clear path to be documented regarding an appointment to the role.

In response to a comment from a Member the Town Clerk agreed to report back on the wider issue of event co-ordination and support in the town.

### **Resolved**

That, subject to receipt of a budget that identifies how the full cost of the event will be met, Dorchester Town Council makes a grant of £5,000 to the Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair 2020, to be funded as a Special Item.

## 19. **Strategic and Operational Risk Register**

The Committee considered a report of the Deputy Town Clerk explaining the process undertaken to manage risk and the high level risks that the Council was currently managing.

Members discussed the current high level risks and invited the Clerk to combine two risks related to the future direction of the Dorset Council into one risk, which should also recognise the impact of the loss of a number of staff with significant experience and knowledge of issues important to Dorchester.

The Committee also invited the Clerk to consider two new risks related to the uncertainty surrounding the future use of the Municipal Buildings and the potential for risks associated with extending the Council's service offer into wholly new activities within the Corporate Plan.

### **Resolved**

- a) That the amended assessed high level strategic and operation risks be approved
- b) That the new risks identified at the Committee be included within the registers
- c) That the strategic, operational and opportunity risk registers, as a whole, be approved

## 20. **Heating of the Municipal Buildings**

The Town Clerk introduced an additional report relating to the potential to replace the current, due for replacement, gas boilers in the Municipal Buildings with a carbon neutral alternative, in line with the Council's position on the Climate Emergency, based on advice from Low Carbon Dorset.

Members considered the practical implications of the project and in particular how to obtain advice regarding the installation of biomass boilers in a complex listed building. It was agreed that, in addition to seeking expressions of interest from potential installers, officers would also look for specialist independent advice and for opportunities to discuss heating options with operators of other listed buildings.

### **Recommended to Council**

That, consistent with the Council's declaring of a Climate Emergency, alternative approaches for heating the Municipal Buildings are explored, including consideration of a biomass heating system, with a view to making a grant application to Low Carbon Dorset for a package of measures to significantly reduce energy use within the building.