

## Dorchester Town Council

### Policy Committee

20 July 2020

#### held via Zoom Video Conferencing

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

**Attending:** Councillors J. Hewitt, D. Leaper and M. Rennie

1. **Minutes and Declarations of Interest**

The Minutes of the Committee of 11 May 2020, adopted by Council on 18 May 2020, were taken as read and confirmed and are to be signed by the Chairman as a correct record once the Covid 19 lockdown has ended.

2. **Financial Update at 30 June 2020**

The Committee noted the Town Clerk's report on the month 3 financial position, noting actual spending at £16,000 below profile.

**Resolved**

That the Payments list, totalling £190,302.02, is approved.

The Clerk also reported on the budget impacts of the Covid 19 outbreak, noting that the overall outcome was unlikely to require use of the Council's General Reserve. The Clerk answered questions relating to funding for Dorchester Arts and the Council's ineligibility for the national Furlough scheme.

3. **Response to the Covid 19 Crisis**

The Committee considered a report relating to non-operational issues resulting from the lockdown in response to the Covid lockdown, covering support during the recovery period for the local economy, community and cultural groups.

A Member noted the appreciation of the Dorchester BID Executive for the work undertaken by the Council's staff on the Love Dorch campaign.

The Clerk outlined discussions with a number of community groups, which was helping to build a picture of support that will be needed by the town's more vulnerable residents over the next year as a result of the impact of the lockdown. An analysis will be reported to the September Committee. A Member asked that contact be made with the local Hospital Cars team.

Members considered the impact of the lockdown on the town's cultural offer and encouraged officers to explore opportunities to work with local musicians to provide entertainment safely.

#### 4. **Municipal Buildings Projects**

The Town Clerk reported on four separate projects relating to the buildings.

The Committee considered the opportunity to accelerate plans to reroof four different parts of the building. Members expressed support for the opportunity to accelerate the reroofing elements of the work. A request was made that procurement frameworks operated by other Councils be explored.

The report provided options for the implementation of the biomass boiler heating scheme, with a choice between a single storey and two storey extensions, plus other climate emergency interventions in the building. A Member raised concerns regarding the availability of financial and risk information relating to this and the related offices project. Members reconfirmed their wish to achieve their carbon neutral goal and understood the urgency to act associated with Low Carbon Dorset grant and Renewable Heat Incentives.

The Committee then considered the potential to reconfigure spaces at the rear of the building to provide upstairs and offices and ground floor multi-use space. It was noted that at this time the Council had not formally committed to relocating from its office at 19 North Square.

Finally the Committee considered the long term future use of the building and the relationship with Dorchester Arts.

#### **Recommended to Council**

- a) That the Council develops an implementation programme to include
  - Procurement of the reroofing of the Council Chamber, Corn Exchange and apse (cost estimate £820,000)
    - To include discussions with users to keep the building closed to deliver these works at the earliest opportunity
  - More detailed development of the Offices over Biomass option, being
    - Submission of a planning application to Dorset Council for a two storey extension into the Car Park (cost estimate £460,000)
    - The conversion of the upper space into offices, on the assumption that once completed, the Town Council would move into this space, possibly with other community partners
    - The conversion of the ground floor into a multi-use space, specifically meeting the needs of groups to meet, for food preparation for casual hires, and dressing room space for performers, as well as facilities for disabled staff and users (cost estimate for these two parts £520,000)
  - Preparation of a loan request for up to £1.4 Million from the Public Works Loan Board, to supplement the use of existing Earmarked Reserves totalling £400,000

- b) That a Task and Finish Group is established, consisting of the Mayor, Chairs of Policy and Management Committee and the relevant Outside Body Representative, to discuss options for the future involvement of Dorchester Arts in the operation of the building

## 5. **Climate Emergency Projects**

The Town Clerk provided an update identifying that Bioheat had been appointed to carry out the Ground Source Heat Pump contract at Weymouth Avenue Pavilion, being the main part of a £53,000 package of works. A £20,000 grant had been received from Low Carbon Dorset using ERDF funding, while the balance will be met by the Town Council, who will also receive Renewable Heat incentive payments for the next 20 years.

The Clerk also discussed green options relating to keeping the South Chapel at Weymouth Avenue Cemetery damp free. While acknowledging that planning permission would be difficult to obtain, the Town Clerk will explore options to use wind energy to supply power, alongside the reconsideration of the current system for maintaining a damp free environment.

The Committee considered a request for support for a tree planting programme from Transition Town Dorchester.

### **Resolved**

That £500 is granted to Transition Town Dorchester, with no requirement to match fund on this one occasion.

## 6. **Corporate Plan**

A Member asked for an update regarding the Corporate Plan. The Town Clerk agreed to produce a report for the next meeting of the Committee, to include a preliminary evaluation of longer term issues that might emerge as a consequence of the lockdown.

Chairman