

Dorchester Town Council

Policy Committee

21 September 2020

held via Zoom Video Conferencing

Present: Councillors B. Armstrong-Marshall, R. Biggs, A. Chisholm, F. Hogwood, S. Hosford (Chair) and G. Jones
Apologies: Councillor T. Harries
Attending: Councillors Hewitt, S. Jones and D. Leaper

7. Minutes and Declarations of Interest

The Minutes of the Committee of 20 July 2020, adopted by Council on 27 July 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.

8. Financial Update at 31 August 2020

The Committee received the Town Clerk's report on the month 5 financial position, noting actual spending at £21,000 below profile. The Clerk responded to a question regarding the use of the Public Realm Reserve for the Cornhill project.

Resolved

- i) That the Payments list, totalling £231,661.08, is approved.

The Clerk presented the results of a review of the procurement of a number of corporate supplies. The Clerk agreed to provide more details regarding the Council's Insurance experience and potential use of the Council's public liability policy.

Resolved

- ii) That, following a review of procurement processes for regular suppliers of corporate services, the future procurement approach for each supply is as laid out in Table 1 of the report to the Committee

The Clerk highlighted that a number of new working arrangements had been put in place in order to maintain business during the lockdown period, some of which could be retained on a permanent basis.

Resolved

- iii) That the following minor procedural changes, developed during the lockdown period, are documented and retained
- Replacing signatures with authorisation by e-mail , by both Members and Officers, for Creditor Invoice approval
 - Replacing signatures with authorisation by e-mail, by the appropriate manager, for Payroll Time Sheets

- Removal of the Order Book and Order number system, including references in Financial Regulations
- Replacing the process for fixed banking of all cash received with an ad hoc arrangement, with the consequent retention of a higher Petty Cash Float (up to the maximum limit specified in the Council's Insurance document)

The Committee considered a request from the Management Committee to release reserves to refurbish the Holmead Walk play area.

Resolved

- iv) That £15,000 is released from the Playground Equipment Reserve to provide new equipment at Holmead Walk Play Area

The Clerk provided an update on progress regarding the appointment of a contractor to undertake works on the Municipal Buildings.

9. Development of the Corporate Plan

The Town Clerk reported the latest position regarding the development of the new Corporate Plan, highlighting the draft High Level Focus document approved by Council in January 2020 and a number of Covid 19 pandemic related issues that needed to be considered for inclusion within the document.

The Committee considered a document highlighting longer term impacts for the community and a Member asked that an extra risk associated with setbacks to the education of young people be added. Members recognised the limited resources available to deliver support to the community.

A local resident spoke, and highlighted the risks to the town centre economy. He commented that with the current pace of change, ideas that had previously appeared unattractive might now be more acceptable to the community. He also noted that the lockdown had accelerated changes already occurring in the High St and advocated that opportunities to lobby Government and other agencies for support be taken and wider community engagement encouraged.

The Committee discussed the role of the BID in supporting the town centre and the future of markets in the town.

A Member asked that specific consideration be given to how best to consult with young people on the future direction of the town, while another Member asked that more information regarding the Council's plans be published through noticeboards.

Recommended to Council

- i) That the proposed redraft (Appendix 1 to the Minutes) is adopted as a new High Level Focus for the Corporate Plan.

The Clerk provided an update regarding projects outstanding from the 2014 Corporate Plan. A Member provided an update on progress towards the development of the (Heritage) Tourism Strategy. A Member asked that attention be given to walking and cycling in any discussion of the Traffic and Parking Strategy.

The Clerk offered an option to nominate the Council's current electrical contractor to reduce risks associated with the Municipal Buildings works contract. After considering the issue and recognising the implications for procurement Members decided not to pursue the option.

Resolved

- ii) That on the conclusion of the Municipal Buildings project a full procurement exercise is conducted for the Council's electrical services

The Clerk provided an additional update on the work to establish the capacity of Dorchester Arts to operate the Municipal Buildings. Members considered an option to part fund, with Dorchester Arts and in kind support from ACE, the appointment of a specialist business planning advisor. In response to a question the Clerk confirmed that the advice would cover the wider role of Dorchester Arts, including outdoor events such as at Maumbury Rings, in order to demonstrate the charity's ability to manage the Municipal Buildings

Resolved

- iii) That the Council funds 50% of the cost, up to a maximum of £2,500, for a specialist advisor to work with Dorchester Arts to develop a Business Plan related to the future management of the Municipal Buildings

Chairman

DRAFT OF REVISED HIGH LEVEL FOCUS OF THE CORPORATE PLAN**AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

- ~~Work proactively with the Dorset Council to develop stronger policies to support the delivery of truly affordable housing~~
- Focus resources and effort into working with key partners on a programme of unlocking and developing sites across the town for affordable housing

COMMUNITY, CULTURE, HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- Working with other agencies and community partners, develop our understanding of the general needs of our community and the specific needs of vulnerable groups, ***in particular as a result of changes brought about by the Covid 19 pandemic***
- Maintain and, where appropriate, adapt the Council's Community, Sports, Cultural and Health & Wellbeing service delivery to meet the requirements of the town's residents and visitors, either directly or working with local partners
- Resolve the future of the Municipal Buildings to make a relevant and environmentally efficient contribution to the town's community

THE ENVIRONMENT

- In response to the declared Climate Emergency, proactively support practical steps to reduce the impact that the Council and the town's community has on its environment
- Focusing in particular on the Town Centre, introduce sustainable practices to assist the town's community and key partners to improve the town's appearance

LOCAL ECONOMY, TRANSPORT AND PARKING

- Working with other agencies and business representatives, develop our understanding of how the town's economy can be strengthened ***and reshaped, with a particular focus on supporting recovery of the town centre following the Covid 19 pandemic***
- Working initially with the town's Heritage and Tourism sectors, develop a holistic strategy to maximise the benefits of tourism to the town
- Work with Dorset Council to agree and implement a new Transport and Parking strategy that resolves the competing demands of residents, workers and visitors to the town

FUTURE GROWTH OF DORCHESTER

- Develop the Town's existing response to the pressure for development of new housing emerging through the Local Plan process

GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

- Ensure that the Council's governance, communication and administration arrangements remain relevant to the needs of the town and are delivered efficiently and effectively
- ***Ensure that the Town Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy recognises the direct and indirect impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic***