

Dorchester Town Council

Policy Committee

18 January 2021

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 Biles, Fry, Hewitt, Potter, S. Jones, Leaper and Rennie.

15. Minutes and Declarations of Interest

The Minutes of the Committee of 16 November 2020, adopted by Council on 23 November 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.

16. Financial Update at 31 December 2020

The Committee received the Town Clerk's report on the month 9 financial position, noting actual spending at £15,000 below profile.

Resolved

That the Payments list, totalling £332,561.91, is approved.

17. Tourism Services

The Committee considered the report of the Town Clerk, which proposed the development of a new tourism service, with a Development Officer providing support for a partnership approach with the local tourism and business sectors, and also considered the future provision of a separate dedicated Tourist Information Centre.

Members discussed the options for delivery of a TIC in future, including an option based on a dedicated centre manned by volunteers. Members sought clarification and made points on the potential for sales income to offset costs, the degree to which funding a preferred provider might destabilise partnership arrangements, the need to provide coverage across the whole town, the potential to fund more than one partner to provide a higher level of service, opportunities for electronic information points and how any funding made available by Dorset Council might be used to develop the strategy.

Recommended to Council

- i) That the Council implements the Tourism Development element of the (Heritage) Tourism Strategy and makes appropriate budget provision in the Medium Term Financial Strategy and 2021/22 Revenue Budget for the first free years of the service
- ii) That should Dorset Council close the Dorchester Tourist Information Centre, the impacts be monitored and that a review of the need for a dedicated TIC service should be undertaken prior to the 2022 summer visitor season, once the new Tourism Service outlined at i) has been fully implemented

18. **Medium Term Financial Strategy and Revenue Budget 2021/22**

The Clerk provided a report covering the Committee's own budgets and those of the Management Committee, and recommended a precept and Band D charge in line with the Council's agreed policy. The report also identified a medium term financial strategy, discussed the Council's reserve levels and planned capital spending.

Noting the Council's strong financial position and the current economic situation a resident invited the Council to consider a reduced precept and Council Tax for 2021/22.

A number of Members advocated continuation of the Council's strategy of regular, inflation linked tax increases. A Member highlighted the need to invest in town centre infrastructure, while another recognised the impact of rises on residents on fixed incomes. A Member noted the regressive nature of Council Tax as a means of fund raising.

Recommended to Council

That the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Revenue Budget are adopted as laid out in the Appendices to these Minutes, to include: -

- A Council Tax Band D charge of £198.21, an increase of £1.57 (0.80%)
- A precept of £1,516,277, an increase of 0.80%
- The inclusion of one-off contributions to a new Development Support Reserve (£90,000) and a continuation of a higher contribution to the Municipal Buildings (£100,000).

19. **A National Park for Dorset**

The Committee considered the report of the Town Clerk, which provided a holistic picture of the advantages and disadvantages of a National Park, based on views collected from other parties.

Four contributors spoke in favour of supporting the idea of a National Park for Dorset, emphasising or challenging the arguments highlighted in the Town Clerk's report. One resident offered a more cautious approach.

Members discussed the options available to them at length, again echoing many of the arguments in favour and against a National Park for Dorset and Dorchester's inclusion in it. These included among other issues whether a Park should extend beyond current AONB boundaries, the degree to which the Park Authority might or might not result in an increase in bureaucracy or reduced level of democratic input, the risks of being on the edge of, rather than within the National Park, the merits of an Authority's approach to housing development and the financial efficiency of creating a separate body. The Town Clerk clarified that the timetable for the Dorset Council Local Plan was such that it was likely to decide the policy for development north of Dorchester before a National Park would be created. Following receipt of feedback from all Members present it was

Recommended to Council

That the Town Council does not determine its position on a National Park for Dorset until the Government formally invites submissions, at which time the Council will consult more widely with residents about its response.

20. **Corporate Plan Update**

The Clerk provided a report regarding a recent consultation exercise in relation to the Council's draft Corporate Plan and the impacts of lockdown. The modest response, from around 1% of households, to the consultation was overwhelmingly positive.

Noting comments made by residents in support of safeguarding town centre retail and non-vehicular transport the Committee invited the Clerk to consider these further during the development of the next phase of the Corporate Plan.

The Clerk also reported the latest position regarding projects from the Corporate Plan 2015.

21. **Minutes of the Dorchester Markets Informal Joint Panel – 16 December 2020**

The Committee noted the minutes of the Panel, particularly recognising constructive discussion with Dorset Council regarding transfer of administration of the Market Panel.

Chairman

APPENDIX 1

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
	Actual	Budget	Budget
	£	£	£
CORPORATE & DEMOCRATIC			
Members Allowance	21,113	21,600	22,200
Members Training (inc CRB) & Travel	1,287	500	500
Civic & Ceremonial Expenses	1,603	1,000	1,000
Mayoral Expenses	10,090	12,200	12,400
Town Crier	552	600	600
Entertaining & Gifts	501	400	400
Youth Council & Democracy Day	151	200	200
Office Team	187,772	193,730	193,979
Met by Precept on Taxpayer	223,069	230,230	231,279
OTHER SERVICES			
Tourism Development	0	0	30,000
Sawmills rent	7,560	8,500	8,500
To Public Realm Reserve	18,800	52,600	53,600
To Clim. Emerg./Development Reserve	0	125,000	90,000
Youth Centre support	23,350	20,400	20,800
Dorchester Cricket Club	6,000	4,000	2,000
Apprenticeships	11,039	15,000	15,000
CCTV/Video Recording	0	5,000	5,100
Election Costs	9,733	0	0
Debt Charges	43,261	41,200	39,100
Staff - Community Development	41,567	42,990	42,941
Total Expenditure	161,310	314,690	307,041
Treasury Interest - Net of Arlingclose	62	-7,000	-7,000
Sawmills rent recharged	-3,780	-4,200	-4,300
Market Income	-38,334	-30,000	-20,000
Total Income	-42,052	-41,200	-31,300
Met by Precept on Taxpayer	119,258	273,490	275,741

APPENDIX 1 (cont)

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
	Actual	Budget	Budget
	£	£	£
OFFICES TEAM			
Salaries	222,305	226,227	226,909
Overtime	207	0	0
Employers National Insurance	21,327	22,292	22,378
Employers Superannuation	48,941	49,770	49,920
Training Courses	1,117	1,000	1,000
Travel & Subsistence	875	1,500	1,100
Subscriptions (Professional Bodies)	3,216	3,600	3,600
Cleaning Materials	1,150	1,200	1,200
Rates	6,136	6,300	7,200
Gas	1,174	1,200	1,200
Electricity	1,836	1,600	1,600
Water	515	500	500
Repairs & Maintenance	2,814	2,700	2,700
Financial Services inc Audit, Bank & Sage	7,832	8,500	8,500
Employment Law and H & S	2,863	3,000	3,000
Legal & Professional Fees, Advertising	593	1,000	1,000
Insurance	32,189	34,000	34,000
Printing & Stationery	1,054	1,000	1,000
Newsletter	2,676	5,000	4,200
Office Equipment & IT	5,786	5,500	5,500
Telephones	1,749	1,900	1,900
Photocopier Charges	690	800	800
Postage	1,004	1,000	1,000
Total Expenditure	368,049	379,589	380,207
Recharge to Dorchester Markets Panel	-1,655	-1,700	1,700
Net Expenditure recharged to Services	366,394	377,889	378,507
Recharged to			
Corporate & Democratic Management	187,772	193,730	193,979
Allotments	3,574	3,658	3,693
Community Development	41,567	42,990	42,941
Cemeteries	25,362	26,061	26,200
Parks & Open Spaces	54,696	56,455	56,504
Municipal Buildings	40,002	41,162	41,325
Cultural Activity & Twinning	13,421	13,832	13,864
	366,394	377,888	378,507

REVENUE BUDGET 2021/22	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
	Actual	Budget	Budget
	£	£	£
Parks & Open Spaces	572,405	542,608	546,125
Allotments	3,029	3,394	3,177
Municipal Buildings	324,094	321,198	308,839
Cemeteries	51,099	65,328	66,536
Cultural & Twinning Activities	67,089	67,932	84,564
Corporate & Democratic Manage.	223,069	230,230	231,279
Other Services	119,258	273,490	275,741
Operational Budget	1,360,042	1,504,180	1,516,261
Precept	1,463,971	1,503,515	1,516,277
Transfer to General Reserves	103,929	-665	15
Subjective Analysis of Revenue			
Employees	730,279	734,520	731,832
External Payments	511,788	511,860	505,560
Transfers to Earmarked Reserves	246,800	394,000	362,100
Capital Financing Costs	43,261	41,200	39,100
Income	-172,086	-177,400	-122,330
Operational Budget	1,360,042	1,504,180	1,516,261
General Reserve			
Opening Balance at 1 April	250,261	100,000	100,000
Transfer from Ops Budget	103,929	-665	15
To Corporate Projects Reserve	254,191	-665	15
Closing Balance at 31 March	100,000	100,000	100,000
Earmarked Reserves			
Opening Balance at 1 April	1,204,233	1,637,631	1,679,866
Transfer from Revenue	513,553	393,335	276,900
Other Income & Transfers	118,592	84,000	0
Expenditure from Reserves	198,747	435,100	663,100
Closing Balance 31 March	1,637,631	1,679,866	1,293,666
All Reserves held at year end	1,737,631	1,779,866	1,393,666
Tax Base	7,594	7,646	7,650
Band D Charge	192.78	196.64	198.21
O/s PWLB Debt at 31 March	162,000	128,000	94,000

Medium Term Financial Strategy	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	Yoy %
	£000	£000	£000	£000	Change
Revenue Budget					
Employees	735	732	746	761	2.00
External Payments	512	506	501	511	2.00
Transfers to Earmarked Reserves	394	362	118	121	2.00
Capital Financing Costs	41	39	109	95	-
Income	-177	-122	-121	-123	2.00
New/Transferred Services	0		190	194	2.00
Operational Budget	1,504	1,516	1,543	1,558	
Precept	1,504	1,516	1,547	1,578	
Transfer to General Reserves	-1	0	3	19	
General Reserve					
Opening Balance at 1 April	100	100	100	100	
Transfer from/to Operational Budget	- 1	0	3	19	
Transfer to Corporate Projects Reserve	-1	0	3	19	
Closing Balance at 31 March	100	100	100	100	
Earmarked Reserves					
Opening Balance at 1 April	1,638	1,680	1,249	670	
Transfers/Payments in to Reserves	477	362	122	140	
Payments/Transfers out from Reserves	435	793	700	400	
Closing Balance 31 March	1,680	1,249	670	410	
All Reserves held at year end	1,780	1,349	770	510	
Corporate Project Unallocated at Year End	582	582	50	100	
Outstanding Debt at Year End	£k	128	94	900	826
Council Tax	£	197	198	202	206
Tax Base		7,646	7,650	7,650	7,650

Notes

1. Inflation at 2.00%, Debt repayment based on new Municipal Buildings debt
2. Precept assumes Council Tax rises @ 2.00% from 2022/23, no Tax Base growth
3. Assumes significant new services or response to cuts at Dorset Council
4. Reducing operational surplus is transferred to Corporate Projects Reserve
5. Corporate Projects Reserve to be allocated in 2021 as part of Corporate Plan
6. Earmarked Reserves expenditure reflects best available knowledge
7. General Reserve reduced due to other mitigation measures in place
8. Budgets savings are now marginal without reducing services

APPENDIX 4

RESERVES	Cttee	Balance	Paid In	Spend	Balance	Paid In	Spend	Balance	Reason for holding Reserve
		Mar 20	20/21	20/21	Mar 21	21/22	21/22	Mar 22	
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	
Earmarked Reserves									
Infrastructure & Equipment									
Cemeteries	Man	32,973	15,500	0	48,473	15,800	30,000	34,273	Buildings/infrastructure refurb.
Municipal Buildings & Maltings	Man	564,805	51,600	199,000	417,405	178,000	345,000	250,405	Reroofing, Lift, Heating, etc
Borough Gardens	Man	33,423	5,100	0	38,523	5,200	0	43,723	Buildings/infrastructure refurb.
Play Equipment	Man	55,184	0	25,000	30,184	0	0	30,184	Equipment replacement
Public Realm	Pol	309,843	52,600	20,000	342,443	53,600	278,000	118,043	Improvements to town centre
Vehicles & Equipment	Man	42,392	19,200	0	61,592	19,500	20,000	61,092	Fleet & equipment replacemen
Dorchester West Rail. St'n	Pol	10,000	0	0	10,000	0	10,000	0	Williams Ave Access Ramp
Cultural									
Arts & Culture	Man	12,007	0	0	12,007	0	5,000	7,007	Various
Christmas Lights	Man	10,553	0	0	10,553	0	10,000	553	Replace lights every 5 years
Miscellaneous Reserves									
New Corporate Projects	Pol	457,484	124,335	0	581,819	0	0	581,819	Own or partner capital projects
Planning Advice Reserve	Pol	32,000	0	6,000	26,000	0	10,000	16,000	Local Plan & other advice
Climate Emergency Reserve	Pol	0	125,000	60,000	65,000	0	50,000	15,000	Own or partner Climate project:
Development Reserve	Pol	0	0	0	0	90,000	30,000	60,000	Temp staff to develop services
Community Infrastructure Levy	Pol	43,814	84,000	125,000	2,814	0	0	2,814	Recreation infrastructure
Treasury	Pol	19,000	0	0	19,000	0	5,000	14,000	To offset losses on asset sale
Graves In Perpetuity	Man	14,152	0	100	14,052	0	100	13,952	Maint. and flowers on 6 graves
Total Earmarked Reserves		1,637,630	477,335	435,100	1,679,865	362,100	793,100	1,248,865	
General Reserve	Pol	100,000	-665	-665	100,000	0	0	100,000	General Emergency Fund
Total Reserves		1,737,630	476,670	434,435	1,779,865	362,100	793,100	1,348,865	