

Dorchester Town Council

Policy Committee

16 September 2014

Present: Mayor P.G. Mann and Councillors V. Allan, R. Biggs, A. Canning, G. Jones, T. Jones (Chairman) and D. Roberts.

Apologies: Councillor T. Harries.

12. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 15 July 2014, adopted by Council on 22 July 2014, were taken as read and were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

13. Finance Report

The Financial Controller presented a positive report covering the 5 months to 31 August 2014.

In response to questions he provided further information about interest rates on cash balances and outstanding debtors.

Resolved

That £150,000 is transferred from the Lloyds Bank account to the NS&I account during September 2014.

14. Budget 2015/16 & Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Committee considered the Town Clerk's report, which summarised the internal and external influences on the council's finances over the short – medium term.

The Committee recognised that, while the Town Council's position is stable and improving annually, the financial pressure building on other parts of Government will impact on services that are valued by local residents. They also recognised that some of the aims of the Corporate Plan required resources to be made available by other public bodies that were becoming increasingly difficult for them to manage.

15. District Council Service Review Programme

The Committee noted a report by the Town Clerk in relation to West Dorset District Council's 3 year Service Review programme. A member provided additional information about the timetable the District Council was working to, with any decisions being implemented from 2016 onwards.

16. **Dorchester Bowls Club – Variations to a Deed**

The Committee considered how the successful transition for the Bowls Club over the last 20 years meant that the original deed was no longer an appropriate means of managing the relationship between the two organisations.

Resolved

That with effect from 1 April 2014 the current deed is replaced by one which requires the Club to pay an annual sum of £3,000, indexed to RPI, but gives the Club the right to request suspension of payments if membership numbers fall significantly or expenditure increases significantly for reasons that appear reasonable to the Town Council.

17. **Local Government Boundary Commission for England – Final Report**

The Committee considered the outcome of the Boundary Commissioner's review which resulted in one eight-councillor ward and three four-councillor wards. The outcome created wards which did not pass the electoral fairness test which applied to District Councils but does not apply to Town Councils. The advice of the LGBCE, that the Council request a community governance review by the District Council, was noted.

Resolved

That the Town Clerk write to West Dorset District Council requesting that a community governance review be undertaken prior to the May 2015 elections, proposing the two alternatives previously agreed by Council.

18. **Request from a resident who is a member of Action Aid**

The Committee considered the request of a local resident that the Council pass a resolution advocated by the group Action Aid.

Recommended

That Council consider passing the following resolution

“While many ordinary people face falling household income and rising costs of living, some multinational companies are avoiding billions of pounds of tax from a tax system that fails to make them pay their fair share. Local governments in developing countries and the UK alike would benefit from a fairer tax system where multinational companies pay their fair share, enabling authorities around the world to provide quality public services. The UK government must listen to the strength of public feeling and act to end the injustice of tax dodging by large multinational companies, in developing countries and the UK”

19. **Urgent Item – External Auditor’s Issues Arising Report for Dorchester Town Council for the year ended 31 March 2014**

The Town Clerk presented a report with an Action Plan dealing with two issues raised by the External Auditor as part of his audit of the accounts.

Resolved

(1) That it be noted that the audit of the Annual Return 2013/14 was now completed.

(2) That the Action Plan summarising the Council’s response is adopted.

20. **Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960**

The Committee considered whether to exclude press and public from the meeting.

Resolved

That, in view of the fact that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the following matters, the public and representatives of the press be excluded from this meeting during their discussion.

21. **Municipal Buildings - Staffing**

The Committee considered the outcome of the appointment process to the role of Senior Town Hall Keeper, and the resulting potential for changes to the team’s structure. It was noted that the additional £3,000 approved at the last Committee was no longer required.

The report proposed that the team be increased from 3.0 full time equivalent staff to 3.5, the additional cost being met by a significant reduction in overtime working. Members discussed the implications for existing staff and noted that the approach would bring staff from the Municipal Buildings into line with other staff employed by the Council.

Resolved

That the size of the Municipal Buildings Team be increased from 3.0 fte to 3.5fte, funded by a reduction in the overtime budget.

22. **Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960**

The Committee resolved to readmit the public to the meeting.

Councillor T. Jones declared an interest in the next item as a member of Dorset Fire Authority and left the meeting. Councillor G. Jones took the chair

23. **Dorset Fire & Rescue Service – Consultation about future direction**

The Committee discussed the three options being considered for the future of the service, which involved increased collaboration to a greater extent with Wiltshire and Swindon Fire & Rescue Service and upper tier Dorset Councils.

Members noted that a merger with Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority would reduce the service's local public accountability and weaken the democratic process, while at the same time delivering greater savings that would reduce the impact on front line services.

It was regretted that the Service was having to look at these options, which arose from cuts in funding by central government. It was noted that the lack of coherent leadership from central government was creating a number of service specific partnerships with a variety of different boundaries which the public would not understand, and which increased the risk that blue light services might not be able to collaborate effectively in emergency situations. It was also regretted that increased collaboration would inevitably result in a loss of local knowledge and local responsiveness.

The potential impact on the Dorchester Fire Service headquarters in Dorchester was noted.

Members acknowledged, however, that the Fire Authority would have considered all of these implications in identifying their preferred option, and would have weighed any negative implications against the financial savings that were required to be made.

Resolved

That the Town Clerk respond to the consultation indicating support for a full merger with Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority, but noting concerns about loss of local accountability, loss of local knowledge and responsiveness, the potential impact on the ability for blue light and public services to collaborate

Chairman