

Dorchester Town Council

Policy Committee

23 January 2018

Present: Councillors B. Armstrong-Marshall, R. Biggs, A. Chisholm, T. Harries, S. Hosford, G. Jones (Chairman) and P. Stein

Apologies: Councillor T. Jones

Also present: Councillors G. Duke and M. Rennie. c.30 residents attended for minute 24, with 14 asking questions with regard to the item.

20. Minutes

The Minutes of the Committee of 21 November 2017, adopted by Council on 28 November 2017, were taken as read and confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

21. Financial Report 2017-18

The Town Clerk provided an update covering the Council's Month 9 spend in relation to the budget, cash position, current debt and payments position and Business Rates on the Weymouth Avenue Pavilion. He also reported 3 recommendations from the Management Committee with a proposed response to each.

Resolved

- a) That the Payments list totalling £216,216.89 is approved
- b) That the request to establish a Coronation Earmarked Reserve is rejected, as any cost could be met from the General Reserve as and when required
- c) That £2,000 is allocated from the Municipal Buildings Reserve to undertake repairs to the car park gates
- d) That a Task and Finish Group be established during the March cycle, consisting of 2 councillors each from Policy and Management Committee, to consider the future management and maintenance of the Municipal Buildings, to report back to Committees by November 2018

22. Medium Term Financial Strategy and Revenue Budget 2018-19

The Town Clerk presented a report which considered the Council's financial strategy, budget, reserves, and precept and Council Tax. He noted the above inflation Employers Staff Pay offer for 2018 and 2019 as an extra cost and also noted the 4.0% increase in Tax Base and the strong financial position the Council is in as it faces discussions regarding the loss of services at District and County tiers. He answered questions regarding the impacts of 3 alternative tax increases and the reasons for the significant increase in Council Tax base.

Proposals to increase the Council Tax by 0.0% and 2.0% received no seconder.

Recommended to Council

That the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Revenue Budget are adopted as laid out in Appendices 1-3 of the Minutes, to include

- a) A Council Tax Band D charge of £189.00, an increase of £5.50 (3.00%)
- b) A precept of £1,388,243, an increase of 7.09%

23. Corporate Plan – Progress against Strategic and Operational Milestones

The Committee received a report from the Town Clerk regarding progress on tasks identified in the Corporate Plan, providing more detailed information regarding progress on Dorchester Area Community Land Trust and Heritage Tourism.

The Town Clerk confirmed that the DTEP Stakeholder Group had considered the materials to be used for works in upper South Street and had agreed to use cobbles, fitted on their sides, mortared flush.

He confirmed that the Heritage Tourism Ideas Group would meet again in February, and that representatives of the Heritage and Tourism sectors would then brief their respective forums. He answered questions regarding the need for match-funding, project management and the commissioning of an auditor to compile a list of heritage assets.

Members discussed the lack of a visible Biodiversity Plan in the Corporate Plan. The Outdoor Services Manager would produce a report comparing current practice to accepted standards, including the Dorset Biodiversity Plan to a future Management Committee meeting.

24. Affordable Housing Sites and Outdoor Recreation Strategy

The Town Clerk reported back on progress since the decision taken in September 2017 to develop an Outdoor Recreation Strategy that might release land for affordable housing sites.

The Committee considered the Outdoor Recreation Strategy.

Recommended to Council

- a) That the draft Outdoor Recreation Strategy is made available for consultation with key partner organisations

A number of residents spoke regarding proposals to consider the use of recreation spaces in the town for affordable housing. A full list of the areas where points were made and questions were asked, with responses, is available at Appendix 4 to the minutes.

Members of the Committee thanked residents for their participation at the meeting. They were conscious of the difficult balance that the Council was trying to strike between the need to retain good quality public recreation spaces while at the same time identifying less well used sites that might be suitable for development to provide affordable housing for

young workers in the town. Several Members noted that national planning rules were not supporting the need to deliver affordable housing in the town. Members made revisions to a draft recommendation to reflect the need to ensure that each site was treated individually and that the pitfalls of potential development were fully captured and recognised.

Recommended to Council

- b) That the Town Council work with Magna to engage the public regarding both the positive benefits and drawbacks arising from the development of each of the following individual sites:
- Elizabeth Place (owned by Magna)
 - Sandringham Annexe
 - Fortress Green Open Space
 - Mellstock Avenue Play Area
 - Poundbury Crescent Play Area

The Town Clerk identified that if Council approved the recommendation then Magna would lead on consultation in February, that the consultation would be well publicised, and that it may lead to planning applications on individual sites later in the year.

25. Local Government Reorganisation and Cuts to Services

The Town Clerk advised the Committee regarding developments related to the potential for the reorganisation of Local Government in Dorset, including the Council's response in support of the plan and a change in momentum on discussions relating to the potential transfer of services from West Dorset District Council.

He confirmed that the Town Council had not been engaged in discussions regarding the creation of a town council for Weymouth.

Resolved

- a) That the Council formally signs up to the West Dorset Towns Programme Board
- b) That for continuity purposes the current Mayor continues as this Council's representative until May 2019, when arrangements for the Board may need to be reviewed

26. The Draft Dorchester Community Plan

The Town Clerk provided an update on the work that the Community Development Officer had undertaken to develop a draft Community Plan, including a review of previous plans, discussions with local groups, the creation of a directory of contacts and register of projects, and the preparation of a draft summary document that summarises key projects and actions for 2018.

Members considered the need to raise the profile of, consult on and formalise the work undertaken to date into a Community Plan.

Recommendation to Council

That a Task and Finish Group comprising two members each of Policy and Management Committee is set up to review the draft Community Plan prior to its adoption at the March Council meeting.

NOTE: Management Committee Members are invited to put their names forward to join the Task and Finish Group at Council on 30 January.

27. **The St Georges Road/Lubbecke Way Junction**

The Town Clerk provided an update regarding the junction works to be undertaken as part of the Red Cow Farm development.

Resolved

That, subject to agreeing appropriate wording limiting the Council's responsibilities under the agreement, the Town Clerk be authorised to apply the Council's seal to a s38 agreement relating to highway works in Lubbecke Way.

Chairman

APPENDIX 1

REVENUE BUDGET 2018/19	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
	Actual	Actual	Budget	Budget
	£	£	£	£
Parks & Open Spaces	538,569	581,490	559,377	582,495
Allotments	3,707	3,254	5,324	3,541
Municipal Buildings	137,726	140,240	184,273	187,036
Cemeteries	53,239	66,894	54,355	56,432
Cultural & Twinning Activities	52,724	63,076	54,008	52,370
Corporate & Democratic Manage.	194,865	210,632	212,095	220,174
Other Services	35,714	24,627	128,903	109,029
Operational Budget	1,016,544	1,090,213	1,198,335	1,211,078
Precept	1,209,555	1,251,000	1,296,336	1,388,243
Transfer to General Reserves	193,011	160,787	98,001	177,165
Subjective Analysis of Revenue				
Employees	590,458	642,954	694,035	718,718
External Payments	434,109	462,382	509,860	491,610
Transfers to Earmarked Reserves	154,306	157,505	141,100	144,000
Capital Financing Costs	61,651	54,528	48,500	46,400
Income	-223,970	-227,156	-195,160	-189,650
Operational Budget	1,016,554	1,090,213	1,198,335	1,211,078
General Reserve				
Opening Balance at 1 April	608,932	751,931	464,377	250,708
Transfer from Ops Budget	193,011	160,787	98,001	177,165
Council Tax Support Grant	69,988	46,659	23,330	0
To Corporate Projects Reserve	-120,000	-495,000	-335,000	-177,165
Closing Balance at 31 March	751,931	464,377	250,708	250,708
Earmarked Reserves				
Opening Balance at 1 April	407,534	613,584	956,392	1,135,612
Transfer from Revenue Budget	274,306	652,856	476,100	321,165
Expenditure from Reserves	68,256	310,048	296,880	600,000
Closing Balance 31 March	613,584	956,392	1,135,612	856,777
All Reserves held at year end	1,365,515	1,420,769	1,386,320	1,107,485
Tax Base	6,853	6,950	7,065	7,345
Band D Charge	176.50	180.00	183.50	189.00
O/s PWLB Debt at 31 March	498,000	264,000	230,000	196,000

APPENDIX 2

Medium Term Financial Strategy	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	Yoy %
	£000	£000	£000	£000	Change
Revenue Budget					
Employees	694	719	743	758	2.00
External Payments	510	492	501	511	2.00
Transfers to Earmarked Reserves	141	144	147	150	2.00
Capital Financing Costs	49	46	44	42	-
Income	-195	-190	-193	-197	2.00
New/Transferred Services	0	0	174	174	
Operational Budget	1,198	1,211	1,416	1,438	
Precept	1,296	1,388	1,416	1,444	2.00
Transfer to General Reserves	98	177	-0	6	
General Reserve					
Opening Balance at 1 April	464	250	250	250	
Transfer from/to Operational Budget	98	177	-0	6	
Council Tax Support Grant	23	0	0	0	
Transfer to Corporate Projects Reserve	-335	-177	0	-6	
Closing Balance at 31 March	250	250	250	250	
Earmarked Reserves					
Opening Balance at 1 April	956	1,136	857	633	
Transfer from Revenue Budget	476	321	147	156	
Expenditure from Reserves	-297	-600	-370	-100	
Closing Balance 31 March	1,136	857	633	689	
All Reserves held at year end	1,386	1,107	884	940	
Corporate Project Unallocated at Year End	130	307	307	307	
Outstanding Debt at Year End	£k	230	196	162	128
Council Tax	£	184	189	193	197
Tax Base		7,065	7,345	7,345	7,345

Notes

1. Inflation at 2.00%, Debt repayment per current debt profiles
2. Precept assumes Council Tax rise @ 2.00% from 2019, no Tax Base growth
3. Best estimate of new or transferred services, driven by cuts in other tiers
4. Operational surplus transferred to Corporate Projects Reserve, but not reallocated
5. Earmarked Reserves expenditure reflects best available knowledge
6. Further savings may be identified in budgets as a result of review processes

APPENDIX 3

RESERVES	Cttee	Balance	Paid In	Spend	Balance	Paid In	Spend	Balance	Reason for holding Reserve
		Mar17	17/18	17/18	Mar 18	18/19	18/19	Mar 19	
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	
Earmarked Reserves									
Infrastructure & Equipment									
Cemeteries	Man	84,222	12,000	0	96,222	12,300	80,000	28,522	Roads and Walls at Poundbury
Municipal Buildings	Man	52,340	60,000	25,000	87,340	61,200	0	148,540	Exterior works
Borough Gardens	Man	24,305	5,100	11,000	18,405	20,000	38,400	5	Painting Bandstand and Clock
Play Equipment	Man	51,748	13,000	9,000	55,748	0	0	55,748	Replace equipment
Walks, Trees & Public Realm	Pol	50,224	30,000	0	80,224	32,100	75,000	37,324	Resurface Walks, new furniture
Vehicles & Equipment	Man	15,632	18,000	17,000	16,632	18,400	14,500	20,532	Fleet replacement
Cultural									
Arts Festival	Man	9,000	3,000	0	12,000	0	2,000	10,000	Periodic Festival
Christmas Lights	Man	4,795	0	0	4,795	0	0	4,795	-
Miscellaneous Reserves									
Corporate Projects	Pol	630,126	335,000	225,000	740,126	177,165	390,000	527,291	Own or partner capital projects
Maumbury Rings s106	Man	9,780	0	9,780	0	0	0	0	Heritage refurbishment
Dorchester West Rail. St'n	Pol	10,000	0	0	10,000	0	0	10,000	Access Ramp
Graves In Perpetuity	Man	14,220	0	100	14,120	0	100	14,020	Maint., flowers on 6 graves
Total Earmarked Reserves		956,392	476,100	296,880	1,135,612	321,165	600,000	856,777	
General Reserve	Pol	464,377	121,331	335,000	250,708	177,165	177,165	250,708	Back Up. Min £200k required
Total Reserves		1,420,769	597,431	631,880	1,386,320	498,331	777,165	1,107,485	

A Summary of Key Points made by residents in relation to Minute 24, being the consideration of the development of Recreational sites for Affordable Housing for Young Workers

The Play Spaces Footfall Audit

- A number of residents expressed concerns and raised questions regarding how the audit had been compiled
- A number of residents expressed views that both Elizabeth Place and Poundbury Crescent Play Spaces were busier than the Audit suggested
- The Town Clerk explained that the audit had been conducted in house, led by and predominately conducted by him, over the period 26 July – 6 September 2017. The data would be made available on the Council's website the following day

Replacement of lost Amenity

- A resident asked what the plans were for replacing any lost play amenity
- The Town Clerk confirmed that any development of Elizabeth Place and Mellstock Avenue would involve re-provision of some play equipment within the site. The need for re-provision at Poundbury Crescent was under discussion with Magna

How the NHS were managing increasing demands on their services

- A resident asked whether there had been discussions with the CCG or Dorset County Hospital regarding the impact of overcrowding on their facilities due to development
- The Town Clerk confirmed that, for other reasons, informal discussions had recently taken place with Dorset County Hospital regarding their future plans, during which DCH confirmed they would routinely plan for new housebuilding included in the West Dorset Local Plan

Other sites as lost opportunities

- A resident asked about the decision by Magna to sell off a garage site in Old Poundbury and the continued inoccupation of property in Coburg Road
- The Town Clerk advised that the Magna decision to sell the site had been taken some time before their decision to recommence house building in West Dorset
- He also advised that the properties in Coburg Road had previously been occupied by Health Service staff and that discussions were ongoing between Health providers regarding its future use

Ongoing Maintenance Costs

- A resident asked whether the possible reuse of the sites was driven by budget pressures and a need to save money
- The Town Clerk confirmed that this was not the case and that the Council's financial position was very strong. He explained that the only driver was the Council's ambition to play a role in the delivery of affordable housing for young workers

Amenity Value of the Sites

- A resident commented that several of the sites under discussion appear to be laid to grass and undeveloped as amenity spaces and asked whether it was possible to make more of the sites?
- The Town Clerk responded that, in the event that individual sites were not developed for affordable housing, their appearance would be reviewed

National Planning Policy and its impact on Dorchester

- A resident commented on lack of delivery of affordable housing on the Prison site, and that national planning policy did not appear to support affordable housing delivery
- Another resident asked what definition the Council was working to regarding making any housing provided on the sites affordable
- Several residents commented regarding affordable housing provision at Poundbury
- The Town Clerk explained that the Town Council had objected to the Prison site development due to the absence of affordable housing
- During the subsequent debate by the Committee several Members of Council commented negatively regarding National Planning Policy.
- The Mayor explained that the Poundbury development had consistently delivered its affordable housing obligations, currently set at 35% of all new homes built, involving a mix of for rent and for sale properties
- The Town Clerk identified that any transfer of land to Magna would be conditional on the delivery of affordable housing that was genuinely affordable locally, well below the national definition of affordability. He cited the planned Tennis Courts development by the Dorchester Area CLT, which is currently focused on trying to deliver new flats at c. £90,000, as an example of the Council's approach

The Elizabeth Place Covenant

- A resident asked about the strength of the restrictive covenant placed on the Elizabeth Place site to retain its use as recreation space
- Councillor Duke explained that this was a matter for Magna to resolve with West Dorset District Council and outlined the content of some correspondence he had initiated with that Council

Space for Contemplation, Health and Safety Issues

- A resident made points about the need for space for contemplation, based on a national report. He also made points about health and safety
- In response to a separate point made by the Chairman the Town Clerk confirmed that all Council-managed play equipment was regularly checked

The wording of the Recommendation identify the Positive Benefits of Developing Affordable Housing

- Councillor Duke asked what the positive benefits of development were
- The Town Clerk identified that early work with Magna had identified that the five sites collectively had the potential to deliver 60-80 affordable units, while still retaining some play equipment on two of those sites that currently enjoy it
- In response to a further point from Councillor Duke regarding the negative impacts of development on residents adjacent to potential development sites a Member of Council recognised the Council had a difficult role in balancing the competing demands of local recreation provision and the delivery of affordable housing

Parking at Elizabeth Place

- A resident expressed concern about the impact of additional parking requirements resulting from new properties at Elizabeth Place
- The Town Clerk confirmed that Magna had been advised that the Town Council could not support a scheme that increased already existing problems associated with car parking

AS

24 January 2018