



Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils
(Affiliated to the National Association of Local Councils)

Towns and Larger Parishes Committee

Friday 26 February 2021

10:00am
via Zoom

Minutes

Present:

Cllr Chris Turner	Beamminster Town Council (Chairman)
Cllr KD Johnson	Colehill Parish Council (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr Dave Rickard	Bridport Town Council
Cllr Haydn White	Blandford Forum Town Council
Cllr John Dean	Chickerell Town Council
Cllr Paul Holland	Corfe Mullen Town Council
Cllr Robin Potter	Dorchester Town Council
Cllr Terry Cordery	Ferndown Town Council
Cllr Barry Von Clemens	Gillingham Town Council
Cllr Belinda Bawden	Lyme Regis Town Council
Cllr John Broom	Lyme Regis Town Council
Cllr Jon Andrews	Sherborne Town Council
Cllr Charles Fraser	Sturminster Newton Town Council
Cllr Lindsey Dedden	Verwood Town Council
Cllr Jane Russell	Verwood Town Council
Cllr Keith Green	Wareham Town Council
Cllr Vera Green	Wareham Town Council
Cllr Colin Way	West Moors Town Council
Cllr David Harris	Weymouth Town Council
Cllr Carol Butter	Wimborne Minster Town Council

Also present:

Cllr Jill Haynes	Dorset Councillor
Neil Wedge	Chief Executive – DAPTC
Kirsty Riglar	Secretary – Towns and Larger Parishes Committee

1/21. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from:

Cllr Janet Page	Beamminster Town Council
Cllr Emma Urquhart	Colehill Parish Council
Cllr Cathy Lugg	Ferndown Town Council
Steve Shield	Sherborne Town Council (Clerk)
Jonathan Ross	St Leonards and St Ives Parish Council (Clerk)
Cllr Stuart Waite	Stalbridge Town Council
Cllr Mike Hawkes	West Moors Town Council
Cllr Colin Huckle	Weymouth Town Council
Cllr Shane Bartlett	Wimborne Minster Town Council

2/21. Minutes

The minutes of the annual general meeting held on 6 November 2020 were confirmed as a true and accurate record, subject to the following amendments:

- (i) attendance list – references to Corfe Mullen and West Moors Parish Councils to read ‘Town Council’;
- (ii) minute 18/20 – to read “... was elected as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for 2020/21.”
- (iii) minute 26/20 – Wareham – to read
 - A working party had been established to investigate the replacement of the roof of the listed building leased to the Purbeck Citizens Advice and a surveyor sought to assist with this.
 - The annual inspection of play areas in the town had identified the need for possible replacement of play equipment.

3/21. Update from Cllr Jill Haynes, Cabinet Member for Customer Services and Communities, Dorset Council

Cllr Haynes provided an update on the latest impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst the infection rate was currently improving in Dorset, there had been more Covid-related deaths across the whole of Dorset in the first five weeks of 2021 than in the whole of 2020. However, the vaccination programme was progressing well with 270,000 people in Dorset having received their first dose and six rapid test centres had now been opened across the Dorset Council area. The announcement of the government’s Covid-19 roadmap with indicative dates for easing of restrictions had caused some concerns about possible issues during the Easter holidays and beyond about increasing numbers of visitors travelling to Dorset. Whilst it was important for businesses to re-open and benefit from this, the Council was working on how best to manage possible influx of visitors.

Cllr Haynes also reported that:

- (i) the Council was seeking to address the issue of empty homes, with council tax for such properties being increased to 400% after four years of being uninhabited;
- (ii) a very positive webinar had been held on the previous day with the DAPTC’s Chief Executive which had been well-received by Dorset Councillors; and
- (iii) a community governance review of the whole Dorset Council area would commence in July to ensure that all areas were represented fairly by town and parish councils.

Members welcomed the extension of the community rapid test sites and encouraged local councils to ensure that relevant businesses in their area were aware of this. The full list of sites could be viewed on the Public Health Dorset [website](#).

In relation to the current consultation on options for the Dorset Council Local Plan, Cllr Haynes reported that a lot of submissions had already been received and urged local councils to submit their views on all aspects of the proposals by the deadline of 15 March 2021. She acknowledged that some local councils had expressed concern that the consultation period was too short and that if the changes proposed in the government’s White Paper on the planning process were implemented, this would have a significant impact on planning in Dorset. However, pending any changes in the law, it was necessary to have an updated Local Plan in place for the whole Dorset Council area in order to prevent developers dictating where development would take place.

In response to a question, Cllr Haynes explained that the current legislation did not enable Dorset Council to take any action in relation to developers who did not progress developments for which full planning permission had been granted. She shared the Committee’s frustration about this and confirmed that this had been raised with local Members of Parliament as a particular issue for Dorset.

In relation to the community governance review, it was noted that this would enable local councils to look at their external boundaries as well as their warding patterns.

In response to a question about the continued rollout of full fibre broadband across Dorset, the Chief Executive explained that he had been asked to sit on a Digital Place Programme Board which would identify gaps in broadband reception. Communications would be coming out to local councils asking for local intelligence about ongoing issues. Cllr Haynes added that whilst Dorset Council had no control over mobile phone network coverage it could influence broadband and 5G coverage. The Chief Executive added that he was looking at how best to brief local councils on this and explain the differences, which were often couched in technical jargon.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Haynes for her update.

4/21. Update from DAPTC Chief Executive

(i) New Local Government Association Model Councillor Code of Conduct

The Chief Executive drew the Committee's attention to the new Model Councillor Code of Conduct published by the Local Government Association in January, following a period of consultation in 2020. This had been developed to provide greater explanation and clarity than the previous model Code issued by NALC, in addition to incorporating the Nolan Principles, and was considered to be more user-friendly. This version was welcomed by the Monitoring Officers of both Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council who were responsible for investigating complaints about councillors. The DAPTC would circulate this new Code of Conduct in the coming weeks and would be encouraging all local councils in Dorset to adopt it. Training would also be offered to help councillors understand the changes and the complaints procedure. The Committee was also informed that this would be linked to the launch of the electronic Register of Interests being developed by Dorset Council. It was anticipated that sessions would be run in late spring / early summer and he encouraged as many councillors as possible to attend.

The Chief Executive explained that DAPTC was unable to mandate the adoption of the new Code but would be encouraging this as strongly as possible and consideration was being given to providing a 'kitemark' for councils to use once they had adopted this. The need for an easy to understand Code was demonstrated by the number of complaints made about councillors and the churn in both councillors and clerks in local councils. This model would be reviewed annually to ensure that it responded to changing circumstances.

Members welcomed having a more detailed Code as a positive step towards better behaviour from councillors but also as a tool to assist them in their dealings with members of the public. It was agreed that this was a particular issue on social media and by having a document to signpost to explain why councillors were required to behave in a certain way would be useful. It was noted that some local councils designated a single spokesperson to engage with the press and public and this worked well.

The Committee thanked the Chief Executive for the newsletter that he had issued in response to the Handforth Parish Council media coverage, which had set back the public perception of the local council sector.

Cllr Jon Andrews left the meeting at 11:14am.

It was acknowledged that some councillors did not behave in compliance with the Code of Conduct and the DAPTC had a role in promoting the importance of this with chairmen and clerks. However, the lack of sanctions for councillors found to be in breach of the Code remained disappointing.

Cllr Robin Potter left the meeting at 11:19am.

(ii) Future of virtual meetings

The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that the legislation allowing for virtual meetings was due to end on 6 May 2021 and lobbying was underway to retain this as an option for local councils in the long-term. A lot of councils had got to grips with meeting virtually to enable business to be conducted during the pandemic and it was felt that there was little widespread appetite to return to face to face meetings. However, government had indicated that there was insufficient time to pass the necessary legislation to extend this. He suggested that councils consider holding their annual

parish meeting virtually before 7 May 2021 and encouraged councillors to raise this with their Clerk.

Members shared their experiences of livestreaming their virtual meetings. It was acknowledged that these had encouraged significantly greater engagement from members of the public than face to face meetings ever had. However, there had some issues in relation to anonymous attendees and unauthorised recording of meetings.

In response to a question, the Chief Executive explained that the development of hybrid meetings could be costly, technical and problematic. It was unlikely that a lot of smaller councils would be able to facilitate these. It was also recognised that any council holding hybrid meetings would need to have a published protocol in place as to how these would work.

The Chairman left the meeting at 11:27am and the Vice-Chairman took the Chair.

(iii) Feedback from survey on the DAPTC Area Committees

The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that a review of the DAPTC's Constitution was underway to ensure that the organisation was representing the view of its member councils. The initial phase had seen amendments approved by the AGM in November 2020. The second phase focussed on the area committees and whether these remained fit for purpose. It was recognised that some councils attended both the Towns and Larger Parishes Committee and their local area committee and that the four local councils within the BCP Council area were not currently embedded in an area committee and boundaries needed to be revisited. It was also acknowledged that whilst meetings of this Committee were well attended, at many of the area committees this was patchy.

Member councils had been surveyed to capture their views about the meetings, their content and value and responses were being analysed. Comments received from the area committees would be considered alongside those of member councils and options would then be developed and presented to the committees for comments. Any consequent changes would then be recommended to the next AGM. A summary of the responses received to date could be viewed on the DAPTC [website](#).

5/21. Dorset Council Local Plan Options consultation – how is it going?

The Chief Executive acknowledged that for some parishes and towns, particularly those where housing was allocated or significant development was proposed, a lot of work would be put into agreeing and submitting a response and asked how councils were approaching the consultation. Members shared their experiences of developing their councils' submission to the current consultation.

Concerns were expressed that:

- (i) the documents did not accurately reflect the current position in a number of areas;
- (ii) there was a lack of understanding of issues such as flooding in a number of areas;
- (iii) there were a lot of inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the information provided;
- (iv) there was no mention of the climate and ecological emergency or the likely long-term impact of the coronavirus pandemic; and
- (v) the timing of the consultation was inappropriate given the heavy reliance on accessing the information online.

For most councils, developing a submission had required the investment of a lot of time and effort by both officers and councillors.

Cllr Charles Fraser left the meeting at 11:50am.

6/21. Climate Emergency – how can DAPTC help and support Member Councils?

The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that one of the motions considered at the 2020 AGM was a request for DAPTC to aid councils in relation to the climate and ecological emergency. Work was currently underway to develop a resource hub on the DAPTC website on this issue

which would link to national organisations and resources and collate information and tools in one place. This also provided links to the activities of local councils in Dorset who had already declared a climate and ecological emergency.

Additionally, it was hoped that a carbon neutral toolkit developed by the Centre for Sustainable Energy would be made available, alongside specific training, but this would be dependent on the availability of funding.

Cllr Bawden added that she sat on NALC's Climate Change Task and Finish Group and hoped that carbon literacy training would be made accessible. She also drew attention to the creation of the Dorset Climate Action Network to bring together local groups. She welcomed the DAPTC resource hub and hoped that this would help councils identify their starting point to focus action at a very local level. She invited members to contact her on belinda.bawden@lymeregistowncouncil.gov.uk for more information.

7/21. NALC update

The Chief Executive reported that the NALC Lobby Day had been disappointing in terms of response from Members of Parliament. This had made the future of virtual meetings and the Motions from the NALC AGM a priority. He had since requested follow-up contact with the Dorset MPs but to date had only received a response from Chris Loder MP.

8/21. Update from Member Councils

Colehill

- The land transfer from Dorset Council had now been completed.
- A review of governance documents for the Parish Council's committees was underway.
- Problems had been experienced with members of the public taking cut timber from Colehill Triangle.
- The Council's key focus was currently its response to the Local Plan options consultation.

Ferndown

- There were currently two vacancies on the Town Council.
- The new Town Clerk had now settled in.
- Taking the lease of the Barrington Centre had proven to be costly but the refurbishment of part of the building had been completed. It was hoped that someone would be found to run the café there.
- All of the major jobs had now been completed at King George V playing fields and the play area had proven to be a major success.
- Currently a key focus for the Council was its response to the Local Plan options consultation.

Wareham

- A working party had been formed to look at the skate park but it was recognised that this work would take some time.

Bridport

- A 'Raise the Roof' project had been launched looking at how to pioneer locally available material, cultural and technical resources to design and construct buildings in the town. It was hoped that this would enable the development of an area of land transferred from Dorset Council.
- The Mayor had been innovative in undertaking his duties during the pandemic, publishing a weekly blog and fundraising online.

Verwood

- There was currently one vacancy on the Town Council for which three expressions of interest for co-option had been received.

- A small site (0.3 acre) in the Green Belt had been purchased by travellers and (illegally) occupied. Enforcement action was ongoing but a planning application for a privately owned traveller site was expected to be submitted.

Lyme Regis

- There was currently one vacancy on the Town Council, arising from non-attendance at meetings for six months, and a by-election would be held in May to fill this.
- Town councillors were due to be provided with laptops.

Corfe Mullen

- A lot of time and effort had been put into developing the Town Council's response to the Local Plan options consultation.
- A new CCTV system had been installed.
- The Town Council had committed to developing a Neighbourhood Plan.
- Councillors were concerned about the possible return to face to face meetings.

Blandford Forum

- The development of a Neighbourhood Plan had now been in train for over eight years. Legal Challenges had been received from Pimperne Parish Council, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England and the Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Team, all of which had been put to the Inspector. The Plan had now been with Dorset Council for nearly a year to make a decision.

West Moors

- A Town Council meeting had been held on the previous day focussing mainly on a contentious planning application.
- A tree-planting programme was underway.

Chickerell

- The Neighbourhood Plan was nearing completion and it was hoped that it would go to referendum in May.
- The Town Council had decided not to increase the precept for 2021/22.
- 2021 marked the 45th anniversary of the local magazine which was marked by a special edition.

Weymouth

- Work had begun on developing a Neighbourhood Plan.
- Working parties had been created focussing on such issues as income generation, the green and clean agenda and community engagement.
- Two by-elections would be held in May to fill current vacancies.

Gillingham

- Land transfers for two developments were in their final stages, thanks to help from Dorset Council officers in calculating the commuted sums.
- A second major play area refurbishment had been completed.
- The Town Council were due to receive a Community Award from the High Sheriff.

Wimborne Minster

- The Council's key focus was currently its response to the Local Plan options consultation.
- The Environment Agency had received updated its flood risk assessment and this had increased in some areas of the town.
- There was currently one vacancy on the Council.
- Virtual meetings continued to work well.

Dorchester

- The Council's key focus was currently its response to the Local Plan options consultation, in particular the proposals for a substantial development north of Dorchester (DOR13).

- The refurbishment of the Corn Exchange roof had commenced.
- The scaffolding around the refurbished Dorset County Museum was being removed.
- The works at the Roman Town House site was nearer to opening.
- Dorset Council had announced its intention to give up South Walks House in the town centre.

9/21. Date of next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting be brought forward by a week and now be held on Friday 21 May 2021 to avoid a clash with a meeting of the DAPTC Executive.

The meeting closed at 12:25pm.

Signed _____ Date _____

Cllr Chris Turner
Chairman