



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

Towns and Larger Parishes Committee

Friday 21 May 2021
10:00am
via Zoom

Minutes

Present:

Cllr Chris Turner	Beaminster Town Council (Chairman)
Cllr Dave Rickard	Bridport Town Council
Cllr Haydn White	Blandford Forum Town Council
Cllr Andy Todd	Colehill Parish Council
Cllr Anne Holland	Corfe Mullen Town Council
Cllr Paul Holland	Corfe Mullen Town Council
Cllr Alistair Chisholm	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 Anne Hall	Sherborne Town Council
Cllr Avril Harris	Swanage Town Council
Cllr Lindsey Dedden	Verwood Town Council
Cllr Keith Green	Wareham Town Council
Cllr Vera Green	Wareham Town Council
Cllr Colin Way	West Moors Town Council
Cllr Tony Willats	West Moors Town Council
Cllr Colin Huckle	Weymouth Town Council
Cllr Carol Butter	Wimborne Minster Town Council
Cllr Diann March	Wimborne Minster Town Council

Also present:

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

Tribute to Cllr Janet Page

Prior to the start of the meeting, on behalf of the Committee Cllr Lindsey Dedden, made the following tribute:

“Since our last meeting, Jan Page, a long standing member of this committee has died. Not only have we lost a valuable member of this committee but DAPTC has lost one of its two Vice Presidents. Jan was appointed Vice President in recognition of her enormous and valuable contribution to DAPTC training as well as long service to committees including the Executive committee and as Chairman of the organisation.”

Jan was one of the kindest people I have known. She shared her wisdom, expertise and experience gently and tactfully in all manner of situations. She, with Chris, served Beaminster and Dorset in so many ways over a very long period and often in spite of significant health problems. It is not possible to explain fully just what a tragic loss Jan is to all of us and we offer our sincere condolences to Chris at this time.”

10/21. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from:

Cllr KD Johnson	Colehill Parish Council (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr Bob Hutchings	Highcliffe and Walkford Parish Council
Ms Trish Jamieson	Highcliffe and Walkford Parish Council (Clerk)
Cllr Rob Hughes	Portland Town Council
Cllr David Harris	Weymouth Town Council

11/21. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2021 were confirmed as a true and accurate record.

12/21. Update from Cllr Jill Haynes, Cabinet Member for Customer Services and Communities, Dorset Council

Cllr Haynes provided the Committee with an update on the activity of Dorset Council including:

- (i) the Council had approved its Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and had submitted a bid for grant funding of £19M to assist with addressing various areas of this;
- (ii) St Mary's School near Shaftesbury had been purchased with a view to creating a school for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and a Centre for Excellence for training SEND teachers to open in early 2022;
- (iii) the work being undertaken on the 'Better Days' initiative in Adult Social Care to identify what provision can be given to older people closer to home in their local communities;
- (iv) over £250M in grants to local businesses had been provided during the coronavirus pandemic which was a remarkable achievement; and
- (v) a review of parking charges was currently underway.

Cllr Haynes also informed the Committee that a 'helpline' for clerks and a protocol for communication between Dorset Council and local councils would be going live in June. The full detail of this would be reported to the DAPTC Executive Committee at its meeting the following week. She added that the amount of information being provided to local councils was being monitored in order to optimise communication routes; this would look at the role of clerks, DAPTC and local ward councillors in sharing information.

She also invited the Committee to suggest particular topics that it wished to consider at future meetings so that she could engage with relevant officers.

In response to a question, Cllr Haynes explained that a company was being established to run St Mary's School for Dorset Council. There were currently insufficient places locally for children with SEND and whilst some children would continue to go out of county in order to meet their needs it was hoped that the establishment of this new SEND school would reduce the number. It was also hoped that the site would enable provision for some respite or small group visits. She added that a new school for children and young people with autism was being built at Bovington.

In response to a question about licensing and local councils being notified of applications in the same way as for planning, Cllr Haynes explained that this was being looked into but the issue was that the information was currently held on a legacy district council electronic system.

The issue of not reopening public customer services access points co-located with those of town councils was raised. Cllr Haynes explained that Dorset Council had agreed that contact should be digital by default but acknowledged that there would need to be some face to face access points for people who could not access services digitally. These were to be gradually re-opened and co-located in public libraries across the county. At present it was a work in progress.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Haynes for her update.

13/21. How to ensure towns and parishes of different sizes are served effectively by Dorset Council/Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council going forward?

The DAPTC Chief Executive reported on a number of initiatives being developed to improve the interaction between the two unitary authorities and local councils.

(i) Working Together Protocol and charters between unitary and local councils

The Committee were shown the flow chart for the protocol for communication with Dorset Council, as referred to by Cllr Haynes. This illustrated the arrangements that would be put in place to aid clerks and chairmen to contact the unitary authority which were designed to assist where established officer contacts changed. Members welcomed this initiative, acknowledging that it would take some time to embed but encouraging all local councils to use this route into Dorset Council when it was launched in June.

The Chief Executive reported that the introduction of this communication protocol was timely as there were a small number of councils exploring the establishment of 'charters' between themselves and the unitary authorities. The Working Together Protocol was a clear and simple approach to the interface between the two tiers and would avoid multiple requests for the same thing.

Cllr Haynes added that this single point of contact approach would enable her to monitor issues and trends arising from local councils and would remove the need for clerks to identify individual officers to approach.

Cllr Jill Haynes and Cllr Anne Hall left the meeting at 11:05am.

(ii) DAPTC area committees

The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that a review of the area committees was underway to assess whether the current arrangements were working. Engagement with member councils would be undertaken about any proposals to improve this in the future but, in the short-term, councils were encouraged to engage with their area committee. In order to ensure the relevance of the committees, proposals for topics or issues for consideration were welcomed as well as feedback on structure and content of the meetings themselves.

It was acknowledged that meetings of the Towns and Larger Parishes Committee were usually well attended and secured engagement from the member councils. It was also noted that virtual meetings enabled greater attendance, as well as being more climate friendly. As the DAPTC was not a council, there was no problem in continuing to meet virtually but it was suggested that the committee meet in person annually.

It was proposed that the development of the Dorset Local Plan should be a standing item on agendas for meetings of the Committee until this was adopted.

14/21. Update from DAPTC Chief Executive

The Chief Executive provided an update including:

- (i) the advice issued to councils about the return to physical meetings which set out suggestions for ways to conduct business in the current phase of the pandemic;
- (ii) the digital register of interests system would soon be ready to be rolled out and would be introduced alongside the training about the new Code of Conduct;
- (iii) a joint venture for the provision of e-learning had been agreed with other associations in the South West which would provide cheaper, bite sized training opportunities to member councils;
- (iv) a Memorandum of Understanding had been entered into with Breakthrough Communications to provide advice to member councils about social media, website content, GDPR and Freedom of Information;
- (v) the DAPTC website had been updated with the latest training on offer, including for new councillors, new clerks, new chairs and the 2021 event for clerks which would take place on 14 October;
- (vi) Dorset Council was hosting a briefing on post-Covid recovery on 3 June;

- (vii) Dorset Council's Cabinet would be considering reports on S106 contributions and asset transfers; and
- (viii) Dorset Council would shortly be launching a Community Governance Review and local councils were encouraged to participate in this.

Members shared the approaches being taken by their councils in relation to no longer being able to meet virtually and returning to physical meetings. Many had taken the opportunity to delegate business decisions to the Clerk, after consultation with the Chairman or Council. In response to a question, the Chief Executive explained that NALC's legal view was that any meeting of a council was a 'council meeting' and therefore could not now be held virtually. It was recognised that the advances made during the pandemic to enable virtual or hybrid meetings should not be lost and would be valuable in the future.

Cllr Colin Huckle left the meeting at 11:28am

15/21. Update from Member Councils

Gillingham

- The Town Council had been awarded a DAPTC Double Star Award for councillor development.
- A new apprentice had started to work with the Town Council under a scheme run by Kingston Maurward College.
- The Annual Meeting had been held in person in a large conference room with councillors having to take lateral flow tests and being subject to temperature checks. However the Council had decided to proceed with business under the scheme of delegation.
- A Heritage Herbetum Trail was currently being rolled out.
- The annual litter pick had taken place but there was actually little litter this year.

Wareham

- Following the establishment of a working party to look at the skate park, residents were being consulted on this.
- The Annual Meeting had taken place and Cllr Keith Green had been elected as Mayor.

Corfe Mullen

- After getting on well with virtual meetings, the Council had delegated authority to make decisions to the Clerk.
- The extension of the small hall was being explored.
- The removal of the dog warden previously employed by East Dorset District Council was making it difficult to enforce the new regulations at the town's recreation ground.

West Moors

- The Council office was now open but running an appointment system.
- A major grant had been received for work on the skatepark.
- The Council had decided not to meet until after 21 June, except for the planning committee.
- The transfer of the car park from Dorset Council had now commenced.
- Similar issues were being experienced as in Corfe Mullen due to the loss of the dog warden.

Colehill

- The parish meeting had been held virtually and decisions were currently being made through delegated powers.
- The BMX track was deemed not fit for purpose and was currently closed whilst the Council considered its future.

Bridport

- All staff were now back to work and tribute was paid to the outdoors staff who had done a fantastic job through the pandemic helping with community efforts and supporting testing and vaccination centres.

- Some of the features implemented during the pandemic, such as the changes to the market, would be retained as they had proven to be very successful.
- An Access and Movement Study had been undertaken looking at ways in which pedestrians and cyclists could move more easily around the town.
- The adopted Neighbourhood Plan was now being used in relation to planning applications.
- The Town Council had been offered the WI Hall but because it was a charitable building, the Charity Commissions would not allow this and the Council had formed a charitable company to enable this.
- The Council continued to be very busy with a number of other projects.

Cllr Tony Willats and Cllr Dave Rickard left the meeting at 12:20pm

Lyme Regis

- The Town Council had returned to physical meetings in the local hall.
- There was now a full complement of town councillors who had been provided with laptops and were now online.
- Two parking machines had been broken into on the previous evening.
- A car club was about to start and next it was hoped to explore rental hubs for electric bikes.
- Work was underway on net zero plans and projects relating to retrofitting housing, traffic, parking, transport and accessibility.
- A new beach toys initiative had been introduced.
- Dorset Council was not interested in funding carbon literacy training for local councils.
- A robust response had been submitted to the Local Plan consultation.
- A new tourism micro-website was being developed with help from Visit Dorset.
- A private security firm had been engaged to assist with the night-time economy.
- A member of the staff was being supported by the Council to undertake a plumbing apprenticeship.

Blandford Forum

- The Neighbourhood Plan referendum had been held with the document approved by over 80% of voters.
- Delegated powers were being used wherever possible to make decisions but the first physical meeting would be held in the Corn Exchange on the following Monday.
- Tribute was paid to how hard the Town Clerk had worked during the pandemic.

Cllr Andy Todd left the meeting at 12:25pm

Wimborne Minster

- The Council had agreed to train its own recreation staff to undertake a dog warden role in the town.
- A new Chairman and Vice-Chairman had been elected at the annual meeting, in addition to changes in chairmanship of a number of committees.
- The Council continued to work remotely making decision via delegated powers but livestreaming its meetings.
- A very thorough and comprehensive response to the Local Plan consultation had been submitted.
- It was felt that better working arrangements were needed with planning officers.
- The Council was considering the introduction of Speedwatch.
- There were currently two vacancies on the Council.

Verwood

- Hare coursing was currently an issue in the area.
- It was hoped to co-opt at the July meeting to fill the vacancy on the Council.
- The local police constable was soon moving to a new job but would not be replaced until October.
- Monthly litter picks had resumed.

- A Jubilee Working Party had been established.

Beaminster

- Police Community Support Officer presence was thin on the ground.
- The Council's own dog warden was proving successful.
- A new skate park had been well received locally.
- The Council was resuming work on its Neighbourhood Plan.
- The Town Hall had been reconfigured over the past year.

Ferndown

- There was currently one vacancy on the Town Council.
- The King George V playing fields project was nearly complete.
- Refurbishment of half of the Barrington Centre was now complete but it was unlikely to be re-opened until September. The building was proving costly to run despite being closed.

Swanage

- It was anticipated that there would be a lot of visitors to the town in the summer.
- An Environmental Plan was underway and a carbon footprint survey of the Council's buildings was being undertaken.
- The Council had moved to a green electricity supplier.
- A Community Land Trust was being formed; this would be community-led and small scale.
- The two largest car parks in the town had been resurfaced.
- Starting the Neighbourhood Plan process was being revisited due to concerns arising from the Planning White Paper.

16/21. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Friday 3 September 2021.

The meeting closed at 12:25pm.

Signed _____ Date _____

Cllr Chris Turner
Chairman