



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

Towns and Larger Parishes Committee
Annual General Meeting
Friday 26 November 2021
10:00am
via Zoom

Minutes

Present:

| | |
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| Cllr KD Johnson | Colehill Parish Council (Chairman) |
| Cllr John Broom | Lyme Regis Town Council (Vice-Chairman) |
| Cllr Chris Turner | Beaminstertown Council |
| Cllr Dave Rickard | Bridport Town Council |
| Cllr John Dean | Chickerell 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 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 David Harris | Weymouth Town Council |
| Cllr Diann March | Wimborne Minster Town Council |

Also present:

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| Cllr Laura Miller | Dorset Councillor |
| Neil Wedge | Chief Executive – DAPTC |
| Kirsty Riglar | Secretary – Towns and Larger Parishes Committee |

24/21. Election of Chairman for 2021/22

Cllr Chris Turner informed the Committee that he did not wish to seek re-election as Chairman of the Committee. Having been duly proposed and seconded and there being no other nominations, Cllr KD Johnson was elected as Chairman of the Committee for 2021/22.

Cllr Johnson proposed a motion of thanks to Cllr Turner for his service as Chairman of the Committee since 2012. This was duly moved.

25/21. Election of Vice-Chairman for 2021/22

Having been duly proposed and seconded and there being no other nominations, Cllr John Broom was elected as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for 2021/22.

26/21. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from:

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| Cllr Cathy Lugg | Ferndown Town Council |
| Mr Jonathan Ross | St Leonards and St Ives Parish Council (Clerk) |
| Cllr Colin Huckle | Weymouth Town Council |
| Cllr Carol Butter | Wimborne Minster Town Council |

President: John Parker -| **Chair:** Jill Crouch -| **Chief Executive:** Neil Wedge

27/21. Appointment of representatives on the Executive Committee for 2021/22

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the following appointments were made to represent the Committee on the Executive Committee:-

Cllr KD Johnson (Chairman)
Cllr John Broom (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr Lindsey Dedden
Cllr Haydn White
Reserve: Cllr Terry Cordery

28/21. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2021 were confirmed as a true and accurate record.

29/21. Update from DAPTC Chief Executive

An update was received from the DAPTC Chief Executive which predominantly focussed on:

- (i) the slippage in the timetable for the Community Governance Review being undertaken by Dorset Council;
- (ii) progress on the submission by councillors of their digital register of interests;
- (iii) progress on discussions with Dorset Council about how to best consult and engage with parish and town councils and a proposed series of 'Working Together' webinars for parish and town council representatives on a number of topics, such as the development of the Local Plan.

Cllr Andy Todd joined the meeting at 10:19am.

In response to comments made by Members regarding the ease with which councillors could now complete their digital register of interests, the Chief Executive reported that approximately 1,050 of the 1,500 local councillors in Dorset had now completed this process. An update would shortly be issued. In response to a question about requesting that home addresses be withheld from the online registration, the Chief Executive explained that if there was exceptional personal circumstances for this, the Monitoring Officer could approve it and the information would be redacted from the register. It was noted that quite a few councillors had indicated that they wished their address to be withheld but there were no exceptional circumstances and the request declined by the Monitoring Officer.

Cllr Anne Hall joined the meeting at 10:27am.

The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that over the last year a number of webinars had been run by Dorset Council on a series of topics which had proven successful and had been attended by between 30 – 80 people. He had recently been in dialogue with Dorset Council about formalising a series of regular webinars as a key mechanism for engaging with parish and town councils. There was a need to ensure that this was disseminated within Dorset Council to ensure that such webinars were used as an opportunity to engage constructively over issues such as consultations and significant changes in services. A number of topics were being explored, including quarterly updates on the emerging Local Plan. It was hoped that the first of these would be held on 25 January 2022. Details would be circulated once they were confirmed. In response to a question, the Chief Executive explained that it was likely that attendees could submit questions in advance to ensure that presenters would be ready to respond but there may be an opportunity for a small number of questions to be asked live. The style and content would be tailored to the audience.

In addition, he reported that member councils would be shortly receiving a survey about engagement and communication opportunities and the flow of information from both Dorset Council and the DAPTC. It was recognised that there was a need to tailor information to ensure it

was relevant to the audience and that the local councils in Dorset varied greatly in size, population and influence.

In response to comments made by Members, the Chief Executive confirmed that NALC were actively lobbying Government for the ability for local councils to hold formal meetings virtually again. Whilst hybrid meetings were permitted, these were often challenging and required specific technology. He agreed that there was a need for councils to have the choice to make meetings work best for them given the ongoing concerns about returning to in-person meetings but that there was currently little will from government to allow this again. He drew attention to the guidance previously issued by DAPTC which set out how decisions could be made under delegated powers but reiterated that any virtual meeting could not be deemed to be a 'formal' meeting and would only be making 'minded to' recommendations.

30/21. Update from Cllr Laura Miller, Cabinet Member for Customer Services and Communities, Dorset Council

Cllr Laura Miller introduced herself as the new Cabinet Member for Community and Customer Services, replacing Cllr Jill Haynes following a reshuffle. She explained that she was looking at what officers within Dorset Council could do better to engage with local councils to ensure that there was a 'no surprise' culture. She acknowledged that there was a need to understand the needs of parish and town councils to ensure that communication and engagement was tailored to the sector as a discrete audience. She drew attention to the 'helpline' recently introduced specifically for parish and town councils which included an escalation process should responses from officers not be forthcoming which was a first step in addressing concerns and frustrations voiced by local councils. She also reported that a meeting had taken place about the asset transfer process and how this could be made as easy as possible for local councils.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Miller for her update and for her willingness to engage with local councils.

31/21. Update from Member Councils

Beaminster

- The new skatepark had now been officially opened and was already being well used and appreciated by children and young people in the town.
- A new 'Beaminster Earth Alliance' had been established which was currently headed up by the Chairman of the Town Council but an independent chair was being sought to demonstrate that this was a community initiative rather than a Town Council one.
- There were some issues with a partly redundant building in the town which needed to be addressed.
- A questionnaire about the development of a Neighbourhood Plan had been circulated to residents.
- It was hoped that two new public toilets would be open by Christmas.
- New Christmas lights would shortly be put up.

Gillingham

- Two vacancies on the Council had been filled; one by election and the other through co-option.
- Whilst there would be a festive lighting up event, there would be no parade this year.
- The Town Council was continuing with the hybrid approach.
- Problems had been experienced in relation to the town's CCTV system and pinning Dorset Police down to accepting responsibility for GDPR.
- The Town Council had signed up to the Green Canopy initiative.
- The town had experienced its worst flooding for a few years.
- Work was underway on becoming a Freetrade Town.
- The review of the Neighbourhood Plan was continuing.

Ferndown

- There was currently one vacancy on the Town Council and a by-election would be held in December.
- Refurbishment of half of the Barrington Centre was now complete but the rest of the work required on the building had not yet started. It was hoped that the café would re-open in December but there had been problems recruiting staff.
- A smallscale Christmas lights event was planned.

Wareham

- A public consultation on the proposed Recreation Project was currently underway and the results would be considered by the Town Council on 14 December.
- The Neighbourhood Plan referendum had been held and there had been a positive result in favour of adoption.
- A Christmas Concert would be held at The Rex Cinema on 5 December.

Wimborne Minster

- The Town Council continued to be very concerned about the removal of neighbour notifications about planning applications. The DAPTC Chief Executive reported that there had been no update about this. However, Cllr Miller reported that there had been a commitment that the publication of on-site planning notices would be reinstated but there was not yet a date when this would come into effect. She undertook to seek a response in relation to neighbour notifications.
- Wimborne Market was due to close on 17 December. Some traders would be moving to the Allendale Centre from 7 January.
- Demolition of The Pippins in Hanham Road had started but Dorset Council had not yet made it known what the plans were for the site.
- The Town Clerk would be retiring shortly and a recruitment advert would be published on 10 December.
- The branch of the Natwest Bank in the town was due to close in April 2022.
- The town's Christmas lights would be switched on the following day.

Corfe Mullen

- There was currently one vacancy on the Town Council which it was hoped to fill by co-option.
- There remained a great deal of concern about in-person meetings in view of current Covid case rates.
- Recruitment was currently underway for staff.

Cllr Laura Miller left the meeting at 11:28am.

Lyme Regis

- A casual vacancy had been filled by co-option with five candidates putting themselves forward.
- The Christmas lights would be turned on with a parade on the following day.
- A member of the Town Council's Environment Committee had attended COP26.
- In the Gardens, an area of old trees had been thinned out and would be filled out under the Green Canopy initiative.
- There had been a substantial mudslide on East Beach.

Chickerell

- It was hoped that a Speedwatch Team would be in place in early 2022.
- Four enquiries had been received for co-option to fill the current vacancy.
- A Halloween house-decorating competition had been organised and it was hoped to repeat this for Christmas lights.
- No public event would be held to light up the Town Council's Christmas tree.
- A willow tree was to be planted to contribute to the Green Canopy initiative.

Weymouth

- The Town Council had received a Gold Award from Britain in Bloom.
- Planning permission was being sought for a new skatepark.
- The town Christmas trees would be lit up on the following day, alongside a world record attempt for the most elves.
- Most of the Town Council's issues related to Dorset Council.

Bridport

- The Remembrance Day parade had been welcomed by local people and a Remembrance Service had been held outdoors.
- The annual Christmas Cheer event would not take place this year. However, the weekly markets in the three weeks before Christmas would have a festive theme and include entertainment.
- The Town Council was engaging with the public on a Climate Change Strategy to try and achieve a balance between involvement and leadership by both the Town Council and community.
- An initiative was underway to training people as energy champions to help people 'green' their homes.
- The changes made to the weekly markets due to the pandemic had proven successful and would be permanent.
- A thank you party was being planned for the volunteers and co-ordinators of community support during the pandemic.
- The community governance review being conducted by Dorset Council was an important issue for the Town Council.

Verwood

- Following a successful recruitment process, with a very high standard of applicant, a new Town Clerk had been appointed and would take up the post in January.
- The Town Council was investigating the use of CIL money to provide traffic islands in the road to improve safety for pedestrians.
- An incident with protesters with an anti-vaccination message had taken place outside the local school to which the Police had responded.
- Two Remembrance events had taken place.
- Investigations about the ownership of the village hall and recreation ground in Three Legged Cross were ongoing.
- Concerns were raised about the newsletter issued by the 'Dorset National Park Team' as this was not a formal body and some groups were listed as supporters of the initiative who did not support it.

Sherborne

- Funding had been received from Low Carbon Dorset for installation of local panels and LED lighting at the playing field pavilion. A heat source pump was also being looked into.
- It was anticipated that a tourism microsite for the town would be live in late December / early January.
- A Festive Day would be held on 5 December; this would include a tree lighting ceremony.
- A new Responsible Finance Officer would start in post the following week and adverts for two further positions would be published shortly.
- Council meetings were being held in Digby Hall to provide more space than the Council Chamber.
- Flu jab clinics and Covid booster clinics were also being held in Digby Hall.
- The Town's museum was now open three days per week and there had been a large influx in volunteers to help run this.

Swanage

- The 'Switch on Swanage' even would take place on the following day, together with 'Artisans on the Beach'.

- The budget-setting process had started with a particular focus on the staffing structure and increasing the number of staff following a review earlier in the year. However, the high property costs locally made it difficult to recruit staff at higher grades.
- Council meetings were being held in-person but not in the Town Hall in order to have more space. Committees continued to meet informally virtually with decisions made under Delegated Powers.
- The list of events for 2022 had been approved but a cautious approach was being taken to these.
- A lease had been acquired on greenspace formerly a primary school playing field and hard play area.
- There was concern about the prospect of the removal of the paramedic car serving Swanage and a meeting had been held with the local Member of Parliament to discuss this.

Dorchester

- The former Dorchester Prison site had recently been used as a filming location.
- Work was continuing on a masterplan for the town centre.
- The Christmas Cracker event would be held during the day on Sunday 12 December during which the High Street would be closed to traffic, to allow stalls to be spaced out.
- The current Deputy Town Clerk had been appointed to the post of Town Clerk.
- No decision had yet been made on the community land trust (CLT) development, despite the establishment of the CLT five years ago.

Colehill

- Once vacancy had been filled by co-option but a further two councillors had resigned.
- In-person meetings were once again being held in the committee room but this had proven difficult when members of the public wished to attend.
- The Remembrance Day parade had gone well.
- A children's Christmas party had been organised.
- The hall had recently been renamed 'Colehill Village Hall' and would shortly have broadband installed.

32/21. Date of next meeting

The Committee considered whether it wished to meet on a Wednesday or Thursday in future as this would allow for better attendance and participation by Cllr Miller, who usually had work commitments on a Friday. Having been put to a vote, there was a clear preference for continuing meetings on a Friday.

The next meeting would be held on a date to be confirmed in February 2022.

The meeting closed at 12:28pm.

Signed _____ Date _____

Cllr KD Johnson
Chairman