



**DORSET ASSOCIATION OF PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS
TOWNS AND LARGER PARISHES COMMITTEE
Minutes of meeting held at 10:00am on Friday 11 September 2020
via Zoom**

Present:	Cllr Chris Turner	Beaminster Town Council (Chairman)
	Cllr KD Johnson	Colehill Parish Council (Vice-Chairman)
	Cllr Janet Page	Beaminster Town Council
	Cllr Haydn White	Blandford Forum Town Council
	Cllr Dave Rickard	Bridport Town Council
	Cllr Emma Urquhart	Colehill Parish 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 Lindsey Dedden	Verwood Town Council
	Cllr Keith Green	Wareham Town Council
	Cllr Vera Green	Wareham Town Council
	Cllr Shane Bartlett	Wimborne Minster Town Council
	Cllr Carol Butter	Wimborne Minster Town Council
	Cllr Colin Way	West Moors Town Council
	Cllr David Harris	Weymouth Town Council
	Cllr Colin Huckle	Weymouth Town Council
Also present:	Neil Wedge	Chief Executive – DAPTC
	Kirsty Riglar	Secretary – Towns and Larger Parishes Committee

10/20. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from:

Cllr Cathy Lugg	Ferndown Town Council
Cllr Mike Bonfield	Swanage Town Council
Cllr Jane Russell	Verwood Town Council
Cllr Mike Hawkes	West Moors Town Council

11/20. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2020 were confirmed as a true and accurate record.

12/20. Update from DAPTC Chief Executive

The new DAPTC Chief Executive, Neil Wedge, introduced himself. He had taken up the post on 1 April at a particularly challenging time for all local councils, as well as the DAPTC. Whilst he and the other staff had been working from home for the past few months, a phased return to the office had commenced earlier in the week. He noted that the nature of the questions now being received from member councils had started to move back to 'business as usual' rather than being Covid-specific.

He explained that the Executive Committee had met frequently via Zoom over the past few months and a review of the DAPTC's Constitution was underway. Feedback had been sought from member councils and this was now being reviewed. Recommendations for change to the document would be considered by the Executive in September and presented to the AGM in November for approval. The Motions submitted for the AGM were also being reviewed. Whilst it was planned to take place in November, the format for this was likely to be different arising from the advice about avoiding face to face meetings where possible. The Area Committees were now being encouraged to meet virtually and Mr Wedge reminded Members that one of the purposes of the Towns and Larger Parishes Committee was to bring forward issues of particular concern to towns and larger parishes for consideration by the Executive.

Whilst all planned training had been cancelled due to the pandemic, a lot of work had gone into providing as much online training as possible, including the use of Zoom for virtual meetings, in bitesize chunks. The training offer also now included a suite of e-learning modules being piloted by NALC. A series of events had now been added into the training calendar to introduce the DAPTC and what it does to support local councils. It was hoped that this would be particularly useful for new clerks and councillors. An effort had also been made to differentiate between training and engagement activities.

Particular attention was also drawn to the weekly newsletter circulated by email to member councils on Friday. Clerks had been asked to forward this to their councillors. One Member commented that the format of the newsletter wasn't very user-friendly both in terms of reading and saving this. The Chief Executive explained that as this was a major weekly undertaking for the team, the MailChimp software aided the compilation and distribution of the newsletter. However, it was possible that the approach to this may change in time.

The Committee were informed that Cllr Anthony Alford was no longer the Dorset Council Portfolio Holder with the overview of the relationship with town and parish council. Cllr Jill Haynes was now Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services. It was agreed that thanks be sent to Cllr Alford for his support and engagement over the past year. Mr Wedge confirmed that he was seeking to engage with Cllr Haynes in relation to the DAPTC.

In relation to returning to offices, Cllr Rickard drew attention to the recent announcement by Dorset Council that those staff working from home would not return to the office before the end of March 2021. He explained that Bridport Town Council's reception area was a joint hub with Dorset Council but over 50% of contacts were for the unitary authority. Currently this remained closed. He asked whether the announcement by Dorset Council was causing similar issues for other local councils. Mr Wedge confirmed that this was a topic being discussed by a number of towns where not re-opening customer contact points in hubs was impacting upon the services provided by town councils. There was also concern about the impact upon Dorchester town centre.

In response to a Member's question, Mr Wedge acknowledged the issue of scale in relation to the development of neighbourhood plans by local councils of different sizes. However, the principles were the same across any geographic area and the training course on this would include these as well as such useful tools as the use of social media for engaging with local residents and businesses. He explained that the course content information was available on the DAPTC's website.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Mr Wedge and the other members of the team for all of their work during the pandemic and offering a great deal of support to member councils.

13/20. Towns and Larger Parishes Committee – Chairman's report

The Chairman informed the Committee that he was sorry to lose Cllr Anthony Alford as the relevant Dorset Council Portfolio Holder.

He explained that his key concern continued to be the ongoing issues relating to public transport in the Beaminster area. The community bus had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and he expressed his concerns about the policies and guidance about ensuring that public transport was as safe as possible.

14/20. NALC Report

Cllr Dedden, as NALC representative, reported that a Virtual National Assembly had been held in July, with a focus on the impact of Covid-19 on the local council sector. Informal meetings had been held during August and September and the next Assembly would be held in December. Meeting virtually had been very well received and NALC was looking at how it could facilitate its forthcoming AGM.

Cllr Dedden reported that the Planning White Paper was a major concern at the present time and NALC strongly encouraged individual councils to respond and comment.

The Chairman echoed this and also expressed his concern that there would not be proper and meaningful consultation on the Dorset Local Plan.

Cllr Bartlett, as a Dorset Councillor, informed the Committee that Dorset Council was extremely keen that town and parish councils respond to the White Paper. Councillors from all political parties were extremely concerned about the implications of the proposals. He also explained that he sat on the Executive Advisory Panel on the Dorset Local Plan and reassured members that Dorset Council had a duty to consult fully with the public. The mechanisms for this would depend on the situation in relation to Covid-19 at the time.

15/20. Updates from Member Councils

Verwood

- The Town Clerk and other office staff had worked from home very effectively during the pandemic but the office had now re-opened following considerable efforts by the Clerk to make it Covid-secure.
- The election of a new Mayor was postponed from May and would now take place at the September meeting.
- One casual vacancy had arisen following a resignation; co-option had been postponed for the time being.
- It was hoped to make the community support scheme put in place during lockdown permanent.

Gillingham

- The Covid volunteer support scheme had been very successful but had now been 'mothballed'. However, to build on the very positive engagement with younger volunteers, some were now also joining the Health Champions database.
- The Town Hall remains closed to the public, whilst the Registration Service was operating out of the Council Chamber.
- All Council meetings continued to be held online.
- The southern extension roadworks were underway and there had been significant reduction in public transport services in the town.
- The Council had decided to cancel the Christmas lighting-up event.

Colehill

- The Chairman and Clerk had been delegated powers to enable the Council to continue operating during the pandemic.
- The Council had met for the first time virtually three weeks ago; meetings via Zoom were working very well.
- The VE and VJ Day celebrations had progressed, including the installation of a Lest We Forget bench.
- The play park at Oliver's Field remained closed, not as a result of the pandemic but for health and safety reasons. Quotes for maintenance to resolve these were being sought.

West Moors

- West Moors had now been declared a town but there were currently no plans to create a Mayor.
- All of the events planned for 2020 had been cancelled.
- The Council had been meeting via Zoom with no major issues.
- A new roof had been installed on the Youth Club.

Weymouth

- The Town Council had moved to virtual meetings which were now being streamed live via Facebook to enable public participation time.
- Working parties had been established to focus on a wide range of topics including green and clean issues, income generation, establishing a youth group, community engagement and governance.
- The governance group had suggested some changes and the Council now had an elected Leader of the Council, as well as a Mayor.
- The Mayor's term of office had been extended for a further year.
- The Council would not be returning to how it had previously operated and could continue to hold virtual meetings. Similarly, it was unlikely that officers would return to the office permanently or on a full-time basis.
- The officers had worked extremely hard during the pandemic.
- A scheme had been set up with local churches to support vulnerable people.
- Most of the town and beach events had been cancelled, resulting in lost income.
- Temporary pedestrianisation had been implemented around the harbourside to enable social distancing and this had worked well.
- New toilets on the beachfront had been opened and the beach had been busy since lockdown was eased.
- The bid submitted to the National Lottery for £1.4M to enhance the Radipole Park Gardens had been successful.
- The Council had started developing partnerships with the neighbouring towns of Portland and Chickerell, as well as Dorset Council.

Dorchester

- The Mayor's term of office had been extended for a year.
- The refurbished Kings Arms was due to re-open imminently.
- The 2020 Heritage Open Day would be held virtually via lovedorch.com/HOD.
- A planning application for the development of a multi-storey car park on the Dorset County Hospital site was due to be considered by Dorset Council's Northern Area Planning Committee the following week. Officers recommended refusal but there was a great deal of local support for this.
- The Town Council office was now open but the Corn Exchange remained closed and the roof would be refurbished whilst events were not happening.
- The town's Christmas Cracker had been cancelled

- Until the announcement of the new 'rule of six', the town was recovering well, with many visitors, including at least three coaches to the market on Wednesday.
- The Council's Planning Committee had discussed the Planning White Paper and would submit a response.

Wareham

- The Town Hall remained closed and staff were working from home.
- The Corn Exchange also remained closed.
- In general the town was very quiet, although there had been considerable traffic issues caused by the influx of visitors to Lulworth Cove and Durdle Door.
- Work on projects had largely been put on hold during the pandemic but there was a need to address significant problems with the roof of the building leased to the Citizens Advice Bureau and a working party had been formed to drive this forward.
- Mayor-making had taken place virtually.
- The draft Neighbourhood Plan would be submitted for inspection imminently and it was anticipated that a meeting would be held in October to approve this.
- It was hoped that the Plan would be adopted in early 2021.

Ferndown

- The new Town Clerk was now in post.
- Staff had worked extremely hard during the pandemic to keep things going.
- The Mayor's term of office had been extended for a further year.
- One councillor had ceased to be a member of the Council due to the six months rule.
- The refurbishment of the Barrington Centre was underway and it was hoped that it would re-open in early 2021.
- The conversation as to whether to hold the annual Christmas lights ceremony was ongoing.
- The Council was in the last stage of negotiating a contract for the installation of a new wheel park.

Corfe Mullen

- The Clerk had retired and her replacement was now in post.
- An Assistant Clerk and a new Groundsman had also been employed.
- The Council office had re-opened this week.
- The events relating to the climate emergency had been cancelled due to the pandemic. Conversations were ongoing about Christmas events.
- The Council was very concerned about the implications of the Planning White Paper.

Wimborne Minster

- The beginning of lockdown had coincided with the provision of laptops to all councillors and had enabled virtual meetings. It was likely that these would continue in the future.
- Events in the town had been cancelled due to the pandemic, including the Folk Festival, resulting in a significant loss of income for the town.
- The Town Council had been offered a football club and skate facility which were being built alongside a large amount of new development and had agreed in principle to take these on.
- There had been problems during the summer arising from young people 'tombstoning' off of the A31 bridge into the River Stour.
- The Council had thanked the local emergency services for their work during the pandemic.
- The Covid-19 voluntary response group had been very busy providing support to the elderly and those shielding. This has included the delivery of pre-prepared meals.

Bridport

- Meetings had initially been suspended, with powers delegated to the Leader and Chairmen of committees. However, meetings had then taken place virtually. 3 councillors had no computer to be able to join the meetings, so a socially distanced hybrid had been in operation.
- All office-based staff had worked from home and the outside staff had been able to undertake a lot of housekeeping tasks.
- The closure of the tourist information centre had resulted in lost income. In total, the Council had lost approximately £50,000 due lockdown and the cancellation of events. However, it had received a small business discretionary grant of £5,000.
- A new Mayor had been elected who had been very active in setting up initiatives such as the community support service.
- A public music event had been held on the Millennium Green as a trial for socially distanced events and have proven successful.
- The Town Council was exploring installing solar canopies at its car parks to generate electricity for charging points for electric vehicles.
- A green route around the town was being planned, including a sculpture trail.
- The Neighbourhood Plan for Bridport and its neighbouring parishes had now been approved and invoked in relation to a recent planning application.

Blandford Forum

- The staff had worked incredibly hard during the pandemic.
- Virtual meetings had been held via Microsoft Teams.
- Some of the Town Council's facilities had been made Covid-secure and re-opened for use by clubs. The biggest issue had been in relation to sporting clubs and it had been decided not to charge them whilst they did not have access to all facilities. It was hoped that the market would restart soon.
- Persimmon Homes had now transferred some land to the Council that had been long-awaited.
- The Town Council continued to be concerned about the issue of town facilities funded by the Council being regularly used by residents of the neighbouring parishes who did not contribute towards them via the precept.

Lyme Regis

- Powers had been delegated to the Chairman and Clerk and meetings had only recently restarted. Full Council meetings were now happening on a monthly basis.
- Some staff had been furloughed but the outdoors team had worked very hard during lockdown. However, councillors were disappointed at the level of abuse from members of the public directed to staff when working in the town.
- A community support group had been set up very quickly and the administration for this had been taken on by one of the staff working from home. Very positive links had been made with the Lead Social Prescriber – the local single point of contact for medical and social care.
- A garden growers group had also been set up.
- Lyme Regis had been picked as one of three towns to participate in a research project on sustainable transport and community engagement.
- Cllr Bawden was now a member of the NALC Planet Action Task and Finish Group and a survey would be sent to local councils about support for this work.
- Dorset Council had now closed the tourist information centre and the Town Council was converting the space into more offices.
- The Town Council had lost approximately £300,000 income due to the pandemic and all events had been cancelled.

Beaminster

- To make the town inviting and encourage more ‘business as usual’, bunting and banners had been put up and a scarecrow competition and treasure hunt held recently.
- The Town Council had decided to employ a dog warden and Dorset Council had agreed to help train them.
- The Town Council were concerned about the development of the Dorset Local Plan and were currently in debate with Dorset Council about a field designated for industrial development for the last 34 years which in the latest information relating to the Local Plan had been designated for residential development, despite having a Section 52 agreement on it. The Town Council would not agree to this being revoked due to the need for employment in the town for younger people.
- The community bus service had been curtailed due to lockdown and subsequent issues relating to insurance.
- The team of volunteers operating during lockdown had received the High Sheriff’s Award for volunteering.

Dorchester

- The Maltings arts project had now been officially abandoned and the Town Council was working with Dorchester Arts to find an alternative way forward.
- The seventh Dorchester community play would be performed during April.
- Dorset County Hospital had received permission for development on its site which would result in the loss of trees but had asked the Council to identify where new trees could be planted to compensate for the loss.
- Former Councillor Trevor Jones had been made a Freeman of the town.

Arising from these updates, the DAPTC Chief Executive made the following points:

- The quarterly newsletter would showcase projects at local council level and he asked that Councils share examples of these for inclusion. He would also be happy to feature other exemplar stories from the pandemic and recognition of long-service by clerks, etc.
- He urged local councils to apply for grants for financial support as a result of income lost due to the pandemic.
- He was staggered at the amount of collaboration between unitary authorities and local councils, which was not necessarily replicated in other areas, and considered that this brought a lot of positives.

16/20. Date and venue of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on Friday 6 November 2020 via Zoom.

The meeting closed at 12:30pm.

Signed _____ Date _____

Cllr Chris Turner
Chairman