



**DORSET ASSOCIATION OF PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS
TOWNS AND LARGER PARISHES COMMITTEE
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 10:00am on
Friday 6 November 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 Dave Rickard	Bridport Town Council
Cllr Haydn White	Blandford Forum Town Council
Cllr Emma Urquhart	Colehill Parish Council
Cllr Paul Holland	Corfe Mullen Parish Council
Cllr Tim Howard	Corfe Mullen Parish Council
Cllr Robin Potter	Dorchester Town Council
Cllr Barry Von Clemens	Gillingham Town Council
Cllr Belinda Bawden	Lyme Regis Town Council
Cllr John Broom	Lyme Regis Town Council
Cllr Giovanna Lewis	Portland 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 Mike Hawkes	West Moors Parish Council
Cllr Colin Way	West Moors Parish Council
Cllr Colin Huckle	Weymouth Town Council

Also present:

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

17/20. Election of Chairman for 2020/21

Having been duly proposed and seconded and there being no other nominations, Cllr Turner was elected as Chairman of the Committee for 2020/21.

18/20. Election of Vice-Chairman for 2020/21

Having been duly proposed and seconded and there being no other nominations, Cllr Johnson was elected as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for 2020.21.

19/20. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from:

Cllr John Dean	Chickerell Town Council
Cllr Rob Hughes	Portland Town Council
Cllr David Harris	Weymouth Town Council

20/20. Appointment of representatives on the Executive Committee for 2020/21

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

Cllr Chris Turner (Chairman)
Cllr KD Johnson (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr Lindsey Dedden
Cllr Haydn White
Reserve: Cllr Barry Von Clemens

21/20. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2020 were confirmed as a true and accurate record.

22/20. Update from Cllr Jill Haynes, Cabinet Member for Customer Services and Communities, Dorset Council

Cllr Haynes introduced herself and explained that her current Dorset Council portfolio for Customer Services and Communities covered a wide and varied range of services including waste, licensing, regulatory services, libraries as well as liaison with the voluntary and community sector and town and parish councils.

She provided an update on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Dorset Council. Welfare calls were being made to all residents who tested positive for the virus and the Council continued to work closely with the voluntary and community sector to support vulnerable residents. Whilst the number of cases were rising, it was felt that the Council was in a better place to provide support as this was a continuation of the arrangements put in place during the first lockdown. A specific issue at the moment was a lack of domiciliary care capacity to aid hospitals discharging patients quickly. A pro-active campaign with providers to encourage more staff was underway. Work was also underway with Citizens Advice Bureaux to prepare for forthcoming pressures, such as increasing the number of specialist death counsellors and support for people worried about jobs and debt.

The Committee was also provided with an update on Dorset Council's financial position. At the end of the first quarter of 2020/21, an overspend was forecast of £43M due to loss of income and additional expenditure associated with the pandemic. However, there had been partial recovery over the summer due to re-opening of services and receipt of additional government funding. At the end of the second quarter, the overspend was forecast to be £27M. This could be covered by reserves in the current year but some hard choices would need to be made in the budget setting for 21/22.

She added that the Cabinet had recently considered a revised asset management strategy, focussing on what was needed, what could be disposed of and what could be provided or built. There was limited staffing in this area, so it was proposed to focus on larger projects. She also drew attention to the climate change and ecological emergency consultation which would run until 6 December.

In response to a question, Cllr Haynes confirmed that Dorset schools were looking at what they could do to help pupils catch up. She understood that exams would be pushed back by three weeks in 2021 to allow for more preparation time. She paid tribute to teaching staff and children who continued to work very hard.

In response to a comment about a lack of clarity on Facebook about those services which were open or disrupted, Cllr Haynes undertook to raise this with Communications officers. She acknowledged comments about the difficulties in using the Council's website and

explained that a new Head of Customer Services had recently been appointed who would have this as a priority when she took up her post.

In relation to the new planning system being implemented by Dorset Council, she reported that she was proposing that a webinar be held for parish and town councils about how to use the system which would provide an opportunity to engage about planning processes. She acknowledged the point made by a councillor that town and parish councillors were not getting feedback on comments submitted on planning applications and why requests that these be referred to the planning committees were not progressed. She suggested that local councils raise this issue with their local ward member(s) who were involved in this process.

In response to concerns raised about the focus on housing in the Planning White Paper and the lack of recognition of the need for building for business and employment, Cllr Haynes explained that this was also a disappointment to Dorset Council. She added that the Council was including this within its asset review.

In response to a question about the Council's County Farms Estate, Cllr Haynes explained that over the past fifteen years this had been consolidated in order to create more viable farms and, consequently, some of the farmhouses had been sold. She was not aware of any pressure to sell the farms.

In response to a question about the possible closure of either County Hall or South Walks House if staff were to continue working from home, Cllr Haynes explained that there were no definite plans until the asset review had been completed. She acknowledged that working from home had worked well for some staff, whereas others had been unable to do this for various reasons.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Haynes for attending the meeting and providing her update.

23/20. Update from DAPTC Chief Executive

The DAPTC Chief Executive noted the comments about planning and reported that this had been a key aspect in his first meeting with Cllr Haynes, as the Cabinet Member with the portfolio for town and parish councils. Three courses on planning had recently taken place which had allowed issues to be collected and consequently he was encouraging Dorset Council to hold a briefing on the new planning portal as well as other aspects of the planning process. As this was a major concern for local councils, he would continue to request regular updates and drop-in sessions to ensure as much awareness as possible. He also added that he had raised the possibility of a dedicated page on the Dorset Council website for local councils to provide information about key issues.

The Committee were informed that there was a busy training and awareness schedule in place for late 2020 and into 2021, being delivered remotely. Training about how to run and chair virtual meetings and use of social media had now been added to the schedule. Links to the training pages and details of sessions were included in the e-newsletter.

In response to a question, the Chief Executive explained that there were a number of platforms that could be used by local councils to hold virtual meetings, including Zoom and MS Teams. A lot of larger companies had chosen to use MS Teams as it was considered to be more secure for sharing data but a lot of local councils – and the DAPTC – had chosen to use Zoom as this was more user-friendly and considered to have better stability. Ultimately the choice of platform was a decision for individual local councils to make.

One member asked whether local councils provided ICT equipment to their councillors to enable virtual meetings. The Chief Executive explained that this was up to individual councils but he was aware of second-hand schemes which had been accessed by some

councils to enable this whilst others had factored this into their budgeting. However, many councillors had their own ICT equipment which allowed them to participate virtually.

One member raised the cost of the training sessions for those who were on a low wage or unwaged. It was agreed that councils should include a training element in their budgets to ensure that their councillors were equipped to fulfil their role; councillors should not be expected to fund training themselves. It was suggested that this should be included in the forthcoming budget-setting process. The DAPTC had sought to provide lower-cost training opportunities to reach as many councillors as possible and it was planned to move forward with a blended delivery approach.

The Chief Executive also drew attention to the 2021 Census and an initial approach to work with local councils on this. He also reported that a project was underway with Dorset Council to digitise the register of interests and process for updating these; more news on this would be issued in coming months.

The Committee were also reminded that the DAPTC AGM would be held on Saturday 14 November and would be taking place remotely. The team had been planning and rehearsing how this would run; this would be very business focussed and therefore shorter than usual AGMs. Members welcomed the ease of enrolling for the virtual meeting.

24/20. Towns and Larger Parishes Committee – Chairman's report

The Chairman expressed his continued concern about the content of the Planning White Paper and the lack of focus on employment land. Beaminster Town Council had submitted a response which included this. He reported that a new Eco Group had been established in Beaminster to progress climate emergency planning from a grassroots level. He also expressed some concern about a lack of information or consultation with local councils about licensing activity and would raise this with Cllr Haynes.

25/20. NALC Report

Cllr Dedden, as NALC representative, reported that the AGM was held on 27 October at which the subscription for 21/22 had been agreed and the submission on the Planning White Paper discussed. Her full report was available on the DAPTC website. As the meeting had been held virtually, it had been shorter than previous AGMs. The Committee were also informed that former NALC Chairman, Cllr Ken Cleary, had recently passed away.

26/20. Updates from Member Councils

Gillingham

- The Town Council were extremely concerned about the proposed changes to car parking charges by Dorset Council and were submitting a letter about the negative impact on a high street and local economy that was already struggling.
- A very limited event would be held on Remembrance Sunday to lay wreaths.
- Christmas events had been cancelled.
- The Green Gillingham initiative had been progressed via the 'Mayor's Green Seven' posts on Facebook.
- There had been a mixed response to the new Dorset Council planning portal.
- Councillors were responding very well to online training opportunities and it was hoped that these would continue.
- The Town Council was in conflict with Dorset Council about entry signs to the town.

Verwood

- A special meeting had been held to discuss the Planning White Paper.
- Cllr Matthew Parker had been elected as Mayor in September.

- The Town Council's office had re-opened but was now closed again with staff working successfully from home during the new period of lockdown and meetings continued to be held virtually.
- The Town Council had been having issues with the naming of a new small development in the town.
- A short ceremony would be held on Remembrance Sunday but people were being discouraged from attending.
- A new accessible website was up and running and staff were receiving ongoing training on updating this.
- In response to receipt of a petition about a pedestrian crossing, a task and finish group had been established to look at the issue of crossings.

Wareham

- A new website was up and running.
- A working party had been established to progress 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 replacement of all play equipment.
- Renovations to the Town Hall had been put on hold.

Sturminster Newton

- There were major issues in relation to a business park in the town which was likely to result in legal action.

West Moors

- The cemetery gates had been replaced.
- Barriers had been put up to address issues with parking adjacent to the office and consequent damage to the wall.
- A virtual public meeting had been held to discuss a very contentious planning application and had worked very well.
- Virtual council meetings were working well.

Weymouth

- A proposal was being put together to link a number of open spaces in the town as a country park.
- Work on a Neighbourhood Plan had commenced with a development consultant engaged.
- There had been some recent issues about catering licences.
- At the end of the second quarter, the Town Council was no longer overspent, following a successful summer after the easing of lockdown.
- Consultation with Dorset Council about the future of a number of former Weymouth and Portland Borough Council sites was anticipated.
- All meetings were being held virtually and main meetings also livestreamed on Facebook.
- The usual largescale Remembrance Sunday event would not be taking place but would be replaced with a modest event to be held at the Nothe Fort.
- The Town Council were concerned about the lack of publicity and consultation on changes to car parking charges.

Lyme Regis

- Office staff continued to work from home; outside staff were working as usual.
- Car parks, public toilets and play areas remained open as usual.
- Concerns were also raised about Dorset Council's car parking charges as it was felt that a blanket charge was not appropriate across the town.
- The Town Council had received negative feedback from residents about the new Public Space Protection Order agreed by Dorset Council.
- Carbon literacy training would shortly be rolled out that was particularly relevant to local councils.
- The community support group was being set up as a Community Interest Organisation.
- The Town Council was working on a carbon management plan.
- The Town Council had given permission to run a trial for a car club and use of a parking space for this.
- The report on the research project on sustainable transport would shortly be published.

Bridport

- The installation of solar canopies in the Town Council's car parks was going ahead.
- A green route around the town was doing ahead and a sculpture trail was in progress with six pieces now installed.
- The Town Council had been able to respond very quickly to the new period of lockdown, with staff working from home.
- A church service would be held on Remembrance Sunday with a very limited attendance but would be livestreamed, as would the wreath-laying.
- A secular Remembrance event would also be held.

Corfe Mullen

- All meetings continued to be held virtually, streamed live and made available on YouTube.
- Staff were working from home.
- A comprehensive submission had been made on the Planning White Paper as it was felt that the town was particularly vulnerable to the consequences of the proposals on housing.
- Two residential roads had been resurfaced by Dorset Council.
- A new Assistant Clerk was now in post.
- Strong communications continued with Dorset Council about a long-standing failure to enforce gross breaches of planning.

Blandford

- Tribute was paid to the Town Clerk who had worked extremely hard during the pandemic.
- Whilst the Neighbourhood Plan had completed the inspection phase, it was not known when any progress would be made on public referendum.
- The revised advice on Remembrance events had been received too late and impacted the arrangements that were being made.
- IT skills of councillors were improving as a result of virtual meetings.

Colehill

- Councillors were happy to meet virtually and no problems had been experienced.
- Improvements had been made to a park area and more were planned.

- A 'Lest We Forget' bench had been purchased in lieu of the VE celebrations during the summer which had been welcome locally and a poppy bin had been installed alongside this.
- An accessible website was now up and running.
- A very small ceremony would be taking place for Remembrance Sunday and live-streamed.

Portland

- Virtual meetings were working well.
- A new Town Clerk had recently been appointed.
- There had been an issue with camper vans staying overnight at free car parks.
- Climate and Ecological Change community groups were very active and had been planting trees.
- The installation of solar panels for council buildings was being investigated.
- A Portland Resilience Committee had been started in response to the pandemic and was very active in supporting local residents.

Beaminster

- The Town Council had appointed its own dog warden who will work closely with Dorset Council.
- The community bus was back up and running and well-staffed by volunteers.
- A submission for Bus Service Operators Grant for the community service was being progressed.

Dorchester

- The Town Council was very concerned about the effect of the proposed car parking changes, in particular on Brewery Square and on the popular Sunday car boot sale.
- An extra 1,200 trees were due to be planted in November in conjunction with Transition Town Dorchester.
- Planning applications had been submitted to alter the rear of the Corn Exchange to accommodate biomass heating for the building and for the works to the roof.
- The latest newsletter asked for people's views on how life after lockdown should affect the Council's corporate plan priorities.
- Consultation was also underway on what improvements could be made in the area around the Town Pump.

27/20. Dates of future meetings

It was resolved that meetings would be held on the following dates in 2021:

Friday 26 February

Friday 28 May

Friday 3 September

Friday 26 November

The meeting closed at 12:26pm.

Signed _____ Date _____

Cllr Chris Turner
Chairman