

Dorchester Town Council

Policy Committee

24 March 2025

Present: The Mayor (Councillor R. Potter) and Councillors R. Biggs, S. Biles (Chair), V. Lloyd-Jones, K. Reid and D. Taylor.

In Attendance

Councillors J. Hewitt, F. Hogwood, P. Farmer, L. Fry, D. Leaper, S. Jones and M. Rennie.

J. Booker, Allotment Representative, Louds Mill and St Georges for Minute No 55.
Various members of the public in respect of Minute No 56.

Apologies: Councillors J. Germodo, G. Jones and R. Ricardo.

52. **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 20 January 2025, adopted by Council on 27 January 2025, were taken as read and were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

53. **Declaration of Interests**

Councillor D. Taylor declared an interest in respect of Minute No. 61, Keep 106, and left the meeting during consideration of that matter.

54. **Finance Update**

Members considered a report by the Finance Officer which updated them on the financial position of the Council as at end of February 2025, the level of debt over 30 days and gave details of the payments list from 1 January 2025 to 28 February 2025.

The report also set out the outcome of the internal auditor's second of three audits held in January 2025. The recommendations of the internal auditor and officers responses to them were noted.

Resolved

- (1) That the payments list, totalling £540,037.19 be approved.
- (2) That the report of the internal auditor and the officer responses to them be noted.
- (3) That the report as a whole be noted.

55. **Management Committee Extract – Louds Mill Allotment Site**

The Committee had before it a report by the Assistant Town Clerk on the current status of Louds Mill Allotment Site. This report had been considered by the Management Committee which had requested that the Policy Committee review the future use of the site in regard to the provision of affordable housing.

Members felt that it would be useful for the Town Clerk to explore with Dorset Council Planners, the possibility of the site being used for affordable housing at some point in the future. It was felt however that any decision to develop, if that was indeed a possibility, would be a matter for the new Council post 2029. In the meantime it was hoped that the plots could be let. It was noted that allotment vacancies had been advertised on social media and in the latest edition of Dorchester News.

The Allotment Representative reported that the existing allotment holders at Louds Mill and St Georges would help clear the plots ready for new tenants which the representative was confident they would be able to find.

Resolved

That the Town Clerk explore, with Dorset Council Planners, the possibility of Louds Mill allotment site being used for affordable housing. The decision to develop, if that was indeed a possibility, to be a matter for the new Council post 2029.

56. **Catering at Council Events**

Further to Minute No. 37/2024, Members considered a report by the Town Clerk which suggested a mix of healthier foods, including an increase in the amount of plant based foods, to be provided at Council events where catering was required.

The Committee felt that the proposed revised menu was a good starting point which provided a reasonable mix of foods. The menu could be reviewed and adapted in the future. Members felt that as well as fruit salad some cake and plant based milk (at events where hot drinks are served) should also be offered.

Members of the public addressed the Committee on the benefits of eating plant based foods and how the Council was in a position to lead the way by moving to plant based catering.

Resolved

That catering at future Council events be changed as set out in the report to include an increase in plant based options and healthier food.

57. **Draft Corporate Plan 2025-2029**

The Town Clerk presented his report which proposed extending the consultation period on the draft Corporate Plan so as to enable some face to face consultation at the informal

Annual Town Meeting to be held in May. This would mean that final approval of the Plan would move from May to July 2025.

Resolved

That the consultation period for the draft Corporate Plan be extended so as to allow some face to face consultation at the informal Annual Town Meeting to be held in May 2025.

58. **New Council Website**

The Committee had before it a report from the Assistant Town Clerk on the progress of the Task and Finish Group which had been established to create a new updated website for the Council.

Resolved

That the progress made by the New Website Task and Finish Group be welcomed.

59. **Dorchester Markets Transfer**

Members considered a report by the Town Clerk which updated them on the progress with transferring the operation of the Dorchester Markets to the Town Council.

The Chairman of the Joint Markets Panel reported that the sub group would be meeting again shortly and clarified that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Panel would be two of the Members on the Sunday car boot fund distribution panel.

Resolved

That the update on the progress of transferring the operation of the Dorchester markets to the Town Council be welcomed.

60. **Wessex Watermark Town Award**

The Committee considered a report by the Development Assistant (as set out in the Appendix to these minutes) on a proposal for the Council to work towards achieving Watermark Town status in 2025.

Members were supportive of the proposal which encouraged towns to value their water resources, understand their supply and waste systems and take action to protect the environment.

Recommended

That the Council commits to becoming a Watermark Status town.

61. **Keep 106 Community Radio Funding Request**

Members were reminded that the Committee had previously agreed an annual grant of £5,000 to Keep 106. The grant was in recognition of the provision of PA equipment at a number of Council and Community events plus technical advice to the Council. The Committee considered correspondence from Keep 106 requesting an increase in its annual grant which had remained unchanged, other than a CPI uplift, for the last two years.

Resolved

- (1) That a 2025-26 grant of £10,000 be awarded to Keep 106.
- (2) That Keep 106 be requested to submit future grant requests prior to the Council setting its budget for the following year.

62. Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960

Resolved:

That in view of the fact that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the following matters the public and press representatives be excluded from this meeting during their discussion.

63. Shire Hall Historic Courthouse Museum

The Committee considered a report by the Town Clerk on the future direction of the Museum and a proposal to increase the profile of Tourism Information Point presently housed in the Museum. It was suggested that Shire Hall might wish to approach the Dorchester BID for support.

Resolved

- (1) That the update be noted.
- (2) That no contribution be made towards the proposal for an improved Tourist Information Point at the Museum.

Chair.....

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE – 24 MARCH 2025

WESSEX WATER WATERMARK TOWN AWARD 2025

1. The Council has been approached by Wessex Water and invited to become one of five local councils working towards Watermark Town status in 2025.
2. The Watermark Town initiative encourages towns to value their water resources, understand their supply and waste systems and take action to protect the environment. Safe and reliable water and wastewater services are essential for our day-to-day lives, our wellbeing and our natural world. We need a world where communities value water and understand their water supply and waste systems so we can protect the environment for all. We must work together with local people to help tackle climate and nature emergencies and respond to the need for carbon neutrality and to build a sustainable future.



Further details of the Watermark Town Award scheme can be found at: <https://www.wessexwater.co.uk/become-a-watermark-town>

3. Bridport Town Council took part in a pilot project of the Watermark Scheme last year. This led to a garden project with two schools, a river water Citizen Science scheme with Dorset Wildlife Trust and Dorset National Landscape, signage around meadows, and three additional water fountains throughout the town. Feedback from Bridport Town Council indicates that local engagement was successful, particularly by allotment holders thanks to the provision of 100 free water butts.
4. To gain Watermark Town status, the Council will need to commit to the promotion of 'Raising Awareness' activities and undertake at least three 'Taking Action' activities over a 12-month period. Examples of such activities include:

Raising Awareness: These will be promoted over the year, through the Council's various communication channels.

- Save Water, Save Money
- Bin the Wipe
- Stop the Block
- Customer Support
- National Refill Day (*DTC already supports*)

Taking Action:

- Rain Savers – installing water butts and rain gardens and helping to reduce rainfall run-off.
- Water Audits – holding water-saving interventions at council and community buildings
- Water Guardians – keeping a watchful eye on local waterways and spotting pollutions

- Water Drop-Ins – a regular time for customers to meet Wessex Water in person in their community (*already in place*).
- Only Rain Down the Drain – national Yellowfish campaign to let people know which public drains lead directly to rivers and waterways
- Education – signing local schools up for a free education visit
- Water Refill Points – installing public water refill point (*already in place*).

‘Taking Action’ steps would be decided based on the needs of Dorchester’s community and can include any type of beneficial project.

5. Dorchester’s key areas of interest/engagement currently include: know your area, where drinking water comes from and where wastewater goes; rainwater management for households and organisations; support for lower-income households; river pollution information/Water Guardians.
6. The Watermark Town scheme can:
 - a. include financial, administrative, and marketing support from Wessex Water throughout, reducing reliance on council funds. This includes:
 - providing funding **up to £5,000** from Wessex Water for local projects and events;
 - bespoke 'Watermark Town' marketing materials;
 - local data and information;
 - free school sessions by the Wessex Water education advisers;
 - free water butts and water saving advice;
 - training for local support groups (social support tariff training);
 - comprehensive water audit for council owned buildings (also finding and fixing water leaks for free).
 - b. support the Council’s climate and resilience goals. The scheme aligns with the Climate Action Plan, particularly in reducing water use, and contributes to the Community Resilience Plan, helping prepare for climate-related challenges like flooding.
 - c. deliver practical environmental benefits by helping to reduce water wastage across the town, raise awareness of water conservation and pollution prevention;
 - d. create opportunity for collaborative projects;
 - e. encourage community action towards sustainability, encouraging local groups, businesses, and residents to take an active role in water conservation.
7. If the Council secured Watermark Town status, then it would be joining a network of concerned and responsible communities across the region, with public recognition from Wessex Water highlighting the Council as a leader in sustainability.
8. If members wish to pursue the achievement of Watermark Town status, then the timetable could be as follows:
 - Full Council considers Policy Committee’s recommendation.
 - Early April: Public announcement of Dorchester’s involvement.
 - Mid/late April: Community workshop to understand priorities (e.g., water saving, waste, cost of living, resilience) and engage groups.

- Throughout 2025: Implementation of water-related projects, engaging local groups and residents.

9. **Recommendation:** That the Committee recommends to Full Council that Dorchester Town Council applies to Wessex Water for Watermark Town status.

Connie Hollings
Development Assistant

2025/2026 DRAFT TIMELINE

An action plan has been created by DTC officers and Wessex Water.

March:

Council Resolution, committing to becoming a Watermark Status town, a public demonstration of commitment to lead the change.

Water audit of council properties.

WW to produce a map of local area to show where Dorchester's water comes from, how much is used and what happens after it goes down the drain. This map and local statistics will be use in school and outreach events.

April:

Community morning or afternoon workshop for groups to shape and engage with scheme.

Public launch of scheme to include results of council water audit.

Press release and community call to action to take part.

Watermark towns network meeting for shared learning between councils.

May:

Train the Trainer – social support tariff training offered for local groups to support low-income households with cost of living.

Priority Service Register Awareness.

WW Education outreach to local schools.

Water butts for gardens/allotments.

June:

The Big Help Out (Volunteer Week) – Litter picks along Dorchester's waterways.

Promotion of water refill points and reducing single-use plastics for World Refill Day.

July-November:

Campaign promotions – Stop the Block, Only Rain Down the Drain, Water Saving / Recycling, Get Ready for Winter.

September:

Start of term WW Education outreach to local schools.

November:

Watermark Town Civic awards presentation.

January, February, March 2026:

Collated reporting on activities (to include engagement stats).

Overview of reporting and feedback for Watermark Town network.