

Minutes of the **FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**
held at the Town Hall, Swanage on **WEDNESDAY**
11th DECEMBER 2024 at 2.15 p.m.

PRESENT:- Councillor T Foster (Town Mayor) – Chair

Councillor M. Bonfield
Councillor D. Monkhouse
Councillor C. Moreton
Councillor C. Tomes
Councillor W. Trite

Also in attendance: -

Councillor S. Vile

Dr M Ayres	Town Clerk
Mr C Milmer Manager	Visitor Services and Business Development
Ms G Percival	Assets & Compliance Manager
Miss A Spencer	Finance Manager

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

1. **Apologies**

There were no apologies to record on this occasion.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

Members were invited to declare their interests and consider any requests for Grants of Dispensations in accordance with Section 9 and Appendix B of the Council's Code of Conduct.

Agenda Item No. 3 (a) – Councillor Bonfield declared a non-pecuniary interest in the scale of charges under the Code of Conduct by reason of being employed as a taxi driver, being a regular hirer of Town Council beach huts and hiring a grid space in the boat park.

Agenda Item No. 3 (a) – Councillor Tomes declared a non-pecuniary interest in the scale of charges under the Code of Conduct by reason of close family members being private beach hut site licensees.

3. **Budget Setting 2024/25 - To consider recommendations from Committees**

The Town Clerk outlined the budget setting process, this meeting being the first of two Finance & Governance Committee meetings at which the budgets would be discussed. It was noted that the primary purpose of this meeting was to review the standing committee's recommendations and to review the affordability of projects in light of the newly introduced Project Initiation Documents (PIDs).

The tax base was noted as increasing significantly in 2025/26, but the need to view any initial positive 'windfall' from the Second Homes Premium within the context of the budget pressures facing the council over the coming three years was highlighted. It was reported that Council had committed to significant expenditure in support of the delivery of its adopted Corporate Plan over the coming years and attention was drawn to the importance of looking at the impact of this on the Council's reserves and balances in year three of the budgets, 2027/28.

The need to finance the Council's Asset Management Plan was also highlighted, with it being recognised that the initial draft estimates did not contain any additional contributions to reserves beyond those already budgeted.

(a) **Draft Scale of Fees and Charges 2025/26**

Consideration was given to a draft scale of fees and charges for the Council's services for the 2025/26 financial year, drawn up further to discussion at the Tourism & Local Economy Committee, the Community Services Committee and council working party meetings. It was noted that the Council's beach hut fees had already been approved by Council and would be excluded from any voting requirement. It was further noted that the private beach hut sites licence fee charge would be excluded from consideration, pending further discussion. Members considered the fees & charges, excluding the charges for Taxis and the Boat Park. It was proposed by Councillor Tomes seconded by Councillor Monkhouse and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

To approve the Scale of Fees and Charges for inclusion in the draft Estimates 2025/26 for consideration by the Finance & Governance Committee in January 2025.

Further to his declarations of interest in sections of the scale of charges under item 2) above, Councillor Bonfield left the meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Moreton, seconded by Councillor Trite and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

To approve the charges for the Boat Park and Taxi Rank annual fee, for inclusion in the draft Estimates 2025/26 for consideration by the Finance & Governance Committee in January 2025.

Councillor Bonfield re-entered the meeting.

(b) **To Review Draft Capital Programme and Minor Works Schedule 2025/26 and To Consider Project initiation Document Submissions**

Consideration was given to the draft Capital Programme and One-Off Minor Works Schedule for 2025/26 and the Project Initiation Documents (PIDs) that had been submitted in support of each project.

It was noted that the projects had been submitted for consideration by each of the relevant council committees with PID forms submitted for review by the Finance & Governance Committee.

Draft Capital Programme

PID forms had been submitted for 4 projects and these were considered individually.

CP1: Skate Park Equipment. The Town Council had been asked by the Swanage Skatepark Community Project (SSCP) to contribute an additional £20,000 towards this project, with £15,000 having already being allocated towards the total cost of £66,000 required to complete Phase 1. It was noted that the procurement in respect of this project would be undertaken by the Council, with the balance of funds required to deliver the project being contributed through fundraising by SSCP. A lengthy debate ensued with Members agreeing on the importance of the project, while recognising that Phase 1 could be completed with a reduced additional contribution of £5,000 in 2025/26 (£20,000 in total). It was suggested that SSCP could request additional funding in 2025/26 once Phase 1

was completed. It was proposed by Councillor Bonfield and seconded by Councillor Trite:

To include a budget allocation of £20,000 in total, being the previously approved £15,000 plus an additional £5,000, in the draft 2025/26 Capital Programme for the Skatepark project for consideration by the Finance & Governance Committee in January 2025.

An amendment to the motion was proposed by Councillor Tomes and seconded by Councillor Monkhouse:

To include a budget allocation of £35,000 in total, being the previously approved £15,000 plus an additional £20,000, in the draft 2025/26 Capital Programme for the Skatepark project for consideration by the Finance & Governance Committee in January 2025.

Upon being put to the Meeting, THREE Members voted IN FAVOUR of the amended motion and THREE AGAINST. The Chairman then exercised her casting vote AGAINST the amended motion, whereupon it was declared NOT CARRIED.

Reverting to the original motion, upon being put to the Meeting, FIVE Members voted IN FAVOUR and ONE AGAINST, whereupon it was declared CARRIED.

CP9: Pay & Display Machine-Main Beach Car Park: It was noted that this machine would service the multi-use area in order to remedy problems encountered with incorrect payments. It was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Tomes and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

To include a budget of £5,000 in the draft 2025/26 Capital Programme for a new pay and display machine in Main Beach Car Park for consideration by the Finance & Governance Committee in January 2025.

CP12a: Godlingston Cemetery Composting Toilet: It was reported that any external funding for this project was seen as unlikely, and as such the full £13,000 would be required as a budget. It was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Tomes and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

To include a budget of £13,000 in the draft 2025/26 Capital Programme for a composting toilet at Godlingston Cemetery for consideration by the Finance & Governance Committee in January 2025.

CP13: Capital Grant to Greengage Community Garden: Members considered a request from the Greengage Community Garden Project for a contribution of £15,000 towards a project to provide a mobile field shelter and refurbish an existing toilet block, the total cost of which was estimated to be £30,000. The importance of supporting the project was acknowledged, while recognising that the group should continue to try to maximise contributions from sources of external funding. Discussion arose as to what, if any, sum the Council should consider as a contribution to the project. It was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Tomes and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

To include a budget of £10,000 in the draft 2025/26 Capital Programme for a contribution towards the construction of a mobile field shelter and refurbishment of an existing WC block by the Greengage Community Gardening Project for consideration by the Finance & Governance Committee in January 2025.

Consideration was then given to the draft Capital Programme in its entirety. It was noted that the Seafront Shelter Replacement project, with a budget estimate of £180,000, could not be funded from internal resources. The need to earmark funds to finance this project, and others in the Asset Management Plan in later years, was highlighted, while acknowledging the near impossibility of doing so within the scope of the initial draft estimates. Following a lengthy discussion, during which it was recognised that the shelter replacement could not be financed in 2025/26, it was suggested that budget allocations could be spread across the next three financial years, at a rate of £65k per annum, to take account of likely inflation over this period. It was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by the Town Mayor and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

That the draft Capital Programme, including the amendments agreed above and the deferment of the Seafront Shelters project and an associated contribution to an EMR of £65k per year over the next 3 years, be included in the draft Estimates 2025/26 for consideration by the Finance & Governance Committee in January 2025.

Draft Minor Works Programme and PIDs

Members considered the projects and PID forms by committee
Community Services Committee

The minor works schedule contained 9 projects, CS1 – CS9, with 8 PIDs submitted for non-essential works.

Ref	Item/location	Description of Works	Budget £
CS1	CCTV	Signage in all relevant locations	2,000
CS2	Public conveniences	Burlington Chine - internal refurbishment	8,000
CS3	Beach Gardens	Heaters, vents and kiosk racking	7,000
CS4	King Georges Skatepark	Lights and new signage	4,000
CS5	Town Hall Chamber and floor	Repair and stain chamber & ground floor lobby flooring, WC refurbishment	9,000
CS6	Public conveniences - Heritage	Repointing and repairs to eastern elevation brickwork and roof parapet	(28,500) 5,000
CS7	Town Hall stone façade	Programmatic survey and preparation of schedule of works	8,500
CS8	Depot	New chairs for meeting room at Depot	1,500
CS9	Beach Gardens Pavilion-Kiosk	Panini machine and freezer	4,000
Sub total			(72,500) 49,000

Members considered the merits of each project and following a lengthy discussion it was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by the Town Mayor and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

That the Community Services Committee minor works schedule be included in the draft Estimates 2025/26 for consideration by the Finance & Governance Committee in January 2025, subject to the budget for project CS6 being revised down from £28,500 to £5,000 pending clarification of the likely impact of the town centre flood defence scheme on the Heritage Public Conveniences.

Tourism and Local Economy Committee

The minor works schedule contained 8 projects, TLE1 – TLE8, with 7 PIDs submitted for non-essential works.

Ref	Item/location	Description of Works	Budget £
TLE 1	Boat Park	Payment terminal – Work towards cashless facility	5,000
TLE 2	Tourism	Pedestrian Signage	2,000
TLE 3	Beach Huts	Booking system upgrade	3,000
TLE 4	Tourism	Town Maps	2,500
TLE 5	Forres bridge	Repairs	5,000
TLE 6	Santa Fe railings upgrade	Maintenance	5,000
TLE 7	TIC	Garden improvements	6,000
TLE 8	TIC	Event management software	6,000
Sub total			34,500

During the debate, it was requested that further information in respect of projects TLE1, TLE5 and TLE 6 should be presented to the committee at its next meeting in January 2025. However, it was agreed that for budget setting purposes these items should remain in the draft revenue budgets at the current time. Therefore, it was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Moreton and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

That the Tourism and Local Economy Committee minor works schedule be included in the draft Estimates 2025/26 for consideration by the Finance & Governance Committee in January 2025.

Environment and Green Spaces Committee

The minor works schedule contained 6 projects, EC1 – EC6, with 4 PIDs submitted for non-essential works.

Ref	Item/location	Description of Works	Budget £
EC1	Spa	Ground monitoring	17,000
EC2	Spa	Risk Assessment	5,000
EC3	Recreation Ground	Resurfacing and kerbing	6,000
EC4	Environmental Projects	Project support-Environmental Action Plan and Motion for the Ocean Action Plan.	15,000

EC5	Environmental Projects	Support Sustainable Swanage	5,000
EC6	Environmental Projects	Water quality noticeboards	1,500
Sub total			49,500

It was noted that EC6 had previously been approved by Council at its meeting held on 18th November 2024. During the debate, it was requested that further information in respect of project EC3 should be presented to the committee at its next meeting in January 2025. The key importance of the Environmental Projects budgets was also highlighted. It was proposed by Councillor Monkhouse, seconded by Councillor Tomes and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

That the Environment and Green Spaces Committee minor works schedule be included in the draft Estimates 2025/26 for consideration by the Finance & Governance Committee in January 2025.

(c) To Consider Third Party Contributions and Grants

Members considered a schedule of Third Party Contributions and Grants for inclusion in the 2025/26 budgets.

- Swanage & Purbeck Development Trust – Focus Centre - £21,000 (previously approved)
- Dorset Council-School Crossing Patrol - £8,000
- Bay Enforcement - £4,200
- Town of Culture – £15,000 in both 2025/26 and 2026/27
- Swanage Town & Herston Football Club - £5,250
- Citizens Advice Bureau - £1,000
- Local Charities and Organisations - £10,000

Members discussed the significant uplift in the costs associated with the Swanage Primary School Crossing Patrol sponsorship. It was noted that this was due to Dorset Council charging administration costs in 2025/26, an increase of £3,500 from the 2024/25 budget. It was noted that this matter should be considered further, potentially by the Traffic Management Advisory Committee, prior to finalising the estimates.

Further to Minute No. 104 of the Council Meeting held on 21st October 2024, Members discussed a request from the CAB for an uplift of £4,000 in the donation made by the Council. It was stated that benefits in kind that had previously been given by the Council to the CAB while using the Town Hall building amounted to approximately £4,000 and it was requested that this be turned into an actual financial contribution. In light of the CAB's proposal to hire rooms at the Focus Centre, some concern was raised around this increase in grant essentially being an additional contribution to the Swanage & Purbeck Development Trust. It was agreed that the matter should be given further consideration and the Town Clerk agreed to raise the matter with the Trust at a meeting later in the week.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor, seconded by Councillor Moreton and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

That the schedule of third-party contributions and grants as presented to the committee be included in the draft Estimates 2025/26 for consideration by the Finance & Governance Committee in January 2025.

Further to Standing Order No. 1 q), at 4.15 p.m. the Town Mayor agreed to extend the meeting beyond the two-hour guillotine.

(d) **Council Tax Base Update**

Members were informed that the council tax base had been provided by Dorset Council, with a significant uplift being realised due to the Second Homes Premium. It was noted that this level of tax base may not be taken for granted for years beyond 2025/26 and may reduce should second home ownership decrease. The impact of the depletion of the Council's reserves to fund the Green Seafront Stabilisation Scheme by the end of 2026/27 was highlighted, as was the need to make the Council's finances resilient to the impact of this. Members were presented with the figures generated by the precept given various percentage uplifts, with it being noted that approximately £140,000 would be generated from the uplift in tax base. It was stated that this increase would be insufficient on its own to cover the increased costs that were being incurred by the Council, and it was further noted that the anticipated loss of revenue from investment income, given the capital programme, was expected to be in the region of £200k in an average year.

It was agreed that a range of precept levels should be reviewed at the next meeting of the Finance and Governance Committee, once the budget book had been reviewed as a whole, with indicative levels of 3.5% and 5% increases on Band D bills.

(e) **Reserves Policy**

During the discussion regarding previous agenda items, Members recognised the importance of building reserves to fund future works to maintain and enhance the Council's extensive asset base. In particular, the need to initiate a Boat Park and Fishers' Hut reserve had been highlighted, with suitable appropriations. Officers were tasked to review proposed reserve contributions for consideration during the next stage of the budget setting process in January 2025.

(f) **Timetable: Committee Meetings, Workshop and Estimates Meeting**

Members acknowledged the proposed date for a finance workshop on 6th January 2025, although it was noted that due consideration would need to be given to the timing due to other meetings that day. Members discussed the date of the next Finance & Governance Committee meeting. It was suggested that due to the short timeframe between the next meeting and the estimates meeting on 20th January 2025, it should be brought forward to accommodate any work required between the two meetings. It was proposed by the Town Mayor, seconded by Councillor Monkhouse and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

TO RECOMMEND

That Council approves a change in the date of the next Finance & Governance Committee meeting to 13th January 2025

4. Items of information and matters for forthcoming agendas

The following matters were listed for inclusion on a forthcoming agenda.

- a) Review of Corporate Plan and Committee Structure
- b) Update on Action Points from Internal Audit Report 2023/24

5. **Date of next meeting**

The date of the next scheduled meeting was noted as 15th January 2025, changing to 13th January 2025 pending approval by Council, minute 3 (f) above.

The meeting concluded at 4.40 p.m.
