

Minutes of the Meeting of the **FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE** held at the Town Hall, Swanage on **WEDNESDAY 12th MARCH 2025** at 2.15 p.m.

PRESENT:- Councillor T. Foster (Town Mayor) – Chairman

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 and RFO
Ms G Percival Assets & Compliance Manager

Councillors S. Brookes and C. Sutton, and Miss A Spencer (Finance Manager) attended the meeting remotely.

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

1. **APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies to report.

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.

There were no declarations to record on this occasion.

3. **ANNUAL EXTERNAL AUDITOR REPORT 2023/24 - TO CONSIDER RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE COUNCIL'S EXTERNAL AUDITOR AND RECOMMEND ANY ACTIONS TO FULL COUNCIL**

Further to Minute No. 111 (b) of the Council Meeting held on 21st October 2024, it was reported that the Final External Auditor Report and Certificate had now been received from BDO LLP for the 2023/24 financial year. It was noted that the accounting statements, Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) had been certified as correct. Having considered correspondence received from a local elector, a recommendation had been made by the auditor to make a note in the asset register of the notional market value of each investment as at 31st March. It was reported that the additional audit work had been at a cost of £1,700 to the Town Council.

It was noted that the local elector had objected to the valuation applied to the freehold of Swanage Bay View Holiday Park, which was noted as an investment property in the council's asset register, with a book value of £600,000. It was reported that the valuation was compliant with the application of the *Practitioners' Guide* and Council policy and that no accounting adjustments were required, nor would there be any impact upon reserves and balances held by the Town Council. It was stated that a note to the asset register would be made for the value at 31st March 2025, for which the Council would need to appoint a valuer.

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

TO RECOMMEND:

To accept the external auditor's recommendation and to appoint a valuer so that the notional market value of each of the Council's investments as at 31st March can be noted in the asset register.

It was reported that the local elector had made a social media post about this matter which was factually incorrect and misrepresented the audit report that had been received. The local elector had also sent this post to committee members by e-mail. Brief consideration was given to the best way to ensure that local residents could access the correct information.

4. ANNUAL HEALTH & SAFETY REPORT

Consideration was given to a report, prepared by the Assets and Compliance Manager, setting out the number of accidents and incidents involving the Council's workforce during the period April 2024 to March 2025. It was noted that there had been nine incidents/accidents, none of which were RIDDOR reportable. Training attended by the operations department staff members and the training plan for 2025/26 was also reported. The content of the health and safety report was acknowledged, and the Assets and Compliance Manager was thanked for her work.

5. COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE - TO INITIATE REVIEW

Further to Minute No. 5 (b) of the Finance & Governance Committee Meeting held on 24th July 2024, consideration was given to how best to take forward the review of the committee structure. It was noted that it may be best to defer this matter until after a revised Corporate Plan had been adopted.

Attention was drawn to the need to consider any changes relating to committee membership, as set out in their terms of reference, prior to the Annual Council Meeting in May. Members discussed the constitution of the Coastal Change & Beach Management Advisory Committee, and it was suggested that the chairman of the Environment and Green Spaces Committee should automatically sit on the advisory committee, or alternatively that there should be an increase in the number of councillor representatives.

It was proposed by Councillor Bonfield and seconded by the Town Mayor:

TO RECOMMEND to the Annual Council Meeting:

That the councillor membership of the Coastal Change & Beach Management Advisory Committee be increased from 3 to 4.

An amendment was proposed by Councillor Monkhouse:

TO RECOMMEND to the Annual Council Meeting:

That the councillor membership of the Coastal Change & Beach Management Advisory Committee be increased from 3 to 5.

The amendment did not receive a seconder. Reverting to the original motion, upon being put to the Meeting, it was **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY**.

It was noted that the Coastal Change & Beach Management Advisory Committee had recently made a recommendation about additional outside representatives being appointed, and that this would also be considered at the Council's Annual Meeting.

The membership of the Tourism and Local Economy Committee was briefly discussed and it was acknowledged that the committee could make recommendations as to its membership at its next meeting.

6. WORKING PARTIES - TO CONSIDER CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING FUTURE ROLE AND TO AGREE NEXT STEPS

Further to Minute No. 6 of the Finance & Governance Committee Meeting held on 26th February 2025, consideration was given to a briefing note setting out options for determining the preferred way forward in reviewing the future role of the Council's working parties. The following criteria had been suggested as a way of assessing whether existing working parties should be reappointed at the Annual Council Meeting, as follows:

- Does the subject matter fall under the jurisdiction of the Town Council?
- Is the matter an identified priority under the corporate plan?
- Does the subject matter suit a short-term 'task and finish' approach?
- Can the matter be adequately dealt with by an existing standing committee, potentially at an extraordinary meeting?
- Can the matter be put forward for consideration by an independent body, to which the Council sends an observer/outside representative?
- Would the matter benefit from in-depth consideration and contributions from both members and officers and/or input from third parties?

During the debate over this matter, the following additional criteria were proposed:

- To what extent is the matter of concern to local residents?
- Will deliberation by a working party help the Town Council to influence the outcome of the matter?

It was suggested that the future of existing working parties could be assessed against all of these criteria on a 'weighted basis' rather than requiring a specific answer to all of the criteria. After detailed consideration, it was proposed by Councillor Trite, seconded by Councillor Monkhouse and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

That the above criteria be agreed and that a councillor workshop be arranged to consider the future appointment of working parties and report to a meeting of this committee prior to the Annual Council Meeting.

7. COUNCIL PRIORITIES SPRING/SUMMER 2025

It was reported that the Council's priority action plan had last been reviewed and updated in July 2024. The purpose of the report was to enable Members to ensure that Council resources were focussed on priority matters identified in the Corporate Plan and to enable progress to be monitored over the next 6 months.

It was noted that a new action had been included to plan steps to be taken following the recent unsuccessful bid to be the Dorset Town of Culture for 2026. It was noted that a budget review had also been included, as had the future review of the Council's committees and working parties.

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

TO RECOMMEND

That the draft Council Priority Plan for spring/summer 2025 be approved.

8. ITEMS OF INFORMATION AND MATTERS FOR FORTHCOMING AGENDAS

The following items were raised as matters for forthcoming agendas.

- Review of Corporate Plan
- Review of Strategic Investments – Members were invited to a Strategy Meeting to be held with Arlingclose on 18th March 2025 at 12:00.
- Member training
- Review of Social Media Policy

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Trite and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That, under Standing Order No. 1 c), in the public interest, the press and public be excluded from the Meeting in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted under agenda items 9 and 10 in relation to legal matters and data protection requirements.

9. SCHEDULE OF DEBTORS AND REVIEW OF BAD DEBT PROVISION

A report on aged debtors dated 11th March 2025 was submitted for information. It was noted that the majority of debts were anticipated to be collected, although it was agreed that a bad debt provision would be retained at £35,000 as a precautionary measure pending resolution of an ongoing debt recovery process.

10. ANNUAL REVIEW OF CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

Further to the initial consideration given to the Council’s Corporate Risk Register at the Finance & Governance Committee Meeting held on 26th February 2025, additional proposals were presented for consideration.

In addition to minor changes, including updated completion and target dates, the following significant amendments were considered as the basis of a recommendation to the Town Council.

Financial Risks	
Add new risk: Liquidity risk: invested funds are not available for significant capital projects. Risk: M	Control: In accordance with Treasury Management Strategy Statement, ensure adequate funds are available to meet both scheduled staged payments for capital projects and to meet a risk-assessed level of unexpected expenditure.
Update risk: Potential bankruptcy of a major supplier. Increase risk level from low to medium given well-publicised collapse of major local authority suppliers in recent years, leading to contracts being re-let at higher prices.	Amend control: Add reference to obtaining financial data as to sustainability of contractors’ business whenever a tender process is undertaken.
Update risk: A change in Dorset Council policy leads to unplanned transfer of assets and/or services to Swanage Town Council Increase risk level from low to medium given financial changes facing the unitary authority.	Amend control, as follows: Ensure maintain close contact with ward members and build relationships with senior leadership team; attend DAPTC briefings. As part of budget setting process, consideration to be given annually to establishing an earmarked reserve to provide emergency funding to support key services.

Compliance Risks	
Update risk: Failure to comply with procurement processes. Remove reference to Public Contract Regulations and replace with Procurement Act 2023.	Amend control: refer to training in connection with Procurement Act 2023.
New risk: Failure of employees to abide by policies in the Staff Handbook. Risk: L	Control: Handbook issued as part of staff induction and employees required to sign to say that they have read the Staff Handbook. Updates to be provided to all staff and discussed at departmental/all-staff meetings.
New risk: Failure to properly fulfil role as charitable trustee and maintain separation between trust and council business. Risk: M	Control: Hold separate meetings for each charitable trust; follow Charity Commission guidance; seek independent legal and valuation advice as required; include role of council as corporate trustee within councillor induction.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor seconded by Councillor Bonfield, and
RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

TO RECOMMEND:

That the amended Corporate Risk Register for
2025/26 be adopted.

11. PROVISIONAL DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The provisional date of the next meeting was noted as 23rd July 2025.

The meeting concluded at 3.30 p.m.
