

DAPTC Larger Parishes and Towns Committee meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2020 by  
zoom

The Chief Executive outlined the first few months since his appointment. The first challenge he faced was setting up for the three staff to work from home. This has been operating well and there is now a phased return to the office with 2 members of staff maximum present at any one time. The Executive has been meeting frequently and concentrating mainly on the review of the constitution. The version to be considered at the AGM in November will be finalised shortly. It is likely that the AGM will be virtual but it's procedure will be as normal as possible.

All training has been moved on line. Training for use of Zoom for Council meetings has been used by 100 people so far. Some Parishes are resisting using Zoom. DAPTC has a new website and Neil demonstrated some features during the meeting. DAPTC has joined a NALC pilot on elearning. Each month, 2 "What we do" presentations have been held and these will continue for 6 or 7 months for new Councillors and Clerks. These sessions are free.

There was an increase in enquiries at the start of the lockdown but enquiries have now returned to more normal levels. Councils can meet in person if the regulations can be met but are being encouraged to continue meeting virtually for the foreseeable future. A newsletter was being produced every 4/5 weeks but there is now a weekly newsletter issued once per week on Friday to try and ensure all relevant information is disseminated from one place at one time. Clerks are asked to circulate these newsletters to all Councillors. There was a request for these newsletters to be in pdf format rather than in emails.

In connection with the return of Dorset Officers to Council Offices, Neil was asked when Dorset Officers are likely to return to offices. Some Town Councils operate facilities such as Tourist Information points which are shared with some Dorset Council Officers. Some of the Town Councils have re-opened their facilities but there are no Dorset Council Officers present which results in members of the public expecting Town Council staff to deal with Dorset Council matters. Neil explained that Dorset Council staff are unlikely to return to such locations until the New Year. Dorset Council will install dedicated phone lines in libraries to enable the public to talk to an Officer. It was suggested that where the service is normally provided in a shared Town Council facility, the dedicated phone should be located there.

The Chairman reported that the Dorset Council portfolio holder for Customer and Community Services has changed and is now Cllr Jill Haynes. It is hoped that she will attend future DAPTC meetings. There was a query about consultation on the new Dorset Plan as some present thought that there would be a consultation exercise during September. A paper has been issued from NALC about Devolution and it is expected that there will be a White Paper on this topic in the near future.

Issues raised and reported by member Councils were as follows:-

**Gillingham TC:** Meetings are being held on-line. The Town Hall is closed as the Registration service is using the Council Chamber. The community support scheme has been suspended and details of the 150 volunteers have been passed to Health Champions so that volunteers can be approached to help. The local bus service has been cut. It only serves the

station and not other parts of the town. It goes to Shaftesbury and the service has been expanded in Shaftesbury.

**Colehill PC:** The Council gave delegated powers to the Clerk, Chairman and Vice-Chairman until a short time ago. The Council is now holding meetings using Zoom. Commemorations were held for the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries of VE and VJ Days but the events planned were scaled back due to Covid-19. The Council was strongly criticised for keeping its play area closed when Dorset Council re-opened its play area. The Parish Council's play area remained closed due to a safety issue involving some rotten timbers. The Council is now awaiting quotes for repairs.

**West Moors Town Council:** The Council changed to a Town Council because of the size of its community but will not have a Mayor. The Council is meeting using Zoom though the office has now re-opened.

**Weymouth Town Council:** The Council is meeting using Zoom and has included public participation. Town and beach events during the summer were cancelled due to Covid-19. The Council has established a number of working parties. It expects to continue to use Zoom for meetings in future, especially working party meetings Staff are partly working from home. A support scheme was organised by the Council with local Churches during the lockdown. The Mayor's term of office has been extended until May 2021 due to the situation. The Council has lost £500K in income due to Covid-19. A partnership is being developed with Dorset and Portland Town Councils. There is now an elected Leader. The Harbourside has been temporarily pedestrianised and this has worked well but there has been some criticism. There are some new toilets and the beach has been very busy since it was re-opened. There is concern that the contract of the Conservation Officer transferred from Weymouth Borough Council, but this post is needed.

**Dorchester Town Council:** The Mayor and Deputy Mayor have been re-elected to May 2021. There is a Heritage plan for recovery underway and the town is recovering well. The Kings Arms was due to reopen the week following the meeting. The plans for a new hospital car park were due to be considered on the following Tuesday. The plans were recommended for refusal though the Town Council and many residents supported them

**Wareham TC:** . The Town Hall remains closed and staff are working at home. This is working very well. The Corn Exchange is completely closed. Projects involving play areas are on hold at present. A working party is urgently trying to solve a problem with the CAB roof. The new Mayor and Deputy Mayor were elected in June and are Cllr Lucia Kirk and Cllr Keith Green. A draft Neighbourhood Plan has been submitted to the Inspector but if approved, no referendum can be held at present. The position regarding adoption in these circumstances is not clear. When the beaches were very busy in Purbeck resorts, the traffic in Wareham was a bit problem.

**Ferndown Town Council:** A new Mayor was elected in September. The Barrington Centre is being refurbished and it is hoped that it will re-open in January. The new play area is open.

**Corfe Mullen Town Council:** The Clerk retired after 18 years service and the new Clerk "hit the ground running". The Council is using Zoom for meetings. The office re-opened this week with suitable spacing and screens in place. The Council has advertised for an Assistant

Clerk and new Groundsman but had surprisingly few applications. Climate emergency events have been cancelled. There is great concern about the White Paper on Planning. The new allotments are settling in well.

**Wimborne Minster Town Council:** Many events including the Folk Festival have been cancelled. The Folk Festival brings in approx. £1.02m to the town. A Folk Festival is being planned for 2021 but there is concern that it might not be able to go ahead. There will be a display of Christmas lights, but the events for New Year's Eve have been cancelled. The Town Council may take over the new Football Club, Skate park and SANGs. There is great concern about "tombstoning" from one of the river bridges. There has been one death due to this activity in previous years. The bridge belongs to the Highways Authority which will not take any action to prevent the activity. The Mayor has visited all services in Wimborne to say thank you for all they have done during the Covid-19 emergency. The local support scheme has worked very well including delivering pre-prepared meals – 716 in one week at the highpoint of the emergency and including to people outside of Wimborne with the full knowledge of the local ward Dorset Councillor. This service is continuing.

(As a Dorset Councillor, Cllr Shane Bartlett, current Mayor of Wimborne, also reported that there is great concern among Dorset Councillors about the Planning White Paper and a joint response from all Councillors will be submitted)

**Bridport Town Council:** Meetings were suspended and delegated powers given and used until recently. Some Councillors were unable to take part in remote meetings but now the Council is holding hybrid meetings as social distancing can be practised in the Town Hall with few Councillors present. Working from home was set up very quickly for Officers. Outside staff were able to continue working and have been able to do some extra tasks as it has been quiet. The Council has lost income from the Tourist Information Centre, market and car parks. The market has re-opened and some parking bays are being used to give extra space. Two side streets are also being used and the market is at 80% capacity. A trial event is planned though there is some doubt that it will be able to take place. This is a music event on the Millennium Green. There will be painted zones, limited ticket sales, no food or drink and the Police will be in attendance. There were some staff vacancies which have not been filled but it is hoped to fill them before long. Quotes are being sought for solar canopies in the Town Council's two car parks. These will generate electricity and provide charging points for cars and bikes. It is hoped to start "round the town" bus services soon. The sculpture trail around the green is appreciated by those using the green for exercise. There was a major planning issue in Bothenhampton. The Neighbourhood Plan was invoked to demonstrate that a retrospective planning application regarding a building which had not been built according to previous planning permission should not be approved. Dorset Council rejected the retrospective application.

**Blandford Town Council:** The staff have all worked very hard during the emergency. Land has finally been transferred to the Council from a developer at last. The market has re-opened. The Council has decided not to ask for rent from local clubs which have no income at present. Sports clubs are most adversely affected by the Covid-19 emergency. The Council has been using Teams for meetings. The representative thinks that using Zoom is easier. New housing is planned on the edge of the town but outside the town's boundary. A boundary review is needed. The occupants will use facilities in the town but will make no contribution to the cost of providing the facilities and services. The parish within which the housing will be built has good income and levies no precept.

**Lyme Regis:** The Council resumed meetings recently, having delegated powers previously. Some staff have been furloughed. Some outside staff have experienced disappointing levels of abuse and rudeness. A support group was set up and has had over 100 volunteers. A volunteer has been allocated to each street. Those with sheltered housing in their street have been particularly busy. The scheme is still operating. One of the staff set up a garden growing scheme to help improve community spirit which has been very successful. The Council is one of three Councils nationally been selected to take part in a Sustainable Transport and Community Engagement pilot project. “Carbon Literacy” training will be offered. Dorset Council has closed the Tourist Information Centre and the Town Council is converting it to office space. The Council has lost approx. £300k due to the Covid-19 emergency. The local bus service has restarted but cannot carry many passengers. The Farmers’ Market has restarted. Cllr Belinda Bawden is a member of NALC’s Planet Action task and finish group.

**Beaminster Town Council:** The town has been decorated with bunting and banners to encourage people to come into town and use local businesses. A scarecrow competition and treasure hunt had also been held. The Council is to employ a dog warden and Dorset Council has agreed to train the new officer. There is a long standing dispute over the future use of a piece of land. It was scheduled for industrial use and the Town Council believes it is still needed for this purpose. Dorset Council wishes to use it for residential use although a section 52 agreement has been in place for 34 years. The Town Council wishes to see more local employment and reduce, not encourage, the “dormitory” nature of the town. The local bus service, run by volunteers on Saturdays has been suspended due to problems with insurance. The company concerned believes the bus has been involved in more accidents than it actually has. A group of volunteers operating during the lockdown has won an award from the High Sheriff for volunteering.

**Verwood Town Council:** The Town Clerk, Assistant Town Clerk and Clerical Assistant have all worked from home but have now re-opened the Office having made great efforts to make it Covid-19 secure. Council Meetings have been held by Zoom from very early in the lockdown. Mayor making was postponed from May and will take place at the September meeting. There is one casual vacancy which will be filled at a later date, no election having been called. It is hoped that the community support scheme will continue after the emergency is over.

The next meeting will be the committee’s AGM and will be held on 6<sup>th</sup> November by Zoom

*The DAPTC Executive has decided to hold the AGM as planned on 14<sup>th</sup> November by Zoom. Motions for consideration will be circulated shortly, as will the draft constitution for approval. A special meeting of the Executive will be held shortly to consider a response to the White Paper on Planning.*