

## PORTLAND TOWN COUNCIL

### TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD AT 7PM ON WEDNESDAY 24<sup>th</sup> JULY 2019 AT PORTLAND COMMUNITY VENUE

#### **PRESENT:**

Councillors: Charlie Flack (Chairman), Jim Draper, Rob Hughes, Dave Thurston, Sue Cocking, Sandy West, Berny Parkes, Carralyn Parkes, Paul Kimber, Pete Roper, Sarah Harpley and Cathy Atkins.

#### **IN ATTENDANCE:**

Andy Matthews (Neighbourhood Plan Working Group) and 6 members of the public.

#### **3916. Chairman's Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and advised that there was no planned fire alarm testing and indicated to those present the various fire exits.

#### **3917. Prayers**

The Mayor's Chaplain Mrs Paula Brown led the meeting in prayer.

#### **3918. Presentation by Rachelle Smith secretary of the South West Dorset Multicultural Network.**

Mrs Smith delivered a presentation highlighting the work being undertaken by the Multicultural Network and the difficulties being faced by Syrian refugees on Portland. She explained that there were two main issues that the refugees faced in relocating, that being the lack of affordable housing and the language barrier. This, she explained was exacerbated by unfamiliarity with the culture and poor transport links. She concluded her presentation by stating that there were two main ways in which people could help, a) by being prepared to rent out any spare properties for an affordable rent, and b) by becoming a volunteer to help with hospital visits and shopping etc. She especially asked that if anybody who could speak Arabic or knew of any Arabic speakers and who would be prepared to help out to please contact her.

The Chairman thanked her for her very informative presentation.

#### **3919. Apologies for Absence**

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Lewis.

#### **3920. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

#### **3921. To Approve the Minutes of the Meeting Held on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2019**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed to be a true and accurate record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

#### **3922. Minute Update and Matters Arising**

- a. Item 3911 – Cllr Parkes advised the meeting that the donation of the display case, and contents by Portland Museum would be on a long-term loan arrangement rather than permanent transfer.

#### **3923. Democratic Public Half Hour Open Forum**

- a. Mr Tony Walter spoke on the issue of moving Portland towards Green Energy. He requested that the Council look at their current arrangement and asked that they consider switching to a green tariff. He also asked the Council to consider setting up a community energy project. **See Annex A** to these minutes.

The Chairman responded, stating that there was to be a climate emergency meeting to be held on 31<sup>st</sup> of July and suggested that this item be discussed further then. Cllr Draper added that further investigation would be undertaken and would be discussed in more depth at the next Policy and Resource Committee Meeting.

Mr Matthews also added that the issue of alternative power was being pursued with the Local Enterprise Partnership, whilst Cllr Kimber stated that he had emailed Dorset Council with regard to potential funding to support this issue of alternative power generation.

- b. Mrs Lesley Saunders stated that she was very concerned with end of life care on the Island. She felt that many people did not wish to leave the Island to receive end of life care and were refusing to leave, this in itself, she said, was causing additional stress to both the patient and their families and the situation was being exacerbated with the loss of facilities at Portland Hospital. She concluded by saying, that whilst she recognised that this was the responsibility of the NHS she wished the Council to consider what it could do to ameliorate the situation.

The Chairman stated that Helen Persey (who had presented at the last Full Council Meeting) was due to come back again to provide an update and felt that this was a question that could be put to her.

- c. Mr Paul Snow spoke on the Wages crisis, child poverty and ill-health within Weymouth and Portland. He presented damning statistics on social deprivation within Weymouth and Portland and asked how the Council felt that they could rationalise proposing an increase in the IT Budget and the move to electric equipment, whilst also endorsing Cllr Kimber's proposal to submit a nomination to Dorset Council on the issue of low incomes, poverty and social mobility in South Dorset (see min 3906 – June '19). He asked that, when the Councillors consider future proposals to commit funds that they consider how better that money could be utilised.
- d. Mr Derek Vincent suggested that, in support of the declaration of a climate emergency previously made by the Council; that rather than move to electric equipment which would only produce a seasonal saving, that the Council revert back to using one vehicle for the Gardening team (rather than the two currently being used) which would produce an immediate reduction.

The Chairman advised that this question could be best answered by the Green Spaces Working Group.

#### **3924. Chairman's Update**

- a. The Chairman advised that Councillor Thurston, the Clerk and himself had viewed some of the assets that were being considered for transfer to Portland Town Council. He added that where the assets represented a liability or did not have any community value then they would be left with Dorset Council.
- b. A meeting had taken place with the Granddaughter (Juliet Springer) of Captain Pennington Legh who had drowned off of Chesil Beach in the preparations for the D Day Landings, and who was looking to erect a memorial to him. A site had been agreed, close to the Beacon (by the Heights Hotel).
- c. The Chairman advised that a public meeting was to be held on the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> August. The aim of the meeting was to provide an update on the progress of the new Council. He added that the meeting would be attended by Mr David Ackerley (Senior Ranger for DC) who would provide an update on DC's plans to deal with the Brown Tailed Moth caterpillars.

#### **3925. Town Mayor's Announcements**

- a. The Mayor advised the meeting of the engagements that she had attended during July 2019 and for the record these are attached at **Annex B**.

### **3926. Receive written reports from and County Councillors**

No written reports have been received.

### **3927. Financial Matters**

- a. **Payments for Authorisation** – The Chairman of the Policy and Resource Committee presented payments for authorisation totalling £30,054.54, the list of payments is held at **Annex C**.

**Authorisation of the payments was unanimously approved.**

- b. The RFO explained that he was legally required to provide a quarterly expenditure and income report, and normally this would include a comparison against the previous quarter. However, as this was the first quarter with an increased precept there was very little to compare it against. He did, however, explain that at the end of the first quarter at 25% of the way through the year expenditure sat at 20.66%. See **Annex D**.
- c. The RFO provided confirmation that the letter which had been sent to Dorset Council seeking £200k from their reserves to cover known expenditure at the point of asset transfer (1<sup>st</sup> April 2019) had been received by them but as yet no response has been provided.
- d. He stated that his one concern was that bills for Business Rates on the carparks and toilets etc had been received at just short of £19k. The bills were unexpected (no forewarning had been given) and, he felt were disproportionately high. Whilst he had deflected payment of these until November, without some reduction payment would certainly impact the budget.

A discussion ensued on the cost of water at Portland Bill Toilets (£8k) and it was noted that the hut owners pay ground rates, a proportion of which covered the costs of the sluice. It was suggested that the RFO speak to the Crown Representative and obtain the details of who the landlord for each field was and then write to them to see if some money could be recovered from them. It was agreed that this issue be dealt with by the Toilets Working Group.

**Action on the Toilets Working Group to meet and discuss and produce a plan to reduce the water bills for the toilets.**

**A vote was taken on whether to accept the quarterly report with a unanimous agreement being returned.**

- e. Internal Audit Approval – The RFO requested the recent internal audit report be accepted by the Council as a true and accurate record, acknowledging that the 1 medium, 1 low observation and the 1 observation recorded for information had or were being actioned. Actions as approved by the June 2019 Policy and Resource Committee Meeting.

Cllr Cocking thanked the RFO, on behalf of the Council for the hard work that he had undertaken to reduce the financial risk to the Council.

**A vote was taken to accept the internal audit report with a unanimous agreement being returned.**

- f. Pre- approval was sought for various items which breached the current £150 limit; servicing of the mower, procurement of a notice board for the allotments and a skip for the allotments. The RFO also advised that the ‘Spinner’ in Victoria Gardens Play Park had broken and a quote to supply the parts to repair it had been received at £1,053.11. He further advised that the Friends of Victoria Gardens (FOVG) had approached the Court Leet who had agreed to pay the full cost of the repair. The Court Leet had made the grant to FOVG who had presented PTC with a cheque.

**Approval to proceed received a unanimous vote.**

### **3928. Introduction of Paperless Committee Meetings**

The Chairman reminded the meeting that a paper had been issued with the Agenda (Annex B) which presented the case for the introduction of paperless committee meetings and provide two options; Option 1 to implement the transition for all meetings over the next two months and Option 2 to opt for a pilot project on an appropriate committee.

Cllr Roper explained the rationale behind the motion stating that with the declaration of a climate emergency by the Council he felt that it was imperative that the Council now pursued ways in which to reduce the impact of PTC on climate change. He further explained that following this course of action would have both environmental benefits and cost savings.

A discussion ensued, during which it was suggested that a screen and projector be employed, as per the Planning Committee Meetings which would aid those people who did not have tablets and still wished to view the agenda and such.

Cllr Draper proposed that Option 2 be implemented for the Planning Committee Meeting and that if successful then it be rolled out to all meetings by the end of the current financial year.

**A unanimous vote for Option 2 was returned.**

### **3929. Proposed Increase in the IT Budget**

Cllr Roper stated that a paper in support of this proposal was issued with the Agenda (Annex C) and explained the background to why the proposal was being made. Following a meeting of the IT and Comms Working Group it was agreed that the current website was not fit for purpose and needed to be upgraded, in addition additional email accounts were required together with other IT equipment.

Cllr Draper explained that this was not a request to spend money, but a request to augment the current budget of £3K by a further £17K to bring the total budget to £20K. He further explained that having taken account of some of the objections put forward by the other Councillors on the proposed increase, that rather than seeking an increase of £17K that it be reduced to £7K taking the budget to £10K. He reiterated that any decision to spend money would need to be approved by Full Council and undertaken in accordance with the procurement regulations, which required a full tender exercise, and that he was not proposing that a contract be placed with the Company that had provided the advice.

**The Chairman confirmed that whilst there was agreement that a new website was required the motion was now to move an additional £7K from the general reserves to the IT budget. A vote was taken with a majority response in favour being returned.**

### **3930. Green Spaces - Move to Battery Operated Equipment**

Annex D to the Agenda provided a strategy paper on the proposal to replace the petrol driven power tools currently used by the Gardening team with battery powered tools. The tools currently being used having been transferred from Weymouth Town Council when the Councils split in April 2019; the tools now being used were old and unreliable. Cllr Roper explained that he believed that there was an overwhelming case for the replacement of the petrol driven power tools not only were they environmentally friendly (reminding the meeting that the Council had recently passed a motion declaring a climate emergency) but also to mitigate the health and safety risks currently being experienced by both the operators and public. A move to battery operated equipment would reduce the risk of vibration injuries and noise and pollution related health issues. He proposed two options for consideration; Option 1 – replace all existing petrol powered devices at an approx. cost of £18,000 (VAT inc), or Option 2 – replace all existing petrol powered devices with the exception of the battery powered mower at a reduced cost of approx. £16,400.00 (VAT inc).

Cllr Draper informed the meeting that a previous Finance Committee had approved the purchase of a petrol driven strimmer, which, because of environmental concerns had not yet been purchased. Cllr Roper added that the expenditure was not unbudgeted as there was sufficient money within the equipment budget to cover the costs. A number of questions were posed relating to the life of the tools and specifically the batteries. It was explained that the tools themselves would become profitable after 3 years. Cllr Cocking pressed that the health and safety of the staff was paramount. David Avery (PTC Head Gardener) offered all Councillors the opportunity to trial the current tools and to see for themselves the conditions experienced by the gardening team in using the current tools.

A discussion was had regarding the manufacturer of the tools proposed, it was explained that currently there is only one manufacturer (Perlunc) who were manufacturing a truly commercial solution which made seeking a comparative cost from another manufacturer impossible.

Cllr Thurston (seconded by Cllr West) proposed an amendment to the motion, in that the Council vote on a move to Battery Powered Tools without agreeing a monetary limit at this time.

A vote was taken which only received three votes and was therefore not taken forward.

Cllr Parkes (seconded by Cllr Cocking) proposed that the Council proceed with Option 1 as stated

A vote was taken on Cllr Parkes proposal, the proposal received a majority vote and was carried.

**Resolved that the Green Spaces Working Group pursue the purchase of battery-operated equipment as per Option 1 up to the value of £18,000; and the costs be attributed to the equipment budget.**

### **3931. Councillor Vacancy**

The Chairman explained that approval had been received for the Council to proceed with co-option action to fill the vacancy left by the passing of Cllr Nowak. He added that an advert had been placed in the Free Portland News and on the Council's, website advertising the vacancy with a closing date for applications of 31<sup>st</sup> August 2019. Candidates will be asked to attend the September Council meeting to present their case for co-option.

### **3932. Formation of Management and Scrutiny Committee**

The Chairman explained that due to the expanded requirements of the Council there was a need to form a Committee to deal with planning and policy issues. It was proposed that the members should be the Chairman, the Mayor and the Chairman of the Policy and Resource Committee, it was also proposed by Cllr Draper that Cllr Roper also be included. Cllr Kimber pointed out that scrutiny of Council decisions by Council members would not be acceptable. Cllr Draper explained that it was not really scrutiny but rather forward planning and objective setting for direction of the Council; and suggested that the term scrutiny was probably a misnomer.

Cllr Draper proposed that as all recommendations would need to be submitted to Full Council for resolution, that the group should in fact be a working group. Making it a working group would mean that no minutes would be required, thus relieving the Officers of any administrative burden; whilst the requirement to bring any recommendations to Full Council would ensure full transparency.

Cllr Cocking suggested that it would probably be useful to agree Terms of Reference prior to the commencement of the working group.

The Chairman proposed that this action be deferred until the next meeting, during which time there be an informal meeting to discuss the Terms of Reference for the working group.

**Following a vote, it was unanimously agreed that the proposed members of the group meet, informally to agree Terms of Reference for the Management Working Group and present at the next Full Council Meeting.**

### **3933. St. Peter's Church**

Cllr Roper presented a report on the current state of St Peter's Church and asked the Council to support an action to fund research to determine who owns the church and to subsequently liaise with them to initiate action to start restoration. Cllr Cocking explained that it was in private ownership but that she was aware that the owner had died and that it was under probate at this present time and that there was very little that could be done until such time that probate had been completed.

Cllr Kimber stated that a copy of the report had been sent to the leader of Dorset Council and the Conservation Officer, he continued that it was essential that a marker be put down that made it clear that there was support for the church be saved. He acknowledged that there was a process to be followed starting with probate, but that it was necessary to keep the pressure on. He expressed a view that the Council should contact Dorset Council to re-iterate the fact that there

**Following a vote, it was resolved that a letter be sent to Dorset Council asking them to take action and to contact the owner and to convey the Council's concern over the building.**

### **3934. Photographic ID for Councillors**

Cllr West explained that as there was a new Council with several new Councillors it would be a good idea for photographic ID's to be issued. She felt that this would go some way to safeguarding vulnerable people, many of them older and provide them with a degree of comfort when meeting with Councillors.

The Chairman proposed that an action be put on the IT and Comms Working Group to take forward this proposal.

**Following a vote, it was unanimously resolved that the issue of photographic ID be dealt with by the IT and Comms Working Group.**

### **3935. Ratification of Financial Regulations**

The Chairman explained that the new Financial Regulations had been approved at the Policy and Resources Meeting in June 2019 and that the action for this meeting was to ratify that approval. A vote was taken which returned a unanimous agreement.

Resolved that the revised Financial regulations for Portland Town Council, as agreed at the Policy and Resource Meeting held in June 2019 be accepted.

### **3936. Report from the Marine, Environmental and Tourism (MET) Partnership**

Cllr Draper provided a brief report on the MET meeting held in July 2019. He brought two things to the attention of the meeting.

- i) Cllr Harpley agreed to update, with the help of the Assistant Town Clerk, the emergency plan. Having been written a few years ago it was now in need of review and update.
- ii) Cllr Harpley agreed to undertake an audit of the Island's defibrillators. Ensuring that where they are situated, they are being maintained, recognising that many sit outside of retail outlets which have changed hands.

He also informed the meeting that a small sub working group had been formed which would specifically look at tourism. This sub-working group have identified three actions:

- i) Look at the Council's website and see if an area of it can deal specifically with tourism.
- ii) Pursue the undertaking of a scoping study to understand the feasibility of accessing the missing link element of the footpath.
- iii) Pursue an access path to the top of the Island.

**3937. Appointment of Community Safety Officer**

No definitive nominations for this post had been received; and it was generally conceded that more information on the role of the Community Safety Officer was required prior to receiving any. As Inspector Gosling is to be present at the Full Council Meeting in September it was proposed that this issued be deferred until then.

**It was resolved that this issue be deferred until the Full Council Meeting in September.**

**3938. Exclusion of Press & Public (discretionary)**

There were no matters to discuss.

**3939. Date of Next Meeting**

The Committee's next meeting is scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 18<sup>th</sup> September 2019 at the Portland Community Venue at 7.00 pm.

The meeting ended at 21.15 hours.

Signed ..... Dated.....  
Chairman