

Minutes of the **SPECIAL MEETING** of the Swanage Town Council held at the Town Hall, High Street, Swanage on **WEDNESDAY, 20th MAY 2026** at 7.00 p.m.

PRESENT:-

Councillor C. Tomes (Town Mayor) - Chairman

Councillor J. Bishop
Councillor M. Bonfield
Councillor P. Burrige
Councillor M. Coward
Councillor J. Dorrington (to 7.35 p.m.)
Councillor T. Foster
Councillor J. Lejeune
Councillor G. Suttle
Councillor C. Sutton

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

24. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for their inability to attend the Meeting were received from Councillors Moreton and Vile.

25. **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.

26. **TO CONSIDER THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE INTERNAL AUDITOR AND TO CONFIRM THERE IS NO CONFLICT OF INTEREST WITH THE EXTERNAL AUDITOR**

It was reported that the external auditor required affirmation of the independence of the internal auditor. Although this was not a statutory requirement it was noted as good practice, as per Sections 4.9 – 4.11: Independence within the *SAPPP Practitioners' Guide*, which recommends a review of the personal, financial and professional independence of the internal auditor on an annual basis.

It was further reported that as a part of the Intermediate Level Review the external auditor, BDO LLP, requires evidenced confirmation on an annual basis that there are no conflicts of interest with the aforementioned auditor. Following consideration of these matters, it was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Foster and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-**

To confirm the independence of the appointed internal auditor, Darkin-Miller Chartered Accountants, and that there are no conflicts of interest with the external auditor, BDO LLP.

It was reported that the existing contract with the Internal Auditor was for a three-year duration with the option for two one-year extensions; it was noted that the 2026/27 audit would require invoking the first one-year extension. A point was raised regarding a periodic change in auditor being seen as good practice, and this was noted as a matter to be considered at the next Finance and Governance Committee meeting in July 2026.

27. **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2025/26**

(a) **Internal Audit Report 2025/26 - Visits 5 & 6 of 6**

Consideration was given to the Internal Audit Report issued for Visits 5 & 6 of 6 by the Council's Internal Auditor. It was noted that areas tested were:

- Risk Management
- Trusts
- Year End
- Lease Income; and
- General Income (conclusion of testing).

It was further noted that 1 high, 6 medium and 1 low recommendation had been made, with the medium and high recommendations reported to Members. It was proposed by Councillor Coward, seconded by Councillor Lejeune and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Internal Audit Report 2025/26 – Visits 5 & 6 of 6 be accepted and approved.

(b) **Annual Internal Audit Report 2025/26**

Consideration was given to the Annual Internal Audit Report (AIAR) for 2025/26, page 3 of the AGAR. It was noted that the Internal Auditor had stated YES to all relevant control objectives.

Consideration was also given to the supplementary Annual Internal Audit Report 2025/26 prepared by Darkin-Miller Chartered Accountants. The document consolidated the High and Medium recommendations that had been made during the year, with 6 visits in total. The report also provided an appraisal function for the Council's internal control system, which was deemed effective.

It was proposed by Councillor Sutton, seconded by Councillor Bishop and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Annual Internal Audit Report 2025/26 be accepted and approved.

28. **TO REVIEW THE SYSTEM OF INTERNAL CONTROL 2025/26**

In accordance with paragraph 6(1)(a) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, a Report on the Findings of the Review of the System of Internal Control 2025/26 was submitted for consideration. The report set out the role of the internal auditor and the steps taken during the year to enhance the Council's system of control, including the review of policy documents and charitable trust governance. The importance of the internal audit process and the scrutiny role played by the Finance & Governance Committee were highlighted. It was noted that the Corporate Risk Register, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations would be reviewed during 2026/27. It was proposed by Councillor Dorrington, seconded by Councillor Bonfield, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Report on the Findings of the Review of the System of Internal Control 2025/26 be approved and accepted.

29. **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN 2025/26**

(a) **Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2025/26**

It was reported that the AGS contained a new Assertion for 2025/26, Assertion 10, relating to IT and Data Management. This Assertion had been marked as yes, with the Council having made suitable arrangements for its IT

and data management and has complied with proper practices, with the adoption of an IT Policy and the continued engagement of i-West in reviewing the Council's compliance with its data protection obligations. This built on the Annual Internal Audit Report 2025/26 which confirmed compliance in relation to these matters. It was proposed by Councillor Foster, seconded by Councillor Bishop, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 be approved and signed for submission to the Council's external auditor with the Annual Governance & Accountability Return 2025/26.

Councillor Bishop left the meeting.

(b) **Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2025/26**

Members considered the Accounting Statements 2025/26 and the supplementary Financial Review 2025/26 provided to support and explain the figures in Section 2 of the AGAR. It was reported that the 2025/26 financial year had been positive, with higher than budgeted car parking and investment income and lower than estimated staffing costs. Beach Gardens had also performed well. Reserves had increased by £280k over the 2025/26 financial year in total, and it was reported that £1.85m was held in an earmarked reserve for the Green Seafront Scheme at 31st March 2026. It was proposed by Councillor Foster, seconded by Councillor Sutton and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Accounting Statements 2025/26 be approved and signed for submission to the Council's external auditor with the Annual Governance & Accountability Return 2025/26.

30. **ANNUAL TREASURY REPORT 2025/26**

It was reported that the outturn for the 2025/26 financial year was positive, with a budget of £240k and an outturn of £287k from investment income. This was a result of higher than estimated balances being held due to the deferment of significant capital expenditure to forthcoming financial years and high interest rates enduring throughout the year.

Pooled funds showed unrealised gains of £149k in total, with both gains and losses reported on individual funds. It was noted that £214k was held in an earmarked reserve to protect the Council should any losses be realised upon the sale of investments when required to fund the Green Seafront Scheme. It was proposed by Councillor BurrIDGE seconded by Councillor Coward, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Annual Treasury Report 2025/26 be approved and accepted.

31. **ITEMS OF INFORMATION AND MATTERS FOR FORTHCOMING AGENDAS**

Members were informed that the Council had been approached by Cultural Purbeck to act as the accountable body in respect of their bid to be the Town of Culture 2028, and that the Town Clerk had agreed to this for the purpose of the application.

Councillor Bishop re-entered the meeting.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Suttle and AGREED:-

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 due to commercial and legal confidentiality.

32. **PROCUREMENT – GREEN SEAFRONT SCHEME**

(a) **Communications & Engagement Plan – To consider quote from Dorset Coast Forum**

Members considered in detail the briefing note submitted containing a quote from Dorset Coast Forum to undertake communications and public engagement for the Green Seafront Scheme in 2026/27.

Discussion arose as to how much work would need to be undertaken during 2026/27, with planning taking up to 12 weeks, and how informative this would be for the public given the potential lack of newsworthy content.

Councillor Dorrington left the meeting.

The possibility of utilising internal resources and the Council's website as an alternative was discussed, with the Communications Working Party being a key resource. The potential to engage Dorset Council's communications team was also put forward, given that the Green Seafront Scheme was being managed alongside Dorset Council's Shore Road project. It was proposed by Councillor Tomes, seconded by Councillor Suttle and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That the appointment of a supplier to undertake communications and public engagement be deferred, and that a meeting of the Communications Working Party be held to discuss the matter in more depth and report back to the Council Meeting to be held on 22nd June 2026.

(b) **Schedule 1 of Collaboration Agreement with Dorset Council – To consider proposed charges payable for project management fees for 2026/27**

Members considered a briefing note detailing the fees payable under the Collaboration Agreement, Schedule 1 for management support provided by Dorset Council for the Green Seafront Scheme. It was noted that the assigned officer's input had been invaluable to date. It was proposed by Councillor Lejeune, seconded by Councillor Sutton and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

To engage Dorset Council via the Collaboration Agreement Schedule 1, to provide project management support for the Green Seafront Scheme in the 2026/27 financial year with a budget of £31,960.

(c) **Arboricultural Impact Appraisal and Method Statement – To consider entering into a contract**

The Assets and Compliance Manager reported that she had received several quotes for the provision of an Arboricultural Impact Appraisal Method Statement. Following discussion it was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Suttle and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That the Assets & Compliance Manager be given delegated authority to issue a contract for the provision of an Arboricultural Impact Appraisal and Method Statement up to £3,000.

33. **PROPERTY RELATED LEGAL MATTERS**

(a) **Day's Park - Vodafone Lease Renewal and Rent Review**

Further to Minute No. 237 (a) of the Council Meeting held on 27th April 2026, Members received an update regarding the lease renewal and rent review for the Vodafone mast at Day's Park. It was proposed by Councillor Lejeune, seconded by Councillor Suttle and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

To instruct solicitors to conclude negotiations and agree revised lease terms, as set out in the confidential briefing paper prepared for this item, subject to ongoing legal advice.

(b) **Football Club – To receive an update re. the terms of agreement for the demolition of the Football Club Sports Hall**

Further to Minute No. 242 of the Extraordinary Council Meeting held on 6th May 2026, Members received an update from the Town Clerk and Town Mayor regarding recent discussions with Swanage Town & Herston Football Club regarding the demolition of the former sports hall at Day's Park.

The meeting closed at 7.45 p.m.
