

## PORTLAND TOWN COUNCIL

Council Offices  
Fortuneswell  
PORTLAND  
Dorset  
DT5 1LW

E-mail: [portlandtowncncnl@btconnect.com](mailto:portlandtowncncnl@btconnect.com)  
Tel: 01305 821638

20<sup>th</sup> November 2014

Dear Councillor

You are hereby summoned to attend an **ADDITIONAL MEETING of PORTLAND TOWN COUNCIL**, to be held at **EASTON METHODIST CHURCH HALL, EASTON, PORTLAND**, on **THURSDAY, 27<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2014**, commencing at 7.00 pm when the business set out below will be transacted.

The meeting has been called at short notice and associated agenda papers will be circulated as they become available.

It should be noted that it is the Council's intention that all meetings of the Council and its Committees be recorded aurally.

Yours faithfully

Ian Looker  
Town Clerk

## **A G E N D A**

- 1. Prayers**
- 2. Apologies for Absence**
- 3. Declarations of Interest** – to receive any declarations from Councillors or Officers of pecuniary or non-pecuniary interests regarding matters to be considered at this meeting, together with a statement on the nature of those interests.
- 4. Public Half-Hour** – to raise issues relating to the agenda
- 5. Minutes** – to confirm the minutes of the Additional Town Council meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2014 (to follow)
- 6. Minute Update and Matters Arising from the Minutes**
- 7. Staffing Review Report** – to consider the issues raised by Mr Randle in the report and his subsequent presentation, in particular the Council's overall strategic direction and the report recommendations tabled as motions at the Additional meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> November (attachments to follow)
- 8. Exclusion of Press & Public (discretionary)**  
“That pursuant to the provisions of Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s), by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.”
- 9. Date of Next Meeting**  
The next scheduled meeting of the Council is due to take place on Wednesday, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2015, starting at 7.00pm.

## PORTLAND TOWN COUNCIL

### ADDITIONAL TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 20<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2014 AT EASTON METHODIST CHURCH HALL

**PRESENT:** Councillors R. Hughes (Chair), Mrs S. Bradley, G. Chadwick, R. Denton-White, Ms S. Lees, A. Matthews, T. Munro, R. Nowak, Mrs S. Reynolds, J. Thorner and R. Wild.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Ian Looker (Town Clerk), Nick Randle and Sam Shippen (Nick Randle Associates), together with four members of the public.

#### **2723 – PRAYERS**

The Clerk led the meeting in prayer.

#### **2724 – APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Cllr. Miss A. Munro, Mrs E. Munro-Price and I. Munro-Price.

#### **2725 – DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr. Tim Munro declared a personal and prejudicial interest in agenda item 6 – Staffing Review Report. The Chair took this as applying to all the other Council members.

#### **2726 – ORDER OF BUSINESS**

The Chair agreed to taking agenda item 4 – Public Half-Hour after item 6 - Staffing Review Report.

#### **2727 – EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Cllr. Tim Munro drew members' attention to Standing Orders 38 and 39. With reference to SO 38 regarding Council employees he suggested there was no need for the press and public to be excluded from the intended debate and the report could be made public subject to two redactions.

Cllr. Munro proposed that a sentence on page 16 of the report, para 3 and para 4 on page 17 should be redacted.

Following a request from the Clerk that individual staff salaries and hours, current and projected, in the report remain confidential. Cllr. Denton-White proposed an amendment that confidentiality in the report be extended to include these. The amendment was **CARRIED**. (For: 6 votes, Against: 5 votes, Abstentions: 0 votes)

The substantive motion – that the report be published with the exception of one sentence on page 16, para 3, para 4 on page 17, and staff salaries and hours was **RESOLVED**. (10-1-0)

It was proposed by Cllr. Chadwick and **RESOLVED** – that the staffing report be published the following day in its redacted form on Facebook.

**2728 – STAFFING REVIEW REPORT**

Mr Randle gave a presentation of his report and answered questions from members on its contents.

With reference to SO 39 concerning expenditure it was proposed by Cllr. Munro and **RESOLVED** – that all the recommendations in the report should be treated as Council recommendations and stand adjourned for debate at a subsequent additional meeting. (11-0-0)

Cllr. Denton-White proposed a formal vote of thanks to Nick Randle and Sam Shippen, which was **CARRIED**.

**2729 – DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meetings of the Town Council are due to take place on Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2014 (Additional) and Wednesday, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2014, both starting at 7.00 pm.

The meeting ended at 8.50 pm.

Signed ..... Dated .....  
(Chair)

## Staffing Review Report

“Portland Town Council is at a significant crossroads in its history,” states the report in its conclusion. Nick Randle emphasised that in his presentation last week by showing two arrows pointing in opposite directions. This may well be the crucial choice the Council has to make either at this week’s meeting or in the near future.

In fact there may be four options available rather than the two put forward by Mr Randle. The first option broadly is to ignore the report and let the Council continue on its way as it has been doing for a good number of ways. However Mr Randle made the case that in the longer term it is not a sustainable alternative.

One viable option would be simply to close down the Council. There is an opinion among Island residents that local government on Portland is best left to Weymouth & Portland Borough Council. There is a counter-argument that Portland’s Island status (and royal manor) gives it a strong identity, which in the future would face not only competition from its larger neighbour, but the towns and villages of two more districts. This also occurs when the tide of “localism” is flowing strongly among the political parties and other towns throughout the country are contemplating enhanced powers and responsibilities.

The third option and the report’s second is to commit to the growth of Portland Town Council. Of course this was the subject of the second phase of the planned Council review and so is not analysed in detail by the first report. There are indicators in what has already been written, but much remains unexplored.

Finally mention must be made of Cllr. Tim Munro’s suggestion at the meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> November that other answers were available to the Council. What these were was not made clear at the time. It rests with Cllr. Munro to share his thoughts with the other members and indeed the public at large.

### Standing Order 39

This Council procedure was raised by Cllr. Munro at the last meeting and is a primary factor in the structure of this coming meeting. The report’s recommendations have been tabled for discussion as now the Council’s own. Some recommendations probably will have little financial impact, but some will have a significant impact.

SO 39 states that judgement of how much effect financially any particular recommendation will have rests with the Chairman of Council. It also requires that discussion and decisions on the financially significant items be made at an **ordinary** meeting of the Council. Members are reminded that this week’s meeting is **additional** and at present the next scheduled ordinary meeting does not take place until February.



Portland Town Council Staffing and Strategy Review

# Phase 1 Final Report Staffing

**Nick Randle Associates Ltd.**

Town, Community and Parish Council Consultants

Fostering Best Practice Excellence in the Local Council Sector

Nick Randle

Sam Shippen



# Contents

- Executive Summary - 4
- Terms of Reference - 5
- Background - 6
- Existing Resources and Workload Drivers- 8
- Current Issues- 13
- Recommendations- 18
- Conclusions- 27
- Summary of Recommendations 28
- Appendices
  - A. Councillor's questionnaire summaries.
  - B. Permissive Powers and Duties of Town and Parish Councils not having the General Power of Competence (2012)
  - C. Salary Scales for Local Council staff
  - D. Recent Ministerial Speech to The National Association of Local Councils

## Executive Summary

Nick Randle Associates Ltd was commissioned by Portland Town Council in September 2014 to undertake an independent staffing review, which examined existing workloads and working methods, comparing them to existing resources and skill levels. The purpose was to consider any potential efficiencies and recommend appropriate resourcing in accordance with current good practice.

Having gathered data and general information about the council's current resources and its commitments, we interviewed each member of staff and 10 of the 14 councillors; looked at online resources locally and nationally; considered the statutory framework within which the council operates and considered best practice within the local council sector.

While we have been able to identify some areas where efficiency improvements can be achieved we have concluded that there is a serious problem in terms of staff resources in the Council. We accept however that no individual or group alone is responsible for the current situation. We find that there are insufficient resources to undertake the work that the Council is committed to. The council is under resourced, staff morale is low, staff have had insufficient training to allow them to succeed, the council accommodation is not fit for purpose, basic processes and policies are missing or out of date, resulting in Councillors, staff and the community being dissatisfied.

Portland Town Council is not alone amongst local councils, many of whom face similar issues. The important point however is that the Council has, by undertaking this review, made the first step in resolving the problems it currently faces. While there are things that can be done, in the short term, to address some of the issues the basic problem is one of resources, the Council precept is very low, which means that most resources are committed to the basic tasks of operating the council without having a meaningful impact on the life of the community. The Council has a clear choice, it could decide that it must remain within its current budgetary framework, in which case it will need to overhaul and further prune its functions to ensure that it can operate successfully within that constraint. Alternatively, it can define a strategy for growth and address the issues associated with funding and deploying increased resources to improve its impact for the community. This is in line with National Policy

We have made a series of recommendations which are summarised in a table on page 28 of this report and which identify efficiencies and recommended the appropriate resourcing. This is aimed at fulfilling the current requirements while meeting good practice standards and optimising effective working. If the Council is able to take these steps we believe it will put itself in a sound staffing position to meet current requirements, with the capacity to grow in the years ahead. We believe that such a course of action, if pursued professionally can succeed and be of significant benefit to the community in the years ahead.

## Terms of Reference

Nick Randle Associates Ltd. has been appointed by Portland Town Council to undertake an independent staffing review of the council.

The council felt that it was timely to conduct such a review because of; -

- a) the findings contained within the council's recent Internal Audit report and Draft Risk Assessment Review.
- b) the need to modernise the council's procedures etc. in the light of changing legislation which is focussed on parish and town councils as being closest to their communities.
- c) the general impact of the localism agenda and the council's potential role.
- d) the current state of the council's staffing resources and accommodation given the uncertainty around the proposed disposal of the building in which the council is accommodated.
- e) the creation of a new committee structure in anticipation of some of the above occurring, given the size and impact of budget reductions by both Dorset County Council and Weymouth and Portland Borough Council.
- f) the need to look at a more entrepreneurial approach.

It was envisaged that the review would have two elements.

- Improvements to the current position
- Proposals for the future

We outlined a two-phase approach to meeting this requirement.

### **Phase 1**

Review existing workloads and working methods and compare against existing resource and skill levels. Consider any potential efficiencies available to the Council including governance structures and use of existing workspace. Recommend appropriate resourcing to fulfil the current requirements while meeting good practice standards and optimising effective working.

### **Phase 2**

Review Portland Town Council's overall strategic direction in relation to changes in principal council resourcing and organisation and the changing role of town councils arising from the provisions of the Localism Act 2011. Interpret community aspirations as expressed in neighbourhood plan surveys and other media. Make recommendations for the longer-term strategic development of the Council with specific reference to required future resourcing and potential benefits for the community.

This report relates specifically to our conclusions in respect of **Phase 1**, which considers and proposes improvements to the current position. In conducting this phase we have necessarily been drawn to look at some aspects of **Phase 2** but this will be the subject of further work if the council agrees to proceed with that phase.

### **Method**

We have gathered data and general information about the council's current resources and its commitments based on the way it currently interprets and conducts its role. We have interviewed each member of staff and 10 of the 14 councillors in two separate groups. We have looked at online resources, including the Council's website and those of Weymouth and Portland Borough Council, Dorset County Council and The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). We have considered the statutory framework within which the council operates and how it compares to councils of a similar size and functional complexity. We have also considered currently accepted best practice within the local council sector.

## Background

Portland Town Council was formed in 1975 as a result of the reforms in the 1972 Local Government Act which abolished many smaller urban and rural district councils (of which Portland was one) and created new town and parish councils which worked in a three tier system alongside new larger district and borough Councils and the existing county council. Portland Town Council is the only town or parish council in the Borough of Weymouth and Portland, and this has had a bearing on the way in which the council has developed since it was first created.

The reasons why Portland has, and needs to have, a Town Council of its own are very evident. It has a distinct territory, literally a tied island sitting off the mainland and joined to it by a causeway and the tombolo Chesil Beach. The island has a distinctive economy that has fundamental differences to the economy in the rest of the borough. The quarrying industry is of national and international significance while the island's topography leads to a distinctive tourist offering and opportunity. The deep-water harbour area has significant potential for development following the closure of Portland naval base in the 1995.

There are eight settlements on Portland, the largest being [Fortuneswell](#) in Underhill and [Easton](#) on Tophill. [Castletown](#) and [Chiswell](#) are the other villages in Underhill, and [Weston](#), [Southwell](#), [Wakeham](#) and [the Grove](#) are on the Tophill plateau. Portlanders think of themselves and feel as part of a distinct community.

### *Strategic Development in Portland*

There are good existing plans to develop the economy and environment of Portland under several initiatives. For example, one of these, the Portland Community Partnership, is a voluntary body, working with the statutory agencies looking at economic and environmental development issues in Portland. There is, among other things, a well-developed tourism strategy and a clear vision for the development of the harbour area that is a potentially very significant economic driver.

The Town Council has some involvement with this, but it should arguably have a major role in working with the community partnership and others to provide a Portland based democratic and community focus in facilitating the delivery of these plans, interacting with the community to generate support for them, and if necessary provide a base for some elements of the service delivery such as operating Tourist Information Centres

### *Demographics and Precept*

In terms of population Portland is a medium to large sized parish. Of the nearly 10,000 Town and Parish Councils in England and Wales Portland has the 473<sup>th</sup> highest tax base with an average (Band D normalised) tax base of 3343.1 properties. However, in terms of precept the council ranks among the smaller parishes in the country. Its precept levy of £15.02 per annum per average band D household means that the council is ranked 7686 in terms of precept levied per household. This is some £35 per year less than the national average for all Parish, Town and Community Councils irrespective of size. This level of precept provides the council with its primary income, which in the 2014/2015 tax year is £50,222.

The precept is, of course, the basis of all the council's resources for staffing and any service it provides to the public. Portland Town Council has a particular problem in this respect in that it is the only first tier council in the Borough of Weymouth and Portland. The borough council's own precepting policy would appear to assume that there are no first tier councils in its area.

As the two tables below demonstrate, when comparing Portland Town Council to other similar sized town councils in Dorset there is a broad relationship between the precepting policy of the town councils and the overall policy of the district. Taking the average band D property (commonly used in precept discussions) Bridport and Sherborne Town Councils in West Dorset, both similar in tax base to Portland, for example, each raise precepts in excess of £150 , ten times the level of Portland. However the West Dorset District Council precept is only £127, which is £151 less than the £278.32 levied by Weymouth and Portland Borough Council. The borough council’s own precept is by far the highest in the county. Total council tax paid by residents across Dorset is broadly similar, but the distribution between the first and second tier councils is very different in each district.

#### Portland Town Council Compared to similar sized Towns in Dorset

Town	District	Tax Base	Precept	Precept Per Av Band D
Bridport	West Dorset	2909.6	£470,753	£161.79
Sherborne	West Dorset	3360.8	£531,774	£158.22
Blandford Forum	North Dorset	3424	£616,490	£180.04
Shaftesbury	North Dorset	2858.7	£379,000	£132.57
Corfe Mullen	East Dorset	3788	£227,391	£60.03
<b>Portland</b>	<b>Weymouth and Portland</b>	<b>3343.1</b>	<b>£50,222</b>	<b>£15.02</b>

#### Comparison of District Council Precepts in Weymouth and Portland

District	District Council Precept
Christchurch	£181.45
East Dorset	£198.35
North Dorset	£111.97
Purbeck	£169.13
West Dorset	£127.28
<b>Weymouth and Portland</b>	<b>£278.32</b>

Anecdotal evidence provided by staff and councillors, which is supported by the data, indicates that this situation may have evolved over many years with the Borough Council operating as a two tier authority, which is true of the rest of its territory, and giving little recognition of the three tier arrangement which exists in Portland. It is a widely held view among Councillors and staff that throughout its history, and particularly in recent years the town council has had difficulty in expressing its role and raising sufficient finance to engage with and serve its community due to this particular relationship with the borough council. Most recently there was an attempt by the town council to significantly raise its precept, which was opposed by members of the community who would no doubt perceive a higher total council tax without necessarily understanding, or wishing to understand, the dynamics of the relationship between the two councils. It has not been a purpose of this review to fully explore this issue but this background is key to setting the context for a staffing and resource review

## Existing Staffing, Resources and Workload Drivers

### *Staffing*

The Council has 14 Councillors and is at the moment supported by 3 part time staff contracted for a total of 40.5 hours a week as follows.

- Town Clerk [Deleted]
- Assistant Town Clerk [Deleted]
- Administrative Assistant [Deleted]

The council office opening hours are currently 10:00 am to 2:00pm Monday to Thursday.

The role of the clerk in Towns and parishes is well established in statute with a clear professional tradition of best practice. The clerk is employed by the council (under section 112 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972) to provide administrative support for the council's activities. Other staff, although employed by the council, answer to the clerk who is their manager and is responsible for their performance.

A clerk's primary responsibility is to advise the council on whether its decisions are lawful and to recommend ways in which decisions can be implemented. To help with this, the clerk may be asked to research topics of concern to the council and provide unbiased information to help the council to make appropriate choices. The clerk has a wide range of other responsibilities which are set out in his / her job description.

In a well run council the clerk recognises that the council is responsible for all decisions and that he / she takes instructions from the council as a body. The clerk is not answerable to any individual councillor - not even the Chairman (Mayor). The council must be confident that the clerk is, at all times, independent, objective and professional.

'Proper Officer' is a title used in statute. It refers to the appropriate officer for the relevant function. In town, parish and community councils, the proper officer is normally the clerk. In financial matters, the proper officer is known as the Responsible Financial Officer.

### *Accommodation*

The Town Council offices are in a former Urban District Council building now owned by Weymouth and Portland Borough Council based in Fortuneswell. It is a large building, which has some other uses. The Town Council occupies the top floor of the building. Other floors are either unoccupied and in need of renovation or partially used.

There is a Council Chamber and a small office, toilets/store area, a kitchen, Mayor's Parlour and a lobby. The Town Clerk and the Administrative Assistant share a small office and the Assistant Town Clerk has a desk located in the Council Chamber. Due to lack of disabled access the council does not use the Council Chamber for its meetings, preferring instead to use church halls and other venues around the island. The accommodation is rather old fashioned and shabby which has an understandable effect on staff morale.

### *Information Technology*

Council staff have laptops or desktop computers linked to a local area network based in the Administrative Assistant's desktop machine. The Town Clerk and Assistant Town Clerk are linked to that. All staff have access to the Internet either through Wi-Fi or Ethernet cable connection. Communication with councillors is mainly via email. There are three printers, one a colour inkjet and two monochrome laser printers.

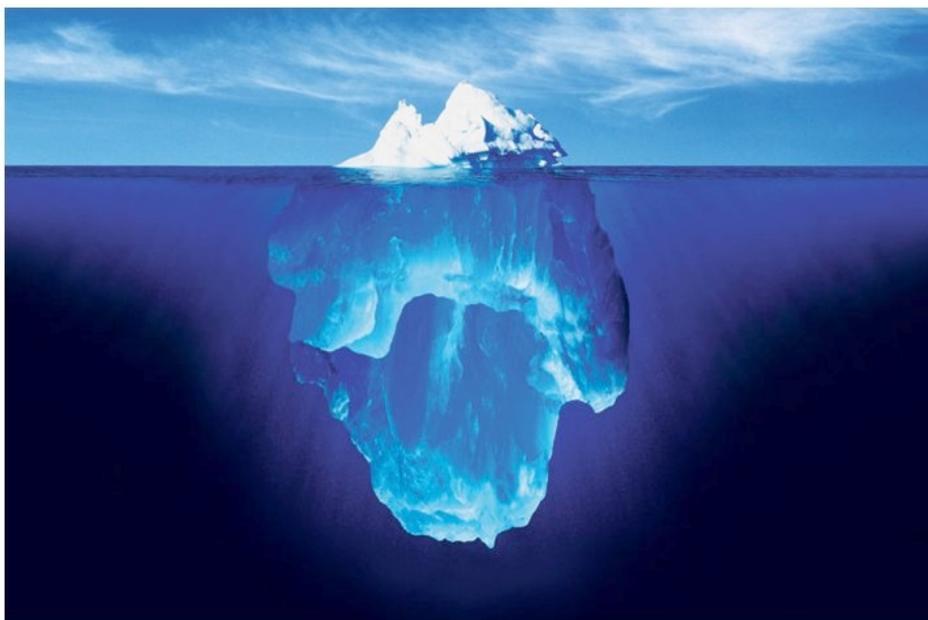
Staff use Microsoft Office applications for most work, although the finances are managed on a version of QuickBooks. Staff also have access to PAYE tools, a risk assessment application and Dragon Naturally Speaking, which is a dictation application that can be used to write minutes. Unfortunately due to a lack of time for staff to develop an understanding and proficiency in these applications some are not currently used or partially used.

The Town Council has a good website which provides information about the Council's activities and is the major means for the Town Council communicating with the public. This is updated by the website provider using information provided to him.

The council has a Facebook page for which staff have had some training provided by one of the councillors, although the staff do not yet feel proficient in using social media.

Councillors do not have any specific Council based IT provision. Meetings are recorded to assist with producing minutes using a recorder owned by one of the councillors.

### *Workloads*



*The normal workload of Town Council Staff can be likened to an iceberg. That which is seen (such as when attending Council meetings or meeting the public) represents only a fraction of the total. In councils most staff work is unseen and unreported although the council should operate smoothly as a consequence. The Council however needs to resource the whole workload and not just the part that is visible.*

There are a number of strands to the council workload.

### *Meetings*

The Council meets bi monthly with additional meetings according to need. In the current council year there will be at least nine full council meetings although we understand that additional meetings may be scheduled at short notice if required. The Council also has a structure of committees and sub-committees. The main Committees are Finance and Resources, Planning and Highways and Marine and Environment. In addition there is a Neighbourhood Plan currently in preparation and a Neighbourhood Plan Committee is also serviced by Town Council staff on an additional hours basis. The Finance and Resources Committee also

has a number of ad hoc sub committees, namely the Budget and Investment Sub-Committee, the Grants Sub-Committee, the Events and Tourism Sub-Committee and the Human Resources and IT Sub-Committee.

### ***Powers and Duties***

All councils irrespective of their size also have an on going workload requirement just to stay in existence as a corporate body. The table below summarises basic requirements for a council based on statutory requirements and best practice. Where we have been able to identify areas where the council currently may not meet best practice we have identified this.

<b><u>Things a Council Must Do</u></b>	<b><u>Comment</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual Council meeting including appointment of chairman (Mayor)</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimum of 3 ordinary council meetings</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agendas 3 clear days prior to meeting</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual meeting of electors</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set precept (full council)</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approve Annual Return &amp; Governance Statement before 30<sup>th</sup> June (full council)</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of internal controls</li> </ul>	Audit and Risk assessment issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appoint an RFO</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commission an annual audit</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approve a Code of Conduct</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appoint internal auditor and set/agree scope</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider provision of allotments</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Freedom of Information Publication Scheme</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comply with Data Protection Act</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider impact of decisions on reducing crime / disorder</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have regard to biodiversity in carrying out functions</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider adoption of closed churchyards</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain records</li> </ul>	Document Retention Policy would be useful
<b><u>Documents councils must have</u></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standing Orders</li> </ul>	On website as April 2014 but based on old model – needs review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial Regulations</li> </ul>	On website Jan 2003 version – needs review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Town Plan</li> </ul>	2006 version will be updated by neighbourhood plan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Code of Conduct</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complaints procedure</li> </ul>	Refers to Local Government Ombudsman - needs review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accounting Records</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal Audit reports</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual Returns</li> </ul>	On website
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Committee terms of reference</li> </ul>	In recent minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scheme of delegations</li> </ul>	Formalise into a policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Freedom of information Publication Scheme</li> </ul>	Review annually
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data Protection Act registration</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of internal controls and accountabilities</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual Risk assessment</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Purchase orders</li> </ul>	

In addition to the basic requirements, town and parish councils as corporate bodies are subject to a raft of permissive legislation that allows them to take action in a particular area. Clearly, if a council chooses to use a power then it will need to provide resources for it. A list of permissive powers for town and parish councils as of 2012 is at Appendix B.

The General Power of Competence was brought into force by SI. 961, The Localism Act 2011 (Consequential Amendments) Order 2012 on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2012. This power is intended to overcome the restrictions placed on local councils due to their having to seek a specific power in order to act.

Under the general power of competence town and parish councils can do *“anything which an individual may do”*. This means effectively that councils holding the power can do anything that they see fit for the benefit of their community. However in order to be able to use the power the council’s clerk needs to be qualified with a Certificate in Local Council Administration incorporating the General Power of Competence module. The current position in Portland Town Council is that the Clerk does not have this qualification and the Council has not adopted the power. Council activities therefore need to be covered by one of the statutes outlined in Appendix B.

The Town Clerk has provided a list of the activities that the Council does currently undertake in addition to the “must do” items outlined above. These are summarised below.

<b>Activities which Portland Town Council Undertakes in addition to the “Must Do” items</b>
Planning Committee – advice on applications and considering highway requests from the public
Marine & Environment Partnership – liaison with Island organisations and community
Neighbourhood Plan
Civic and charity events
Community grants
Appoints representatives to outside bodies
Cheyne Weares car park / viewing area
West Weares land sculpture
Jubilee Gateway
Providing recycling bins to public (service for Dorset Waste Partnership)
Provision of grit bins
Gardening competition
Christmas Lights competition
Town Crier
Island Caretaker – ( currently suspended)
Membership of Quarries Liaison Committee
Portland Flag
Portland Fair
Remembrance Service (recently acquired oversight and insurance responsibility)
Tourism leaflets
Resilience Plan for general emergencies
Emergency planning liaison (flooding and sirens)

Underlying these general areas of workload are specific ranges of tasks. For example, as shown below the work involved in servicing meetings, financial management, managing staff and general administration involves a number of activities, each with its own work commitment and output requirement.

#### **SERVICING MEETINGS**

- Preparation of Council Agendas
- Copying of Papers
- Despatch Arrangements

Posting of Agendas on Council Noticeboards  
Preparation time for meetings  
Attendance at Meetings  
Preparing Minutes of Council Meetings  
Undertaking actions from Council Meetings  
Organising Council and Committee Timetables  
Filing of Papers from Council Meeting

#### **FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**

Preparation of budget  
Monthly bank reconciliations  
Obtaining cheque signatures  
Checking of invoices and processing cheques  
Updating accounts system  
Budget monitoring  
Preparation of financial reports for Committee  
Annual Statement of Accounts  
Processing of salaries and wages payments including HMRC monthly processes  
HMRC Annual Employer Return/Issue of P60s /Start of year procedures  
Preparing for submission of End of Year Return  
Working with Internal Auditor  
Maintaining financial records  
Negotiation with suppliers  
Tendering/procurement arrangements  
Banking arrangements  
VAT Returns

#### **MANAGING STAFF**

Health and Safety - reviewing risk assessments  
Regular engagement with staff  
Annual appraisals  
Training/induction of staff  
Recruitment and selection of staff  
Dealing with referred matters by staff  
Organising relief cover

#### **ADMINISTRATION**

Dealing with crisis issues/special issues, obtaining legal advice  
Dealing with Enquiries from the public, liaison with County/Borough Council, updating of Council  
Procedures liaison with Council Chairman  
Liaison with Committee Chairmen  
Dealing with specific Councillor issues  
Weekly General/Non Specific Matters

#### **OTHER**

Allowance for Leave/Bank Holidays  
Sickness - assumed Absence Rate of 5 days pa  
Allowance of 2 full time days training  
Keeping up to Date with Developments/Legal Changes  
Attendance at SLCC Meetings

## Current Issues

### *Councillors Views*

As part of the data gathering for this review we asked councillors to complete a questionnaire and to attend a meeting in two groups to discuss the issues related to staffing. Ten out of fourteen councillors participated in this exercise. The councillor questionnaire responses are summarised at Appendix A.

The purpose of the survey was to assess the extent to which councillors had a common view about what the council is for and what problems existed which affected Council staffing. Out of ten councillors three had more than ten years' councillor experience, four had between one and three years and three had less than one year. Two had experience as former Borough or District Councillors and one had experience as a county councillor.

Councillors were asked in question 4 to rank the different potential areas of focus for a town council. There was not a common view as to what their areas of focus are, but the trend of responses indicates that a majority favoured the idea that the Town Council should be a manager of projects to improve aspects of the town. The least favoured response was providing direct services to the community.

Councillors were asked questions (5 and 6) that indicated their views about whether Portland Town Council should be abolished and leave all local council functions to the Borough Council, or seek to become more active, grow the council's capacity and take on more responsibilities.

It is clear that there is no appetite to abolish the council and the overwhelming majority believed in some degree or other that the Council needed to grow.

Councillors were asked to state what they felt were the most important activities to be undertaken by council staff. As the summary below shows, activities associated with meetings and acting as a contact point for the public were the most important.

#### **Councillors Comments on the most important activity undertaken by staff**

- Clerking meetings
- Arranging meetings
- Managing tax payers monies
- Communication
- Keeping members of council informed and accurate minutes
- Maintaining an organisation that is becoming increasingly relevant beyond the deminimis role that it was established as
- Supporting councillors
- Keeping councillors informed of changes within government law and local issues. Liaison with the public and answering question first point of call for the public
- Nothing
- The first point of contact with the public

Councillors were then asked whether there were any other areas of work, which they felt, should be covered by staff, but which are currently not supported. The majority of councilors said no but two mentioned raising grant funding, one the management of the island caretaker. One expressed the view that there are too many staff.

Councillors were then asked to say whether they believed that there are areas of staff working which could be handled more efficiently. Responses to this question are as follows.

**Do you believe that there are areas of staff working that could be handled more efficiently.**

- Spreading the working hours so the office is available on more days
- Minute taking and taking on tasks they have not been asked to do by council members
- Yes, committee clerking, accounts, delegation communications
- Time management especially the clerk
- Yes, one of the main issues has been the poor and sometimes negative reply to e-mails. In addition there has been a weakness in following through decisions made by council so that the paper trail is broken or not visible to Cllrs if they were not in attendance. The business management of the council in my opinion is very weak; this has created local tensions and bad communications.
- All processes need to be reviewed for efficiencies and modernisation
- Time management
- Making payments by BACS or direct debits for monthly payments as well as staff wages reducing the need for cheques.
- Proper Training
- Faster processing of matters arising

Finally councillors were asked whether there are any other considerations of which they felt we should be aware in conducting the staffing review.

**Are there any other considerations of which you feel we should be aware in conducting the staffing review**

- Budgets vs. aspirations
- Staff member continually take on tasks and try to over turn decisions that council have made without being asked. Other than council meetings and civic events we do not offer any services to the public.
- The unpaid hours the clerk works
- The Clerk quite rightly gives his opinion as to options that the council is considering pointing out possible problems if certain options are taken. However at times council has decided to press ahead and the Clerk has either deliberately chosen to ignore or to change the implementation because he was against this - that's out of order. There is weak office management and it's clear that the Clerk and staff need some training on e process and social media including webpage management. In addition there is a failure of council to deal on line with regular bills for payment, this would save time and save costs.
- A clarity of approach from the two principal councils as to their futures and the role of the Town Council and if so a commitment from both to capacity building
- councillors time
- Staff could be working longer in order to get through all the work that needs to be done on time and managed with time frames. Staff need more space in order to improve working conditions within the office environment.
- Too many staff with inadequate training
- The general lack of cooperation from senior management in WPBC, requests for reallocation of office space have gone un- actioned.
- Lack of available time for staff training.

We met with councillors in two groups to discuss councillors' aspirations and the issues they saw in relation to staffing. The two meetings had a different tone, which reflected the personalities present but many of the same themes emerged.

A summary of the meetings is as follows: -

#### **First Councillor meeting (5)**

- Identified the need for growth
- There is no motivation in sitting still
- Councillors very keen to make a difference
- Identified Underhill as most deprived area
- Want to engage the community in participation – especially on precept level
- Identified distinct communities – may be scope for some community budgeting
- Identified Portland as distinct within district – needs Town Council to be driver. Portland is 20-25% of population of district
- Feeling that staff lack enthusiasm and direction. Town Clerk is “afraid to put his head above parapet”
- Discussed links between council, community partnership and neighbourhood plan
- Council has existed for 40 years and still does very little
- Meetings are too long
- Councillor training is available. New councillor and budgeting training has been accessed by some
- Identified need for manual – to contain policies and procedural advice
- Mentioned asset transfer – existing offices?

#### **Second Councillor meeting (5)**

- One councillor thought nobody would notice if PTC was disbanded, others disagreed.
- Most thought there was a need to gain back community respect.
- Councillors should attend community events and be seen around doing useful things
- Perceived need for council offices to be open 5 days per week, although no purpose stated.
- Mayor comes in to talk to TC couple of times a week but there is no formal system of review or supervision in place.
- One Councillor currently runs Facebook page but would like staff to take this on
- Was an opinion expressed that staff are not up to the job and should be replaced
- Discussion re morale and mutual respect of roles

#### ***Staff Views***

We also asked staff to complete a sample timesheet, to allow us to assess how work time was being spent, and a questionnaire asking about how they approached their role and how it might be improved. One member of staff declined to complete either of these. We also conducted individual interviews with each staff member.

The Town Clerk is the manager of the other two staff. All staff were generally loyal and circumspect about criticising each other or the council. However it is clear that there are many issues and that staff morale is very low. Broadly speaking the working conditions are seen as poor, while the staff feel undervalued, and overworked. Lack of time spent on basic administration and regular process reviews has resulted in a lack of clear policies and a decay of the basic administrative framework. All staff felt that they were required to work more hours than they were paid for in order to get things done.

The Town Clerk had been in post since 2005 and had been recruited at a lower grade than his predecessor. Having had a background in principal councils he has had some limited formal training as a clerk via the

Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils. He does not hold the Certificate in Local Council Administration or any of the higher-level qualifications for clerks. His contract is for 18.5 hours a week.

The Assistant Town Clerk had been recruited in 2013 on a lower level of the same grade as the Town Clerk. She is contracted for 6 hours a week. She has a background in the Civil Service. She has also had some limited training via the Dorset Association.

The Administrative Assistant has been with the Town Council since 2002 with a background in private industry. She is contracted for 16 hours a week. Her training has mainly been "on the job". [Sentence deleted]

### *Summary of Issues*

#### **Problems and difficulties identified by staff include the following: -**

- Staff perceive a lack of hours available to complete their work
- Elaborate committee system has over burdened the staff
- The issue with the 2014 precept has damaged the Town Council's reputation
- There are few formal structures for the Council and staff to connect outside meetings.
- Meetings are sometimes inquorate
- Office location hampers public access (although this is not a universal view)
- Councillor behaviour can on occasions be challenging
- TOIL, holiday and bank holiday policies unclear
- Office space cramped and limited. The Assistant Town Clerk has to sit separately from the other staff, which hinders communication.
- There is a large filing backlog which hinders efficiency
- There is no document formal retention policy.
- There is only one email address meaning emails have to be printed.
- IT has not been backed up
- Slow responses from councillors and other staff hinder efficiency
- Feelings of isolation
- Lack of a management system to give direction, no appraisals. Staff receive negative feedback but rarely positive
- Staff sometimes feel scapegoated for problems that are not their fault.
- Staff sometimes feel intimidated.
- Staff expected to have more contact with the public but not clear what for.
- Due to lack of resources priorities tend to be set by what is imminent and urgent.
- There are significant health and safety risks in the office.
- The office is old fashioned, storage is in the men's toilet
- Recent changes to meeting venues have made meetings more complicated to organise.
- There is no cover for staff who are ill or on leave.

There is, in our opinion, a serious problem in terms of staff resources in the Council. Based on our experience of comparable Town Councils working in different environments all over the country we believe there are insufficient resources to undertake the work that the Council is committed to. The council is under resourced, staff morale is low, staff have had insufficient training to allow them to succeed, the council accommodation is not fit for purpose, basic processes and policies are missing or out of date, Councillors, staff and the community are dissatisfied.

No individual or group alone is responsible for the current situation of the Town Council.

**Staff** may be criticised for failure to keep policies and processes up to date, to follow up on council decisions, to complete all the tasks required of them, or to work efficiently using modern methods, but the fact is that they do not have enough hours to do everything that is expected of them nor sufficient training to implement current best practice when appropriate. Poor morale has a direct impact on performance in any role.

**Councillors**, past and present may be criticised for failing to appreciate what is required to operate a proactive and successful Town Council, to evolve a clear strategy in concert with the community, to take decisions on recruitment, resources, training and equipment which will make the council successful. However they do currently operate in a difficult precepting environment, with, we understand, a less than co-operative principal council and a diverse community interest to serve.

**Members of the Portland Community** may be criticised for not demanding more from their Town Council since it came into being and for not being prepared to pay for the benefits which successful town councils bring. However they cannot be generally expected to understand the difference between the different council tiers and without experience of a proactive town council will be unlikely to miss it.

[Paragraph deleted]

While there are things that can be done, in the short term, to address some of the issues the basic problem is one of resources. The Council is, for a number of reasons, in a difficult, financial position. For historical and local structural reasons the Council precept is very low which means that most resources are committed to the basic tasks of operating the council without having a meaningful impact on the life of the community. A recent attempt to radically increase the precept has enraged the community and as a result it will be difficult, although still essential, to attempt again to increase it.

The Council has a clear choice. It could decide that it must remain within its current budgetary framework, in which case it will need to overhaul and further prune its functions to ensure that it operates successfully within that constraint. In that event it is unlikely that the community will benefit greatly from its work.

Alternatively it can define a strategy for growth, which is in line with current national policy, and address the issues associated with funding and deploying increased resources to increase its impact in the community. This will not be straightforward, and will involve a number of actions including discussions with principal councils in whatever form they take following the proposed reorganisation. However we believe that this course of action if pursued professionally will succeed and could potentially be of significant benefit to the community in the years ahead.

Our remit, however, in this review is to identify efficiencies and recommend appropriate resourcing to fulfil the current requirements while meeting good practice standards and optimising effective working. The recommendations which we now make are directed towards that objective.

## Recommendations

We have addressed firstly the recommendations that we are able to make which have a bearing on efficiency. We then look at staffing levels and grading and make recommendations on what they should be to support the current workload given that these efficiencies are implemented

### *Efficiencies*

#### **Committee System**

Although it was explained to us by both staff and Councillors that the recently adjusted committee and sub-committee system is in preparation for future growth we consider the current structure to be excessive and unsustainable with the current resource.

The timetable of sub-committees does not currently coordinate with parent committees leading to potential delays in acting on recommendations. Staff attendance at evening meetings is often not currently accommodated in working patterns or hours leading to an unsustainable build up of time off in lieu (TOIL). Some meetings are left inquorate as a result of none attendance by councillors. There is no formal scheme of delegations to the Clerk and to committees which means that decisions tend to be referred back to the Town Council

*RECOMMENDATION: the Council should consider restructuring the system of committees and sub-committees. Some sub-committees should be changed to working groups which are not staffed and whose chairmen should give verbal reports to the Town Council if action is needed e.g. Events and Tourism.*

*This situation should be kept under review and if the council grows it can be addressed again. The target should be to hold a monthly Town Council meeting and limit the number of committees and workgroups to the minimum needed to achieve objectives. Committees and workgroups should be scheduled so that the monthly meetings cycle deals with all business required while Councillor and staff time is optimised in dealing with it.*

*The Grants and Budget & Investments Sub-Committees should be abolished and reallocated back to Finance & Resources Committee with officer reports.*

*The Council should also implement a clear scheme of delegations which states what decisions can be delegated to committees and the Clerk to avoid delays.*

#### **Apologies for absence**

There would appear to be a tendency for a slow response or absence of response by councillors and other invitees to events (including meetings). This adds to staff workloads as they need to chase responses and time is wasted when meetings are inquorate.

*RECOMMENDATION: Introduce a clear Council policy for notifying and accepting apologies for absence as soon as possible after the summons for or notification of the meeting.*

## **Matters Arising**

Councillors were concerned that actions from meetings were not followed up or they were not aware of how matters were resolved.

*RECOMMENDATION: The Clerk should maintain an on going list of matters arising from meetings. This list should be tabled as a matter of course at each meeting with completed items highlighted. The Council will then be aware of whether the backlog of work is growing or shrinking and will be aware when actions are completed. Once completed actions have been tabled they should be removed from the list.*

## **Typing of Minutes and Agendas**

It is the current practice for the Clerk to write minutes and agendas in long hand and to pass these to the Administrative Assistant for typing. We believe this approach is out of date, is a duplication of effort and a poor use of limited resources. Either: - the clerk should type up the minutes, we suggest using a template which is created from the agenda and filled in at the meeting, with refinements added on the following day using the recording of the meeting as a reference. Alternatively the Clerk should delegate responsibility to the Administrative Assistant to attend some meetings which he does not attend, and complete the minutes directly. The council has a copy of Naturally Speaking dictation software. This might be also deployed to draft minutes.

*RECOMMENDATION: That the practice of writing minutes in long hand and passing them to the Administrative Assistant to complete should change. The Clerk should create his own minutes or delegate minute taking and writing to a staff member. This might entail additional training in minute taking and writing and the use of existing software.*

## **Filing, Routine Administration and Annual Tasks/Policy Updating**

We understand that there is a significant backlog in routine tasks and we judge that these backlogs have accumulated because they have not received focus, essentially due to the lack of resource. Significant filing backlogs exist. When we attended the office papers were sitting in piles on the floor of the office and may of themselves constitute a fire hazard or other health and safety risk. There are a number of routine administration tasks such as undertaking bank reconciliations, conducting risk assessments, establishing and maintaining a regular backup of the Councils electronic data that are missing or out of date. Several significant policies or governance processes are in need of review and updating. All these are deficiencies that may be tolerated in the short term but become a major impact on efficiency in the long term and should be addressed.

*RECOMMENDATION: The Council needs to consider a one-time grant of additional hours to staff in order to bring all routine tasks up to date. This might be supplemented with volunteer support under staff direction. A list of short-term tasks such as filing and bank reconciliations should be created. A review list of policies and governance procedures (Standing Orders, Financial Regulations etc) should also be created. Where procedures are absent they should be created using an available model. Model lists are available on the SLCC website or from the Dorset Association of Local Councils. A backup system for the data held on the computer should be implemented, as a matter of urgency; either via dual stand alone detachable hard drive or cloud based back up.*

*An action plan should be created to bring all these matters up to date either through a focussed effort over a few weeks or a regular one-day a week over a longer period, but not more than three months. It is unfortunately an activity which will not provide an immediate perceptibly benefit the community although it will indirectly benefit it by improving long-term efficiency and effectiveness. We suggest that the Council should set aside £1,500 to fund this exercise.*

## Email

The single email address for the council leads to potential duplication of effort and delays in response. Similarly printing off of emails not efficient or effective use of resources.

*RECOMMENDATION: each staff member should have an individual email address with a facility for forwarding to a shared email address in periods of absence.*

## Statutory Improvements to Council procedures

Recent legislation has simplified the operating of certain aspects of local council finance and governance. For example the relaxation of the two signatures rule in financial management has opened the way for electronic banking and a statutory change is proposed to remove the requirement for hard copy agendas and minutes making electronic distribution the norm.

*RECOMMENDATION: That the council considers implementing all statutory improvements affecting council workload as and when they become available. Guidance on implementing these can be obtained from the Dorset Association and the Society of Local Council Clerks.*

## Clerk/Council Contact Point

At present there is no clear management system between the Clerk and the Council that exists outside of meetings. The Clerk serves the Council as a whole but there needs to be a structure which provides management and direction for the Clerk and provides him with feedback and support. He also needs this in order to make best use of his own management of staff directed towards Council objectives.

*RECOMMENDATION: The Council should appoint a three member Town Clerk Liaison Group consisting of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor and the Chairman of Finance and Resources (or three other appropriate councillors as the council sees fit). The liaison group should meet regularly one week after each town council meeting. The meeting should review the list of matters arising (outlined above) and agree priorities. It should review a list of annual tasks (see recommendation above) and the progress in undertaking these. It should discuss training plans for staff and councillors and any other relevant matters. The Clerk should raise any matters of concern, which the workgroup will either resolve or raise at the next meeting of the Council. The liaison group should work with the council to set annual objectives for the clerk and conduct an annual appraisal using a recognised method such as that recommended by the Society of Local Council Clerks. The Clerk should appraise staff using the same method.*

## Employment Policies

Although the Town Council is a small organisation it has a legal duty to act as a reasonable employer and to provide a range of employment conditions for staff and clear information about roles and how they should be undertaken. Clarity and reasonableness in employment practice has a significant bearing on employee morale.

Current job descriptions are in different stages of relevance.

- The Town Clerk's job description is based on the national model available when he was recruited. It has not been adapted to suit the particular circumstances of Portland Town Council.
- The Assistant Town Clerk's job description is more recently drafted but there are some areas that are unclear.
- The Administrative Assistant's job description is well out of date and has limited relevance to what she actually does.

In addition there are particular employment situations that it is unclear how they are managed and which is a cause of particular employee stress. The management of on going health issues is one and the operation of time off in lieu or overtime is another.

In small organisations it is easy to assume that all these issues can be dealt with through day-to-day contact. However the dynamics of the employment relationship is fundamentally the same irrespective of the size of organisation.

*RECOMMENDATION: The Council should review its staff job descriptions and its employment policies (we suggest through the Council/ Clerk liaison group recommended above with subsequent ratification by the council). The council should consider providing an employee handbook based on the template provided by the Society of Local Council Clerks that would detail the employment policies of Portland Town Council applicable to all staff and laid out in a way that is easily understood. This would include policies that cover working hours, payment of travel for return to work on same day, holidays & bank holidays (in accordance with the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Terms) Regulations 2000)*

### **Training**

Training for staff and councillors should be seen as an essential part of creating and maintaining a successful council. There are unavoidable costs attached to training but these are inevitably recouped in the long run through improved efficiency and effectiveness in council activities, and improved reputation in the community. A training development plan should be established via an appraisal process for all staff. Training for councillors should be planned to ensure all councillors have the required skills to undertake their role.

While the Clerk has considerable experience of public sector working he does not currently hold the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) or any of the higher-level qualifications available to clerks and councils. Clerks are key professionals in local councils and specific training for the role is essential. We strongly believe that an investment by the council, in training and portfolio preparation time for the clerk to achieve the CiLCA qualification would be very beneficial to the longer term efficiency and effectiveness of the council. A qualified clerk can be confident that they are operating best practice, are more able to anticipate problems and deal with them before they arise and are able to engender the most efficient working methods. They are also better able to manage the staff under their control. In addition, if the council does intend to become more pro active the holding of CiLCA by the clerk will make the council eligible to use the General Power of Competence, which will greatly simplify the management of projects and the taking of new initiatives by the council.

The Assistant Town Clerk should be encouraged to undertake further training on social media and website updating and other communications skills to facilitate this aspect of her role.

*RECOMMENDATION: The training budget should be reviewed and a specific emphasis placed on training for all staff and councillors.*

*In particular the Clerk should be encouraged to undertake training and to complete a portfolio to obtain the Certificate in Local Council Administration. This will involve supporting training/portfolio completion hours as well as funding any training courses taken.*

### **Accommodation**

The Town Council is considering options for improving the council office set up and this is given emphasis due to plans by the Borough Council to sell the building in which the town council is housed. While the current building is an imposing municipal building with traditional elements it is not currently fit for purpose for a Council office in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It might be possible to refurbish accommodation for the

town council within the building and provide disabled access to it, but this would involve significant cost and does not address the issue of accessibility. The current building is not very accessible to the public and indeed may give an impression of remoteness. We are aware that improving accessibility and perceptions of the public in order to improve community relations is a long-term aim of councillors.

During discussions it was suggested that the Council could possibly move to a modified shop premises, possibly in Easton. It was felt that this would improve accessibility and provide an opportunity to create a modern, fit for purpose working environment for staff which is more accessible to the public. The Portland communities are dispersed and it is envisaged that the Council would continue to meet in different venues around the island to facilitate public accessibility.

We believe that the second approach is the better option as it would address the long-term accessibility issue, but equally importantly it provides the opportunity to change the nature of the Council's approach to its work and significantly improve working conditions for staff. This change should be seen as a priority as it will create a fresh start for the Council and staff and allow the implementation of new and improved working practices through the move.

*RECOMMENDATION: The Council should address the issue of council accommodation as a matter of urgency. In undertaking the change the following considerations should be kept in view.*

- *The need to ensure that staff are fully involved in any changes that affect them.*
- *The need to ensure that staff are located in office accommodation which supports their effective working (adequate space, access to technology, safety and security considerations, dedicated space for private meetings, sufficient storage etc.*
- *The need to anticipate the future development of the Council and to provide adequate accommodation for any future growth. We believe that if the Council does intend to grow towards the typical size for its population it would need central office accommodation for up to 5 full time staff. This would be separate to any recruitments of other staff such as outdoor workers*

### *Staff Hours and Grades*

We have outlined above those improvements that can be made to the existing way of working, which will contribute to improved efficiency and effectiveness in the long run. Additional training in core skills, and use of technology will, in particular, foster permanent long-term improvements. However, the fact remains that the Town Council is currently under resourced to properly undertake its current remit, using best practice. The consensus among Councillors is that the Council needs to become more proactive and to grow its role and this underlines the need to ensure that the council staffing and other resources provide a sound base for achieving that aim.

The Town Council has unfortunately evolved to a position where it is run at the least possible cost but this approach has led to a systemic decay in its capacity and an accumulating list of problems. It may be surprising to some that an organisation spending £23,000 per year on staff salaries while having minimal functional commitments should struggle to operate successfully. However this fact is evidenced in serious audit comments, poor staff morale, councillor dissatisfaction and hostility from the community. For its population, the council staffing is currently too small for the council to have a significant impact in the community but is also not at all big enough to properly fulfil the core requirements arising from its being in existence.

One past decision of the council highlights this issue. When the present Town Clerk was recruited the position was downgraded and the hours reduced. The previous Town Clerk was specifically qualified to undertake the role but his replacement had only general principal council experience. The view at the time was clearly that money could be saved. What is subsequently surprising is not that problems have accumulated but that things have managed to keep going for as long as they have.

Given the current situation and the Council's direction of travel it is inevitable that increased staff hours need to be considered and pay scales need to be reviewed. We are not aware that there is yet a formal council strategy for moving forward and that is not part of this phase of the review. We have therefore made some general assumptions on which to base our recommendations.

**These assumptions are as follows:**

1. The Council is successfully able to raise its precept for the coming year to £25 per average Band D household (£2 per month) raising an additional £33,000 in the financial year 2015/2016. A £25 precept is exactly half the national average.
2. The Council uses the period from now until the elections in May 2015 to consolidate, move to new premises, address all outstanding process maintenance issues and consider its long-term strategy.
3. When the new council is formed work with the community to develop the strategy for the Town Council and for Portland, which encompasses all the existing work by community groups and projects.
4. During this period the Council would negotiate a new relationship with principal councils and implement the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 to progress its strategy with the community.

**Staff Numbers**

One suggestion that has been made is that overall staff numbers are too high. We do not agree with this view. Having more than one staff member provides the council with flexibility in its operation. If the council grows there is potential to increase hours to accommodate this. Less staff numbers mean that the council closes when staff sickness and holidays intervene.

*RECOMMENDATION: We believe that the Current structure of Clerk, Assistant Clerk (potentially migrating to Deputy Clerk), and Administrative Assistant is the right level for the immediate future. Any growth in capacity should first be found through working with existing staff to increase their hours.*

**Staff Roles**

As mentioned above the staff roles have evolved. The job description of the Town Clerk is a reproduction of a national model, the Assistant Town Clerk's job description is too brief to be useful and the Administrative Assistant's job description is well out of date. We believe that the existing job descriptions should be updated and refined to ensure that all members of staff are clear about their roles. The Town Clerk's job description should be revised to take account of his management responsibilities for all resources other than staff. The Assistant Town Clerk's role should be redefined to state specific areas of responsibility. We believe overall responsibility for communications (Website, Facebook, Media releases, community newsletter) might be one area of development. The Administrative Assistant's job role should be updated to reflect what is actually done and to emphasise the objective of acting as first point of contact or the public and ensuring that all routine administration is undertaken efficiently.

The outline of each role should be as follows.

**Town Clerk**- Proper Officer, Responsible Financial Officer, manager of staff, property and all other resources. Advises the Council and oversees implementation of all Council decisions. Oversees communication with councillors and the public.

**Assistant Town Clerk** - Supports the Clerk in supporting a proportion of the meetings, takes overall responsibility for events and communications.

**Administrative Assistant**- First point of contact for councillors and the public, responsibility for specific administrative tasks e.g. managing and tracking correspondence, filing, ordering stationery, ensuring regular back ups are made, producing public notices. Circulating papers to councillors. Word processing higher level documents, flyers, newsletters (not minutes and agendas).

## **Hours**

In considering the correct hours that should be applied we have considered current workloads, the likely trend for workloads to expand (in line with our assumptions above) and the requirement to ensure that the decay due to longer term process maintenance does not reoccur once all these areas are brought up to date.

**Town Clerk:** The Town Clerk is currently working in excess of the contracted hours. If efficiency savings were not made then we would envisage a workload of in excess of 26 hours a week. However we believe that efficiencies can be made particularly in reducing the number of committees and through training on best practices. We do not envisage that the change to typing own agendas and minutes will have a long-term impact as these are currently handwritten in any event, but the transition may have a short-term impact.

*RECOMMENDATION: that hours are immediately increased [Deleted]. That a further temporary grant of [Deleted] for the Clerk to take specific training and prepare his CILCA portfolio. This would be established under a training contract between the Clerk and the Council requiring the Clerk to achieve the qualification in the specified period in exchange for the grant of hours. Once CILCA is obtained and the council strategy is clear hours may need to be reviewed again.*

**Assistant Town Clerk:** The Assistant Town Clerk is currently working slightly in excess of her contracted hours. There is a question over how TOIL is applied for evening meetings and we believe this issue should be addressed. We believe the role should be expanded to include a focus on communications, as this will be an essential function if the council is to effectively evolve in the direction it wishes to go.

*RECOMMENDATION: that the hours of the Assistant Town Clerk are increased [Deleted] with specific responsibility for communications being added to the role. When the Clerk has successfully completed his CILCA portfolio then consideration should be given to supporting the Assistant Town Clerk to achieve this.*

**Administrative Assistant:** The Administrative Assistant currently works in excess of her contracted hours although we were unable to make a clear assessment of this because the requested timesheets and questionnaire were not provided. We believe that changes to the way minutes and agendas are produced will reduce her workload but we note that the filing backlog and other routine tasks are not being fully addressed and we believe this to be due to ongoing workload pressures.

*RECOMMENDATION: We recommend that hours are increased [Deleted]. We further recommend that although the Clerk and the Administrative Assistant work together the Clerk should hold regular individual meetings with both staff, linked to the meetings of the liaison group outlined above to review priorities, workloads and other personnel matters. Specifically with the Administrative Assistant this should monitor how filing and routine tasks are being addressed and [Deleted]. The administrative assistant should be*

*asked to complete a timesheet for a short period to assess how her workload develops. Once the council strategy is clear the hours for this role may need to be reviewed again.*

### **Salary Scales**

From 1 April 2005 the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) jointly agreed the National Agreement on salaries and conditions of service of local council clerks in England and Wales. The current Salary Scales for administrative staff are locally determined but there are best practice norms within the sector.

The Scales in force for Local Council staff at present are shown at Appendix C

### **Town Clerk**

The Town Clerk is currently paid according to the national terms and conditions agreement at the higher tier of scale LC1, [Deleted]. The definition of an LC1 post includes the following criteria.

- Small or medium sized Council
- No staff
- 6 meetings a year
- No committees
- No devolved functions
- Typical budget up to £25,000 per annum

We believe that the Portland Town Clerk's position as currently defined does not fit the LC1 scale although we note that the higher point of the LC1 scale has been applied. The Criteria for the LC2 Scale include the following.

- Small or medium sized Council
- Small team of staff
- 12 meetings a year
- 2 committees
- 1 devolved function
- Typical budget £25,000- £250,000

Utilising the benchmark profiles we have evaluated the post of Town Clerk and used this as a reference point for the other current posts.

*RECOMMENDATION: That the Town Clerk be re-graded to [Deleted]. This re- grading should be conditional on and effective at, the point where the Town Clerk achieves his CILCA qualification. In the interim the Town Clerk should be graded immediately on [Deleted]*

### **Assistant Town Clerk**

The Assistant Town Clerk currently undertakes work that is above her salary scale. We also believe that the Assistant's role has potential to operate as a Deputy particularly in the Town clerk's absence. This is a potentially important role in providing flexibility in the work of the council and for developing expertise in key functional areas.

*RECOMMENDATION: that the Assistant Town Clerk be re-graded to [Deleted]. This re-grading should not be directly conditional on further training but the Assistant Town Clerk should be encouraged to work for her*

CILCA qualification. Meanwhile she should be asked to undertake further training on social media and website updating, and other communications skills to facilitate this aspect of her role.

### Administration Assistant

The Administrative Assistant is currently paid on [Deleted] . We note that the bottom end of this scale now falls below the National Minimum wage and would therefore be illegal. The normal scale range for Administrative Assistants in Parish and Town Councils is [Deleted]. We believe that the Administrative Assistant would benefit from an on going training plan based on refining her skills in her current role.

*RECOMMENDATION: that the Administration Assistant be placed with immediate effect on [Deleted].*

### Costs

The additional immediate annual salary costs of the above hours and grading recommendations are laid out in the table below. The total additional cost of these measures is £13075.83. Of this £2,780.96 is a cost of additional study hours for the Clerk and the Assistant Town Clerk to study for their CILCA qualification, which would be a cost for one year only. The ultimate additional salary cost is therefore £10,118 subject to further review if the Council adopts an expansive strategy. This cost would be about 30% of the additional amount raised by establishing a £25 per household precept. Funding would therefore be available to support a move to new accommodation and make other capacity improvements in anticipation of implementing a new strategy following Council elections in May.

<b>Current Salary Costs</b>				
	Current Annual Rate	Current Hourly Rate	Current Hours	Current Salary Cost
Town Clerk	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]
Assistant Town Clerk	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]
Administrative Assistant	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]
				£19,495.03
Pensions and National Insurance Contributions				£3,791.97
				<b>£23,287.00</b>
<b>Salary Cost Including Increased Hours- First Full Year</b>				
	Current Annual Rate	Current Hourly Rate	Revised Hours	Revised Salary Cost
Town Clerk	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]
Town Clerk/ Asst Town Clerk Training Contract	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]
Assistant Town Clerk	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]
Administrative Assistant	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]
				£28,077.76
Pensions and National Insurance Contributions				£4,572.08
				<b>£32,649.00</b>

<b>Salary Cost Including Increased Grades and Hours- First Full Year</b>				
	Revised Annual Rate	Revised Hourly Rate	Revised Hours	Revised Salary Cost
Town Clerk	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]
Assistant Town Clerk	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]
Town Clerk/Asst. Town Clerk Training Contract	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]
Administrative Assistant	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]	[Deleted]
				£31,270.81
Pensions and National Insurance Contributions				£5,092.03
				<b>£36,362.83</b>

## Conclusion

Portland Town Council is at a significant crossroads in its history.

The world of municipal governance is changing and Portland Town Council has a clear role to play. A recent speech by Local Government Minister, Kris Hopkins MP (reproduced at Appendix D) clearly underlines how the direction of travel for local councils is now set. Localism and the new empowering of local councils is not a single party issue, it is a cross party consensus trend which has been gathering pace since 1997 and issues such as principal council funding and the national debate on devolution of powers will only give impetus to this.

In 2015 Portland Town Council can expect to change the relationship it has with its principal council so that instead of being the only local council in the district, it will be one of 200 parishes within the tripartite area representing most of the parishes in Dorset. The creation of new parishes in urban areas is gathering pace and this can be expected to further strengthen the local council position in the years ahead.

Portland Town Council has a clear mission and significant opportunities in the years ahead. However in order to grasp them it needs to ensure that it has a sound foundation and a solid core capacity to build on. As detailed in our recommendations there is work to be done and investment to be made to establish such a foundation. This may entail a different approach to budgeting for resource to that which has been taken in the past. However while good stewardship of public money is always important is about more than not committing to spend. It is also about making sound judgements and investments to bring benefits for the future. We believe these recommendations are about sound judgements for investment for the future and we commend them to the Council.

## Summary of Recommendations

<b>Committee System</b>	Review system of committees and sub-committees; keep under annual review
	Hold monthly Town Council meeting
	Abolish Grants and Budgets & Investments Sub-Committees
	Implement Scheme of Delegation to Committees and Town Clerk
<b>Apologies for absence</b>	Introduce a policy for notifying apologies for absence
<b>Matters Arising</b>	Town Clerk to establish and maintain an ongoing list for each Council meeting
<b>Typing of minutes and agendas</b>	Change the current practice
<b>Filing, Administration &amp; Annual Tasks</b>	Allow a one off additional time to enable staff to get routine tasks up to date, supplement with volunteer support (including councillors)
	Create a list of short term tasks which require catch up
	Create a list of policies and governance procedures which require updating with an action plan for updating
	Establish a system of back up for the IT system
<b>Email</b>	Introduce individual emails for each staff member
<b>Statutory improvements to Council procedures</b>	Implement statutory improvements as and when they are announced
<b>Clerk/Council contact</b>	Establish a three member Clerk Liaison group
	Establish list of annual tasks
	Establish an appraisal system for all staff to include training plans
<b>Employment Policies</b>	Review all staff job descriptions
	Produce a Staff Handbook containing relevant employment policies
<b>Training</b>	Establish a training plan for staff and councillors
	Review the training budget
	CiLCA training for Town Clerk and Assistant Town Clerk
	The Assistant Town Clerk should undertake further training on social media and website updating and other communications skills to facilitate this aspect of her role
<b>Accommodation</b>	Review the issue of council accommodation urgently
<b>Staff numbers</b>	Maintain existing
<b>Working hours</b>	<b>Town Clerk:</b> Increase hours to [Deleted]; establish a training contract for completion of CiLCA; <b>Assistant Town Clerk:</b> Increase hours to [Deleted]; consider application for CiLCA after Town Clerk has completed; <b>Administrative Assistant:</b> Increase hours to [Deleted].
<b>Salary scales</b>	<b>Town Clerk:</b> Re-grade to [Deleted] upon completion of CiLCA, with immediate point [Deleted]; <b>Assistant Town Clerk:</b> Re-grade to [Deleted]; <b>Administrative Assistant:</b> Re-grade to [Deleted]

Portland Town Council – Budget 2015/16 Working Draft Meeting Notes

Nov

	Expend. 2013/14	Budget 2014/15	Projected 2014/15	Budget 2015/16		Core	Non Core	IT Review	Staff Review	Other
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>										
Salaries	23,112	23,287	22730		Staff Review				22730	
Advertising	449	400	330		Core £14 * 12 months	280				
Audit	521	805	1500		Internal Audit £620, External £400	1020				
Civic Expenditure	1,603	1,541	600		Keys £550, Mayor Making £450	1000				
Computer Equipment		0	640		Provision laptop+peripheral			300		
					MS365 (£120) +					
Computer Software	62	50	50		Accountancy(£120)+Anti			360		
IT Support	200	260	260		Virus(£60)+Provision (£60)			200		
Contingency		1,241	0		4 call outs * £50					
					To be determined					
					1 Additional + May 2015 Seek					
Elections	738	1,500	5850		WPBC advice on deferred charging	5850				
Fair Expenses		0								
Furniture and Equipment	376	378	600		Provision £100, Copier £103 per			612		0
Honorarium	100	100	100		quarter+Audio/PA/Tel £100					
Insurance	1,287	1,300	1300		Chaplain	100				
Mayoral Allowance	700	700	700		3 year agreement but confirm	1300				
Miscellaneous	144		50		Core or non core ?	700				
					Defer rock salt purchase					144
					Move to electronic distribution					
Postage	822	600	510		review impact/ Provision			750		40
Publications	116	0	20		meanwhile/£40 keys					
Stationery	689	600	750		No provision					
					Accept	710				
Subscriptions	1,676	1,400	1440		Return as core element following					0
Telephone	632	600	630		Nov 19 2014 TC meeting	1440				
Training / Conferences	105	100	100		New System £25*12 months	0		300		
Travelling & Subsistence	110	100	60		Staffing Review				100	0
Room Hire					Conditions of service	100				
					£70 a month *12 months					840
Sub-Total	33,442	34,962	38,220			12,500	0	2,522	22,830	1,024
Gifts and Donations	50	210	50			50				
Grants	1,994	3,000	1000		To match grants	0	1000			
					Currently Project Non Core but TC					
Lengthsman / l. Caretaker	7,915	15,000	3900		desire implied to retain full			15000		
Neighbourhood Plan	4,234	5,500	8266		allocation			6,600		
Projects		0	980		Project Non Core					
Town Crier	35	50	40			50				
Website	1,051	1,500	1200		IT Review o/s item			1200		
Sub-Total	15,279	25,260	15,436			100	22,600	1,200	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>48,721</b>	<b>60,222</b>	<b>53,656</b>			<b>12,600</b>	<b>22,600</b>	<b>3,722</b>	<b>22,830</b>	<b>1,024</b>
										<b>62,776</b>
<b>INCOME</b>										
Precept	47,910	50,222	50222		Seek Julie Strange advice	50222				
Discount Grant	4,726	4,000	4051		JS Advise unlikely to be paid					
Fair	750	3,000	1000		To match grants		1000			
Lengthsman / l Caretaker		0			Project non core					
Neighbourhood Plan Grant	6,300	2,500	5266		Project non core		3600			
Interest	644	500	230		Provision	220				
Other	46	0	-46							
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60,376</b>	<b>60,222</b>	<b>60,723</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>50,442</b>	<b>4,600</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
										<b>55,042</b>
<b>SURPLUS / DEFICIT (-)</b>	<b>11,655</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7,067</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>37,842</b>	<b>-18,000</b>	<b>-3,722</b>	<b>-22,830</b>	<b>-1,024</b>
										<b>-7,734</b>
<b>FOR YEAR</b>										
<b>To be agreed</b>										
Release of Reserves to match excess election costs (£5850-£1500)			£4,350					Estimated additional precept need 2015/16		£2.24
Revised position			£11,417					Attributable to providing for election costs say £4350		£1.26
								Loss of discount grant	£4,051	£1.17
<b>Caretaker (£15000-£3900)</b>			<b>£11,100</b>							