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Harbours Advisory Committee

3 December 2025

Harbour Budget and Setting of Fees and Charges 2026/27

For Recommendation to Cabinet

Cabinet Member:
Cllr J Andrews, Place Services

Local Councillor(s):
All Councillors

Senior Leadership Team:
J Britton, Executive Director for Place Services

Report author and job title:
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Statutory Authority: Dorset Council

Report status: Public Choose an item.

Executive summary

1. The purpose of the report is to set out the budget and the predicted balance of harbour reserves for Bridport, Lyme Regis, and Weymouth Harbours for 2026/27. This requirement includes setting fees and charges for all harbours. The financial summaries are given in the appendices.

2. **Recommendation(s)**

2.1 That Cabinet asks Full Council to

1. Approve fees and charges for Bridport, Lyme Regis and Weymouth Harbours for 2026/27.

2. Approve the forecasted budget for Bridport, Lyme Regis and Weymouth Harbour for 2026/27

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3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

3.1 The Harbours Advisory Committee is responsible for informing Cabinet on the 2026/27 budget, reserve balances and proposed fees and charges for Bridport, Lyme Regis and Weymouth Harbours.

4. **Fees and charges 2026/27**

4.1 The harbours have carried out a bench marking exercise to assist with reviewing fees and charges.

4.2 Benchmarking provides a good starting point; however, consideration must also be given to the differing facilities and services on offer and historic price increases. Over the past three years, most harbour fees have increased by between 5% and 7.5%.

4.3 We need to ensure we have confidence that any price increase reflects the service provision and facilities we offer.

4.4 For Weymouth the bench marking focused on four key areas: annual recreational mooring fees, rates for visiting vessels, commercial berthing charges, which included charges levied for storage

4.5 Some key points from benchmarking that need to be considered when evaluating pricing strategy are:

4.6 Annual mooring fees for recreational craft: We remain competitively priced, with fees generally lower than those charged by comparable harbours. However, it is important to acknowledge that our facilities are not of the same standard or quality as those found in higher-priced locations.

4.7 Current rates for visiting recreational vessels are slightly above average and over the past three years, price increases for these visitors have risen more sharply than those applied to our other fees. Our visitor berths are typically offered alongside or rafted, whereas many competing harbours provide dedicated marina-style berthing at comparable rates. This difference in berth type may impact perceived value and visitor experience.

4.8 Annual commercial fees are slightly higher than those at some comparable harbours. However, unlike certain other locations, we do not levy separate harbour dues. This means that while headline fees may appear higher, the overall cost to commercial users remains competitive when considered in full.

4.9 Weymouth harbour provides a substantial amount of dedicated storage space for local fishermen to safely store their gear. This provision plays a vital role in maintaining clear and safe working conditions on the pontoons. During our benchmarking exercise, we found that many other ports and harbours do not offer similar storage facilities. Among those that do, the associated charges are significantly higher than those currently applied at Weymouth.

5 Pricing recommendations for 2026/27:

5.1 Dorset Council has set a minimum expectation of a 3.4% increase in fees and charges. It is proposed that in general, this is applied across all three harbours.

5.2 Minor variations in fees may occur due to rounding adjustments. These are made to ensure pricing remains clear, consistent, and easy to process for both customers and administrative systems.

5.3 Where a variation from the proposed 3.4% price increase is justified, the relevant exceptions are outlined below:

Bridport & Lyme Regis		
Fee		**Rationale**
Winter Mooring Fee	No increase	To increase the difference between the summer rate to encourage take up.
Annual & Summer Vessel Storage	Increase by £30 per meter	To increase take up of harbour services. In return we will offer: Slipway user’s season tickets free of charge, plus 10% discount on launch and recovery services. Mooring holders free launch and recovery at start and and end of season plus one free pressure wash of hull.
Boat Lifting Charge	No increase	Feedback is that the fee is already high and is currently comparable.
Launch and Recovery Service	Increase by 20%	To bring the fee more in-line with other harbours.

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Quayside Parking	No increase	Results from recent customer survey showed a large concern for private mooring holders is the cost of parking.
Commercial fishing vessel overnight and landing fees	No increase	Already high compared to other harbours.
Weymouth		
Fee		**Rationale**
Visiting recreational visitors – overnight stays	No increase	Fee increases over the past three years have been relatively high, with increases of **11.5% in 2022**, **10% in 2023**, and **7% in 2024**. Our rates for visiting recreational vessels are slightly above average. Unlike competitors offering marina-style berths, our visitor berths are typically alongside or rafted, which may affect perceived value.
Fishermen's Storage	Increase from £2.15 per pallet per month to £5.00 per pallet per month.	Benchmarking shows that few other harbours provide this service, and those that do typically charge considerably more.

6 Budget forecasts for 2026/27

6.1 The Dorset Council Harbours Strategy and Business Plan outline a five-year financial and investment framework to guide future budget decisions. It has helped refocus priorities and align resources with long-term operational and strategic goals.

6.2 As detailed in the Business Plan, significant investment is planned across Dorset Council Harbours over the next five years.

6.3 Investment in harbour facilities is essential to protecting existing income streams and enabling future growth.

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6.4 The Business Plan demonstrates that substantial investment over the next five years is achievable while maintaining a financial reserve. This ensures the harbours remain safe, legally compliant, sustainable, and economically viable in the long term.

6.5 Budgets for all three harbours have been based on the following

- Existing operational arrangements, unless stated otherwise
- Occupancy rates for moorings and visitors remain stable
- Proposed changes to fees and charges as set out in the report are approved
- Assumed pay award of 3.2% and incremental salary increases
- Anticipated increase in energy costs of 7% for electricity, 3.4% for water and fuel
- Inflationary increases applied of 3.4% where appropriate

6.6 A detailed financial breakdown for each harbour is provided in the appendices. The variations to budgets that impact all three harbours are as follows. Variations relating to individual harbour budgets are presented later in the report.

6.7 The cost for shared services such as IT support, facilities management, HR, finance have been reviewed to better reflect a more accurate costing. For all three harbours this has resulted in a saving. For some areas, at the time of writing this report the final figure has not been fully approved and there may be a counterproposal that impacts the final budget.

6.8 In line with the current Dorset Council budget-setting timetable, assumptions regarding pay, inflation, and other key factors are still subject to change over the coming weeks and months. As such, the figures presented could be subject to change.

7 Bridport budget forecast 2026/27

7.1 The financial outlook for Bridport remains positive, with a projected surplus of £90,400. A detailed budget summary is provided in appendix 2.

7.2 This surplus marks an improvement on last year’s position, driven by increased parking revenue and the dedicated efforts of the harbour team. Their success in recent years boosting income and implementing operational efficiencies continues to play a key role in strengthening the harbour’s financial performance.

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7.3 In addition to the pay award the budget for pay-related costs has been adjusted to provide a more realistic figure based on current staffing levels.

7.4 There have been some increased costs relating to establishing dedicated budgets for banking and cash collection charges

7.5 Third-party contractor costs are forecast to increase by £10,000 to more accurately reflect actual expenditure trends in recent years.

7.6 The dredging budget has been restored to previous levels. In November, a trial of Water Injection Dredging has been undertaken at Bridport and Lyme Regis. If successful, this approach could significantly reduce the high annual costs currently allocated for maintenance dredging. However, as the trial is still ongoing, no adjustments have been made to the 2026/27 budget at this stage.

8 Lyme Regis forecast 2026/27

8.1 Historically, the Lyme Regis budget has been supplemented by the corporate budget. However, it is now expected to operate on a cost-neutral basis, with future budgets anticipated to break even.

8.2 This shift towards cost neutrality presents challenges when setting the budget, even with thorough scrutiny across all areas. Balancing operational needs with financial constraints requires careful consideration and pressures remain in achieving a break-even position.

8.3 Employee costs have increased due to the re-evaluation of posts under the Job Evaluation (JE) process. As a result, incremental pay rises will apply over the next few years, leading to pay increases that exceed standard inflationary awards.

8.4 In most areas, space is already at capacity, making it challenging to generate additional income. Inflationary increases have generally been applied to income budgets.

8.5 Based on current year actuals, parking income is expected to rise, while income from mooring fees is projected to be slightly lower than last year. These trends have been reflected in the current year forecasts

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9 Weymouth forecast 2025/26

9.1 The financial picture for Weymouth remains healthy and is forecast to return a surplus of £603,300.

9.2 A significant impact is forecast on the harbour budget for 2026/27 for the partial closure of the car park located on the Peninsular to facilitate the repairs to walls F&G. This budgetary change was originally anticipated in 2025/26; however, due to a delayed start to the works, the financial impact now falls within the new financial year. As a result, income for the previous year has returned to normal levels.

9.3 New income streams, including the sale of ice, use of catch stores, expanded storage areas for fishermen, and parking in the commercial area, have contributed to increased revenue.

9.4 The highly successful visit of the vessel *Waverley* generated new income for the harbour. As she is scheduled to return to Weymouth this year, projected income from her upcoming visit has been included as new revenue in the budget.

9.5 Income and costs associated with selling fuel from the new fuel pontoon are currently difficult to forecast. Rather than include an arbitrary figure, it has been decided not to estimate this at this stage. As the service becomes established, any financial changes will be reported throughout the year as part of budget monitoring.

10 Reserves and Asset Management Plans

10.1 Harbour reserves are built up to enable the harbours to be financially self-sufficient and to build the ability to invest into the harbours. Any year end surpluses are transferred into reserves.

10.2 Over the next 5 years, significant investment is planned as outlined in the business plan. Where reserves exist, they are fully committed to these works.

10.3 The tables below show the financial commitments of the Asset Management Plans and Development and Project Plan for the next 3 years:

Asset Management Plan			
	Bridport	Lyme Regis	Weymouth
2026/27	£291,000	£28,400	£364,000
2027/28	£40,200	£29,100	£219,500
2028/29	£18,000	£29,900	£271,800

Development and Projects	
	Weymouth
2026/27	£1,500,000
2027/28	£500,000
2028/29	£500,000

10.4 **For Bridport reserves** it is anticipated that the opening balance carried forward will be £257,900. The projected surplus for 2026/27 will be transferred into reserves, resulting in an estimated closing balance of £348,000.

10.5 Projects outlined in the business plan, with expected costs of £291,000 are expected to be funded from a combination of reserves and revenue.

10.6 **Lyme Regis** opening balance is expected to be £3,900. There is no surplus expected in the 2026/27 financial year.

10.7 **For Weymouth**, the predicted year end forecast is £1.46 million. The reserve is split to give clarity and show how and where the reserves are committed ensuring sufficient funds are available for both development and existing asset maintenance.

10.8 Reserve funds have been established for future repairs to the Pleasure Pier and for Maintenance dredging. These annual allocations were made historically, and a review will be undertaken to assess whether the current balances are adequate and to determine what future contributions may be required to ensure the reserves remain fit for purpose.

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10.9 At a Cabinet meeting in 2024, it was approved that £1.48M in funding for the repair of harbour walls F and G would be met from Weymouth Harbour reserves. This funding is allocated over three years, with the final transfer scheduled for 2026/27. The balance is held in a separate reserve fund. If there is an underspend on this initial programme of works, the remaining balance will stay within the reserve to support future wall repairs.

10.10 Capital receipt reserves are generated from the sale of assets and can only be spent on capital projects, such as buying new assets (e.g. land, buildings, vehicles) or improving existing ones.

11 Financial Implications

11.1 The report covers harbour budgets. The summary information is presented under the standard corporate headings. Dorset Council has outlined its financial plans for Bridport, Lyme Regis, and Weymouth Harbours for the 2026/27 financial year, with a focus on maintaining safe, sustainable, and economically viable operations. Revenue adjustments and any cost pressures have been considered when setting forecasts.

11.2 The harbours accounts form part of the Councils overall Statement of Accounts, which is considered and approved by the Audit Committee.

12 Legal considerations

12.1 This report has been reviewed and signed off by the Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer, confirming compliance with relevant legal and financial regulations. All proposed fees and use of reserves are in line with the Council’s statutory powers and financial governance requirements.

13 Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

14.1 The Harbours’ budgets funds items that have implications for sustainability and climate change. In utilising future budgets every effort will be made where possible to consider how carbon output can be minimised and operations made more sustainable.

15 Well-being and health implications

15.1 The harbour budget supports safe, well-maintained facilities that contribute to the well-being of harbour users, including local fishermen, recreational boaters, and visitors. Continued investment in infrastructure and services helps promote a safe working environment and supports the economic and social vitality of coastal communities.

16 Other implications

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16.1 Harbour issues are subject to regular consultation with customers, the Harbour Consultative Group and the Harbours Advisory Group.

17 Risk implications

17.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

18 Equalities

18.1 There are no equalities implications arising from this report

19 Appendices

19.1 Appendix 1 Bridport Harbour Financial Summary

Appendix 2 Lyme Regis Harbour Financial Summary

Appendix 3 Weymouth Harbour Financial Summary

20 Background papers

20.1 None

21 Report sign-off

21.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s).