General Licensing Committee

28 January 2026

Market Agreement for the provision of Fairfield and Cornhill Markets, Dorchester

For Decision

Cabinet Member:
Cllr G Taylor, Health and Housing

Local Councillor(s): Cllrs S Jones; R Major: R Biggs; A Canning; L Fry

Senior Leadership Team:
S Crowe, Director of Public Health & Prevention

Report author and job title: Graham Duggan, Head of Regulatory Services
Email: graham.duggan@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Statutory Authority: Royal Charter, 22 September 1630

Report status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

Executive summary

1.

1.1 The historic right to hold a market in Dorchester was confirmed by Royal Charter in 1630. Since February 1984, West Dorset District Council (later Dorset Council) and Dorchester Town Council have jointly managed the market. Management was initially through a Joint Committee. In 2001, day to day responsibility for Fairfield market was leased to Ensors, the current market operator. The Joint Committee was replaced with an Informal Joint Panel that oversaw this arrangement. Ensor's lease terminates on 2 April 2026, after which Dorchester Town Council will assume direct management under a concession agreement with Dorset Council. This report seeks your approval to enter into the concession agreement with the Town Council.

2. **Recommendation**

2.1 To approve the Council entering into a concession agreement, as set out in draft in Appendix 1, with Dorchester Town Council for the provision of Fairfield and Cornhill Markets.

3. **Reason for the recommendation**

3.1 To ensure effective arrangements for the provision of Dorchester Markets and satisfactory governance arrangements between the parties.

4. **Report**

4.1 Dorchester's historic right to hold a market was confirmed by a 1630 Royal Charter. Following local government reorganisation in 1974, a dispute between West Dorset District Council and Dorchester Town Council arose over which authority held the market rights. On 24 February 1984, the parties into an agreement providing that the day-to-day operation of the market should be jointly managed ("the 1984 Agreement"). A Joint Committee was established to manage the market as per the terms of reference set out in Schedule 6 of the 1984 Agreement.

4.2 On 26 June 2001, a 25-year lease was granted to T. Ensor and Son (Dorchester) Limited ("Ensors") in order that they might administer the operation of the Markets on the Fairfield Market Site on Weymouth Avenue, Dorchester. The lease transferred many of the powers previously exercised by the Dorchester Markets Joint Committee to Ensors in order that they could operate the Market as a business. This substantially reduced the powers and functions of the Dorchester Markets Joint Committee. It was agreed that the Dorchester Markets Joint Committee be dissolved and replaced with the Dorchester Markets Informal Joint Panel (the Panel). The agreement was completed and dated 18 November 2010.

4.3 On the 1 April 2019, Dorset Council succeeded West Dorset District Council.

4.4 The lease to Ensors terminates on 2 April 2026. The parties agree that the Town Council should take over the day-to-day management of the Dorchester Markets (Fairfield and Cornhill) subject to the terms and conditions of a Concession Agreement which is presented in Appendix 1 for your consideration today. The Agreement enables the Town Council to organise and operate the markets including the selection of traders. Governance of the arrangement will still be achieved through the Panel whose terms of reference have recently been updated and approved by Full Council to reflect the changed arrangements.

4.5 The Concession Agreement has been drafted by the Council's Legal Services, and the draft was considered by the Panel at its meeting on 13 November 2025, where it was referred for approval by both councils. The Town Council considered the matter at its Policy Committee on 17 November 2025 where it recommended approval of the agreement.

5. **Alternative options considered**

5.1 Dorchester Markets Informal Joint Panel has considered the options for the operation of the markets after the Ensors lease finishes. This included tendering for a new operator. However, the market is limited, and the preferred option retains all income with the councils and increases operational flexibility. It is their considered opinion that the best option for the future prosperity of the markets, and both councils, is for Dorchester Town Council to take on operational responsibility through a Concession Agreement with Dorset Council.

6. **Legal considerations**

6.1 The draft Concession Agreement has been produced by Legal Services and considered by both councils.

7. **Financial implications**

7.1 Under the proposal, financial management for the markets would transfer to Dorchester Town Council from Dorset Council. There is no anticipated financial impact from the proposal.

8. **Natural environment, climate & ecology implications**

8.1 The sale of goods within urban centres can reduce the need for travel and lessen carbon footprint.

9. **Well-being and health implications**

9.1 Thriving market environments can be a valuable community asset as a place to meet, eat, and greet. The sale of fresh, healthy foodstuffs at competitive prices can support people in managing their budgets.

10. **Other implications**

10.1 Economic impact – supporting small traders and adding vitality to the local area, increasing shopper footfall.

11. **Risk implications**

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

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Low

12. Equalities

12.1 There are no equality impacts.

13. Appendices

13.1 Appendix 1 – Draft Concession Agreement.

14. Background papers

14.1 Terms of Reference for Dorchester Markets Informal Joint Panel.