

WELLS CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE WELLS CITY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 28TH SEPTEMBER 2023 AT 7.00PM

Written reports can be viewed on the Agendas

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Cllrs: L Agabani, T Butt Philip, D Denis, S Eden, G Folkard, N Kennedy, D Orrett, S Powell, T Pullin (Mayor), G Robbins, T Robbins, I Von Mensenkampff, P Welch

IN ATTENDANCE: Town Clerk: S Luck
Assistant Town Clerk: C Woodland
WCC Staff: A Blackwill
Mace Bearer: G Woodland
Somerset Cllr: T Munt
11 members of the Public

23/127/C APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
Cllrs: J Browne, S Cursley, H Siggs
Cllr J Brown was on Deputy Mayor duty.

23/128/C DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS
To receive Councillors' Declarations of Interests, made under the Council's Code of Conduct adopted 12th May 2022.
None declared.

23/129/C MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL HELD ON THE 27TH JULY 2023
Cllr Denis asked whether the Town Clerk had received any response to his letter to the Rivers Authority and Food Retailers. The Town Clerk confirmed no response had been received.
Minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Mayor.

23/130/C MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
Mr Rob Bevan spoke about two items he had raised at the previous council meeting:
i He thanked the police for their response to the recent shoplifting problems in Wells.
ii He highlighted, again, the ongoing problems of faulty and unsafe pavements in Wells. He showed CCTV footage of members of the public falling. He spoke about the Highways Act and the poor response from Somerset Council. He repeated his request that Wells City Council take over delegated responsibility for repairs hoping that the response time would improve.
Members agreed to continue discussions with Somerset Council.
A member of the public spoke about parking and speed of vehicles in the Kennion Road area and was very concerned about the safety of children attending the Blue School.

Mr Graham Livings raised his concerns on the closure of Wells Police Station, the new development proposed and the lack of council support in keeping the station open.

23/131/C POLICE REPORT
The police were not in attendance. No report was provided.

23/132/C PRESENTATION BY COUNCILLOR ABI MCGUIRE, PROSPECTIVE INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATE, WELLS & MENDIP HILLS CONSTITUENCY
Cllr Abi McGuire introduced herself to councillors.

23/133/C PRESENTATION BY CRYSTAL JOHNSON, PROJECT MANAGER VICARS CLOSE
Crystal Johnson explained the Heritage Project and the extent of work proposed in Vicars Close. A PowerPoint presentation was given highlighting the problems; historic England and other groups were involved. It is hoped the project will be funded by a lottery bid with a delivery timetable for the project of 4 years.
Members asked questions and gave their support of the project.

23/134/C PRESENTATION BY FOCUS, CHARITY FOR AFFORDABLE COUNSELLING
The presentation by Lucia Chadwick was received and the problems with counselling in the area were highlighted. Focus Wells is a charity and relies on donations. It concluded 6,800 counselling hours in the past year and its focus was on young people.

23/135/C MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Civic Event

Remembrance Service & Parade, Sunday 12th November 2023, 9:45am
All councillors are invited to attend, more details to follow.

Mayor's Diary

- i 29th Sept- Film Premier 'Avalon of the Heart', Glastonbury
- ii 6th Oct -- Chair of Somerset Award for Service to the Community, Taunton
- iii 6th Oct -- Wells in Bloom Presentation Evening, Town Hall Deputy Mayor to attend
- iv 8th Oct – Somerset Young Farmers Harvest Service & Supper, Wells Cathedral
- v 10th Oct -- Local Council Award Scheme, Zoom mtg
- vi 14th Oct – Soup!, Connect Centre
- vii 14th Oct -- Refugee Art Exhibition,
- viii 19th Oct – Symphony Orchestra Concert, Cedars Hall
- 28th Oct – Mayor's Charity Quiz, Town Hall

23/136/C OUTSIDE SPACES & ESTATES COMMITTEE
The minutes were presented for the meeting held on 7th September 2023.

23/137/C FINANCE & COUNCIL MATTERS COMMITTEE
Cllr T Robbins presented the minutes of the Finance & Council Matters Meeting on 14th September 2023.

23/138/C PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
Cllr D Denis presented the minutes of the meeting of 17th August and 21st September 2023 and highlighted the 5G principal which will be on a future full council agenda for discussion.

23/139/C UNITARY COUNCIL

- i. Cllr Welch presented his report from Wells and Rural LCN meeting on 14th September 2023 in Binegar Memorial Hall.
He also raised the matter of LCN funding and Cllr Butt Philip responded.
- ii. To discuss WCC future working relationship with Somerset Council.
Members raised various issues regarding future working with SC and the Town Clerk said he would raise these matters at a meeting planned with SC officers and councillors with local Clerks. He would report back on the meeting.

The Town Clerk followed up on the request for WCC to look after the pavements and express his concerns on liability issues, which would need to be overcome in

any delegated authority.

23/140/C REPORT FOLLOWING LAST COUNCILLORS SURGERY ON 18TH SEPTEMBER 2023

Councillors in attendance: Cllrs Orrett and Welch
No members of the public were present.

23/141/C CIVIC AWARDS

Cllr Welch and the Town Clerk updated members on the planned event for January 2024.

23/142/C REGULAR COVERAGE OF WELLS CITY COUNCIL IN THE LOCAL PRESS

Cllr Orrett presented a report.

23/143/C PORTWAY ANNEXE

Minutes of the PA meeting presented by Cllr D Orrett.

23/144/C BAD DURKHEIM 40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

The Town Clerk updated members on the planned celebration and an attendance request was circulated.

23/145/C TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM COUNCILLORS/TRUSTEES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

None received.

23/146/C TO RECEIVE ANY WRITTEN REPORTS FROM SOMERSET COUNCILLORS

Cllrs Munt and Butt Philip presented their written report which had been circulated prior to the meeting (attached below)

23/147/C ANY OTHER URGENT MATTERS OF REPORT

- i Cllr G Robbins notified members of a community lunch she is planning for 18th December in the Town Hall.
- ii The Town Clerk informed members the first draft of the 2024-25 Budget will be presented to the Finance meeting in October.
- iii The Town Clerk reminded members of Mr K Westwood's retirement party on Wednesday 8th November.

23/148/C DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of Wells City Council will be **Thursday 26th October 2023, 7pm**

EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Note: If it is necessary for matters to be considered in confidence, it will be proposed by the Mayor that a resolution be passed under the provisions of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 as amended.

Minutes signed by The Mayor: **Date:**

Somerset Councillors' report to Wells City Council – September 2023

Council Finances

Somerset Council's financial position remains extremely challenging. At yesterday's full council meeting, the final outturn report for Somerset County Council 2022/23 was accepted, showing an overspend of £23.4million on the revenue account – principally as a result of overspends in Adults' Services and Children's Services.

This month's budget monitoring report for the new Somerset Council describes the financial situation as "stark and challenging" and highlights the major contributory factors of high inflation, interest rates, rising complexity of care, and the labour market.

The projected outturn for 2023/24 was £28.6million at the end of month 3, although this slightly improved to £26.1 at the end of month 4.

We have been advised by Somerset Council's Executive Director for Resources and Corporate Services, and by the Executive Lead Member for Resources and Performance, that the council would have to issue a section 114 notice (effectively declaring that it doesn't have enough money to cover its commitments) in approximately 18 months if no action is taken to address the situation. Action is being taken to address the situation.

The administration is focused on getting Somerset Council into a sustainable financial position, but this will inevitably involve significant budget restraint.

Local Community Networks

The second meeting of the Wells and Rural Local Community Network (LCN) took place on 14th September at Binegar and Gurney Slade Memorial Hall. Again, this meeting was well attended by Somerset Councillors, city and parish councillors, and other partners. In addition to its formal representative (Cllr Welch), Cllrs Butt Philip and Robbins also sit on the LCN as Somerset Councillors, as does Cllr Munt. However, other Wells City Councillors would be welcome to attend and participate, as would representatives of other groups and members of the public.

The key issue covered at the last meeting was active travel, and it seems likely that this will become a theme which the Wells and Rural LCN focuses on over the coming months.

Full minutes of the meeting are available at:

<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=895&MId=7063>

We would encourage all members to read the minutes.

The staffing structure for the Localities and Partnerships service is still being finalised, however interim LCN Link Officers are now being appointed.

The next two meetings of the Wells and Rural LCN are scheduled for 16th November and 1st February – venues to be confirmed.

Traffic lights

Members will be delighted to know that the signal recovery programme has entered its final stage. The works at Whiting Way were completed last week and work has now started to the East Liberty/St Andrew Street crossing. Owing to the nature and location of this crossing, the works are likely to cause significantly less disruption than the previous set of works. However, a road closure will be necessary from 23rd to 27th October – this has been deliberately timed to coincide with half term so as to reduce the disruption around the school pick up/drop off, when St Thomas Street, North Road, the Liberty and College Road are particularly heavily used.

Buses

Working with North Somerset Council, Somerset Council put out to tender for an operator for the 126 running from Wells to Weston super Mare (to replace the current Somerset Council-only service from Wells to Axbridge). Unfortunately, this did not receive any bids. The proposed route is now being revised (at the North Somerset end), to make it more attractive to bus operators, and will be put out to tender again. A new operator has also now been added to the list of approved bidders, who may bid for the 126 when the councils go out to tender again. In the meantime the current arrangement with Libra Travel has been extended until 31st December 2023.

Theo Butt Philip and Tessa Munt
Somerset Councillors for Wells
28th September 2023