

WELLS CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE WELLS CITY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 26TH OCTOBER 2023 AT 7.00PM

Written reports can be viewed on the Agendas

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Cllrs: L Agabani, J Browne, T Butt Philip, S Cursley, D Denis, S Eden, S Powell, T Pullin (Mayor), G Robbins, H Siggs, P Welch

IN ATTENDANCE: Assistant Town Clerk: C Woodland
WCC Staff: C Hobbs
Mace Bearer: C Price
Somerset Cllr: T Munt
Somerset Cllr: E Hobbs
3 members of the Public

23/149/C APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllrs: G Folkard, N Kennedy, D Orrett, T Robbins, I Von Mensenkampff

23/150/C DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

To receive Councillors' Declarations of Interests, made under the Council's Code of Conduct adopted 12th May 2022.

None declared.

23/151/C MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL HELD ON THE 28TH SEPTEMBER 2023

Minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Mayor.

Cllr D Denis requested an update on 23/129/C (Page 1) The Assistant Town Clerk reported that there had not yet been a response.

Cllr D Denis reported that she had written to Neighbourhood Services to invite an officer to visit waterways in Wells to assess work required to clear them. Cllr D Denis reported that she had not had a reply.

23/152/C PROPOSAL FOR A SAFER SPEED LIMIT ON A PARTICULAR SECTION OF THE A39 MAIN ROAD BETWEEN WELLS AND GLASTONBURY.

S Clements spoke to Wells City Council about her wishes for a speed limit change on the A39 at Polsham. The same request has gone to St Cuthbert Out and Glastonbury Parish Councils.

23/153/C MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

C Simons spoke about damaged pavements in Wells and suggested the placement of bollards along the High Street to prevent parking on the pavements.

23/154/C POLICE REPORT

Apologies were received for absence. No report was provided.

23/155/C MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- i. 28th Oct – Mayor's Quiz, Wells Town Hall
- ii. 28th Oct – Classic Motorcycle Club Presentation Evening, Town Crier attending
- iii. 30th Oct – Wells in Gloom, Shop Window judging
- iv. 30th Oct – Wookey Hole Scarecrow Competition
- v. 1st Nov – Blessing of the River Brue, Pomparles Bridge
- vi. 11th Nov - Remembrance at the Conduit at 11am
- vii. 12th Nov - Remembrance Service 9.45am
- viii. 14th Nov – Wells Floral Art Club, Wells Town Hall
- ix. 17th Nov – Wells Carnival
- x. 18th Nov – Wells Twinning 40th Anniversary Dinner, Wells Town Hall

23/156/C OUTSIDE SPACES & ESTATES COMMITTEE

Cllr S Powell presented the minutes of the Outside Spaces Committee meeting held on 5th October 2023

Cllr D Denis reminded the meeting that she had requested a volunteer from the Finance Committee to join a Wells in Bloom review group. Cllr P Welch put himself forward.

23/157/C STAFFING COMMITTEE

Cllr P Welch presented the Minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting held on 12th October 2023

Cllr D Denis requested all Councillors attend a Staffing Meeting on 30th November 2023.

23/158/C FINANCE & COUNCIL MATTERS COMMITTEE

Cllr S Cursley presented the Minutes of the Finance and Council Matters Committee meeting held on 12th October 2023

No questions received

23/159/C EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

The Assistant Town Clerk reported that the External Audit Report had been returned from Auditors. It was a clear audit and has been published in all the appropriate places.

23/160/C PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Cllr D Denis presented the Minutes of the Planning and Environment Committee meeting held on 19th October 2023

No questions received

23/161/C WELLS NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Cllr D Denis reported that the external Examiner has approved the Neighbourhood Plan, subject to small changes. It will go to referendum in January.

23/162/C 5G PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE

The meeting referred to an email from Cllr G Folkard. Following a lengthy discussion, Cllr G Robbins proposed that Wells City Council abandon the 5G precautionary principal. Seconded by Cllr D Denis. Proposal was passed by majority. Cllrs: L Agabani and H Siggs abstained.

23/163/C CALENDAR OF MEETINGS AND ENGAGEMENTS

The Meeting approved the Calendar of Events.

23/164/C REPORT FOLLOWING LAST COUNCILLORS SURGERY ON 16TH OCTOBER

Cllr S Powell reported that no one had attended. Cllr S Powell made a proposal to stop Councillor Advice Clinics as they were rarely attended. Cllr L Agabani seconded the proposal. The proposal was passed by majority. Cllrs: D Denis and P Welch abstained. The meeting already scheduled for 13th November 2023 will go ahead.

23/165/C YOUTH CLUB

Cllr P Welch presented a report (attached to the agenda) outlining plans for a Youth Club by the YMCA. Cllr I Von Mensenkampff had previously also emphasised the importance of youth provision. A lengthy discussion took place about the type of youth provision required, the involvement of outside organisations such as the YMCA and Elim Church. It was discussed that in principal, Councillors were in favour, but a strong business plan be required to identify funding, research be undertaken as to type of services and which locations may be the most appropriate.

23/166/C SALE OF VAPES

Cllr P Welch gave a report about concerns of the sale of vapes to young people. The Blue School Headteacher Mr M Woodlock has written to parents, informing them of the risks. A discussion took place and the suggestion was that The Town Clerk write to Mr M Woodlock expressing support and to encourage him to take the matter further.

Cllr T Munt reported she had attended an NHS meeting on the subject of vapes. Vapes are useful for smoking cessation but there are health concerns of young people vaping.

Cllr D Denis has written to MP J Heapey and asked that Wells City Council also write to

him. A further discussion took place about the environmental impact of discarded vapes

23/167/C TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM COUNCILLORS/TRUSTEES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

i. Cllr D Denis reported that Citizens Advice service has merged with Somerset Council and that they intend to increase publicity of their kiosks at the Town Hall and Portway Annexe. Their services' contact details remain the same

ii. Cllr D Denis reported that Tor Hill Lane Sustainable Wells group have applied for a licence to continue from December and has become an area that is having a positive impact on the environment and bio-diversity.

23/168/C TO RECEIVE ANY WRITTEN REPORTS FROM SOMERSET COUNCILLORS

Cllr T Butt Philip provided a report (attached to minutes) outlining Somerset Council finances and large budget deficit.

A lengthy discussion took place regarding Wells City Councils' frustration at the timescale of the transfer of assets from Somerset and the impact on its budgeting plans.

Cllr T Butt Philip reported that the legal process for transferring assets is very long and arduous.

Cllr T Munt reported that the Town Clerk had attended a meeting with other Parish Council Town Clerks to discuss the process and to strategise negotiations.

23/169/C ANY OTHER URGENT MATTERS OF REPORT

Cllr S Powell agreed with C Simons' suggestion of Bollards to be placed along the High Street and asked for the idea to be given serious consideration.

Cllr P Welch reminded that the deadline for Wells Civic Awards is 11th November and urged everyone to use the nominations forms to make their votes count.

Cllr D Denis reminded the meeting that on the 7th November 2023 there is a meeting with the Church Commissioners regarding proposed development plans and asked that all Councillors attend.

Cllr Agabani reported progress regarding the Skate Park after meeting Somerset Officers.

23/170/C DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of Wells City Council will be **Thursday 23rd November 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