

WELLS CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE & COUNCIL MATTERS COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 2ND DECEMBER 2021 AT 7:00PM IN WELLS TOWN HALL

PRESENT: Cllrs: J Browne, S Cursley (Deputy Mayor & Chair), S Johns, T Robbins, J Rust, P Welch (Mayor)

IN ATTENDANCE: Town Clerk/RFO, S Luck
WCC Cllrs, L Agabani, D Denis, A l'Anson, S Powell
WCC Staff, S Glendinning, A Westwood
SCC Cllr T Munt
1 member of the public

21/21FCM APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Cllrs: N Kennedy, J Osman

21/22FCM DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive Councillors' Declarations of Interests, made under the Council's Code of Conduct adopted 26th July 2012.

21/23FCM MINUTES OF THE FINANCE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 11TH NOVEMBER 2021:

Minutes of the previous meeting were proposed, seconded, approved for signing by the Chair.

Cllr Johns spoke. A member of the public, Chris Simons, had raised a number of questions on the budget at the last meeting and these questions had not been listed. The Town Clerk explained due to the number of questions raised and the restricted time allowed for public speaking questions were answered at the time. It was agreed in future to note the questions in the minutes.

21/24FCM MEETING OPEN TO PUBLIC

Nobody wished to speak.

21/25FCM FINANCE

The Town Clerk provided an update on the following:

- i. To receive the Finance Reports for November 2021.
The bank statements were checked prior to the meeting by Cllr T Robbins.

There has been an issue with rental from two properties:

Property 1: since going to court, rent has now been paid in full.

Property 2: some payment has been made, in the hands of the Solicitor who is negotiating repayment terms for the outstanding amount. The Town Clerk is confident this will shortly be resolved.

Our insurance company have advised as we have had no major claims we will receive our 'No Claims Discount' returned of £815.

The loan money for Portway Annexe remains in the account.

- ii. To receive the final draft budget for 2022-23.
£1,000 extra for Neighbourhood Plan has been included. Cllr Rust suggested going forward all Committees look at spend and consider ways to reduce. Cllr Robbins felt this was in place already, but perhaps it needed to be made more transparent.

Cllr Agabani asked whether the budget process could start earlier. The Town Clerk confirmed it can start anytime throughout the year.

A vote was taken by Committee Members to take the budget to Full Council for final approval. This was agreed unanimously.

- iii. To consider Unitary budget provision.
The WCC Parish elections have been confirmed for May 2022.
Precept request will include: new premises and an additional member of staff for the Open Spaces Team, an additional cleaner and caretaker for the Portway Annexe.

Precept will rise to £914,670 which is £1 extra on Band D Council Tax. WCC have the objective of keeping future increases as low as possible.

Cllr Agabani stated that without knowing exactly what will happen with unitary, it is difficult to comment on the increase. The Town Clerk stated we have to prepare and if funds are not used, they will be left in our account and the precept will not be increased next year.

Cllr Browne asked whether we had any prior knowledge on car park ownership following unitary. The Town Clerk stated this was not yet known.

SCC Cllr Munt stressed again how important it was for WCC to request assets now from MDC. Agreement has been sought to keep the Market Place pedestrianised for tourism for the next 18 months. SCC anticipate they will save £18million in the first year of unitary. This can only happen by cutting services.

After Full Council the unitary budget provision will be communicated to press and public.

A vote was taken by Committee Members to take the Precept request which includes the unitary budget provision to Full Council. This was agreed unanimously.

21/26FCM UNITARY & ACQUISITIONS

- i. To receive update from Town Clerk on meeting with SCC.
He has attended the fortnightly meeting with Carlton Brand Programme Director for Somerset Unitary Council, they will be organising an online conference for an evening in February 2022 for WCC Councillors to attend. More details to follow.

The Town Clerk has been to visit the Town Clerk in Frome, whose plans are very similar to WCC. They have used a consultant to help with their plan, whereas WCC has conducted ours in house. They are likely to take on the Frome Cemetery which will be a new asset for them so The Town Clerk has offered to help and share our experience. Frome are in a stronger financial position than WCC with a precept double the size. WCC will continue to work with Frome and the other Towns throughout this process.

Cllr Denis asked for an additional sentence be added under the vision on the lines of 'WCC will consider the impact on any decision that may impact on the climate emergency'. The Town Clerk to refer to The Town Clerk Assistant and Sustainability Officer to agree the appropriate wording.

- ii. To receive final draft proposal.
A vote was taken by Committee Members to take the final draft proposal to Full Council. This was agreed unanimously.

21/27FCM ARCHIVES & CIVIC ASSETS

- i. To receive update from Lead Councillor J Rust.

The Wells Archivist, Dr Julia Wood, had hoped to attend the meeting but was unable. The following update was provided and read out by Cllr Rust.

Dr Wood has researched and created a large exhibition for Saturday night's ceremony. It covers the history of Freedom of the City, previous grantees of the Honorary Freedom, and the two new grantees: Cllr Norman Kennedy and the Wells Branch of the British Legion. A glass-case display of original artefacts and documents, including items borrowed from Wells Museum and the City Archives, has been put together.

The main displays will be at the back of the ballroom on Saturday night, as well as one on the landing at the top of the stairs to your left as you enter the Main Hall. After the event, a display will be made in the vestibule.

Dr Wood has made a recent visit to the Somerset Branch of the Richard 111 Society, where she displayed three City Archives treasures, which proved extremely successful and much appreciated. There continues to be a good take-up on the Archives Reading Rooms. Jean Imray's book on the history of Wells Old Almshouse is now at the binder's.

21/28FCM STAFFING

To receive update from Lead Councillor T Robbins.
No issues had been raised by any members of WCC staff to Cllr Robbins. Cllr Robbins stated again that current staff should be kept up to date throughout the unitary process as it is a very uncertain time.

21/29FCM ANY MATTERS OF URGENT REPORT

The Town Clerk confirmed that a possible unit/yard has been found for the Open Spaces Team. We are now in early stages of negotiation, an annual rental fee of approximately £13,500 is being offered. Additional meetings have taken place with other landlords in the City and options are still being considered.

21/30FCM DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Thursday 13th January 2022, 7pm

EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Note: It is necessary for matters to be considered in confidence, it was proposed by the Chair that a resolution be passed under the provisions of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 as amended to allow a private property report.

Minutes signed by The Chair: **Date:**