

WELLS CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE & COUNCIL MATTERS COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 14TH NOVEMBER 2024 AT 7:00PM IN WELLS TOWN HALL

PRESENT: Cllrs: L Agabani, J Browne (Mayor), S Cursley (Chair), G Folkard, H Siggs, I Von Mensenkampff

IN ATTENDANCE: Town Clerk: S Luck
RFO: C Woodland
WCC Cllrs: T Butt Philip, D Denis, S Powell
WCC Staff: S Glendinning
1 x Member of Public

24/100/FCM APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Cllrs: T Pullin, T Robbins

24/101/FCM DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Cllr Butt Philip declared an interest as a Somerset Councillor.

24/102/FCM MINUTES OF THE FINANCE & COUNCIL MATTERS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 10TH OCTOBER 2024

The minutes were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair

24/103/FCM MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Mr Chris Simons asked the following questions:

- whether the Wells Rec Investment Account was a ring-fenced account. The RFO and Town Clerk explained it was a ring-fenced account for capital use only.
- He also questioned the format used for listing salaries. It was explained salaries were listed as net salaries and this was a requirement by the auditors.
- Do we have to pass any money back to Somerset Council once Wells City Council have taken over the running of the market. It was confirmed this would be an income generator for WCC and no money would be passed back to SC. The devolution of the markets is part of a five town deal, of which Wells is included. Mr Simons also asked whether VAT would need to be included on the market fees and charges, clarification will need to be sought.

Cllr D Denis raised the following:

- She stated that members of the public had been strongly sharing their concerns over the likely increase in the precept as a result of devolution. She wished to express this concern, to ensure the council looked to make savings/efficiencies wherever possible throughout the process.
- A breakdown was requested on staff costs for different locations at Portway Annexe, Town Hall, Cemetery, Outside Spaces.

24/104/FCM FINANCE

C Woodland (RFO) presented the draft Finance reports for October 2024 and answered the following questions:

- Cllr Cursley asked why the rental income for Priory Road was low compared to the annual budget. The RFO explained this was received quarterly and another payment had now been received which would show in next month's figures.

- The income on the Portway Car Park appears low, but the RFO explained some pay quarterly and some annually. It was also explained there are still three spaces vacant.

The accounts and expenses for October 2024 were approved by the committee.

24/105/FCM BUDGET 2025-26

The RFO gave a detailed explanation on the DRAFT base budget which had been circulated to members prior to the meeting. A budget based not on devolution as those figures have not been agreed yet.

It was requested for all members to feedback any amendments/savings to the Town Clerk and RFO in time for the next Finance & Council Matters meeting on 12th December. A vote will be taken at the December meeting and the Final Budget will need to be agreed in the January meeting (16th January), in order to present to Full Council on 30th January.

The Town Clerk specifically asked members to look at any possible savings for Wells in Bloom, installation of a second disabled lift in the Town Hall, replacement windows, community grants, Christmas lights.

The Chair thanked the RFO for all her effort in preparing the budget so far.

24/106/FCM UNITARY DEVOLUTION

To agree recommendations from Devolution Working Group:

- i To proceed to scope 3 team model for further financial scoping precept and loan impacts
- ii Proceed with the devolution of market service to Wells City Council, subject to further diligence and reporting to the Devolution Working Group as referenced within the Terms of Reference and Delegated Authority from Finance & Council Matters Committee
- iii Endorse in principle a market fee structure as set out by the Devolution Working Group
- iv Endorse in principle any profit made by the market in its first year will be reinvested to improve the physical infrastructure of the weekly markets and in readiness for future Christmas and other events

Cllr Siggs stated that to compare with Yeovil and Bridgwater is not a like for like comparison, due to the smaller number of houses in Wells. The impact on an increased precept, per household, is therefore much higher. Cllr Siggs is not in support of immediately taking on all services through devolution.

Cllr Butt Philip stated he was surprised the figures did not include any capital spend for the playgrounds. He was also of the opinion that WCC should not take on all services immediately.

After a lengthy discussion, it was proposed for officers to cut the scope 3 team model by up to 50% and present at the next meeting on 12th December. Cllr Agabani made the proposal, it was seconded by Cllr Browne. Five members agreed, one member abstained.

The Town Clerk agreed to contact other nearby towns to establish what increase they are planning to introduce in their precept.

It was also agreed to proceed with items ii, iii, iv above.

24/107/FCM ANY MATTERS OF URGENT REPORT.

There were none.

24/108/FCM DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 7pm, Thursday 12th December 2024

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 report.

Minutes signed by The Chair:

Date: