

WELLS CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE & COUNCIL MATTERS COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 12TH DECEMBER 2024 AT 7:00PM IN WELLS TOWN HALL

PRESENT: Cllrs: L Agabani, J Browne (Mayor), S Cursley (Chair), G Folkard, H Siggs, T Robbins

IN ATTENDANCE: Town Clerk: S Luck
RFO: C Woodland
Devolution Officer: H Wilkins
WCC Cllrs: D Denis, S Powell
WCC Staff: S Glendinning
Mayor's Consort: B Nuttall
2 Members of Public

24/109/FCM APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Cllrs: T Pullin, I Von Mensenkampff

24/110/FCM DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Cllr T Robbins declared an interest as a Somerset Councillor.

24/111/FCM MINUTES OF THE FINANCE & COUNCIL MATTERS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 14TH NOVEMBER 2024

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

24/112/FCM MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Mr Chris Simons asked why when the Wells Rec Investment Account is ring fenced it appears in the general reserve. The Town Clerk explained this was in accordance with the advice of the auditor. The Town Clerk also explained reserves were run on three months salary. Mr Simons also asked whether any clarification had been sought on the charge of VAT for the market fees and charges. The Devolution Officer is still awaiting clarification.

Cllr Denis asked whether the provision for youth of £15,000 was in the budget. It was confirmed it wasn't but this was to be discussed later in the meeting. There is a fund pot available for community health and well being which could form an LCN initiative which will require match funding in 2025-26.

24/113/FCM FINANCE

C Woodland (RFO) presented the draft Finance reports for November 2024 and answered questions.

24/114/FCM WELLS & MENDIP MUSEUM

The Town Clerk explained a request had been received from Wells & Mendip Museum to increase their grant from £3,000 to £6,000 next year due to their rising expenditure. A discussion took place and it was agreed for the Town Clerk to write back and explain we are unable to justify an increase due to other budget constraints and ask them to apply for a community grant for WCC to consider any future projects.

24/115/FCM BUDGET 2025-26

The RFO gave a detailed explanation on the 2ND Draft base budget which had been circulated to members prior to the meeting. It must be noted this does not include expenditure or income on Devolution. A discussion took place on how reductions had been made since the first budget.

It was agreed for £15,000 youth budget to remain ringfenced for a possible LCN project.

The Town Hall main lift is currently out of order, quotes have been obtained which are around £31,000 for its repair. A lift is required in order for the building to be compliant.

The budget increase would be £114,850.00, which equates to a 9.75% increase.

It was proposed by Cllr Agabani and seconded by Cllr Robbins to take this budget to Full Council. This was agreed by five councillors present, one councillor abstained.

Cllr Siggs suggested forming a working group in the New Year to look at staffing costs split across the different council areas. It was agreed for a proposal to be put to Full Council by Cllrs Siggs and Agabani.

24/116/FCM UNITARY DEVOLUTION

The Devolution Officer handed out a report to all members and answered questions.

The option presented, represents a devolution cost of £510,043, equating to an average increase of precept, when considered alongside the base budget impacts, of £32.73 per household per annum (average). This represents a precept rise of from £1,178,497 (2024-25) to £1,786,944.75 in 2025-26 or the equivalent of a rise of £608,477 (51.6%).

This however, is reduced by the assumed income levels of £200,000, which are in addition to the income already received by the council, which also has the opportunity to be further maximised with time and resource. (Commercial business acquisitions £20,000, Weekly & Christmas Market Offering £180,000)

When income is considered, this reduces the financial impact to the precept to £1,586,944, or increase of £408,447, the equivalent of 34.7%.

The supporting report referenced the break down of costs attributed to the open spaces function, and those expected from income.

The precept for 2025-26 will be £1,603,433.00 (noting that adjustment will be required ahead of the meeting to account for the changes noted within this meeting).

It was proposed by Cllr Agabani and seconded by Cllr Robbins to take these recommendations to Full Council. This was agreed by five Councillors present, one councillor abstained.

Therefore, the recommendations to Full Council are:

- 1. A base budget increase of £114,850.00**
- 2. The devolution budget increase of £428,923 includes the base budget.**
- 3. The precept for 2025-26 will be £1,603,433.00**

24/117/FCM ANY MATTERS OF URGENT REPORT.

There were none.

24/118/FCM DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 7pm, Thursday 16th January 2025

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.

24/119/FCM DEVOLUTION OF ASSETS

The confidential property matter was discussed, Officers were given instructions and will report to Full Council.

Minutes signed by The Chair:

Date: