

WELLS CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE WELLS CITY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 24TH NOVEMBER 2022 AT 7.00PM

Written reports can be viewed on the Agendas

COUNCILLORS

PRESENT:

Cllrs: L Agabani, J Browne T Butt Philip, S Cursley (Mayor), D Denis, G Folkard, D Orrett, S Powell, T Pullin, T Robbins, H Siggs, I Von Mensenkampff, P Welch

IN ATTENDANCE:

Town Clerk: Steve Luck
Town Clerk Assistant: C Woodland
WCC Staff: C Hobbs, A Westwood
Mace Bearers: C Price, G Woodland
4 members of the Public
Press: A Vallis
PC D Pearson (Neighbourhood Police)
SCC Cllrs: T Munt, M Rigby, Cllr E Hobbs

22/130/C APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllrs: N Kennedy, S Eden

22/131/C DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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

Cllrs L Agabani and T Robbins declared that they would leave the meeting should discussions take place regarding the Britannia Inn

22/132/C MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL HELD ON THE 27th OCTOBER 2022

Minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Mayor. Cllr T Butt apologised for his absence at the previous meeting of Wells City Council particularly when he had asked for an agenda item to be discussed regarding the Britannia Inn. Cllr T Butt Philip mentioned interest from several members of the community and thanked A Vallis for including an article in the Wells Voice.

22/133/C MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

C Price requested information in advance of the draft budget with regard rises in the precept. The Town Clerk reported that the second draft will go to Finance Committee in December but with Unitary imminent, there are services potentially being given to Wells City Council that may need a contingency in the budget.

22/134/C POLICE REPORT

- i. PC D Pearson reported that patrols have been increased after reports were made of an increase in drugs paraphernalia in the park.
- ii. Progress is being made regarding an individual suspected of carrying out graffiti
- iii. There has been liaison with the "Close pass team" regarding Cycling safety and in January 2023 with cameras and recording equipment being fitted to Police bicycles. Cllr E Hobbs expressed a wish to be involved.
- iv. Untaxed and non MOT'd vehicles have been clamped and removed.
- v. An individual has been identified and is being seen by the Youth offending team following incidents of stones being thrown from a bridge onto cars.
- vi. The Parking Attendant who was victim of an incident where she was driven at whilst on duty has seen them since and challenged the driver and considers the matter closed.
- vii. Violent crime stats are at a high level again this month.

Cllr E Hobbs asked whether a drug driving campaign around Wells would be possible, such as one taking place around Bridgwater. PC D Pearson reported that the traffic department hopefully will be operating a similar campaign running up to Christmas

Cllr I Von Mensenkampff asked what was being done to reduce violent crime. PC D Pearson responded and said a bigger Police presence on weekends around the city centre may help.

Cllr T Munt requested support in helping the parking offences that are taking place near St Cuthbert's School. Parking buddies (cones) and double yellow lines are being considered to solve the issue of road safety and illegal parking.

Cllr J Browne thanked Wells Police for supporting the carnival and for helping to deliver a safe event.

22/135/C FIRST BUS

Apologies sent from Doug Claringbold, First Bus.

Cllr Mike Rigby, (Portfolio holder for Highways and Digital) Somerset County Council reported that he would have liked to discuss with D Claringbold why timetables are still not available for the D2 bus from Frome to Bath in the bus shelters and stops.

- i. The 173 service has been spared. The 126 service is partially in place but only goes as far as Somerset County Council boundary at Axbridge. Negotiations are taking place with North Somerset County Council for them to enable the 126 to complete the service to Weston super Mare. Discussions with Cllrs T Munt and T Butt Philip regarding the end of the route at Axbridge to join up with the A38, then passengers can pick up another service and continue their journey. This may be possible by facilitating movement of bus stops and shelters.
- ii. 5 million pounds spent by SCC a year on funded services. Non-viable services are taken on by SCC and we are lobbying Government to extend the bus recovery grant since covid. The "Bus it" campaign was successful during the summer to encourage people back to using buses and it will continue.
- iii. Local journeys in England are being capped at £2 per journey for a period of three months which will be a significant help. The scheme should be in place by operators who have responded to the government's invitation to take part. The service will commence on 3rd January 2023.
- iv. The Bus service improvement scheme is trialling Night Buses, but is currently only in Taunton, which is being used as a hub. If successful, it can be replicated across Somerset.
- v. We need to all get behind the Bus recovery grant beyond March 2023. Bus user figures need to improve further, so that we can retain the services. Somerset County Council are not able to force Operators to run services that are not viable.

Cllr T Pullin asked about the possibility of concessionary bus pass users having access to the bus at peak times. Cllr M Rigby said that unfortunately the buses are full at commuting times and that capacity is a problem.

Cllr J Browne reported that students cannot get to Weston Super Mare and cannot access certain college courses, improvements need to be made to the Bus Station and there is a problem with the recruitment of bus drivers. Cllr M Rigby informed the meeting that a new operator may be interested in running a service from Bridgwater to Weston Super Mare and then Bristol Airport which may fill that hole. He mentioned that Somerset County Council don't have a problem recruiting bus drivers and that operators need to address the issue of recruitment themselves. Cllr M Rigby said he will look into the possibility of improving the Bus Station as it is a Hub Bus Station and that it may be eligible for a bid for funding with the Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Cllr D Denis reported that timetables are still required in timetable cases and that she has written to First Bus and requested for the Town Clerk to write to Mark Harper (secretary of State for Transport) on behalf of Wells City Council

A member of the public asked if the bus recovery grant isn't given an extension, is there a contingency in place? Cllr M Rigby said that there is some funding in the pot and he will fight to maintain the funding and increase it if we can to replace it if we have to.

Cllr E Hobbs reported that some 173 service timetable schedules have been changed from 0815 to 0730 as well as the after school bus. This is having a negative impact on school and college children who have purchased their monthly passes and are getting to school or home at inappropriate times. Cllr M Rigby said he will look into this issue.

22/136/C SOMERSET SKILLS AND LEARNING

Kathryn Baker, CEO of Somerset Skills & Learning gave a presentation.

- i. SSL is a not for profit community interest company spread across the County. The mission is simply to change lives through learning.
- ii. The Somerset Community Learning's fund is worth 2.4 million per year and we are exploring needs of local people to use the fund to best effect. To educate on flexible courses and to give people skills to move into employment or formal education.
- iii. A new initiative called "Multiply" to improve mathematic skills. 1 in 4 people struggle with the subject and the course helps with "Maths anxiety." Funding of £800,000 per year has been set aside for this.
- iv. Various adult skills programs, the most commonly Maths and English and other qualification courses.
- v. Pre Apprenticeship schemes for 16 to 19-year-olds who don't feel ready for college and Apprenticeship schemes are run at Somerset Skills and learning.
- vi. There were over three thousand Learners in 2021/2022. Community learning has a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing. We operate in many community venues. 177 attended courses in Wells through Heads Up, Elim Connect Centre and now the Portway Annexe.

A Westwood reported that he had received feedback at Portway Annexe that people would like foreign languages, particularly Ukrainian as well as English and language skills. Other suggestions were made about courses for CV writing and IT skills for older people who need an introduction to it.

22/137/C MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mayor's Diary

- i. 26th Nov, St Joseph & Teresa's Christmas Bazaar, Wells Town Hall
- ii. 30th Nov, Performance at Wells Cathedral Pre-Prep – Deputy Mayor attending
- iii. 3rd Dec, Crib Festival, St Cuthbert's Church
- iv. 3rd Dec, Messiah Concert, Wells Cathedral
- v. 4th Dec, Advent Carol Service, Wells Cathedral
- vi. 5th Dec, Christmas Celebration Concert, Wells Cathedral
- vii. 6th Dec, Christmas Celebration, Wells Cathedral Junior School
- viii. 7th Dec, St John Ambulance Presentation Evening and Carol Service, Wells Town Hall
- ix. 14th Dec, Somerset Freemasons, Annual Carol Service, Wells Cathedral
- x. 15th Dec, Christmas Party, Heads Up
- xi. 16th Dec, Christmas Party for Ukrainian Families and their Hosts, Portway Annexe
- xii. 17th Dec, Wells City Band Christmas Concert, Wells Town Hall - Deputy Mayor attending
- xiii. 18th Dec, Family Fancy Dress Fayre, Market Place
- xiv. 19th Dec, Carols by Candlelight, Wells Cathedral

Invitation from The Mayor to join him in the Mayor's Parlour after the Full Council Meeting on 22nd December for Christmas refreshments.

Cllr P Welch thanked The Mayor for hosting the Christmas party for the Ukrainian families and their host families.

22/138/C COUNCILLOR VACANCY

The vacancy in St Cuthbert's Ward was noted.

22/139/C PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Cllr D Denis (Chair) presented the minutes. No questions were received. Cllr D Denis expressed a wish for Wells City Council to thank Mr l'Anson for his work on the Neighbourhood Plan.

Cllr I Von Mensenkampff was welcomed to the Committee

- 22/140/C OUTSIDE SPACES & ESTATES COMMITTEE**
Cllr L Agabani (Chair) presented the Minutes. No questions were received
- 22/141/C FINANCE & COUNCIL MATTERS COMMITTEE**
Cllr T Pullin presented the Minutes. No questions were received
- 22/142/C COUNCILLORS MONTHLY SURGERY**
Cllr P Welch reported that there were no attendees for this month's Councillor Advice Surgery and suggested that the meetings be advertised 6 months into the future.
- 22/143/C STAFFING COMMITTEE**
Cllr P Welch (Deputy Lead) proposed for a stand-alone staffing committee to meet quarterly. Cllr Robbins (Lead Councillor) seconded the proposal and the proposal was carried unanimously.
Four members put their names forward Cllrs: L Agabani, D Denis, S Eden, H Siggs. They will join Cllrs: T Robbins (Lead) and P Welch (Deputy Lead)
Cllr L Agabani requested that all proposals be submitted in a written format in the future.
- 22/144/C CLIMATE EMERGENCY WORKING PARTY**
Cllr Denis proposed that Wells City Council ensures a regular oversight of issues relating to Climate Emergency be placed on Outside Spaces meeting agendas. A working party can then feed-back any work to the Outside Spaces Meeting. The proposal was carried unanimously.
- 22/145/C NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**
Cllr D Denis reported that Mendip District Council had suggested minor wording amendments. There had been 50 responses to the Public Consultation out of five thousand leaflets delivered. The Neighbourhood Plan will be ready to vote on at next month's Full Council Meeting. The Neighbourhood Plan is expected to go to the Examiner in January 2023
- 22/146/C WELLS HERITAGE PARTNERS**
Cllr S Powell was appointed as representative to the Wells Heritage Partners on behalf of the Wells Recreation Ground Trust.
- 22/147/C TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM COUNCILLORS ON OUTSIDE BODIES**
- i. Connect Centre Report from Cllr Welch (attached).
Cllr S Powell asked which groups use the Connect Centre and was informed that Wells Men's Breakfast and Wells Soup are using the centre free of charge.
Cllr P Welch reported that the Connect Centre is running their own outreach service and working with the new outreach service now run by Mendip District Council as the Connect Centre is widely known as being a location where support can be accessed. This is being financed by the Elim Church with £100,000 but there are problems accessing further funding and there are fears that their work will have to cease in 2023.

A brief discussion took place about how homeless people access assistance and the process for reporting somebody so that they can access help.
Cllr D Orrett asked how many groups were accessing the Portway Annexe and was informed that 8 to 10 groups were making use of the building.
 - ii. Museum Report from Jenny Rust. The Report was noted, no further comments made.
- 22/148/C TO RECEIVE ANY WRITTEN REPORTS FROM DISTRICT OR COUNTY COUNCILLORS**
Cllr T Butt Philip (SCC) produced a report from Somerset (attached)

Cllr D Denis asked about the potential for Wells City Council to be transferred allotments for the cost of £1, which has been reported as having taken place in Frome from Mendip District Council. The Town Clerk reported that the legal fees for transfer are £4k per asset.

A discussion took place regarding the length of time that roadworks have taken to be completed at locations in the City. Cllr T Munt reported that the Highways team upgrading the traffic lights had over run but that other un-associated roadworks, where utility companies are

carrying out essential repairs cannot be prevented from doing so. There is a program of further works upgrading traffic lights scheduled which will continue from the recently completed location to Whiting Way.

A brief discussion took place about the possibility of improved communications from the Highways department in the future, along with contact details in the event of a failure of the temporary traffic lights.

22/149/C ANY OTHER URGENT MATTERS OF REPORT

None received

22/150/C DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of Wells City Council will be Thursday 22nd December 2022, 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:**

County Councillors' report to Wells City Council – November 2022

Council finances

All local authority budgets remain under enormous strain and Somerset County Council is no exception. In November the council's projected spend for this financial year was £21.2m in excess of the budget (5.5%), the projected overspend is currently declining month on month, thanks to the work of officers and the Executive Lead Member for Finance, but the council is clearly still under enormous financial pressure. Looking towards the 2023/4 budget for the unitary authority, even after £27.8m in savings and income generation proposals are taken into account, and assuming the cost of social care reform are fully funded, there remains a budget gap of £38.2m to be addressed. The new authority's budget is due to be agreed at the 22nd February 2023 full council meeting.

Local government reorganisation

The new Somerset Council will come into existence in a little over four months' time. Work is continuing to ensure that the new authority is legal and operational by 1st April 2023 – attempting to do this in the short time remaining, coupled with ongoing financial pressure and the day-to-day business of running a local authority means the staff are under enormous pressure.

The consultation on Local Community Networks (LCNs) has now closed – thank you to Wells City Council for ensuring its submission went in. Unsurprisingly the consultation on LCNs did not give an entirely clear steer as to what the geography and functions of the new LCNs should be. A report will be brought to the Executive in January which it is anticipated will enable a decision to be made as to what LCNs will look like from April 2023.

A decision on how planning will be managed once the new unitary comes into existence is expected before the end of the year.

Council tax support

The creation of the new unitary necessitates the creation of a single council tax reduction scheme across Somerset (previously each district operated its own scheme). At its meeting this Wednesday, the full council agreed to a scheme for working-age people (discounts for those of pensionable age are dealt with by a different, nationally-set scheme) agreed to a scheme of council tax reduction which would mean those on the lowest incomes pay no-council tax at all (currently the maximum discount under the Mendip scheme is 80%).

Under the scheme of council tax discounts and premiums the Somerset Council will also offer a 100% discount on council tax to care leavers under 25 and a 50% discount to qualifying foster carers and special guardians.

Cost of living crisis

At its July meeting of the full council a decision was made to declare a cost of living emergency, subsequently a cost of living working group was set up which reported to the Executive in October. Work is ongoing to implement the recommendations of that group including initiatives to tackle food insecurity and supporting the Warm Welcome initiative.

Theo Butt Philip and Tessa Munt
County Councillors for Wells
24th November 2022