

## WELLS CITY COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE & COUNCIL MATTERS COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2021 AT 7:00PM IN WELLS TOWN HALL

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

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Town Clerk/RFO, S Luck  
Town Clerk Assistant, C Woodland  
WCC Cllrs, L Agabani, A l'Anson, S Powell  
WCC Staff, S Glendinning, A Westwood  
SCC Cllr, T Munt  
1 member of the public (Chris Simons)

#### **21/11FCM APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Cllrs: J Osman, J Rust

#### **21/12FCM DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

#### **21/13FCM MINUTES OF THE FINANCE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2021:**

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

#### **21/14FCM MEETING OPEN TO PUBLIC**

WCC are committed to the Climate Emergency plan declared in Apr '19 so Cllr Powell commented on the purchase of the truck for the Open Spaces Team. She proposed that if a diesel truck is purchased that it should be less than 5 years old to achieve the emissions target. The Town Clerk provided an update, rather than a used vehicle, the Outside Spaces Officer is in negotiation to buy a new diesel truck which has a low emission engine. The cost of this is likely to be just in excess of the £20k put aside but will be a better option until an electric alternative is available.

Cllr Powell asked what is understood by WCC to be cost neutral. The Town Clerk explained WCC will be negotiating with SCC for new services to be cost neutral but it will depend on the assets we are able to get back from SCC and MDC.

Cllr Powell stated the Sports Ground has a 30-year lease. The Town Clerk explained, WCC would like the freehold, any existing lease would be honoured and the future lease would be up to the committee to decide.

It was stated by both the Town Clerk and The Mayor, Cllr Philip Welch, WCC will negotiate to get the best deal possible from the Unitary Authority.

Chris Simons raised a number of points on the budget and future risk assessments which the Town Clerk was able to clarify.

#### **21/15FCM FINANCE**

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

- ii. To receive the draft budget for 2022-23.  
The Town Clerk presented a detailed explanation on the draft budget (new expenditure & new income). Discussion took place and the Town Clerk answered questions. The draft budget was accepted and it will return to this committee again on 2<sup>nd</sup> December before going to Full Council on 9<sup>th</sup> December for approval.

The Planning & Environment Committee have requested an extra £1k for the Neighbourhood plan consultation costs. This was proposed, seconded and agreed and will be included in the budget.

- iii. To consider unitary budget provision.  
The Town Clerk explained:
  - the new open spaces yard is a priority as current conditions at the cemetery are unsuitable,
  - an extra member of staff on open spaces is vital to meet the extra demands,
  - since the start of COVID, we can no longer guarantee our regular income from rental properties,
  - the budget is very tight, flexibility is needed through the precept.

The Town Clerk requested members to contact him if anyone had any further comments on the budget.

#### **21/16FCM UNITARY & ACQUISITIONS**

- i. To receive update from Town Clerk on meeting with SCC.  
The Statutory change order for unitary has been issued but the date of the elections will not be known until the end of the month.  
The parish elections will definitely tie in with the unitary elections.  
There are 2 options:
  - 1) bring forward Parish elections to May 2022 or
  - 2) put the Unitary elections back to May 2023.

WCC have been told to prepare for both options at this stage.

- ii. To receive draft proposal update.  
This draft document needs to be ready for SCC by January 2022 to start negotiations. Any comments at this stage are welcomed. It will be submitted to Full Council in December to be signed off.  
The Town Clerk stated he was working with other Parish Councils and asked for the committee's agreement to share our proposal and receive others so a combined approach could be considered. This was proposed, seconded and agreed.

SCC Cllr Munt stressed the importance of WCC being prepared to take on services and attain assets, for example the library.

#### **21/17FCM ARCHIVES & CIVIC ASSETS**

- i. To receive update from Lead Councillor J Rust.  
The attached report had been circulated in advance of the meeting. No further comments were made.

#### **21/18FCM STAFFING**

To receive update from Lead Councillor T Robbins.  
No staff issues were reported.

The Town Clerk explained a recent Staff meeting had taken place to update them on the unitary proposals and possible staff changes that may be needed.

**21/19FCM ANY MATTERS OF URGENT REPORT**

The Town Clerk explained one of the rental properties that were not paying rent were now contributing.

The Mayor, Cllr Philip Welch, expressed a vote of thanks to The Town Clerk and Town Clerk Assistant for the work to date on the Unitary proposal.

**21/20FCM DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 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:** .....

**Summary of recent Archives news, 8/11/2021**

Members of the public are once again being welcomed to the City Archives Reading Room to consult documents in person. This follows considerable preparation to make it as safe as possible for volunteers and visitors. Progress is being made by the Archivist and her volunteer assistant, Jonathan Chivers, in catching up with the enormous backlog of Archives enquiries which accrued over the past eighteen months. Wells Museum has invested in a new dehumidifier for its Strong Room, which is contributing considerably to maintaining an appropriate environment in which to store the City Archives. Several historic volumes from the Archives collection will shortly be going for conservation. On 20<sup>th</sup> November the Archivist will be displaying two medieval charters and the Convocation Book dating from 1450-1553 at a meeting of the Wells branch of the Richard III Society. Jean Imray (former City Archivist)'s book on the history of Wells Old Almshouse is now at the printer's and it is hoped to launch it next February. The Archivist was one of its editors, and the book makes extensive reference to sources held by the City Archives. Finally, the Archives is participating in the Wells and Transatlantic Slavery Working Group spearheaded by the Cathedral's Chancellor.

Julia Wood, Archivist, Wells City Council