

WELLS CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF WELLS CITY COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, WELLS TOWN HALL ON THURSDAY 27TH FEBRUARY 2020 AT 7.00PM

PRESENT: Cllrs: L Agabani, S Briton, P Crummay, S Cursley, O Hartley, R Humphreys, A l'Anson, N Kennedy, J Linsdell, J Osman (Mayor), J Parker, J Rust, P Welch (Deputy Mayor), C Wride

IN ATTENDANCE: Town Clerk/RFO: S Luck
Mace Bearer: R Payne
Chaplain: A Glanville
Leader of SCC, Cllr D Fothergill
County Cllr T Munt
MDC Cllrs: R Wyke (Leader), L Rogers
SCO Cllr M Cooke
WCC Staff
16 members of the public

PRAYERS

Prayers were conducted by the Mayor's Chaplain, A Glanville

WELCOME

Cllr J Osman welcomed newly elected St Thomas' Ward members Cllr R Humphreys and Cllr J Parker

20/21C APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr C Rees

20/22C DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive Councillors' Declarations of Interest, made under the Council's Code of Conduct adopted 27th July 2012:
None Declared.

20/23C MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CITY COUNCIL HELD ON 30TH JANUARY 2020

Minutes of the previous meetings were proposed, seconded, confirmed as a true record and signed by the Mayor.

20/24C MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

SCO Cllr M Cook – Following a meeting with St Cuthbert Out PC concerning funding for the No 67 Bus Service. A meeting with David Huxtable is planned in a few weeks regarding funding and Cllr Cook requested that Wells City Councillors attended to support the service's continuation.

Mrs Lewis – Thanked City Council for supporting the Fairtrade Foundation through a grant of £200 which has funded the latest brochure and Fairtrade event.

Mrs Welch – Raising awareness of the proposal to erect a mast in Cathedral Playing field. Would like the environmental issue to be taken into account and asked for a review into any siting of any new mast. Cllr J Osman advised Mrs Welch to contact Cllrs T Ronan and Cllr C McKinnell at Mendip District Council, who would be able to raise the issue with Mendip District Council, who are the decision makers.

20/25C POLICE REPORT

Beat Manager Dan Williams was unable to attend but sent a brief summary that

- i. Drug education at Wells Blue School had been very successful.
- ii. Car Crime in Wells – Beat Team are aware and are actively trying to curb this recent theft spree which is predominantly someone taking cash/items from unlocked vehicles – One male arrested and released under investigation.
- iii. Following a recent PACT meeting the issue of Chamberlain Street was brought up (Speeding and No entry violation) – Police will be focusing on this issue over the next couple of weeks.

DEVOLUTION IN SOMERSET

Presentation by:

- i. Cllr David Fothergill, Leader SCC

Report has shown that there is a need for change. Somerset will have another 60000 older people in a few years which will put the County Council in a serious position. Doing nothing is not an option. The proposal is to move to a Single Unitary Authority. County Council will be abolished as will District Council. This is already the case in many locations such as Wiltshire, Cornwall, Buckinghamshire, all London Authorities and 135 other Councils.

Reports show that savings could be £47million but £25million I would be happy with. This money is needed for Services and it would reduce the duplication of departments. Power would be devolved as much as possible to local level. Everyone would benefit and services would be more local. It will also stop confusion about what service is done and by whom. What is best for the people of Somerset is paramount.

- ii. Cllr Ros Wyke, Leader MDC

Change is needed. Daily services are delivered locally and this is important. There are understandable concerns about distances. Children's services and Adult Social Care are 2 largest proportion of the budget for a small population. It is a black hole and we can't predict the future. Housing is delivered by MDC and is contentious. Housing is important as is economic growth. MDC have secured £1 million for green issues. The implementation will be £82 million but I wonder if the savings will happen. I see it will bring cuts not savings to Libraries, Roadside cleaning, white-lining and more. "What has County done for us? No new roads in Mendip District. Change is needed but is devolution to a Unitary Authority right?"

QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Cllr N Kennedy – Concerned about the positions of Parish Councils in a Unitary Authority.

Cllr R Wyke – Parish Councils can/should do more. If Devolution happens we need to support small Parishes have a larger share.

Cllr D Fothergill – Some Parish Councils will take on more than others. We will make deals and have Trust status and different levels. Some Parish Councils will take more responsibility and some will take less.

Cllr L Agabani – It is paramount that confusion is cleared up as people don't know if District or County are responsible for a service.

Cllr D Fothergill – Joined up services are needed so that local and strategic planning is joined up.

Cllr R Wyke – Estimate 3-5 years creating new authority. Unable to predict if it will work. This is not about savings but quality of service.

Cllr O Hartley – Management of current or perceived issues. Issues such as Skills gaps, school underfunding. What are proposals to help services?

Cllr R Wyke – Education is Central Government. MDC have deprived wards and has significantly lowered homelessness as it has reacted early and taken preventative actions.

Cllr S Cursley – Suspicious of the savings but how are decisions made? Is there a vote?

Cllr D Fothergill – Process is that I have written to the Secretary of State last week, copied to all District leaders. A Business case will be built. This will be done by the end of July 2020. Secretary of State will want to see that there has been Consultation. The decision is his. The timeframe could be 6 months or 6 years and cannot be predicted.

Cllr R Wyke – Decision happens at Whitehall. Reality is that we don't have a vote.

Cllr J Parker – Is there a feel of what proportion is saved from reducing duplication?

Cllr D Fothergill – Savings are significant. Currently we have 5 Chief Executives, 300 Councillors. We will only need 100 – 120. Procurement Contracts for IT, Revenue and benefits and facilities will show savings.

Cllr J Rust – With regard to Democracy. Have SCC triggered the process?

Cllr D Fothergill – Parliament will vote. We will consult and will have roadshows to hear local response.

Cllr R Wyke – Decision did not go through Full Council. I am fearful that democracy will be challenged.

Cllr J Osman – Do you think devolution will discourage people who work, from becoming a Councillor due to the workload? The plans for devolution in 2007/2008 were debated but it didn't happen.

Cllr D Fothergill – Devolution will make issues more local so it will help local people get involved.

Cllr R Wyke – You will get a plan. I am happy to talk about the issue. These plans have been going on for some time. Mendip voices need to be heard and local needs met.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Colin Price – With regard to finances. Money is gained through car parking precept etc.; I cannot see how the shortfall will be met.

Cllr D Fothergill – Car parks will be covered in the deal the Council draws up.

Mrs Welch – With regard to the employment savings, will there be support for staff in the period of uncertainty.

Cllr D Fothergill – My background is HR. Staff will always be my priority.

20/27C MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- i. Annual Parish Meeting - 11th March 2020 6pm, Town Hall.
- ii. Legal Service, Wells Cathedral, 15th March 2020, 11.30am.
- iii. Tourist Information opening 29th February 2020 Town Hall
- iv. Charity Event Hooray for Hollywood - 28th March 2020 7pm, Town Hall

20/28C NOMINATIONS OF MAYOR AND DEPUTY MAYOR

Cllr P Welch was proposed by Cllr O Hartley, seconded by Cllr P Crummay there were no other nominations. A show of hands showed majority support for the nomination.

Cllr Welch thanked members for their support.

Cllr S Cursley nominated Cllr O Hartley as Deputy Mayor, seconded by Cllr J Osman.

A show of hands showed unanimous support for the nomination

20/29C MINUTES OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 13th February 2020.

The Chairman presented the minutes and invited questions.

Cllr L Agabani thanked the Town Clerk and A Westwood for help in getting the Tourist Information Centre re-established in the Town Hall.

Cllr J Linsdell enquired about the decrease in Town Hall Lettings and was assured that after Christmas the bookings have been slow.

20/30C ANNUAL GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The Scheme of Delegation was presented:

- i. Cllr L Agabani announced that Finance and General Purposes Committee will be called Finance Committee going forward.
- ii. Cllr J Osman reassured Cllr J Linsdell that it would be possible to establish working groups as and when they are required.
- iii. Cllr S Britton requested that individual Committee have a yearly review and this be included on the Agenda. The Town Clerk was asked to inform each Committee when a review is due.
- iv. Cllr L Agabani announced there will be a Budget sub-committee.
The Scheme of Delegation was proposed, seconded and approved.

20/31C ASSETS REGISTER (PROPERTIES)

The Chairman presented the Assets Register which was proposed, seconded and approved.

20/32C MINUTES OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 6th February and 20th February 2020.

The Chairman presented the minutes and invited questions.

20/33C MINUTES OF THE ARCHIVES & CIVIC ASSETS COMMITTEE

To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 20th February 2020.

The Chairman presented the minutes and invited questions.

20/34C WORKING GROUP POLICY (attached)

The policy was presented by Cllr Briton and was proposed, seconded and approved.

20/35C WELLS RECREATION GROUND

Cllr Osman outlined the main options to the Council.

- i. We take no action and advise MDC we do not wish to take over the recreation Ground.
- ii. We proceed with negotiations with MDC to take control and responsibility of the Wells Recreation Ground.

The Council agreed that we would proceed with entering into negotiations with MDC about taking control and responsibility of the Wells Recreation Ground.

As the Council had decided to proceed with negotiations with MDC, Cllr Osman presented the various options available to the Council.

- i. We could accept MDC's proposals of a 3-year lease.
- ii. We could ask MDC to become a joint Trustee along with MDC and have joint control / responsibility and burdens of the Recreation Ground with them.
- iii. We could ask MDC to pass over full control / ownership and responsibility of the Wells Recreation Ground. In this case we would be the only Trustee.

The Council agreed that

- i. On a unanimous basis, it does not wish to enter into a 3-year lease for the Wells Recreation Ground.
- ii. On a majority basis, its preferred choice would be to take full control / ownership and responsibility of the Wells Recreation Ground. However, if that was unacceptable to MDC then we would be prepared to become a joint Trustee with MDC.

20/36C

Cllr L Rogers – Commenced report by speaking in a hostile manner about Cllr J Osman. Cllr Rogers does not accept his view on Housing and the Christmas Markets. Cllr Rogers looks forward to working with a new Mayor. At this time Cllr Rust intervened and asked that Cllr Rogers refrain from making attacks in the Council Chamber upon a member. Cllr Rust asked Cllr Rogers to move on. This proposal from Cllr Rust was accepted by Councillors and Cllrs Rogers was instructed to move on.

- i. MDC now has a new corporate plan to provide more affordable and social housing, also to accelerate Mendip's response to the climate and ecological emergency including the establishment of more footpaths and cycle paths, and reduce the wasteful outsourcing of council services. We are also reviewing the local plan to look for ways to encourage developers to build better quality, carbon neutral houses and more social housing. We are also looking for other ways to modify or even prevent development on the scale being forced on us by national government and we want to collaborate with you on this going forward. As you know we are now being required to absorb 604 new houses being built every year in the district - up to 2,000 of them around Wells alone.
- ii. Since 2010, 4,449 new houses have been built in the district, 1 thousand around Wells. Only 997 of the total were 'affordable', available at 20% below the market price which in Mendip is an average £283,000. That price means an average house locally costs just below 12 times average local earnings. Mendip district has also been a considerable way off its target for 30% of new housing to be affordable or social housing, which would allow us to find housing for the growing number of local homeless people. This is partly as a result of changes in government policy allowing developers to argue they need to protect their profit margins.
- iii. We want to stop drivers sitting in cars and buses with their engines running which is already an offence under road traffic legislation. We are investigating ways to enforce this.
- iv. A procurement process has started so that we can provide a small number of EV rapid charging points in Mendip car parks throughout the District. There will be four to five to start with and if these prove successful more will follow.

- v. We received a very encouraging presentation from Somerset Waste Partnership showing Somerset is the 7th best rated area for carbon saving in England. Mendip is also going to be the first area in Somerset to have the new Recycle More Service from June 2020. The new kerbside collections will see a wide range of extra materials added to weekly recycling collections: household and food plastic pots, tubs and trays, Tetra Paks and other beverage cartons, small electrical items and household batteries.
- vi. To mark the anniversary of the council's Climate Emergency declaration, the council is giving two trees each to all members of staff to plant where they choose, plus they are planting one tree for each member of staff on Mendip land making a total of 570 fruit and native trees. This scheme will run for four years meaning a total of 2,280 trees over that time. We have carried out a CO2 baseline for the Mendip district as the first step to developing a carbon management plan. We are fully committed to Mendip's target of being carbon neutral by 2030. Please come along to our drop in event here at the Town Hall on Thursday 19th March from 6pm to 9pm where you can find out about the work of CEEG - the climate and ecological emergency group.

Cllr T Munt –

- i. Reported that the 2007 business case was being used in the bid for Unitary Authority.
- ii. Proposed improvements to roads near Stoberry School, it was reported that some residents are contesting the proposals.
- iii. Somerset County Council have passed a budget of 338 million. Some cuts from the Emergency budget not had an impact.
- iv. 20mph zones have been implemented outside Schools
- v. Full Council have a Tree Motion where a tree will be planted for every birth.
- vi. There is Parish level focus so that Working together will be improved
- vii. Carbon Emissions – A draft report will be written over the next 10 days
- viii. A Nature Partnership has been set up
- ix. SCC Improving Lives – The Elim Connect Centre have benefited as have the Laurence Centre and Heads Up.

Cllr J Osman welcomed the proposal to extend tree planting to include children who died young or were stillborn. Cllr Osman asked Cllr Munt to pass on his thanks to whoever at Somerset County Council make this proposal.

Cllr S Britton – Two members of the public were fined in a Wells Car Park after the parking meter was not working and as they are elderly were unable to use the Pay by phone facility. They paid their fine but Cllr Britton was concerned that Wells is a tourist destination; it does not show the City in a good light.

20/37C ANY OTHER URGENT MATTERS OF REPORT

Cllr J Linsdell - Informed the meeting of the Fairtrade in Wells launch on the 28th Feb 2020

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, excluding the press and public to consider a Civic event.

20/38C MAYOR'S REPORT

After discussion it was proposed, seconded and agreed to hold a full Civic Freedom event in May subject to the agreement of the participant.

20/39C DATE OF NEXT MEETING will be at 7pm on Thursday 26th March 2020