

WELLS CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL WELLS CITY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 27TH MAY 2021 AT 7.00PM

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Cllrs: L Agabani, S Briton, S Cursley, A l'Anson, S Johns, N Kennedy, T Leach, S Powell, T Pullin, J. Rust, P Welch (Mayor)

IN ATTENDANCE: Town Clerk/RFO: S Luck
WCC Staff: M Culliford, C Hobbs, A Westwood, K Westwood
6 Members of public

21/81/C APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllrs J Browne, O Hartley (Deputy Mayor), R Humphreys, J Osman

21/82/C DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

21/83/C MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL HELD ON 29TH APRIL 2021

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

21/84/C PRESENTATIONS:

All Councillors introduced themselves in turn for the benefit of the four newly-elected Councillors.

1. Cllr R Wyke, Leader of Mendip District Council – Update on Stronger Somerset

Cllr Wyke thanked the City Council for allowing her to give an update but explained that due to the Stronger Somerset/One Somerset poll still running and in the absence of D Fothergill, Leader of Somerset County Council, she felt it inappropriate to say too much. Cllr Wyke stressed that voting on the poll is easy either digitally or by post. Cllr Kennedy asked for the costings of the poll. Cllr Wyke explained that it will be approx. 72p per elector. This equates to approximately £60,000 for Mendip and £300,000 for the whole of Somerset. The figures banded about of about £1.4million are totally inaccurate. Cllr l'Anson asked for details regarding the Secretary of State's consultation that took place. Cllr Wyke explained that that consultation was in three parts but that it didn't directly consult any of the Councils in Somerset, it was difficult to understand, even for better informed people and that the questions asked were archaic. Our poll is simple to understand and MDC will listen and are beholden to respond. Cllr Kennedy – Stated his opinion that the poll is a waste of money as the Secretary of State will do what he wants. Cllr Wyke responded that this is the case but that the Secretary of State needs to be given the opinion and hear the voice of the electorate. This is an advisory poll and will have a public result. Once the Secretary of State has made his decision, this will go to the House of Commons as well as the House of Lords before it is a statutory situation. Cllr Pullin - Where did the figures come from that are stated at the bottom of the poll? If there are going to be twice as many Councillors, then how can it be so cheap? Cllr Wyke explained the reason being the reduction in services and having a smaller executive team. The savings of the team are a small amount of the £350 million as Adult Social Care and Social Care is a huge proportion. We have an ageing population. Preventative and early intervention can save money and reduce demand which is significant over 10 years. Mendip homelessness figures are better than other parts of the County due to early intervention.

Cllr Pullin – Asked why the need for twice the number of Councillors in the Stronger Somerset option? Cllr Wyke responded that there are two reasons. The One Somerset option would be very remote due to its position. Secondly, the County of Somerset is very large. Splitting it into East and West provides the area will give us a responsive organisation which better represents the electorate, it will give a larger proportion of Councillors to the electorate.

Cllr Agabani – In my opinion I feel the poll is misleading as people believe it's a vote rather than simply seeking an opinion especially as one consultation has already finished. It's unfortunate that £60,000 has been spent and hope the result can and will be used towards the final decision. Cllr Wyke agreed and stated that the documentation said it is an advisory poll.

Cllr Kennedy – When Unitary happens will a lot of the things that Mendip do now, fall on parish Councils to do? Cllr Wyke – Not necessarily. Some things will be delegated to some of the larger Parishes with support and with locality agreements. An example of this is the Bishop's Barn and Recreation Ground being returned to the City.

21/85/C MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Member of the public spoke about the resignations over the last two years and that a few have spoken about a lack of transparency which concerns her. The second point was the difficulty of parking in city due to the lack of disabled spaces in the City in recent years and that she appreciates that tourism needs support but so do local residents. The third point was regarding the bins being left outside of premises and she was concerned by the amount of rubbish generated by businesses and that rubbish management should be part of the business plan. She is monitoring the amount of rubbish and that it needs to be taken seriously and dealt with as animals get at the rubbish and it is being spread across the pavement and action needs to be taken.

Cllr Agabani – With regard to the commercial rubbish, there is a plan developing but this takes time. No commercial rubbish should be left out as they should have a contract with a company to deal with their waste. The parking is being dealt with too but again this takes time.

Cllr l'Anson – We have been in touch with the Mendip officer who is aware of the rubbish problem and it is in hand.

Cllr Munt – There is a parking review due and residents will be getting a questionnaire through their door, though I can't say when at this point. Due to lack of funds at Somerset County Council, there is a shortage of disabled parking and bays outside houses. Review is underway.

Cllr Wyke added parking in Wells is challenging. MDC is currently reviewing the parking situation.

21/86/C MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mayor's Diary

1. 17th May – Royal visit to Wells
2. 20th May – Wells Cinema reopening
3. 27th May – Licensing of new Vicar at St Thomas Church
4. 2nd June – U3A Day in the Market Place
5. 6th June – Royal British Legion 100th Anniversary, Evensong, Wells Cathedral
6. 13th June – Mayor's Charity open garden, Coxley House
7. 13th June – Royal British Legion 100th Anniversary, Yeovilton Military Wives Choir, Bishop's Palace
8. 1st July – Symphony Orchestra Concert, Wells Cathedral School
9. 17th July – Starting the Classic and Historic Motor Club Rally at the Bath & West Showground. This is a fundraiser for the Mayor's Charity
10. 24th July – Wells Community Day

21/87/C MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 13th May 2021.

The Chair presented the minutes and asked for questions. None received

21/88/C MINUTES OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 6th May 2021.

The Chair presented the minutes and mentioned Rock House's application for return to a residence from a dental surgery and the refurbishment of Wells Almshouses and asked for questions. None received

Cllr Rust announced that due to the Planning meeting of 20th May 2021 not being quorate, that an item was referred back to Mendip for guidance as it was Listed Building Consent. The other items were dealt with by delegated authority.

21/89/C MINUTES OF THE PORTWAY ANNEXE COMMITTEE

To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 19th May 2021.

The Chair presented the minutes and asked for questions. Thanked the working groups and individuals who have facilitated work.

Cllr Rust - Expressed concern about the potential for an increase in the precept and requested details about expenditure. In particular, a pre-application document, submitted in March 2021 as part of the Portway Annexe loan process. It contained two Business Plans. Cllr Osman's document put the expenditure at £38,850. The Hub document put it at £76,502. In April 2020 WCC issued an Excel spreadsheet which put the expenditure at £100,752. Not taking income into account as it is an unknown. What is the current expenditure determined by the Business Plan working group and will there be an increase on the Excel spreadsheet's figure? Cllr Briton explained that estimates are being worked on and will be available in due course. The PAC is working from the WCC Business Plan. The Portway Annexe Community Groups business plan is their responsibility.

Cllr Rust – With reference to 21/19 PAC Committee & working group process. The Chair referred to the report circulated before the meeting. A vote took place and it was proposed, seconded and agreed not to allow observers at working groups.

Cllr Rust – I was pleased to see the Town Clerk state in the June edition of the Wells Voice that he considered that WCC was 'open and transparent in all its dealings and welcomed any scrutiny'. I can only wish that some councillors took the same view. On 7 May I wrote to the chair of the PAC to ask to be put on the agenda mailing list as I wished to observe the Business Plan Working Group. She replied that the Working Group Policy did not state that this could happen. Equally I would state that the policy does not say it cannot. I see from the minutes that the councillors on the PAC also take the view that a fellow councillor should not be allowed to attend a Working Group focusing on the spending of Wells' citizens' money. I take the view that the more understanding councillors have as to how decisions are reached the clearer and more thoughtful their decision-making will be. I therefore am proposing a motion to amend the Working Group policy to allow any councillor who wishes to attend a Working Group to do so. I hope another Councillor here will second this motion.

Cllr l'Anson offered to second.

Sarah Briton – Working groups are there to work and it seems unusual to have someone observing rather than working within the group. This was the unanimous view of the Portway Annexe Committee as reported.

Cllr Rust - Repeated motion that the policy that any Councillors should be able to attend the working groups.

Cllr l'Anson – Point of order: Request time to consider the motion and it be discussed at next City Council meeting and have notice of the motion

Town Clerk – It can be added to the agenda next time to give Councillors time to consider the motion.

Cllr Kennedy – Clarified that Councillors are already able to sit in on any Council Committee or Sub-committee.

Sarah Briton – Proposed that Cllr Rust’s motion which is an amendment to Council policy be put on the agenda for the next Full Council for discussion in order that Councillors have time to consider.

Cllr Kennedy seconded this proposal.
Cllr Rust requested a recorded vote.

Recorded vote

For the amendment: Cllrs Agabani, Briton, Cursley, Leach, Powell, Pullin, Kennedy,
Against: Cllrs l’Anson, Johns, Rust

21/90/C Cllr S Briton – The minutes of the Climate and Biodiversity Committee were left off the agenda and she will cover these under any other business.

21/91/C MINUTES OF THE WELLS RECREATION GROUND TRUST COMMITTEE

To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 12th May 2021.

The Mayor presented the minutes and informed that sound equipment has been donated to the City Council to use in the Bishop’s Barn or Portway Annexe. The Mayor asked for questions. None received

21/92/C WELLS NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REPORT

Cllr A l’Anson as Chair applied for additional funding under the umbrella of Locality up to £15,000 for the improvement of the High Street. There are three elements:

1. To include a vacant shop to be a pop-up shop used for public to have consultations with Councillors.
2. For a consultation to consider partial pedestrianisation of the High Street and a traffic survey.
3. An application to fund the use of recycling bins in the High Street. The Chair asked for questions. None received

21/93/C COMMITTEES UPDATE

Finance Committee 2 vacancies

Cllr Johns, Cllr Powell put themselves forward for Finance Committee. Cllr Osman will continue and will return when his 6 months leave of absence is over

Planning Committee 3 vacancies

Cllr Powell put her name forward and Cllr Kennedy will continue on this committee

City Centre and Open Spaces Committee

After a brief explanation of the purpose of the committee Cllr Leach, Cllr Pullin and Cllr Powell put themselves forward for this Committee

Archives and Civic Assets Committee

Vacancies unfilled

Climate and Biodiversity Emergency Committee

Cllr Johns put himself forward for this committee

Portway Annexe Committee 2 vacancies

Cllr Pullin and Cllr Leach put themselves forward for this Committee

Covid Recovery Working Group

Cllr S Briton gave a brief explanation of the purpose of the committee and that it has 4 months to run, also that the City’s bunting project came from the work on this committee

Neighbourhood Plan Committee

No vacancies filled

Almshouses Committee

Members were asked by the Mayor to contact him if they were interested in becoming Trustees.

21/94/C COUNCIL DIARY

Cllr Powell discussed timing of training as they can clash with Council Meetings. Cllr l'Anson agreed it was unfortunate. The diary was agreed.

21/95/C AWARDS WORKING GROUP

No report received and will be on the next agenda.

21/96/C TO RECEIVE ANY WRITTEN REPORTS FROM COUNCILLORS ON OUTSIDE BODIES

Bus Back Better - Cllr Rust gave a report about the scheme for improving public transport by encouraging more people to use the services. Would like Pete Travis who is involved with the scheme to be invited to the next meeting to give a presentation. This was agreed.

Wells Museum and Garden Cllr Rust – The new garden has been created at the Museum is a great place and is free until 5th June.

Audit of outside bodies. Sarah Briton – Apologised that she is returning this work due to the level of her existing Council commitments

21/97/C TO RECEIVE ANY WRITTEN REPORTS FROM DISTRICT OR COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Cllr Wyke presented the Mendip District Council report. The MDC written report can be viewed via the link on our website alongside these minutes.

Cllr Munt – Requested that improvements were made as the public area was having difficulty in hearing the meeting. Cllr Munt also asked that Hybrid meetings might be considered.

County Council Report

- £12.4 million budget gap announced at beginning of the month at County that she assumes will be covered by a Council Tax increase as well as business rates. More Covid funding coming but will be committed by June. County Council has committed to borrow over half a million pounds.
- Next full County Council meeting is on 21st July 2021
- The result of the One Somerset / Stronger Somerset poll will be declared. The County Council has spent nearly £1 million on the One Somerset project. When unitary happens in whatever form we will take ownership of assets around the City so that Councils can run things well.
- I am aware that many roads on estates both established and new estates are not adopted and I have asked that the County Council are looking into how this situation can be improved to improve matters as well as for the elderly, disabled with dropped kerbs and disabled spaces outside homes.
- County Councillor Surgeries will return to the City in July if Covid 19 regulations allows.

The Mayor respectfully requested written reports to be provided by county and Mendip councillors prior to City Council meetings in the future so city councillors are better able to ask questions.

21/98/C ANY OTHER URGENT MATTERS OF REPORT

Cllr Briton – Seek support from WCC to sign up make Ecocide a criminal offence as requested in the Climate and biodiversity minutes' item 21/08CBEC. Requested a vote. Cllr Rust asked for further details. Cllr S Briton will circulate details so that this can be discussed at the next Full Council.

Cllr l'Anson – WCC are member of Historic Towns and Villages Forum. They are organising seminars on 10th 17th and 24th of this month (June) between 12 and 2pm online. Called Training visions for High Streets. Cost is £20 each. Invited Cllrs to watch it on the 10th.

Welcomed new Councillors and said farewell to former Councillor Joe Parker.

Cllr Briton – Covid Recovery Working Group suggests that consideration be given to the Tourist Information Centre having a rolling information monitor about events on such as the Museum opening times, etc. It would still be visible when the TIC is closed. They would like to see Active Transport leaflets about walking and cycling routes for residents. Cllr Agabani asked that the monitor purchase request goes before the Finance committee.

Cllr Briton – Community Art project – Current suggestions are Christmas tree poles used to hang medieval flags.

Cllr Powell expressed concerns about the safety regarding holding face to face meetings and Covid regulations. Cllr Rust agreed.

21/99/C DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of Wells City Council will be at **7pm on Thursday 24th June 2021**

Minutes signed by The Mayor: **Date:**