

WELLS CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE WELLS CITY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 25TH JULY 2024 AT 7.00PM

Written reports can be viewed on the Agendas

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Cllrs: L Agabani (Deputy Mayor), J Browne (Mayor), T Butt Philip, S Cursley, G Folkard, N Kennedy, D Orrett, S Powell, T Pullin, G Robbins, T Robbins, I Von Mensenkampff, P Welch

IN ATTENDANCE: Town Clerk: S Luck
RFO: C Woodland
Devolution Officer: H Wilkins
WCC Staff: C Hobbs
Mace Bearer: C Price
Somerset Cllr: E Hobbs (Mendip Hills)
10 members of the public

24/98/C APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
Cllrs: D Denis, S Eden, H Siggs

24/99/C DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS
To receive Councillors' Declarations of Interests, made under the Council's Code of Conduct adopted 12th May 2022.
Cllr T Butt Philip declared a potential, perceived prejudicial interest in item 12 on the agenda and will leave the room during the discussion. (Cllr T Butt Philip is an Executive member of Somerset Unitary Authority)

24/100/C MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL HELD ON THE 27TH JUNE 2024
Minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Mayor.
Cllr G Robbins requested information regarding bleed kits (Discussed by Full Council and referred to the Finance Committee); Cllr S Cursley (Chair of Finance Committee) reported that Finance Committee had approved the purchase.

24/101/C MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
Two representatives spoke to the meeting of their plans to hold a Jazz Blues Festival in Wells in 2025. Free to entrants but funding will be sought through sponsorship from local businesses and grants. The event will start small and take place from Friday to Sunday.
Cllrs: P Welch, D Orrett, J Browne (Mayor), G Robbins, I Von Mensenkampff spoke of their support in principal for the event to take place.

24/102/C PRESENTATION BY MAYOR'S CHOSEN CHARITY, 5th/7th WELLS SCOUT GROUP
Robert (Explorer Scout 5th/7th Scout group) explained to the meeting that he was working towards his Young Leaders award. He reported that Scouting has helped him gain confidence in public speaking, learn life skills and therefore independence which will be helpful when he goes to University.
Nessa has been involved in Scouting since the age of six. Nessa described her progression from Beavers to Explorers. She told the meeting of the variety of activities that she has taken part in such as camping, themed camps, chip shop challenges, building camp fires, cooking for leaders. As an Explorer Nessa has visited Kenya which was self-funded through making keyrings. This skill was then taught to the school children that she met in Kenya. The young children in Kenya taught the scouts their songs etc. Nessa has also learned to ski during a scout trip to Italy.
Thomas, a young Explorer, has also been in Scouting since the age of 6. Thomas has experienced adventures such as camping, caving, climbing, orienteering, map skills, first aid. A favourite activity is a pioneering activity with a challenge to build something as a team, with varying degrees of success but the activity helps build social skills and confidence. Scouting is inclusive for all and is an opportunity to do a real activity away from a screen.

Shane (Scout Leader for 22 years) praised the three young speakers and explained briefly of the benefits of scouting and how scouting is approximately a 50:50 split of girls and boys.

Heather updated the meeting that the fundraising platform has been set up. Fundraising events are planned such as a charity ball. Following an AGM, there is a lot of parental support and aims of refurbishment are looking positive. Asbestos is needing to be removed, installation of a disabled toilet and refurbishment of the current toilets.

24/103/C MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mayor's Diary

- i. 27th July, Somerset Chamber Choir, Wells Cathedral
- ii. 3rd Aug, Wells Railway Fraternity Exhibition, Wells Town Hall
- iii. 3rd Aug, Wells Pride Event, Recreation Ground
- iv. 6th Aug, Nuclear Disarmament and Peace group event, Bishop's Palace
- v. 26th Aug, Wells Moat Boat Race, Bishop's Palace Moat
- vi. 15th Sept, Battle of Britain Commemoration, St John's Church Glastonbury
- vii. 15th Sept, Pass Wide and Slow event, Palace Fields, Deputy Mayor attending

24/104/C OUTSIDE SPACES & ESTATES COMMITTEE (Outside Spaces, Wells In Bloom, Portway Annexe)

Cllr D Orrett (Chair) presented the minutes of the meeting held on 4th July 2024
No questions were received

24/105/C STAFFING COMMITTEE

Cllr T Robbins (Chair) presented the minutes of the meeting held on 11th July 2024 and to also receive the Protocol for Councillors and Staff.

Cllr S Powell asked for clarity on paragraph 2 item 24/22/S. The Town Clerk reiterated comments made in the minutes.

Cllr T Robbins reported that there is a written protocol which is in place and that he will forward to Cllr S Powell.

Cllr L Agabani asked that protocol be reviewed.

The Town Clerk explained that it is reviewed annually.

24/106/C FINANCE & COUNCIL MATTERS COMMITTEE

Cllr S Cursley (Chair) presented the minutes of the meeting held on 11th July 2024.
No questions were received.

24/107/C PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Cllr G Robbins (Vice Chair) presented the minutes of the meeting held on 18th July 2024.
No questions were received.

24/108/C DEVOLUTION UPDATE:

Devolution Working Group (DWG) – Terms of Reference

Cllr S Cursley explained that the Terms of Reference for the Devolution Working Group had been circulated to Councillors via email on 25th July 2024.

Cllr S Powell asked the definition of a closed session.

H Wilkins (Devolution Officer) explained that closed session is not a public meeting but a working group.

Cllr S Powell asked if Cllrs were permitted to attend.

H Wilkins informed the meeting that Cllrs may attend closed sessions and that the minutes of the closed session meetings can be circulated.

H Wilkins reported that the working group have undertaken a number of tasks. Project documents are in place. There is progress in writing a communication plan and a newsletter being drafted which will be sent to members and will be sent to the Wells Voice in the coming months and a public meeting planned for 26th September 2024.

Cllr L Agabani thanked H Wilkins for her hard work on the devolution process.

24/109/C DEVOLUTION COUNCIL PRIORITY MOTION

Cllr T Butt Philip left the meeting whilst the item was discussed.

Cllr J Browne invited a proposal to approve the Terms of Reference for the Devolution Working Group.

Cllr S Cursley proposed that Wells City Council act to support the devolution of public services with immediate suspension of non-urgent matters and/or projects and in doing so allowing Council staff under the guidance of the Town Clerk to ensure the best possible outcome for the City, its residents and visitors.

Cllr L Agabani seconded the proposal.

In response to a question from Cllr L Agabani, H Wilkins suggested the addition of the wording "Wells City Council act to support the devolution of public services, by making it a key strategic project for the Council until transfer on 31st May 2025"

Cllr S Powell asked if the above suspension of non-urgent matters applied to all staff.

H Wilkins explained that day to day work will continue but that we need to recognise that there is a large volume of work to be done by a small team of staff.

All Cllrs voted for the proposal

Cllr T Butt Philip returned to the Council Chamber.

24/110/C TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM COUNCILLORS/TRUSTEES ON OUTSIDE BODIES
No reports were received

24/111/C TO RECEIVE ANY WRITTEN REPORTS FROM SOMERSET COUNCILLORS
Cllr T Butt Phillip asked for questions of the report (attached) circulated via email on the 25th July 2024.
Cllr L Agabani made reference to the £1.6 million underspend. Cllr T Butt Phillip reported that it was of course good news with more difficult decisions having been made with more to come.

24/112/C ANY OTHER URGENT MATTERS OF REPORT
Cllr G Robbins reported that the Wells Community Fridge will go ahead. Details of location will be circulated in due course.

24/113/C DATE OF NEXT MEETING
The next meeting of Wells City Council will be **Thursday 26th September 2024, 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:**

Somerset Councillors' report to Wells City Council – July 2024

Finance

The financial situation remains extremely challenging, although early indications are that the various actions taken by the council to get spending under control have been effective.

The draft outturn for 2023/24 shows an underspend of £1.6million compared to a projected £28.6million overspend at the start of the year.

The above does not mean that the financial emergency is in any way over. Although the draft outturn for 2023/24 does show a slight underspend, the budget already included a £10million use of reserves. Additionally, the small overall underspend masks significant overspends in Adult Services (£17.4million) and Children, Families and Education (£12.4million), these are balanced with significant underspends in all other directorates and in treasury management. Turning a projected overspend of £28.6million to a projected underspend of £1.6million does mean that considerably less has to be drawn from the general fund reserve, and consequently the council will have a much healthier financial buffer for the future.

However, none of the above changes the fact that we are still faced with substantial pressures in this and future years – the hard work and difficult decisions needed to bring Somerset Council to a sustainable position will need to continue.

At its meeting next month the Executive will be considering proposals to dispose of 22 property holdings deemed by the council to be surplus to requirement. A full list of these properties is available at

<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s33963/C%20R%20Appendix%20A%20-%20Disposal%20of%20Non%20Operational%20Assets%20Draft%20Executive%20Report%20Draft.pdf>, however none of these properties is in Wells or the nearby area. The sale of these

properties are anticipated to generate £17-21million. These disposals are separate to the sale of the council's commercial investment portfolio which also continues. The sale of a wide range of council assets is necessary to fund ongoing transformation work.

Transformation

The Council's consultation on the tier 2 and 3 restructuring (Executive Directors and Service Directors) has concluded. The proposed new structure has been confirmed, moving from seven Executive Directors and 22 Service Directors, to four Executive Directors and 15 Service Directors. The senior management of the Council will be structured as follows:

Executive Director Children and Family Services (DCS)

Service Director Children & Families

Service Director Education, Partnerships & Inclusion

Service Director Commissioning & Performance

Executive Director Adults and Health (DASS)

Service Director Adults & Health Operations

Service Director Adults Commissioning

Service Director Housing

Executive Director Community, Place and Economy

Service Director Infrastructure & Transport

Service Director Regulatory & Operations

Service Director Partnership, Localities and Culture

Service Director Economic Development, Skills and Climate

Executive Director Strategy, Transformation & Resources

Service Director Human Resources and Organisational Development

Service Director Digital Services

Service Director Strategy, Performance and Communications

Service Director Finance and Procurement

Director of Public Health

Interim Finance Director (S151) – until 31st March 2024*

*It is intended, under the new structure that the S151 Officer will be the Service Director Finance and Procurement, however there will be a transitional period building up to the next budget where an Interim Finance Director will be in post as S151 Officer.

Interviews for those posts which need them will be taking place next week with the new structure to be operational by 1st November.

The 45-day consultation on the remaining restructure (tiers 4-6) is expected to start in September, with the intention that the new overall structure will be in place by 1st April 2025.

Wells and Rural Local Community Network

Wells and Rural Local Community Network (LCN) held its AGM this Tuesday at Gurney Slade and Binegar Memorial Hall. Following the decision of Cllr Edric Hobbs to stand down as Chair, Cllr Tony Robbins (Mendip Hills) was elected as Chair and Cllr Edric Hobbs (Mendip Hills) was elected as Vice Chair (Cllr Hobbs has indicated that he would like to stand down as Vice Chair when a suitable alternative Vice Chair can be found).

At long last Wells & Rural LCN has a permanent LCN Link Officer, Megan Harnedy who joined Somerset Council in this role at the start of the week. LCN Link Officers serve two LCNs and Megan's other LCN is Cheddar & Axbridge. Megan can be contacted via the Wells & Rural LCN email address: wellsandrurallcn@somerset.gov.uk.

The Wells & Rural LCN still has three working groups:

- Active Travel
- Traffic and Highways
- Flooding and Emergency Planning

The draft schedule of meetings for the full LCN is:

- Thursday 10th October
- Tuesday 17th December
- Tuesday 18th March
- Tuesday 17th June

Venues to be confirmed.

Litter Bins and Dog Waste Bins

The council's Head of Operations has recently written to all city, town and parish councils in the former Mendip and South Somerset areas. Previously Sedgemoor, and Somerset West & Taunton Councils charged town and parish councils for emptying litter bins and dog waste bins, whereas this has not been done in the old Mendip and South Somerset areas. In order to deliver a consistent approach across Somerset, it is intended to charge for collections from litter bins and dog waste bins on city, town and parish council-owned land from 2025/26. The first stage is to establish which bins sit on city, town and parish council-owned land, so the Head of Operations' letter is seeking to establish that on a parish-by-parish basis.

Mendip Local Plan Part II

Consultation on the Mendip Local Plan Part II opened on 28th June and will remain open until 12th August. This consultation is necessary as a result of a Judicial Review of the adopted Mendip Local Plan Part II (Sites and Policies) 2006-29. Whilst leaving the majority of the adopted Mendip Local Plan Part II in place, this Judicial Review resulted in the removal of five allocated-sites and the need to reconsider these allocations.

Only one site has been allocated in Wells, that being The Old Police Station site on Glastonbury Road, which already has detailed planning consent for 47 units and which is proposed in the update to the Local Plan Part II to be allocated for 47 units.

Further information can be found at:

<https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/planning/mendip-local-plan-part-ii-limited-update-reg-19/>

Work on the new Local Plan covering the whole of Somerset is at an early stage, but when adopted that will replace the Mendip Local Plan.

Buses

First Bus has recently announced two further changes to the operation of buses through Wells from 1st September.

Following the decision that the 374 Bristol-Taunton and the 375 Bristol-Bridgwater services will not serve Windmill Hill in Glastonbury, a new 373 Wells-Street service will be introduced which will go via Windmill Hill.

Changes are also being made to the Wells-Bath service on Sundays, from 1st September some Sunday morning services will use the 171 route, meaning they will not go via Shepton Mallet. More details of these changes should be available on the First Bus website shortly.

Theo Butt Philip and Tessa Munt MP
Somerset Councillors for Wells
25th July 2024