

WELLS CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE WELLS CITY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 30th JANUARY 2025 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, D Denis, G Folkard, S Powell, G Robbins, T Robbins, H Siggs, I Von Mensenkampff, P Welch

IN ATTENDANCE: Town Clerk: S Luck
Incoming Town Clerk: H Wilkins
Mace Bearer: C Price
WCC Staff: S Glendinning
10 members of the public

25/01/C APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
Cllrs: S Eden, N Kennedy, D Orrett, T Pullin

SC Cllr and MP for Wells and Mendip Hills: T Munt

25/02/C DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS
To receive Councillors' Declarations of Interests, made under the Council's Code of Conduct adopted 12th May 2022.
None were declared.

25/03/C MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF CITY COUNCIL HELD ON 19TH DECEMBER 2024
Minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Mayor.

25/04/C MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
Mr Chris Simons spoke on the recruitment of the new Town Clerk. The following had been quoted in the job description:

- In 2025, the Council will be taking on an extensive devolution program,
- the council is growing considerably and may grow further thereafter,
- the council does not currently have an adoptive strategic plan, as such.

Is there a draft strategic plan available?

Cllr Denis advised the council did start working on a strategic plan which was not completed, this will be taken forward under the new Town Clerk. The goals of the Neighbourhood Plan are being followed, together with the results of a public consultation as part of the devolution process.

Mr Simons reiterated his concern that there was no strategic plan.

25/05/C PRESENTATION BY THE WELLS LISTENING PROJECT
By Alan Guyver

The Mayor had invited Alan Guyver of Wells Rotary Club and founder of 'The Listening Project Wells' to address the meeting of Full Council. He was accompanied by Liz Ramsay, English lead at St Cuthbert's Primary School and two of the school's reading ambassadors. The two children gave a talk about why they love reading and their favourite authors. Each week, a team of volunteer listeners from the Rotary Club Listening Project go to St Cuthbert's Primary School and more recently also to Stoberry Park School to listen to children read. At St Cuthbert's Primary School each of the six classes has a dedicated listener. In one and a half hours, a volunteer typically listens to between 6 and 9 children.

25/06/C

PRESENTATION ON WELLS CITY W1 CIRCULAR BUS

By Rosa Kell, Wells Bus Users Group, Somerset Bus Partnership

Rosa Kell leads the Wells Bus User Group which represents the passengers of the buses and campaigns for the preservation of the existing bus and coach network, pushing for improved access to and from Wells for the isolated housing estates, hamlets and villages in the immediate area.

Rosa asked for Wells City Council to support the proposed new Wells City W1 Circular route, which would connect isolated hamlets and new housing estates that are currently not on a bus route.

Cllr G Robbins and Denis thanked Rosa for her dedication to this cause for the benefit of residents.

25/07/C

ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW TOWN CLERK

Haylee Wilkins left the room.

The existing Town Clerk, S Luck, asked the committee to ratify the appointment of Haylee Wilkins as the new Town Clerk.

Cllr Cursley explained a management group had carried out the recruitment process where interviews had taken place over a two day period with the help of an independent recruitment consultant.

It was proposed by Cllr Cursley, seconded by Cllr T Robbins to appoint Haylee Wilkins as the new Town Clerk. 11 Councillors agreed, none were against, 1 abstained.

Haylee Wilkins returned to the room where she was congratulated on her appointment. Haylee expressed her thanks and stated it would be a privilege to act as Town Clerk, she also gave her thanks to the outgoing Clerk, Steve Luck for his support. The Mayor thanked Steve Luck for his many years of service. Haylee will take over the role from 24th February. Steve Luck retires on 31st May.

25/08/C

MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Legal Service, Wells Cathedral, Sunday 23rd March 3pm
- Civic Service, St Cuthbert's Church, Sunday 6th April, 3pm

Mayor's Diary

- i. 1st Feb Cathedral Choristers Concert, Wells Cathedral
- ii. 7th Feb Somerset High Sheriff's Charitable Trust, North Cadbury
- iii. 22nd Feb Carnival Presentation Evening, Wells Football Club
- iv. 22nd Feb City of Wells Lions 50th Anniversary of their Charter, The Burcott Inn – Deputy Mayor attending

Mayor's Charity Quiz, Saturday 15th March, 7pm in Wells Town Hall

25/09/C

OUTSIDE SPACES & ESTATES COMMITTEE

Cllr Welch presented the minutes of the meeting held on 9th January 2025, in the absence of Cllr Orrett (Chair).

25/09/OSE A working group has been proposed to work together with the Bishop's Palace around the use of the Bishop's Barn, splitting any profits 50/50. The following councillors agreed to form the working party:

Cllrs: Agabani, T Robbins, Powell and Welch.

25/10/C

STAFFING COMMITTEE

Cllr T Robbins presented the minutes of the meeting held on 16th January 2025.

Cllr Folkard stated he had sent advance apologies for this meeting, minutes to be amended.

To adopt the agreed Protocol for Councillors and Staff. This document will be adopted as part of the Code of Practice.

25/11/C PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Cllr Denis presented the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd January 2025.
No comments were made.

25/12/C FINANCE & COUNCIL MATTERS COMMITTEE

Cllr Cursley presented the minutes of the meeting held on 16th January 2025.
Cllr Folkard stated he had sent advance apologies for this meeting, minutes to be amended.
Cllr Denis thanked all those that had worked on the new policies.

25/13/C ANNUAL GOVERNANCE REVIEWS

A vote was taken to adopt the following policies approved by the Finance Committee:

- i. Standing Orders
- ii. Financial Regulations
- iii. Scheme of Delegation

All were agreed and adopted.

25/14/C NEW AND REVISED POLICIES

- i. Safeguarding Policy
- ii. Councillor Discrimination, Bullying and Harassment Policy
- iii. Complaints Policy
- iv. Ethical Procurement Policy
- v. Employee Handbook

Cllr Denis asked about taking photographs of children at Wells in Bloom events. The incoming Town Clerk, Haylee Wilkins advised it was advisable for the council to seek written permission.

All the above policies were agreed and adopted.

**25/15/C Community Prepared Planning and Community Emergency Response Plan
Proposer: Cllr Powell, Seconder: D Denis**

Cllr Powell presented her proposal.

Wells City council is currently reviewing and updating the Wells City Community Emergency Plan.

The Proposal is that WCC develops a Community Prepared Planning and Community Emergency Response Plan in conjunction with Wells Community Network (WCN) and other organisations e.g. Rotary.

WCN have a well-established network of volunteers and experience in responding to emergencies from its inception at the outbreak of Covid 2019.

Cllrs Powell and Denis attended the Somerset Prepared Community Resilience Day 2024 and from this have recognised the value of voluntary sector resources in responding to emergencies.

Further advice: www.somersetPrepared.org.uk

This proposal was seconded by Cllr Denis.

This was agreed by all.

**25/16/C SALC Community Health and Wellbeing Seed Grant Funding Application via LCN
Proposer: Cllr Denis, Seconder: Cllr Welch**

Cllr Denis presented her proposal.

WCC applies for the SALC Community Health and Wellbeing Seed Grant of £1500 to scope possibilities of increasing engagement from young people in the Wells and Rural LCN with the YMCA youth project running in Wells. There is a very short time frame to apply, and neighbouring parishes have shown an interest but are not yet in a position to lead. The scoping exercise will identify which parishes might take part in future engagement and what the needs and priorities for young people outside Wells. If the scoping can show results before March, then a larger £35K Grant might be applied for you by Wells and those parishes which are prepared to contribute match funding.

It was suggested that the Town Clerk would support the application process.

This proposal was seconded by Cllr Welch and agreed by all.

**25/17/C Task and Finish Group Proposal
Proposer: Cllr Harvey Siggs, Seconder Cllr Agabani**

Cllr Agabani presented the proposal.

With the forthcoming additional services that Wells City Council has voted to undertake, it is suggested that a task and finish group is set up to investigate the current committee structure.

For example, forming a Premises and Properties committee would free up Outside Spaces Committee to focus on the challenges from the devolution of services.

It would also look at the need for revision across all committees in the light of the much larger organisation.

This task and finish group will report back to Full Council at the April Full Council meeting. The group would be Cllrs Siggs, Agabani and Folkard.

This was proposed by Cllr Siggs, seconded by Cllr Agabani. This was agreed by all.

25/18/C TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM COUNCILLORS/TRUSTEES ON OUTSIDE BODIES
Cllr Denis advised a meeting had taken place with St Cuthbert Out Parish with the purpose of joint working/sharing information. A report from this meeting will be provided for the February Full Council meeting. Future meetings would take place every other month.

25/19/C TO RECEIVE ANY WRITTEN REPORTS FROM SOMERSET COUNCILLORS
A report from Cllr T Butt Philip and Cllr T Munt was circulated prior to the meeting (attached).

25/20/C ANY OTHER URGENT MATTERS OF REPORT
Cllr G Robbins thanked all those who had helped with the Christmas Eve Community Gathering.

25/21/C DATE OF NEXT MEETING
The next meeting of Wells City Council will be Thursday 27th February 2025, 7pm

25/22/C EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC
Note: If it is necessary for matters to be considered in confidence it will be proposed by the Chairman that a resolution be passed under the provisions of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 as amended, excluding the press and public, in order that confidential items can be discussed.

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

Agenda Item 25/19/C

Somerset Councillors' Report to Wells City Council – January 2025

Budget

Somerset Council is in the process of agreeing its 2025/6 budget and a consultation on this took place between December and January.

The Council is still facing a financial emergency – balancing the budget for 2024/5 is requiring a considerable amount of one-off funding (e.g. use of reserves and the sale of assets).

Whilst significant savings have been made for the 2025/6 budget, there is still a substantial budget gap which cannot be bridged without Exceptional Financial Support (in the form of a capitalisation direction allowing Somerset Council to use the receipts from sale of assets and/or borrowing to fund revenue) or permission to increase Council Tax above 4.99%.

Transformation

The workforce programme – the reorganisation of the Council's staff is drawing to a close, with a view to having the new structures in place by 1st April 2025.

Financially, the combined impact of the tiers 2-3 restructure (£1.5m) and the wider restructure (£32.1m) is expected to be a saving of £34m from the Council's budget. The total impact of the reorganisation is a reduction from 5,205 (1st April 2024) to 4,650, a total reduction of 555 FTE posts (excluding tiers 1-3).

A report on the Workforce Restructuring Programme was considered at Somerset Council's Corporate and Resources Committee on Wednesday, 29th January and can be found here:

<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=199&MId=7353&Ver=4>

Foster Carers

Somerset Council has a serious shortage of foster carers – this means that children who should be in foster care are instead having to be found residential placements. The impact of this is enormous both on those children's childhood and future life chances, and on Somerset Council's budget (residential placements cost thousands of pounds a week more than foster care). For both these reasons Somerset Council is currently running a campaign to recruit new foster carers. All members of Wells City Council are encouraged to look at the dedicated website: www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk Local Councillors at both Somerset Council and Wells City Council level know the members of their communities well and are ideally placed to encourage people to considering becoming foster carers, helping to vastly improve the lives of many of Somerset's young people.

Local Plan Call for Sites

As part of the creation of a new Somerset-wide Local Plan, Somerset Council is now undertaking a "Call for Sites" exercise. This is an opportunity for landowners, developers and site promoters to put forward sites for consideration for inclusion in the local plan. The current process is an information gathering exercise, so that Somerset Council knows which sites are potentially available for inclusion in the local plan – there will be full consultations on this at the appropriate time.

Further information can be found here: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/planning-buildings-and-land/local-plan-call-for-sites/>

LGBCE

Work is continuing on the proposed divisional boundaries for Somerset Council for the 2027 local elections.

At the request of Somerset Council, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has extended the current phase of consultation by 6 weeks to 4th March 2025.

It has already been agreed that there will be c.96 members on the authority from 2027. What is currently being considered is the exact divisional boundaries and names. All proposals we are aware of are for Wells to remain a two-member division coterminous with the city boundaries.

Following this round of consultation, LGBCE will publish its initial proposals. There will be a further consultation on those proposals from 2nd June – 11th August. The final recommendations are due to be published on 2nd December 2025.

Details of the consultation can be seen here: <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/somerset>

Wells and Mendip Hills LCN

The Wells and Mendip Hills LCN met on 14th January at The Little Theatre, Wells. The meeting focuses on two main subjects: youth provision (where there was an interest from some of our neighbouring parishes in working together on a grant application to support this).

Additionally, the LCN received a presentation on the development of the new Somerset Local Plan.

The next meeting is due to take place on 18th March 2025 – venue TBC.

Regional Devolution

The Government published its Regional Devolution White Paper on 16th December. This details the Governments proposals in relation to both further Local Government Reorganisation and Regional Devolution.

Because Somerset has already been through the process of Local Government Reorganisation, this element of the Government' policy is unlikely to significantly impact us (Government is embarking on the process of unitarising all local government in England).

The Government does not currently have the power to compel local authorities to join Combined Authorities, this seems likely to change. The Government has also made it clear that access to future additional regional funding will require local authorities to join Strategic Combined Authorities (with a directly elected Mayor) and that every area of England is expected to have a regional Mayor.

Regional Mayors are likely to have powers in the areas of economic development, transport, strategic planning and housing.

After discussions with neighbouring authorities, Somerset has formally expressed an interest (along with Wiltshire, Dorset and Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole (BCP)) in forming a "Heart of Wessex" Mayoral Combined Authority".

Current indications are that we will know if we are one of the Government's "priority areas" (with elections likely in May 2026) next week.

Theo Butt Philip and Tessa Munt MP
Somerset Councillors for Wells
30th January 2025