

WELLS CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE WELLS CITY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 27TH MARCH 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, S Eden, G Folkard, D Orrett, S Powell, T Pullin, G Robbins, H Siggs, P Welch

IN ATTENDANCE: Town Clerk: H Wilkins
RFO: C Woodland
Projects/Facilities Manager: L Wassell
Mace Bearer: G Woodland
WCC Staff: C Hobbs
MP for Wells and Mendip Hills/ Somerset Cllr for Wells: T Munt
7 members of the public

25/39/C APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
Cllrs: N Kennedy, T Robbins, I Von Mensenkampff

25/40/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 an interest in agenda item 12 and will not be present in the Council Chamber during the debate.
Cllr G Robbins declared that she would leave the Council Chamber during discussions regarding Wells Market should they arise.

25/41/C MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF CITY COUNCIL HELD ON 27TH FEBRUARY 2025
Minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Mayor.

25/42/C MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
Mr Chris Symons asked the following questions regarding the acquisition of property in item 12:

- i. Is there an existing tenancy agreement and how long is it?
- ii. Is it a full repairing lease?
- iii. Is there a property condition survey and will WCC have repairing liability?
- iv. Is there an EPC rating and an asbestos report?
- v. How long is the period of public consultation?

The Town Clerk responded that the tenancy agreement will be created alongside the purchase.

It will be a full repairing lease with associated insurance liabilities.

Condition surveys have been completed satisfactorily, where needed as part of the purchase from Somerset Council.

The EPC rating has been received and is rated band B.

The timeline for public consultation will be discussed with Council as part of the agenda item.

25/43/C PRESENTATION FROM WELLS YOUTH CLUB
Members of the Youth Club spoke to the meeting about the types of activities that take place at the sessions. The activities that take place are art, cooking, games. They run their own tuck shop and recently took part in activities where they learned about Chinese New Year. The Mayor has visited them recently. The Youth Club attended Wells Cathedral for Wells Soup which was enjoyed by all. The young people spoke of the benefits they get from Youth Club, as it helps to deal with feelings of loneliness and boosts confidence.

Cllr D Denis asked if any Councillors should visit the Youth Club.
The Youth worker responded that Councillors are always welcome but it would be advisable to email in advance.
Cllr S Powell reported that she had played Table Tennis with members of the Youth Club and that it was a nice group of young people.

25/44/C MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Civic Service, St Cuthbert's Church, Sunday 6th April, 3pm

Mayor's Diary

- i. 28th March Wells Little Theatre AGM
- ii. 29th March Wells Cathedral Oratorio Society, Carmina Burana - Deputy Mayor
- iii. attending
- iv. 2nd April Civic Reception for Osiligi Maasai Warriors from Kenya, Glastonbury
- v. 4th April Stoberry School Easter Competition
- vi. 6th April Mayor's Civic Service, St Cuthbert's Church
- vii. 13th April 'The first bowl', Wells Bowling Club
- viii. 23rd April Scout Hut re-opening ceremony

The Mayor announced that after a suggestion from Cllr H Siggs the Civic service is being reinstated. Sam Denyer will take the first service and St Cuthberts'.

Primary School children from Wells will attend as well as many visitors from neighbouring parishes, Towns and Cities.

The Mayor stated that donations of cakes will be very gratefully received for the purpose of serving refreshments after the service.

Cllr H Siggs suggested that J Rackstraw be included in the guest list for the reopening of the Scout Hut as he had been involved when the Scout Hut was built. The Mayor promised that she would suggest his inclusion on the invitation list.

25/45/C OUTSIDE SPACES & ESTATES COMMITTEE

Cllr D Orrett presented the minutes of the meeting held on 6th March 2025.

Cllr D Denis asked for a correction in 25/31/OSE from Mr Horridge to Mr Hornidge.

25/46/C STAFFING COMMITTEE

Cllr S Eden presented the minutes of the meeting held on 13th March 2025.

No questions received.

25/47/C FINANCE & COUNCIL MATTERS COMMITTEE

Cllr S Cursley presented the minutes of the meeting held on 13th March 2025.

No questions received.

25/48/C PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Cllr D Denis presented the minutes of the meeting held on 20th March 2025.

Cllr D Denis announced that the planning application for the land at the rugby club is likely to be on the next agenda and that public are welcome to attend.

No questions received

25/49/C PERMANENT TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDER FOR WELLS MARKET PLACE

The Town Clerk presented the report. The temporary traffic regulation orders have been in place for 18 months at a time. As there have been three concurrent orders we are moving towards implementing a permanent traffic regulation order as further temporary arrangements are not possible to secure with Somerset Council.

The report provides a background of the orders to date and seeks agreement to proceed with a permanent order through the necessary stages of consultation.

Cllr D Denis asked that appropriate plans are made for blue badge parking.

The Town Clerk explained that parking for blue badge holders will maintain the same permissions that are currently in place.

Cllr G Robbins asked that the signage be clarified as there is a lot of conflicting information.

MP T Munt expressed her wishes for the implementation of the permanent traffic regulation order and stressed that it was a great opportunity for improving parking for the 1400 blue badge holders in Wells.

Cllr L Agabani asked about the funding for the traffic regulation order with regard to the financial year as a fee change was noted from 1st April.

The Town Clerk reported that she had prepared the application in advance of 1st April, in anticipation of the decision, so as not to incur additional costs. It will be presented tomorrow, seeing the lesser fee incurred.

Cllr S Powell asked what non-essential infrastructure pertains to?

The Town Clerk explained that if the permanent traffic order didn't proceed, the planters and bollards running along the centre of the Market Place would be required to be removed.

Cllr L Agabani proposed that WCC proceed. The Mayor asked that Councillors take a vote on the recommendation to adopt a permanent traffic regulation order in Wells Market Place.

Cllr P Welch seconded the motion.

The meeting voted unanimously in favour of WCC applying for a permanent traffic regulation order in Wells Market Place.

25/50/C

PROPERTY ACQUISITION REPORT AND RESOLUTION TO BORROW

Cllr T Butt Philip left the meeting

The Town Clerk note that the decision had already been taken by Council to purchase the asset, however, the paper this evening was to determine the payment mechanism in which to purchase.

There is an agreed purchase price of £150,000 which has been accepted by Somerset Council. The necessary legal reports of sale are taking place. The report sets out the public works loan rates and details suggesting WCC borrow £150,000. Negotiations are taking place with the current sitting tenant who are very keen to reach an agreement with WCC. It will be a nil - balance transfer, with the rental from the tenant will cover costs of the loan.

- i. Cllr S Powell asked if there are restricting covenants on the land

The Town Clerk reported that the covenant is for film and entertainment purposes only and that the tenant is seeking a long-term tenancy and are keen to grow their business, under this covenant banner.

- ii. Cllr D Denis asked if legal costs are included in the £150,000 purchase price and the options should the loan application be refused.

The Town Clerk responded that other options have been looked into, but that public works loans are for this purpose and offer a better rate of return. Legal costs are not included in the figure of £150,000. Should the loan not be successful, Council will need to utilise revenue to pay and will need to make associated savings in other areas of budget to support the purchase.

- iii. Cllr D Orrett asked how the figure of £150,000 had been reached.

The Town Clerk informed the meeting that the purchase price had been negotiated with Somerset Council down from £250,000 to £150,000.

- iv. Cllr G Folkard asked if due diligence had been taken to ensure the tenants have been assessed as to their capacity to function as a business and how Wells City Council will justify the expenditure to the public.

The Town Clerk assured that 2 years of business accounts had been requested. They have a set of draft plans and intend in alter/make improvements to the building and grow the business and add further asset value.

Cllr L Agabani said that the public consultation process is still required but that he is in support of the acquisition.

The Town Clerk read out Appendix A Resolution to borrow as follows:

To determine, at Wells City parish Meeting of Thursday 27th March 2025, whether to resolve to seek the approval of the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to apply for a PWLB loan of £150,000 over the borrowing term of 25 years for the premises Princes Road in Wells, occupied by Wells Film Centre. The annual loan repayments will to come to £266,467.

It is not intended to increase council tax precept for the purpose of the loan repayments.

Cllr D Denis proposed that Wells City Council proceed with the loan application.
Cllr G Folkard seconded the proposal.
The meeting voted unanimously to approve the proposal.

25/51/C TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM COUNCILLORS/TRUSTEES ON OUTSIDE BODIES
Cllr D Orrett reported that a new mutual interest group had been set up with councillors from Wells City council and councillors from St Cuthbert Out Parish Council. The ethos is of a think tank with a co-chair. There are shared interests between the two parish councils, such as planning, youth project work, devolution, felling of trees in park woods are all common interests.

25/52/C TO RECEIVE ANY WRITTEN REPORTS FROM SOMERSET COUNCILLORS
Cllr T Butt Philip had provided a report from Somerset Unitary Authority for Councillors at the end of 27th March 2025. (attached).
Cllr L Agabani asked for a definition of the term “capitalisation direction” referred to in the report
Cllr T Butt Philip explained that it’s permission from the government to spend money which would otherwise only be permitted to be spent on capital to be spent on revenue, either by borrowing or selling of assets.

25/53/C ANY OTHER URGENT MATTERS OF REPORT
The Mayor thanked councillors for attending the Legal Service, which was a very successful showcase event.

The Mayor reported that she will represent Wells City Council at the funeral of Cllr Marshall and will be accompanied by Cllr S Cursley.

Cllr L Agabani asked for clarification that arrangements are in place for the takeover of the weekly markets and who will be collecting stall rental monies
The Town Clerk reassured the meeting that processes and relevant licenses are in place. The Market Supervisor commences their role on the 16th April but for first two weeks the Town Clerk, Outside Spaces Manager and a member of Idverde will be covering and there are hopes for a seamless transfer. Wells City Council will be collecting the Stall rental monies from 1st April.

Cllr T Pullen asked that there be more information publicised about acquiring assets as well as an explanation regarding council tax increases.
The Town Clerk reassured the meeting that a press release was due to be published about the acquisition of the Wells Cinema on the 28th March 2025

Cllr D Denis thanked the WI who at short notice provided refreshments after the Legal Service. Cllr D Denis explained that M Townsend is the current Chair.

Cllr P Welch reported that he has received complaints regarding the Town Hall lift being out of order at the Town Hall and asked about the timeline for its repair and is it a legal requirement?
The Town Clerk reported that the lift is currently not functioning. It is a legal requirement. A report has been prepared containing three quotes for repair and three quotes for provision of a new lift. This will be on the agenda of the next meeting of the Finance committee.

25/54/C DATE OF NEXT MEETING
The next meeting of Wells City Council will be **Thursday 24th April 2025, 7pm**

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.

Somerset Councillors' Report to Wells City Council – March 2025

Budget

Somerset Council set its 2025/6 budget on 5th March 2025, in line with what was reported to Wells City Council last month. Pressure in the budget is still dominated by adult social care and children's services. Even with additional Council Tax income, the budget currently requires £43m of exceptional financial support in the form of a capitalisation direction. Setting the 2026/27 will remain challenging.

Transformation and workforce restructure

Work continues to put the agreed new staffing structure in place in advance of the 1st April. The official decision on the final structure for the organisation was taken by the Chief Executive on 13th February 2025. The full decision, together with the detailed structure broken down for each directorate/service/department can be found here:

<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=1625>

Somerset Council's interim Chief Finance Officer and 151 officer, Maria Christofi, will be leaving the authority towards the end of April. Whilst a permanent replacement has yet to be found, current Service Director Finance and Procurement and Deputy 151 officer, Nicola Hix, will be interim 151 officer.

Under the restructure the position of Monitoring Officer will be held by the Executive Director for Resources, Strategy and Transformation, Alyn Jones (supported by multiple deputies).

Both of the above appointments were confirmed by Full Council on 26th March.

Over 2025-26 substantial work will be undertaken on the wider improvement and transformation programme to create a sustainable Somerset Council.

Over the past year, Somerset Council has undergone a Corporate Peer Challenge by the Local Government Association (LGA) and an External Assurance Review by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), both of these reports are publicly available:

LGA: <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/council-assurance-and-peer-challenge/peer-challenges-we-offer/corporate-peer-111>

CIPFA: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/somerset-council-external-assurance-review-2024-25>

BSIP

A decision on the allocation of Somerset's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) has been made, this includes continued funding to support the Wells-Axbridge leg of the 126 bus (including increasing the frequency of the Saturday services).

Household Support Fund

A decision was made on 24th March on the allocation of the £6.74m DWP Household Support Fund. This is money provided by Central Government, to local authorities, to support those struggling with the cost of living. This funds a number of initiatives, including free school meal vouchers in holiday time, grants for vulnerable/low income people, support for the VCFSE, community grants, support for local hubs (e.g. warm spaces).

The full decision report can be found here:

<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s49560/Household%20Support%20Fund%20Report.pdf>

Wells and Mendip Hills LCN

The meeting of the LCN scheduled for 18th March was postponed owing to lack of availability from some of the key stakeholders who had been invited to attend to discuss housing. Another date is due to be arranged.

The Active Travel Working Group will meet on 1st April at 7pm in the Portway Annex, the

Highways Working Group will meet on 8th April at 2pm, also in the Portway Annex.

Contacting Somerset Council

The general enquiries number for Somerset Council is: **0300 123 2224**, there's also a general enquiries email address: generalenquiries@somerset.gov.uk

Theo Butt Philip and Tessa Munt MP

Somerset Councillors for Well

27th March 2025

Minutes signed by The Mayor:

Date: