

WELLINGTON TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES 5TH OCTOBER 2020

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF WELLINGTON TOWN COUNCIL HELD ONLINE VIA ZOOM ON MONDAY 5TH OCTOBER 2020 AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor J Lloyd (Mayor),
Councillors W Battishill, D Bradley, C Booth, A Govier, R Henley, J Hunt, M Lithgow, M McGuffie, N Powell-Brace, S Pringle-Kosikowsky, V Stock-Williams, J Thorne, M Barr.

Kathryn Hemensley (Town Clerk)
Alice Kendall (Assistant Clerk)

There were 5 members of the public present and 3 members of the press.
Sergeant Daniel Bishop was present, as were Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts, Leader of Somerset West and Taunton Council, and Nick Bryant, Assistant Director of Planning at Somerset West and Taunton Council.

83. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Mayor opened the meeting with a welcome to attendees and reminded Councillors to raise their hand when they wished to speak.

84. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for non-attendance.

85. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Govier, Lithgow, Lloyd, and Stock-Williams declared personal interests as members of Somerset West and Taunton Council.

Councillors Thorne, Govier and Hunt declared personal interests as members of Somerset County Council.

Councillor Lloyd declared a personal interest relating to payments to MTMIT (items 11/12b/12c), being a former customer of MTMIT, the Council's IT consultant.

Councillor Thorne declared a personal interest relating to payments to MTMIT (items 11/12b/12c), being a customer and personal friend of MTMIT, the Council's IT consultant.

86. MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve and formally adopt the minutes of the Planning and full Council meetings held on 7th September.

87. TOWN MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor presented her report for the previous month. This covered topics such as a recent visit to the proposed allotment site at Longforth Farm and recruitment of the replacement Town Clerk. It was announced that the successful candidate was Mr David Farrow who would be joining the Council around the beginning of December.

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88. POLICE REPORT

Sergeant Dan Bishop presented his Police report for the previous month. He asked that the Clerk circulate the report to Councillors after the meeting. There was also an updated poster with details of the local policing team for sharing as widely as possible. A new PCSO, Chandler Hallett had recently joined the team.

Sgt Bishop's report highlighted an exceptionally successful week spent in the Town Council's pop-up shop, where there had been excellent engagement with the public on many local and rural issues. A slight increase in crime was noted for the previous month, but with reassurance that Wellington remains overall a very safe place to live.

Cllr Henley advised that he had a town centre related query which he would raise with Sgt Bishop outside of the meeting.

Sgt Bishop left the meeting at this point.

89. CLERK'S REPORT

The report had been previously circulated to Councillors. The Clerk took the opportunity, at this her last meeting, to thank Councillors and staff for the amazing support she had received over the past 2 years. She also offered testament to the many wonderful local people she had met as Town Clerk, and paid tribute to the generosity of spirit seen in so many individual contributions to the success and wellbeing of the town.

Cllr Barr expressed frustration that the benches purchased by the Council prior to lockdown still had not been put in place. The Clerk offered an apology for the delay as other issues had needed to take priority.

90. TO APPROVE AND FORMALLY ADOPT A NEW 3-YEAR SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT WITH WELLINGTON COUNSELLING CIC

Following a meeting with a delegated panel of Councillors and Directors of WCC a Service Level Agreement had been drawn up. It had been circulated to Councillors prior to the meeting and was presented for their formal adoption. Cllr Pringle-Kosikowsky noted that now more than ever there was a need for Counselling Services in the town.

RESOLVED to formally approve and adopt the Service Level Agreement which would now be signed by both parties.

91. TO DISCUSS THE SOMERSET DISTRICT COUNCILS' *STRONGER SOMERSET* BUSINESS CASE FOR THE TRANSFORMATION INTO UNITARY STATUS

The Leader of Somerset West and Taunton Council, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts gave a short presentation on the District Councils' 'Stronger Somerset' Business case for transformation. The proposal had been circulated to Councillors prior to the meeting. Key points covered in the presentation were:-

- The previously 5 (now 4) District Councils had been jointly discussing the future of public services for some time. Somerset County Council had been part of these

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discussions but withdrew to pursue their own Unitary Option. District Council discussions had continued, and there had been consultation with the government.

- The previous government guideline was for an alternative Local Government arrangement for Somerset by 2022, but this date is at present unconfirmed.
- 'Stronger Somerset' seeks to reform public services by creating 2 brand new Unitary Authorities, one in the West (currently covered by Somerset West and Taunton Council and Sedgemoor District Council) and one in the East (currently covered by Mendip and South Somerset District Councils). This option was felt to better support local democracy across what is a large geographic area.

At this point Cllr Powell-Brace entered the meeting.

- The focus was on improving services, as well as saving money – estimated savings proposed as up to £204 million over 10 years.
- A strong need existed to reform the County's Social Care system, including the reintroduction of early-intervention children's services.
- Stronger Somerset is a cross-party business case.
- The transformation would include open conversations with City, Town and Parish Councils to enable locality-based service agreements.
- District Councils wished to emphasise their proposal was about complete transformation of services rather than simply re-organising existing services.

Councillor Lloyd informed Federica that Wellington Town Council had joined forces with neighbouring parishes to set up a Network Partnership to focus on the Unitary issue.

Councillor discussion and questions followed:-

- Might Stronger Somerset be a confusing model with the public not sure who to contact to access particular services? Federica reassured the meeting this would not be the case as contact would be via the Unitary Authority where the customer lived.
- It was felt to be essential that local Democracy should be a key consideration within the transformation of Somerset Councils.
- How would services be devolved to local Councils? Federica's response was that these details were being developed and it was planned to have discussions with local Councils in coming months. There had been liaison to date with Somerset Association of Local Councils.
- Concern was expressed that if the decision on Somerset's Unitary transformation had been pre-judged, council tax-payers would lose out.

The Mayor thanked Federica and Nick for their presentation, and both left the meeting at this point.

92. IN LIEU OF PUBLIC SPEAKING TO RECEIVE ANY REPRESENTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Clerk advised that a representation from Transition Town Wellington would be read to the meeting under agenda item 15 – Somerset Climate Emergency Community Fund.

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93. TO REVIEW ELECTRONIC DECISIONS MADE BY COUNCILLORS

At a Coronavirus emergency meeting on 19th March, Councillors made several proposals that were subsequently approved by full Council. This included electronic voting for decisions about the Council's affairs. A summary report of electronic decisions made since the Council meeting of 7th September was attached to the agenda, with the full voting records available on the Council website.

RESOLVED to note and accept the voting report.

94. COUNCIL ACCOUNTS (a) TO NOTE AND APPROVE THE AUGUST BANK RECONCILIATION (b) TO NOTE AND APPROVE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ITEMS FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST (c) TO NOTE AND APPROVE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE AGAINST BUDGET FOR THE YEAR TO DATE AS AT 31ST AUGUST 2020

RESOLVED to accept the Bank reconciliation, income and expenditure, and budget reports as presented.

95. TO NOTE CIL FINANCIAL POSITION

The 2020 CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) return to Somerset West and Taunton Council had been circulated with the agenda. This showed the Council's CIL balance to be £22,105.41. The Clerk advised that CIL funds have to be spent within 5 years of receipt, or returned to the District Council. Of the total funds available £1,068.75 had to be spent before end of March 2023, £8,319.25 by March 2024 and £12,717.41 by March 2025.

The report was so noted.

96. TO CONSIDER LATEST INFORMATION CONCERNING A WELLINGTON TOWN POST OFFICE

Councillors discussed recent correspondence from the Post Office stating that due to having no local offer to run a Post Office, plans to replace this facility were currently shelved.

Cllr Thorne's suggestions for Councillors to consider had included the following points:- a. To express concern to Rebecca Pow MP for Taunton Deane.

b. To seek any guidance from Local Authority advisory bodies as to how the Council might positively respond to this challenge.

c. To repeat concerns to the Post Office as previously expressed, also querying the validity of all the statements made in their recent correspondence.

d. To consider a public appeal to local businesses who may be willing to incorporate a Post Office within their premises, and the possibility of a financial subsidy from the Council.

e. To consider whether current empty premises around the town have a role to play in seeking to re-establish a Post Office.

f. To review information received previously from another Town Council who had taken on the management of a Post Office (as recently re-circulated to Councillors).

There was a short debate around the 'pros and cons' of having a Post Office. Concern was expressed that the Post Office were not willing to step in to run a service themselves. It was

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proposed that all points above should be followed up, and that a sub-group should form to tackle the issue. It was noted that Rebecca Pow's office had been in contact to advise that she would once again be actively engaging with this issue on behalf of the town, to include setting up a stakeholder meeting if appropriate.

RESOLVED to form a Post Office Working Party, open to all Councillors.

Cllrs Govier, Pringle-Kosikowsky and Powell-Brace offered to join the group. Other interested Councillors were advised to let the Clerk know after the meeting.

97. APPLICATION TO THE SOMERSET CLIMATE EMERGENCY COMMUNITY FUND

It was noted that Somerset County Council would shortly be inviting bids of between £5,000 and £75,000 to its £1 million Climate Emergency Community Fund.

A statement from Transition Town Wellington (TTW) regarding the benefits of street trees in the town was read out by the Clerk. It included a summary of TTW's work to date on proposals for street trees, and a formal request for the Council to bid, on behalf of TTW, for £75,000 of funding from the fund.

Cllr Thorne advised the meeting that although there were two bidding rounds, bids should be submitted as soon as possible as it was likely funds would be depleted quickly.

Cllr McGuffie, acting Chairman of the Environment and Open spaces Committee advised that the grant fund would be discussed in more detail at the meeting of the Committee on 13th October.

It was agreed that the fund represented a valuable opportunity for investment in the town, and that the Town Council might consider top-up funding towards any successful initiatives. Further ideas, to be sent to Cllr Mike McGuffie or the Clerk, were welcomed. These might include solar energy, cycling and walking initiatives, food production opportunities, or the purchase of land and subsequent tree-planting.

Cllr Hunt left the meeting at this point.

98. TO REVIEW COUNCIL OPERATIONS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF CORONAVIRUSRELATED WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

It was proposed that a meeting of the Staffing and Resources Committee should be arranged.

99. FEEDBACK FROM ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE (a) Allotments Committee Meeting

The Allotments Committee met on Monday 21st September and Minutes of the meeting had been included with the agenda. Councillor Lloyd gave a verbal summary.

(b) Longforth Farm Allotments

Following the site meeting on the 18th September the Council received advice that the land should be registered as a Statutory Allotment site. This would protect in

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perpetuity against the land being put to any alternative use. This proposal would be brought back to a future Council meeting once ownership had been transferred.

Consideration of bunny-proof fencing was raised, given their penchant for tasty home-grown (organic) vegetables.

**100. TOWN CENTRE WORKING GROUP AND TOWN CENTRE EMERGENCY FUND (a)
Working Group Status and Revised Terms of Reference**

Following feedback from Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWTC) changes had been made to the Terms of Reference for the Working Party, necessary to enable the Council to receive monies and manage the fund. This included the group becoming a formal Council Committee. The revised draft Terms of Reference had been circulated to Councillors prior to the meeting.

RESOLVED that the Working Group should be constituted as a full Council Committee.

Subject to updating membership to reflect the current year, **RESOLVED** to accept the revised Terms of Reference as previously circulated.

(b) Feedback from the Town Centre Working Group

The group had met on 30th September to discuss the proposed revised Terms of Reference, and to review feedback from SWTC about the first draft of the Indicative Plan for the Town Centre Emergency fund. Cllr Lithgow gave a verbal update noting that repairs/replacement of the town centre railings would not be eligible. As they are an eyesore he entreated County Councillors to lobby for having the railings improved.

Cllr Lloyd also provided further information, including a need to fund additional staffing out of the grant money, thus ensuring there were adequate resources to effectively manage the fund.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.20 pm.

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Councillor Janet Lloyd Mayor