

Minutes of the Town Council Meeting
held on Monday 11 September 2023 at 7.00pm

Present: Cllr Brake, Cllr Campbell (Chair), Cllr Ellwood, Cllr Irven, Cllr Johnson, Cllr Moss, Cllr Murphy, Cllr Summers, Cllr Terrett, Cllr Westcott and Cllr Whetlor.

In attendance: Sarah Reed, Town Clerk, Somerset Cllr Davies (arrived late due to attendance at another meeting).

23/37 To receive Apologies for Absence (LGA 1972, section 85 (1)- Cllr Campbell proposed that '**apologies from Cllr Richards are accepted**'. Seconded by Cllr Summers. Carried with 10 votes for and 1 abstention.

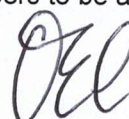
23/38 To receive any **Declaration of Interests** under Watchet Town Council's Code of Conduct (adopted on 9 July 2012) issued in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 and the Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012 Si No: 1464

Name	Minute No:	Description of Interest	Personal / Prejudicial	Action Taken
Cllr Whetlor	23/44a	Member of WLF	Personal	Cllrs remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion and voting.
Cllrs Irven & Murphy	23/44a,	Member of FOSL and WLF,	Personal	
Cllrs Johnson, Murphy & Whetlor	23/40 (2)	Trustees, Market House Museum	Personal	

At this point, the Chair proposed that '**the order of business is changed on the agenda and item 23/41 is considered when Somerset Councillor Davies arrives at the meeting**'. Seconded by Cllr Ellwood. Carried.

23/39 **Town Council Minutes** - To confirm and sign the Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on the 10 July 2023- (LGA 1972, Sch 12 Para 41 (1))
Cllr Murphy proposed that '**The minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 10 July 2023 are approved as a true and correct record.**' Seconded by Cllr Whetlor. Carried.

- 23/40**
- (i) **Chairman's Report:**
 - Opened and attended both the 'Watchet Summertime' and the 'Council Fun Day' events. They were both very successful.
 - Continues to assist with the community meal held at the Sanctuary twice per month on a Friday.
 - The Vice Chair attended the 1940's event and greeted the King & Queen (George VI and Elizabeth) at Watchet station and escorted them to the War Memorial for a short service. Thanks to the 1940's Committee for putting on an amazing event.
 - The Vice Chair attended a service at Wells Cathedral to commemorate the passing of Queen Elizabeth II and the accession of King Charles organised by the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset. Very moving service.
 - (ii) **Clerks Report-update on previous matters:**
 1. **Awareness of Scams** – A Watchet Councillor was a recent victim of a scam. The scammers sent an email as the Chair of Council. Whilst this email did not come from the mailbox of the Chair of Council or the Council Office, it is important for members to be aware of this, and to



inform Council immediately of a suspicious email to prevent a reoccurrence of this unfortunate event.

2. **Lease for the Market House Museum-** Risdon Hosegood Solicitors have been liaising with Foot Anstey on the Town Councils behalf. A payment of £2,106 legal fees have been paid. The response is as follows: *'Foot Anstey were due to send the draft lease to Richard Wedgwood (Savills) in the first instance. We have raised a further enquiry with both to see if this has happened yet and to obtain a copy of the draft lease, together with the Title documents to review. We have advised in respect of the Town Council meeting on 11 September and that you would like to provide a copy by then'*. Further update will be given at the meeting. A brief discussion ensued whereby members stated that the proposal submitted to Savills was based on £1500 legal fees and an annual rental of £455. The fact that the Council has paid £506 over the agreed legal fees quotation, and the new draft lease states an annual rental for the Museum of £1200, left members disgruntled. Cllr Irven proposed that ***'the basis on which the Council agreed to pay the legal costs for the new lease have not been met and the Council has been misled, the Clerk has delegation to convey this to Savills and seek clarification and financial recompense'***. Seconded by Cllr Moss. Carried with 8 votes for and 3 abstentions.

3. **Assets:**

- a. *Sea Scouts building lease and boat yard storage addition* – as this is an asset that the Council submitted an expression of interest to the former District Council, the Asset Surveyor, Somerset Council, contacted the Clerk to schedule a meeting to discuss this matter further. The Chair of Council and the Chair of Assets were in attendance. Please see the attached notes of the remote meeting which were also sent to the Chair of the Sea Scouts Committee for information. Any further updates will be reviewed by the Asset Management Committee with recommendations presented to Full Council when appropriate.
- b. *Reception – front office* – as the annual rental is due to expire. The Clerk and Chair of Assets have a meeting with Onion Collective on 26 September and will bring this matter back to Full Council in due course.

23/42

Reports from Representatives of Outside Organisations, Verbal – no Decisions

- (i) To appoint a member to represent the Council on the Carnival Committee - Cllr Murphy proposed ***'that Cllr Brake is appointed as the Council representative'***. Seconded by Cllr Irven. Carried. Cllr Terrett informed the meeting that he had stepped down due to family commitments. The Clerk reported that she had received correspondence from the Carnival Committee thanking Cllr Terrett for his work to date.
- Cllr Westcott as the Council representative on the ***'St Decumans Charity'*** reported that the charity gives funds to help residents living within a 2-mile radius of Watchet and Williton for white goods such as fridges and washing machines and other household items. If anyone knows of anyone who needs assistance, please contact either the Village Agent, local churches or Magna WS. Although several hundreds of pounds have been allocated, there is still money in the fund.
 - Cllr Murphy as the Council representative on ***'WACET'*** informed the meeting that he had not received recent emails and seemed to have dropped off the mailing list, could the Clerk query this.
 - Cllr Murphy as the Council representative on ***'WCCT'*** reported the following:
 1. At a directors meeting, the sustainability and viability of the community car (Nissan Leaf) was discussed. The vehicle is 3 years old and runs on a donation-based system and is not breaking even. A tariff-based system which is used for the community car 'EVIE' has the potential to make the car sustainable, so the directors need to look at which system helps the viability of the car.
 2. Connects Newsletter – the aim was that the revenue for advertising would cover the cost of publication, and the newsletter would be self-financing. This is not currently the case but looking at ways to rectify this. Funding is being sought to keep this project running as it is proving very important to many residents for an information source other than the internet.
 - Cllr Irven as the Council representative on the ***'Quantock Foodbank'*** reported that there was a trustees meeting on the 17 July 2023, where the draft Annual Report was finalised for circulation at the forthcoming AGM. Charities are being targeted by cybercrime, so security needs to be increased. The Financial policy was modified regarding bank accounts, and the chassis for the mobile pantry has been delivered and the box body is now being built. A secure car parking space or semi-secure compound is being considered, possibly the EDF park & ride in Washford, any suggestions would be gratefully received.

The Chair thanked all representatives for their reports.



23/43 **Verbal reports from sub-committees, working groups, and other outside organisations, where Watchet Town Council does not have representation:** (Notification to the Clerk prior to the meeting) – no notifications received.

23/44 **Reports from Working Groups:** *any relevant paperwork will be issued prior to the meeting.*

- a. **Watchet Library** – Cllr Irven informed the meeting that the working group was due to meet the new Library Manager on 31 August at the library premises, but this was postponed due to illness, and has been rescheduled for 26 October 2023 at 12noon, followed by the quarterly CLP meeting.
- b. **Wheeled Park** – Cllr Ellwood presented the update report which was circulated prior to the meeting and collated by the Deputy Clerk.
 - Unfortunately, it's not great news as Sports England refused the £15,000 funding bid. Contacted the National Lottery Communities Fund Advisor for the Somerset area, and due to funding for other projects within the area, it is unlikely there will be any available for 1-2 years. As the Council is a local authority, they are restricted in what they can bid for, so consideration should be given as to whether the Council involves a CIC in the bidding process on behalf of the community to see this project to fruition. Contacted Somerset Council regarding S106, and as a local school has registered an interest to seek funding for new play equipment, the funding pot is seriously depleted.
- c. **Climate Change** - no update
- d. **Watchet Task Force** – the minutes of the last meeting were circulated prior to the meeting - Chair of the working group Cllr Terrett summarised the main points:
 - Road alignment at the cross – no update
 - Signage – reviewed and revised.
 - Social media – good feedback on posts
 - Urban design- due diligence shown by seeking alternative quotes.

Cllr Murphy continued that he would like to thank Cllr Johnson for deputising in his absence as the Council representative. The meeting considered parking prioritisation in the town, which would be considered further by the E&P Committee, and updated members on the £2,000 allocation from Council for social media set up costs. The agreed £500 contribution from WACET, the group were informed, would not be available until the new year.

Cllr Terrett concluded that the Clerk was stepping down from the group and he would like to thank her for her hard work to date.

23/45 **Councillor Surgeries** – update report by Cllrs Johnson and Murphy who attended the Surgery held on Saturday 2 September 2023 with 3 attendees:

- Styles on the donkey field - *referred to the Watchet Task Force*
- Various parking issues raised, these can be tackled if Somerset Highways agree to meet regarding the parking at St Decumans Road, already referred to at the last surgery.
- Operations of a business on Brendon Road- E&P Committee has raised this previously with planning enforcement with little success.
- Range of issues on the esplanade- being addressed by R&T Committee where a meeting with Somerset Officers has been scheduled.

23/46 **Policies:**

- (i) To approve the Major Projects Policy Document – circulated via **Appendix 2** – a long discussion ensued where it was apparent that this document did not fit the required criteria and another policy document more fit for purpose drafted with input from members if required.

23/47 **IT Matters:**

- (i) Councillors mailboxes – *information circulated via Appendix 3* – the Clerk informed members that the new mailboxes required backups to protect against corruption, accidental deletion or even malicious deletion, and the extra charge left a shortfall of £302.40 in the agreed budget of £705.60.
After a brief discussion relating to the cost, Cllr Moss proposed that ***'the Clerk is delegated to seek further clarification on costs with the provider and agree costs up to the current shortfall of £302.40'***. Seconded by Cllr Murphy. Carried.

Somerset Cllr Davies arrived at 8.08pm

23/41

Reports from the Principal Authority Members:

Members noted the generic report from Somerset Cllr Woods.

Report from Somerset Cllr Davies was circulated prior to the meeting, and he highlighted further matters not included in the report:

- Road Closures:
 1. Carhampton on 12 September from 7pm to 6am – 1 night only
 2. Surface works at Minehead Seafront (Warren Road and Seaward Way) on 13 September from 8pm-6am – 3 nights
 3. Spaxton & Cannington Road on 21 September – overnight
- Apply now for 2023-24 school places
- Coastal protection Scheme - Blue Anchor progressing well
- HPC free bus – schedule back to normal after crash in Minehead last week

No questions from the floor

The Chair thanked Somerset Cllr Davies for his report.

23/48

Community Ownership Fund:

(i) Potential bid by Watchet Town Council (WTC) and Watchet War Memorial Ground Management Committee (WWMGMC) – report by Cllrs Irven and Campbell via **Appendix 4**- Cllr Irven reported that he and Cllr Campbell had met with the Chair and the Treasurer of the WWMGMC to discuss the bid further and produced a progress report outlined below:

- The next window for submitting a bid has now opened on 30/8/23 closing Oct 11th, 2023.
- However, we had been advised by Locality the bid advisors to COF that a decision on whether we qualify for enhanced support to help frame the bid won't be taken until 15th September nor implemented if agreed until early October, so would not be available in time to benefit and submit by 11th Oct. The next window will likely from Nov 30th (4 per annum until March 2025)
- It is regarded as key to obtain the enhanced support if possible as we would get several days consultancy to advise how to complete support documentation to a standard expected by COF assessors, as well as additional revenue to cover extra professional fees required to obtain it.
- Initial advice was that as a local authority WTC will not qualify for such support, whereas WWMGMC as a charity could, so we were asked whether we could change our approach to WWMGMC fronting the bid.
- Having reviewed this with WWMGMC we believe it is not viable for them to do this as they don't have the capability, but more importantly cannot reclaim VAT, increasing cost by >£30k. Furthermore, they would have to submit a new EOI further delaying matters with no guarantee it would be acceptable.
- Rather we have made a case, which Locality are supporting, that due to the special status of the WTC as holding trustee with WWMGMC as managing trustee we should still qualify, and we will know by Sept 18th. We have also pointed out such a change would increase costs to COF by >£30k which is avoided if WTC continue as applicants.
- If we are unsuccessful in getting enhanced support, we may still get one day consultancy.
- In a meeting with WWMGMC we stressed the need for wider community use to help justify finding. As a result, a further review with the WCCT surveyor at site has assessed the potential for increasing internal space to make it more attractive for community use, together with toilet upgrades for potentially opening these for public use at the ground.
- WCCT have covered costs of the surveyor to date and preparing re-costings of this new option. It is likely the revised costings will increase total costs especially if also running into 2024, and why the enhanced support package would help advise what costs might be reasonable to include in a bid.
- In the interim WWMGMC are obtaining quotes for minimum urgent maintenance work required to make the building waterproof pending applying for and receiving a COF grant. A request will be made to WTC F&P committee for help with these costs.
- Appendix 1 gives the WWMGMC current views on the approach.
Cllr Irven proposed that '**Council endorse the approach being taken and continue delegation to produce and submit a COF bid**'. Seconded by Cllr Whetlor. Carried.



External Audit

To note the contents of the External Auditors report an acknowledge the 'Notice for Closure of Audit – clerks report circulated via **Appendix 5** –

BACKGROUND:

On completion of the 2021/22 audit, it was recognised by the External Auditor that the 'Exercise of Public Rights' in relation to when the public can inspect the accounts was issued on the 5 June 2022, when in fact the accounts were not signed off until the Full Council meeting on the 13 June 2022. In the AGAR Section 1, Assertion 7, was answered yes stating that we had complied with the notice periods, when in fact it should have stated 'no'. I explained this to Council when signing off last years audit, but the fact that we didn't re-address the AGAR and change the answer, it has been brought up again on the 2022-23 External Auditors report.

15 August – email from external auditors

This email also serves to notify you that I will be raising the following 'except for' matter subject to sign off by an engagement lead:

- The smaller authority has disclosed that it made proper provision during the year 2022/23 for the exercise of public rights, by answering 'Yes' to Section 1, Assertion 4. However, as was reported last year, we are aware that it failed to do this and therefore should have answered 'No' to this Assertion. It has also disclosed that it took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit, by answering 'Yes' to Section 1, Assertion 7, which, on the basis of the above, is not correct. Also, the Internal Auditor has not provided an explanation as to why the response to Objective M is not consistent with the information provided in the prior year external auditor report.

Clerk's response – email 25 August

With reference to your note about the 'except matters' I don't really know what more the Council could have done, this matter was conveyed to them and addressed as outlined in the paperwork sent to you. I submitted a written report supported by a verbal report and made the Council fully aware of the error and it was noted that this would not be a re-occurrence. Are you stating that the paperwork should have been brought back re-considered and corrected at the same meeting where it was addressed, as we were not aware that we had to do this as it was not communicated clearly.

Cllr Summers proposed that **'the following recommendation is approved'**.

To note the contents of the External Auditors certificate and report and acknowledge its contents, and to note the 'Notice of Conclusion of Audit' and authorise payment of net £630 for services'

1. Notice of conclusion of audit – attached – to be published on the Councils website before the 30 September 2023.
2. Section 3 – External Auditor's Report and Certificate 2022/23 – attached, with an explanation of the 'except for matters' detailed below: Seconded by Cllr Johnson. Carried.

23/50

Exclusion of the public:

"That in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it is advisable in the public interest that the public be temporarily excluded, and they are instructed to withdraw" (Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960

Cllr Campbell proposed that **'due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, Standing Order (1d) is invoked, and the public and press are instructed to withdraw'**. Seconded by Cllr Ellwood. Carried.

Somerset Cllr Davies left the meeting at 8.35pm

23/51

Recommendations from the Finance & Staffing Committee:

- (i) To approve the employment pack for the Clerk's position- circulated via **Appendix 6**- members approved the pack as presented.

See Excluded notes 23/15 EX

Cllr Campbell proposed that the **'public are re-admitted to the meeting'**. Seconded By Cllr Ellwood. Carried.

23/53 **Accounts for payment** - to retrospectively approve the July schedule (paid on August) and to approve the August schedule (paid in September).
Cllr Summers proposed that ***'the Payment Schedule is approved, and the invoices duly paid.'***
Seconded by Cllr Terrett. Carried.

23/54 To note **Matters for the next meeting** – no discussion or decisions made.

Meeting closed at 8.53pm

Signed: 

Dated: 