

**Minutes of the Town Council Meeting
held on Monday 4th December 2023 at 7.00pm**

Present: Cllr Brake, Cllr Irven, Cllr Moss, Cllr Summers, Cllr Terrett, Cllr Westcott and Cllr Whetlor.

In attendance: Sarah Reed, Town Clerk, Somerset Cllr Davies, Jo Grellier, Deputy Clerk

In the absence of the Chair of Council, Cllr Campbell, Cllr Whetlor presided over the meeting.

- 23/88** To formally resolve to suspend standing order 3(x) – to allow this meeting to take place on the first Monday of the month due to the Christmas period
Cllr Whetlor proposed that ***‘Council formally resolve to suspend Standing Order 3(x) to allow the meeting to take place on the first Monday of the Month due to the Christmas period’***. Seconded by Cllr Terrett. Carried.
- 23/89** To receive Apologies for Absence (LGA 1972, section 85 (1) –
Cllr Whetlor proposed that ***‘Apologies given by Cllrs Campbell, Ellwood, Murphy & Richards are accepted’***. Seconded by Cllr Summers. Carried.
- 23/90** 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	23/78a	Member of WLF	Personal	Cllrs remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion and voting.
Cllr Irven	23/78a	Member of FOSL and WLF,	Personal	
Cllr Whetlor	23/74 (1)	Trustees, Market House Museum	Personal	
Cllrs Irven & Summers	23/82(i)	Directors of WCCT	Personal	
Cllrs Terrett & Whetlor	23/94(i)	Watchet Conservation Society Members	Personal	

- 23/91** **Town Council Minutes** - To confirm and sign the Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on the 9 October 2023- (LGA 1972, Sch 12 Para 41 (1)
Cllr Brake proposed that ***‘The minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 13th November 2023 are approved as a true and correct record.’*** Seconded by Cllr Summers. Carried.

- 23/92** **Reports:**
- Chair- verbal
Nothing to report.
 - Clerks report – See **Appendix 2**
 - 1. Lease for the Market House Museum – update**
The Clerk confirmed the final draft just waiting for the Solicitors to answer the queries made by the Museum Committee regarding an extension of the term beyond 10 years.
 - 2. Assets- front office – update and recommendations**
The Clerk informed that she has been working with the Chair of Assets in line with the resolution passed at the November Council meeting as follows: *‘To appoint a mutually acceptable independent valuer (acceptable to both WTC and OC) to undertake a full spec onsite valuation of the front office at a budget of up to £1,500 and the Clerk in liaison with the Chair of Assets*

present a report at a future Council meeting'. This has been communicated this to Onion Collective and asked them to agree for the Council to engage the services of Vickery Holman, the recommended valuer from Somerset Council, to undertake the valuation on the Councils behalf at a cost of up to £1,500 which will be borne by the Town Council. We are awaiting a response.

3. Retirement

As this is the last Full Council meeting the Clerk will attend due to retirement, the Clerk read out the following statement at the meeting:

On 12 August 2002 I was employed by WTC as Finance Officer, I arrived on my first day to be met by two very large piles of box files full of papers and was told by a Councillor, 'we've bought you a new computer so you can now digitally input our financial data' this was my first challenge! Many challenges followed, after stepping in as Acting Clerk due to maternity leave in 2003, I attended every training course on offer, and spent hours reading legislation and working out how the Town Council could work better and lawfully. This led to me to being offered the job permanently in 2004, and attaining my CiLCA in 2006, and followed in 2008, 2 years at Gloucester University to attain my Higher Certificate in Local Policy. This also led me to make lifelong friends and form a very helpful network of Clerks around the country. This again was very challenging for me as my sons were only 9 and 12 when I took on the Clerks role. In 2010 I was offered a place on the Branch Executive for the Somerset Branch of SLCC as an advisor to Clerks in West Somerset, a role I have just recently stood down from. I was also the treasurer of the branch for several years.

I am very proud of what I have achieved as Proper Officer and RFO for Watchet Town Council and proud of the pro-active approach staff and members have towards working for their community, and we can all agree Watchet is an amazing community! However, I will enjoy coming to the town as a visitor and enjoying its attractions, as my job was so busy, I rarely had time to appreciate it fully.

I have worked with many fantastic Councillors over the years, I will not name names as some of you are still sitting around this table, some have inspired me in a positive way and others have been less inspirational and cost the staff valuable time and energy, not aware of how their actions have negatively impacted on others who are trying to do their best during very challenging times for local Councils. There are clashes of personalities in all walks of life, but I would urge Councillors to work positively together to serve a very deserving community.

I have worked with several staff members over the years and the current Council team are fabulous, hardworking and I will miss them. I am delighted to be leaving my legacy in the capable hands of Jo Grellier who I have every confidence will step into my shoes admirably, please support and look after her, she has some challenging times ahead.

Thank you for your support in what has been a very rewarding, challenging and sometimes very stressful role, of which I have given 110% to, I hope that my efforts have made a difference to how effectively and lawfully the Council continues to operate, but feel it is time to move onto pastures new and send you all my best wishes.

Cllr Whetlor made the following comment - ***'I have worked with the Clerk since the day she joined, and I can concur with everything that has been said in her statement. The Council is losing a huge asset and she will be missed. We look forward to the new Clerk carrying on her legacy'.***

Cllr Irven commented – ***'I would have been lost without Sarah's invaluable guidance and advice regarding legislation during my time on the Council, she will be missed terribly. In 2018 Sarah helped Watchet Town Council to achieve runners up in Star Council of the Year awards, we would not be where we are without her'.***

Cllr Westcott commented – ***'I have been on the council longer than Sarah, she has made Watchet Town Council what it is today, without her we would not be one of the best Council in Somerset. Thank you, Sarah,'.***

Cllr Summers commented – ***'Thank you for giving me the confidence to stand to become a councillor and the advice you have given to help me recognise my strengths within the council'.***

Cllr Terrett Commented – ***'Thank you Sarah, I came to the Council nervous, and you have helped me grow as a councillor'.***

Cllr Moss commented – ***'Thank you for being very welcoming and making my start as a new Councillor enjoyable'.***



4. Security for the Council office

Since the safety of the Council office staff was raised as a concern when they were recorded without their permission by an aggressive member of the public, increased security is a priority. Please see attached the details and cost of a camera that can be installed above the reception door, this is a wire free design stick up cam battery. This costs £89.99 and for £41.88 per year this provides software allowing recordings straight to a PC.

RECOMMENDATION:

To purchase a 'stick up cam battery' for the cost of £89.99 plus £41.88 per annum for software to increase security in the front reception office to safeguard and protect staff.

Cllr Whetlor proposed that **'the recommendation is approved'**. Seconded by Cllr Summers. Carried.

23/93

Reports from the Principal Authority Members:

Somerset Council, County Cllr Davies and to receive questions from the floor.

Members noted the generic report from Somerset Cllr Woods. A report from Somerset Cllr Davies was circulated prior to the meeting and noted. He highlighted the following matters:

- Somerset Council is carrying out essential repairs in the new year. The Grade 11 listed Town Bridge carries the A3027 over the River Tone in the centre of Taunton and for a number of years has been showing signs of wear and tear. Engineering reports revealed the need for extensive refurbishing works to the bridge structure, including concrete repairs, parapet repairs, new joints, waterproofing, and painting of the steelworks and ornate cast iron parapets. The painting will ensure the steel and iron elements of the bridge are protected for another 30 to 40 years. Funding has been ring-fenced for what is the essential structural repair programme.
- Somerset Council has signed two new four -year contracts with Kiely Bros and Hanson UK to carry out essential surface treatments and resurfacing works respectively on Somerset's road network.
- Accessing Somerset Council Services in Taunton - Customers who need to talk to Somerset Staff face to face about enquiries that cannot be dealt with online by phone will need to visit DEANE HOUSE, STATION ROAD, TAUNTON from 1st December. The reception desk at A Block, County Hall, will be closing on Thursday 30th November with this part of the building closed off as part of measure taken in response to the financial emergency to reduce costs. The Customer Service Point at Deane House is already dealing with Somerset Council enquiries and is more accessible for customers than County Hall. Customers will be able to ask about Blue Badges, Council Tax, Homelessness or Benefits. Parking is available close to Deane House and it's on several bus routes, so is accessible. The staff are looking forward to welcoming customers, whatever their enquiry may be. Customers can also find lots of information and access our services at www.somerset.gov.uk.
- Sarah thank you so much for helping me while serving the public. May I wish good health to carry you through a well-earned retirement.

Questions from the floor – None

The Chair thanked Somerset Cllr Davies for his report.

23/94

Reports from Representatives of Outside Organisations - Verbal

(i) To consider the appointment of a representative on the Watchet Conservation Society. Due to Cllr Campbell standing down as the representative on the Watchet Conservation Society, Cllr Summers proposed that **'Cllr Whetlor stand in as substitute representative until the Annual Town Meeting in May 2024'**. Seconded by Cllr Moss. Carried with 2 abstentions.

- Cllr Whetlor as the Council representative on 'SALC' - tabled a written report and informed members that she attended the SALC AGM on 2nd December. Cllr Bill Revans, Leader of Somerset Council was there to explain the situation regarding the finances of Somerset Council. There will be a more in-depth report from SALC, but the main areas of conversation related to the huge deficit in their budget, this is a real emergency. The main reason for the deficit is the rising costs of Adult Social Care and Covid causing unprecedented problems. Cllr Whetlor also attended the NALC assembly where Wellington Council, nominated for Best Council, came 2nd. Cllr Whetlor was reappointed as SALC Director and Chair of the west area.
- Cllr Irvén as the Council representative on the 'Quantock Foodbank' – tabled a photograph of an electric van and informed members that following the Trustees meeting, Quantock Foodbank has taken delivery of a new Electric pantry delivery vehicle. This is the first ever mobile electric pantry in the Country. It will not be out and about for a further 4/6 weeks until the final H&S assessment are completed. The mobile pantry will eventually be visiting surrounding villages one day a week.



- Cllr Terrett as the Council representative on the '**Knights Templar Swimming Pool Committee**' – there have been a couple meetings since the formation of the new Committee. The pool now offers the only opportunity for the school and surrounding area to meet government mandatory standards which requires every child to be able to swim 25 metres. The use of the pool is also in line with several other government initiatives and guidance notes relating to Sport, Healthy Living, Disability, Mental Health, Fitness and Wellbeing. The Committee are Income generated by School classes each term, and outside classes and group bookings. Any income that had accrued was spent to keep the pool running during Covid. They need help to keep the pool in operation. The Clerk has informed that Watchet Town Council are unable to provide any grant or donation directly to the school but could explore the options of providing help via the KTSCA. The Committee are researching other funding pots, especially with Hinkley Point, but they have been informed the funding pot suitable is currently closed and will not reopen 2024.

23/95 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)

- Cllr Irven as EH&S Officer informed members that he attended a SALC Events Safety Zoom meeting this week, which primarily focused on Event safety and risk assessments due to the increase in Councils organising Community events. Councils are legally liable for its activities and accountable if accidents were to occur, and in some cases can run the risk of prosecution if policies and procedures are not in place and followed correctly.

H&S must be taken seriously, and Risk assessment policies and procedures must be up to date and adhered to, to safeguard the Council and the Community.

23/96 Reports from Working Groups and appointed representatives: - Any relevant paperwork will be issued prior to the meeting:

- Watchet Library** - Cllr Irven informed members that at a recent FOSL meeting a query was raised regarding the location of the photographs taken at the recent Library rededication event. The library staff are now in possession of them and are planning to create a historical scrap book of photographs over the generations. Cllr Summers informed Cllr Irven that a local photographer has many photos that he may be willing to share to add to the book.
- Wheeled Park** – Nothing to report.
- Climate Change** – Nothing to report.
- Watchet Task Force** – Nothing to report.
- EH&S Policies** – Cllr Irven informed members that he has been working with the Admin Support Officer, the Admin Support Officer, to establish the location of WTC's hard and digital copies of H&S documentation. There are a number missing. Cllr Irven has located over 700 files from the last 8 years, and these will be collated to identify what policies and Risk Assessments are missing. There was nothing on file on Hand & Arm Vibration. Cllr Irven created and produced a document to cover this to ensure the Council are covered for any liability. Calculations were conducted with Ground staff, and we are currently within the safe area, but annual checks must be conducted. Cllr Terrett has agreed to help with this. Cllr Terrett proposed to '**formally approve and adopt the Hand & Arm Vibration document**'. Seconded by Cllr Summers. Cllr Summers thanked Cllr Irven for his hard work and time spent.

23/97 Councillor Surgeries:

Cllr Summers reported that she attended the Surgery held on Saturday 2 December 2023 with Cllr Johnson. There were 2 visitors.

1. Regarding the popular trees that have been felled at the Stoats mill site. She was seeking the opinion of Watchet Town Council, and she was not in favour of the felling of these trees and wished to know who felled the trees and their qualifications because in her opinion the trees were not felled correctly. Cllr Johnson assured her that the tree felling company would have been sourced correctly from the then District Council.
Cllr Moss updated all members that there were 13 popular trees pollarded due to safety concerns by qualified tree surgeons, the tree applications were approved by the Somerset planning department. Two trees were cut down as there were dead.
2. An enquiry about the lack of hedge maintenance on Cleeve Hill since the road closure. Secondly, if access could be made through the barrier for walkers or persons on bicycles, as it's becoming increasingly difficult to use the coastal path at the top of Cleeve Hill.

The Clerk informed members that this is an ongoing concern being dealt with by the WTF and Somerset Council.

Oze

23/98

Community Ownership Fund:

- (i) Potential bid by Watchet Town Council (WTC) and Watchet War Memorial Ground Management Committee (WWMGMC)

Cllr Irven informed members that himself, Cllr Campbell and WWMGMC attended a virtual 2.5hr assessment meeting. He tabled the Diagnostic report for members to note. Cllr Irven was pleased to report that following their assessment they have received confirmation that they qualify to generate a bid. The first stage is to instruct a Quantity Surveyor to put costings together, which they hope to achieve within the next 2 weeks, then a further 2/3 weeks to collate all the information and costings before submitting the funding bid within the next window around April time.

Cllr Terrett asked what measures were in place for the building to survive the winter?

Cllr Irven responded and gave a brief update regarding the grant of £1,750 awarded to the Watchet War Memorial Ground Management Committee by the Finance & Staffing Committee, which will top up the emergency repairs budget to allow the building to be safe over the winter period. There was a stipulation that the grant could only be used for a replacement roof on the spectator stand (cowshed).

23/99

Recommendations from the Asset Committee:

- (i) To recommend to Full Council the exploration of the following asset transfers from Somerset Council – see **Appendix 3**

Cllr Irven informed that at this stage it is an expression of interest only. Watchet Town Council need to know if Somerset Council are prepared to transfer these Assets, Full Council are to note at this stage. Members noted Appendix 3.

23/100

Matters of Correspondence for Report:

- The Clerk informed members that a letter had been received from Williton Allotments Ltd requesting a letter from Watchet Town Council to support their purchase of the Williton Allotments.

At this stage Cllr Whetlor declared a personal interest as a Williton Councillor. She remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion and voting.

Cllr Westcott proposed that **'Council approve the request for a supporting letter'**. Seconded by Cllr Moss. Carried.

23/101

Accounts for payment – to approve the November schedule (paid in December):

Cllr Whetlor proposed to **"the Payment Schedule is approved, and the invoices duly paid"**. Seconded by Cllr Summers. Carried.

23/102

To note Matters for the next meeting:

- Liaise with Town Clerk
- Precept

Meeting closed at 8.28pm

Signed:

Dated: