

Minutes of Full Council Meeting
held on Monday 12th February 2024 at 7.00pm

Present: Cllr Brake, Cllr Irven, Cllr Moss, Cllr Murphy, Cllr Westcott, Cllr Whetlor

In attendance: Jo Grellier - Town Clerk, Annie Robinson – Deputy Clerk, County Cllr Davies – Somerset Council, Ian Liddell-Grainger MP, 1 member of the Press, and 5 members of the public.

In the absence of Cllr Campbell, Chair of Council, Cllr Whetlor, as Deputy, chaired the meeting. Before the meeting commenced Cllr Whetlor informed Council that her Husband and ex Town Councillor, Mike Whetlor, had sadly passed away, there will be no funeral but a celebration of his life in May, invitations will be sent. A minute silence ensued for Council to remember Mike and his dedication to Watchet.

24/121 To receive Apologies for Absence (LGA 1972, section 85 (1) –
Cllr Murphy proposed that ***'Apologies given by Cllr Campbell, Cllr Johnson, Cllr Richards, and Cllr Terrett are accepted'***. Seconded by Cllr Brake. Carried.

24/122 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
Cllrs Irven, Murphy & Whetlor	24/129a	Members of FOSL & WLF	Personal	Cllrs remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion and voting.
Cllr Murphy & Whetlor	24/124 (1)	Trustee of Market House Museum	Personal	Cllrs remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion and voting.
Cllr Muphy & Irven	24/131 (i)	Directors of WCCT	Personal	Cllrs remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion and voting.
Cllr Whetlor	24/133 (i)	Chair of WHAC	Personal	Cllr remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion and voting.

24/123 **Town Council Minutes** - To confirm and sign the Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on the 8th January 2023 (LGA 1972, Sch 12 Para 41 (1) *circulated prior to the meeting via Appendix 1*
Cllr Moss proposed that ***'the Full Council minutes of the 15th January 2024 meeting are a true and accurate record'***. Seconded by Cllr Brake. Carried with 1 abstention.

Due to the public interest in item 24/126 Cllr Whetlor as Chair of the meeting proposed that ***'item 24/126 - Joint statement from all parties in attendance at the meeting held on 6 December 2023, is moved up the agenda to be discussed as the next item of business'***. Seconded by Cllr Irven. Carried.



24/126 **Joint statement from all parties in attendance at the meeting held on 6 December 2023:**

- (i) To approve the statement - *if received tabled at the meeting* - Chris Odling-Smee in attendance via Zoom to discuss response
- The Clerk updated Council, Chris Odling-Smee cancelled his attendance via zoom session giving the following statement: ***"I am eager to fully engage with the Town Council and the community at large as soon as practicable. The Town Council is already aware of the details of the investment in Watchet and my plans in general following December's meeting. Due to press misrepresentation, I regret that the quality of reporting in the newspaper is such that I and my investors will not wish to divulge any detail whatsoever in our plans and consequently we will not attend this evening's meeting. We will instead on a closed session basis update the Town Council as soon as an alternative meeting can be arranged. As soon as I am ready (and not before) I will ensure that a full and open account of the affairs and plans for the marina are published and I will gladly meet the community directly. For reference there is an ongoing review of Tindle Newspapers with the IPSO (Independent Press Standards Organisation) as to whether the editors' code of practice has been breached in past coverage of the marina(s)".*** Cllr Whetlor proposed that ***'members note the statement'***. Seconded by Cllr Irven. Carried.

24/124 **Reports:**

- Chair- verbal

Cllr Whetlor informed Council that the Chair of Council and herself have accepted an invitation to attend the annual Legal Service at Wells Cathedral on Sunday 17th March 2024 at 3pm

- See Clerks report – See **Appendix 2**

The Clerk updated the Council on the following items:

1. **Lease for the Market House Museum – update**
There is still a holdup on the documents arriving for signature, due to Orchard Wyndham Estate Solicitor but they are being chased. The Market House Museum Chair has been informed of the hold up.
2. **Assets- front office – update**
GTH attended to conduct a Market Appraisal we have since has this returned at Market value is recommended between £15k-£17k we are awaiting a follow-up negotiation meeting with Onion Collective
3. **Citizens Advice bureau request for letter of support - update and recommendations – resolution required**
Citizens Advice Bureau are in the process of trying to attract funding from the Somerset Community Fund for a project exploring the impact on local housing issues in the Hinkley Point impact zone. Watchet is an area which sits within the zone, so they are requesting a letter of support from Watchet Town Council which endorses their approach to expand an outreach service which they were previously offering up until the end of 2023 for the benefit of the Community **for the next 2 years**. Cllr Moss proposed that ***'a letter of support is approved'***. Seconded by Cllr Murphy. Carried.
4. **Banking signatory amendments – update and resolution**
Sarah Reed who has returned on a consultancy basis until 8th February is currently working with Natwest Bank to amend the bank signatories. I will be contacting the Chairs of each Committee, who are not currently listed as signatories, to request any information and documentation required to add signatories in the near future. As the new Clerk and RFO I will also be added to as a signatory and contact for any banking issues. Approval to be given by Council. Cllr Murphy proposed that ***'approval is given for the new signatories to be added to the bank accounts'***. Seconded by Cllr Irven. Carried.
5. **Update on casual vacancies – update**
The Elections Officer has been notified of the two Casual Vacancies, and these were advertised on 30th January on Social media, WTC Website and in our Noticeboards. We must await the 14-working day notice period which ends 19th February, whereby I will be able to inform Council if the Electorate has called for a Bi-election or if we are able to co-opt. If we are able to co-opt, this will take place at the April Full Council meeting.
6. **Invitation for a Watchet Town Council representative to attend West Somerset Railway working group – resolution required**
A representative of West Somerset Railway PLC is currently chairing a working group which includes Somerset Council, Heart of the Southwest Local Enterprise Partnership, Great Western Railway and Network Rail. They are putting together a Strategic Outline Business Case for the restoration of scheduled trains to the national network between Bishops Lydeard and Taunton. The intention is that this will be submitted to the Department for Transport by the end of March 2024. They are currently undertaking an informal stakeholder engagement process and would like to invite a representative of the Town Council to a meeting in Taunton in February. The date and venue have yet to be confirmed but if the Council is interested in being represented at the meeting, they would be grateful to have contact details. Cllr Whetlor proposed that ***'Cllr Irven is appointed as the representative for Watchet Town Council for the West Somerset Railway Working Group'***. Seconded by Cllr Moss. Carried with 1 abstention. Cllr Irven accepted the appointment.
7. **Approval of appointment of Internal Auditor – resolution required**
Bryan Howe has agreed to conduct the Town Council Internal Audit this year and most likely for the last time before retirement. Council to approve his appointment. Cllr Murphy proposed that ***'The Council approve the appointment of the internal Auditor'***. Seconded by Cllr Westcott. Carried.
8. **Watchet Marina article in West Somerset Free Press (2nd February 2024 edition)**

I have been alerted of an article in The WSFP titled 'Anger as Marina dredger sails away' by Tony James. The article includes comments from Cllr John Richards and Deputy Watchet Mayor Cllr Whetlor, as Watchet Harbour Advisory Committee members and Chair. There are concerns with the use of their Watchet Town Council title as this could be interpreted as the Watchet Town Council view, which is not the case. Contact will be made with WSFP to reiterate the Council position on this matter, and guidance is being provided by the Monitoring officer to establish if a breach of conduct has been made by Cllr Richards, after confirmation from Cllr Whetlor that the information used under her name was not authorised and was taken from confidential emails between WHAC members and Somerset Council only and not for the public domain. I have advised Cllr Whetlor that this matter should be addressed directly with the WHAC as a breach of conduct also.

Cllr Whetlor advised that she was absolutely appalled to see herself quoted as "Advisory Committee Chair and deputy Watchet Mayor Cllr Loretta Whetlor". The wording used was from an email sent to WHAC members and the Somerset Council officers in her capacity as Chair of the organisation in response to several members asking for clarity on the situation. It was sent on 28th January 2024 in late evening. It was not for public use and the newspaper has misappropriated its contents without her knowledge.

A long discussion ensued. Cllr Irven proposed that **'a referral to the monitoring officer is made by Watchet Town Council as a breach of conduct for further investigation'**. Seconded by Cllr Murphy. Carried with 3 abstentions.

Ian Liddell-Grainger MP, 1 member of the Press, and 2 members of the public left the meeting at 7.35pm

24/125 **Reports from the Principal Authority Members:**

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

A written report from County Cllr Woods was circulated to Council prior to the meeting. Members noted the report.

Questions from the floor: None

County Cllr Davies gave the following verbal report:

- Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel met to consider the Police and Crime Commissioner's proposed increase in the Council tax precept-the money collected from Council tax specifically for Policing. The Panel was required to consider if an annual increase of £13 for an average Band D property was fair and appropriate.
- Our finance team are looking through the details, but we did receive an update on our two requests to Government. The first request for capitalisation will not be given permission to raise Council Tax by 9.99%. The other request for capitalisation direction (which would allow us to use capital funds raised by selling assets or borrowing to pay every day running costs) is still being considered and decision on this will follow in due course.
- Threat from Asian hornets - Somerset Beekeepers Association represents 1,000 amateur beekeepers here in Somerset with the wider British Beekeeping Association representing around 38,000 such beekeepers are writing to ask to prewarn any and all grounds staff, schools, Council workers and contractors whose job it is to clear and cut shrubs and trees: cut playing fields public parks etc, of the risks to them of inadvertently disturbing the nest of Asian Hornets.
- Flood relief scheme opens for communities hit by storm Henk - Residents and businesses can apply via Somerset Council's portal. Householders who suffered flooding inside their home, making it wholly or partly unliveable for a while, may qualify for help. Businesses will be able to apply for rates relief as well as a Business Recovery Grant.
- RECYCLING SITES - Meeting Williton Pavilion 30th January 2024. I have not made any report as Cllr Irven attended.

Questions from the floor: None

24/127 **Reports from Representatives of Outside Organisations, Verbal – no decisions**

SALC – Cllr Whetlor gave the following verbal report as WTC representative - The Board of SALC now has a full complement of directors. Each Director will have certain responsibilities. i.e., one for Financial and another for Health and Wellbeing etc. As Chair I will have overview of all matters. They will be attending all LCNs to give updates of what SALC are doing. As reported at the recent Minehead and Watchet LCN they are discussing with a couple of legal companies the possibility of them taking on the work for Councils in relation to devolvement of services and properties. It makes sense for one or two companies to be dealing with Somerset Council rather than about 40.

LCN –Cllr Irven gave the following verbal report as WTC representative:

- Attended a LCN meeting which covered the recycling centre closures but will discuss this in more detail later in the agenda.
- Highways Steward Scheme – £50k a year for highway steward to aid parish/town Councils with minor highways repairs ran pilot on Exmoor scheme will continue more clarification on the scheme is required.
- Local Community Land Trust – low-cost housing request as Somerset Council declare a Housing emergency. Very good support, WTC may want to support in the future.

24/128 **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)

None to report



24/129 **Reports from Working Groups and appointed representatives:** - Any relevant paperwork will be issued prior to the meeting:

- a. **Watchet Library – Update and recommendations**
Cllr Irven informed Council that the transfer of Deed for the Library toilet is now complete.
- b. **Wheeled Park – Update and recommendations**
The Clerk informed Council that Cllr Johnson accepted his nomination to aid the clerk in the continuation of the Skate Park project. This has been put on hold due to staff changes and extensive workloads in the office.
- c. **Climate Change- Update and recommendations on de-carbonisation action plan**
Nothing to report
- d. **Watchet Task Force – Update and recommendations**
Cllr Murphy as WTC representative informed Council that at the last WTF meeting they discussed and approved the Urban design contractor. An initial zoom meeting has taken place and they are expecting contact with them shortly with available dates for public consultation events.
- e. **EH&S Policies – Update**
Cllr Irven as WTC EH&SO informed Council that a draft revised H&S policy is in progress and hope to address this at the next Full Council meeting. Cllr Irven also updated Council that PSPO signs previously removed due to historic WSDC PSPO's being disbanded in this area, have reappeared on Liddymore Road. This is an old sign with the out-of-date information. Clerk will contact Somerset Council to inform and ask for it to be removed.

24/130 **Councillor Surgeries** – update from Cllr Irven & Murphy who attended the Surgery held on Saturday 3rd February 2024 and any matters arising.

Cllr Murphy reported that two members of the public came in with enquiries. One regarding Cleeve hill barrier which has been dealt with and one regarding the triangular noticeboard on the Esplanade. This will be addressed by the R&T committee.

A discussion ensued. Cllr whetlor proposed that **'contact is to be made with Somerset Highways to suggest the barrier is moved back beyond the Warning sensor signs'**.

24/131 **Community Ownership Fund:**

(i) Potential bid by Watchet Town Council (WTC) and Watchet War Memorial Ground Management Committee (WWMGMC) – *verbal update by Cllr Irven*

Cllr Irven informed Council of the following:

- Received £9881 of the COF grant to allow initial stages of the bid process to be completed, including architect drawings. The Committee needs to define exactly what they want within the building.
- Likely capital bid now to have increased to £170k rather than £150k. Ongoing enquiries being made to establish if the Council can reclaim VAT. If this is not possible the project will be closer to £200k. If VAT owed this could increase WTC matched funding.
- COF require consultation and engagement with the community to show community support for the project.
- No movement on dog issues.
- 13th February – committee to have meeting with outside group to gain a quote for survey.

24/132 **Non-Committee access to information** – report from Cllr Richards and response from the Town Clerk - (**See Appendix 3**) circulated to all members prior to the meeting.

Cllr Moss proposed that **'in the absence of Cllr Richards who had requested the item be addressed at Full Council, this item is deferred until he is in attendance'**. Seconded by Cllr Whetlor. Carried.

24/133 **Somerset Council Harbour Advisory Committee response:**

(i) To discuss the membership of the Somerset Council Harbour Management Advisory Committee response – (**See Appendix 4**) circulated to all members prior to the meeting.

Members noted the response from Somerset Council. Cllr Irven proposed that **'WTC thank Somerset Council for their response and inform them that WTC had not appreciated that it was a S/C working group, but WTC look forward to engaging as a Stakeholder in the future'**. Seconded by Cllr Whetlor. Carried.

24/134 **Somerset Council Budget cuts:**

(i) Williton Recycling Centre potential closure - To discuss details of the public meeting hosted by Williton Parish Council on 30th January 2024, and subsequent meeting held on 6th February 2024 – *report tabled at the meeting by Cllr Brake*.

Cllr Brake presented a tabled report to Council following attending, along with Cllr Irven, the Public meeting on 30th January 2024, the report covered the following points raised at the Public meeting:

- Environment concerns
- Fly tipping concerns
- Site locations

Cllr Irven attended a subsequent Williton Parish Council meeting on behalf of the Chair who was unable to attend. He reported that a resulting composite set of questions were compiled and represented at the LCN meeting on 7th February. A total of 17 parishes supported retaining the Williton recycling Centre for the reasons identified including its better location, accessibility, and lower carbon footprint. A letter has been drafted by Williton PC for countersignature by those local parishes supporting its retention. A decision will be made by S/C on 20th February Public speaking would be beneficial and WTC should support Williton Parish Cllr Peter Payne in attending to speak on behalf of our area. A discussion ensued.

Cllr Irven proposed that **'the recommendation in the report that WTC sign the proposed letter is approved'**. Seconded by Cllr Murphy. Carried.

- (ii) CCTV concerns – *Verbal report from Cllr Richards*
Cllr Moss proposed that **'in the absence of Cllr Richards who had requested the item be addressed at Full Council, this item is deferred until he is in attendance'**. Seconded by Cllr Whetlor. Carried.

1 member of the public left the meeting at 8.30pm

24/135 **Harbour Road/Swain Street realignment:**

- (i) To note Somerset Highways response (*See Appendix 5*) circulated to all members prior to the meeting. Members noted Somerset Highways response. A discussion ensued. Cllr Murphy proposed that **'the response given should form the basis to a statement for social media'**. Seconded by Cllr Whetlor. Carried.

24/136 **To consider the recommendations from the Finance & Staffing Committee for the 2024-25 Earmarked Reserves:**

- (ii) To approve the Earmarked Reserves 2024/25 - (*See Appendix 6*) circulated to all members prior to the meeting.
The presented Earmarked Reserves 2024/25 were considered. Cllr Murphy proposed that **'the 2024/25 Earmarked Reserves as approved by Finance & Staffing Committee are accepted'**. Seconded by Cllr Irven. Carried.

Total Reserves figure to be provided by the RFO.

- (iii) To endorse Environment & Planning Committee to spend up to £5000 from traffic analysis earmarked Reserves to support the objection to Parsonage Farm development - *quotation tabled at the meeting*.
Cllr Irven presented the quotation from Traffic Analysis company Entran. A discussion ensued. Cllr Whetlor proposed that **'Council accept and endorse the Environment & Planning Committee recommendation to spend up to £5k on a traffic analysis for the Parsonage Farm Development'**. Seconded by Cllr Moss. Carried.

24/137 **Matters of Correspondence for Report** - Correspondence is addressed daily and filed - *The Clerk will report on any relevant correspondence*.
None to report.

24/138 **Accounts for payment:**

- (i) to approve the January schedule (paid in February) – *The schedule circulated to all members prior to the meeting for their consideration*.
Cllr Moss proposed that **'the January Schedule is accepted'**. Seconded by Cllr Irven. Carried.
- (ii) to approve all payments made outside of Full Council meetings - *The schedule circulated to all members prior to the meeting for their consideration*.
The Clerk informed Council that in attempt to aid her with the account reconciliation, all payments made outside of Full Council meetings from the previous month will be signed off and approved by Full Council moving forward, rather than Finance & Staffing committee. Cllr Whetlor proposed that **'Council approve the payments as presented'**. Seconded by Cllr Brake. Carried.

24/139 To note **Matters for the next meeting** – no discussion or decisions made

- Access to non-committee information
- CCTV
- Liaise with Town Clerk

Cllr Whetlor thanked the newly appointed Town Clerk and Deputy Clerk for their hard work ensuring members received all the reports on time.

The meeting closed at 8.42pm

Signed.....

Date.....11/3/24



