

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM (ADDITIONAL MEETING)

Tuesday, 11 August 2026

Attendance:

Councillors

Westwood (Chairperson)

Aron
Eve
Learney
Morris
Murphy

Thompson
Tod
Tippett-Cooper
Wise

Apologies for absence:

Councillors Batho, Becker, Reach and Scott

[Full video recording](#)

1. **APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIRPERSON AND VICE CHAIRPERSON FOR THE 2026/27 MUNICIPAL YEAR**

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Westwood be elected Chairperson and Councillor Eve be appointed Vice-Chairperson for the 2026/27 municipal year.

2. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Batho, Becker, Reach and Scott.

3. **DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS**

Councillor Tod declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of items on the agenda due to his role as a Hampshire County Councillor. However, as there was no material conflict of interest, he remained in the room, spoke and voted under the dispensation granted on behalf of the Audit and Governance

Committee to participate and vote in all matters which might have a County Council involvement.

4. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements made at this meeting.

5. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 9 MARCH 2026**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 March 2026 be approved and adopted.

6. **TO NOTE THE DATE AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE FORUM AS SET OUT BELOW:**

RESOLVED:

That the date of future meetings for 2026/27, as set out on the agenda, be noted.

7. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Two members of the public addressed the Forum. Ian Tait spoke during public participation, as summarised below.

In addition, Patrick Davies spoke during items 8 and 9 and a summary of their comments are set out under the relevant minute below.

Ian Tait raised concerns regarding antisocial behaviour and shoplifting in the city centre, questioning the effectiveness of current policing strategies. He highlighted the following points:

- His attendance at the Town Forum meeting on 22nd January where Chief Inspector Korine Bishop provided an update on Operation Compile, which was established to tackle city centre crime.
- A discrepancy between the "rose-tinted" statistics provided by the police regarding arrests and prison sentences and the daily reality witnessed in the city centre.
- Knowledge of specific instances where community behaviour orders had been issued but subsequently breached.
- Personal observations of individuals openly drinking stolen wine outside Marks and Spencer as early as 10:30 am.
- The regular occurrence of individuals entering retailers to steal and only retreating temporarily if challenged.
- Reports from staff at several major retailers—including Greggs, Pret, M&S, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Boots, and Iceland—that they are instructed not to challenge thieves.

- The perceived lack of purpose and policing of the city centre's alcohol exclusion zone.
- Concerns that government pressure to reduce the prison population will lead to non-custodial sentences for the worst offenders, allowing them to continue stealing.
- The assertion that most of these problems are drug-related.
- A comparison between the lack of shop security and the "disciplined approach" drug dealers take regarding payment for their goods.
- The issue of under-reporting, as many members of the public feel it is "not worth it" to report incidents, meaning official arrest figures are only the "tip of the iceberg".
- A follow-up on a specific individual mentioned during the meeting on 11th November 2024 who continued to cause problems despite being recently re-arrested.
- A warning that the community was becoming "blind" to a serious problem that will continue to worsen without custodial sentences.

In response, the Chairperson clarified the response of the Community Safety Team who they had approached prior to the meeting in anticipation of these concerns raised and that further comments would be taken back to the team to obtain a further update in due course.

8. **COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW (PRESENTATION)**

Patrick Davies addressed the Forum on this item. His comments are summarised below:

- Expressed his long-standing involvement with the city, noting that he first attended a council meeting in the building 60 years ago.
- He raised concerns that the current proposals could potentially make the situation for the city much worse.
- Mr Davies stated that the reimposition of two-tier government was a "grave error," as he believed the city functioned best without such a system.
- He expressed the hope that any new unitary authority would be based within the city and highlighted a requirement in new legislation for proper neighbourhood governance to be instituted by the new unitary authority, which he noted was not mentioned in the meeting papers.
- He described the proposed parish council as "expensive" and "pointless," arguing it would have limited powers no greater than a village parish council.
- He contended that calling the new body a "city" would be a "grave insult" to the history of Winchester.
- He criticised the public consultation results, noting that only 337 responses were received from 19,860 leafletted households, representing less than 1% of the town area.
- Mr Davies argued that the proposal was unnecessary and confusing, and that it was a "nonsense" to suggest it would be welcomed by the public.
- He expressed concerns regarding the financial cost, specifically the expense of hiring a new chief officer and additional staff.

- In conclusion, Mr Davies suggested that the council should not proceed as recommended and should instead allow a new unitary authority to establish proper governance for the city.

The Strategic Director gave a presentation regarding the Community Governance Review and the draft budget for the proposed Winchester Town Council. The key points of the presentation were highlighted as follows:

- (i) Meeting purpose and timeline: The Forum was convened to consider the draft list of assets for transfer to the new town council. It was noted that the Licensing and Regulation Committee would also consider the draft list at its meeting on 12 August 2026. While full Council was originally intended to consider the final order on 20 August, the Monitoring Officer had recently advised that this decision had been rescheduled for 7 October 2026.
- (ii) Opportunity for review: Due to the revised timeline for the full Council decision, the recommendations made at the current stage were not final, allowing an opportunity to revisit the work regarding asset transfers.
- (iii) Principles of asset transfer: The primary principle was that "assets follow services". The starting position for transfer includes assets for which services are currently, or have historically been, provided and funded by the Winchester Town Forum budget.
- (iv) Transfer of assets not currently funded by the Forum
- (v) Service transfer (The Market)
- (vi) Assets proposed for retention by the District/Unitary Council
- (vii) Financial impact of retained assets
- (viii) New Town Council operational costs
- (ix) Budget Savings and Ground Maintenance
- (x) Future considerations: It was recognised that the new town council would need to establish a reserve equivalent to at least three months of expenditure. Additionally, costs related to the Mayoralty were not currently included in the draft budget and would represent a net increase in cost if transferred in the future.

The forum proceeded to ask questions and comment on the following matters which were responded to by the Strategic Director, as summarised below.

- (a) A question was asked regarding the mayoralty and the reasons for its exclusion from the current community governance review process. It was explained that the Council meeting to consider the matter was moved to 7 October 2026 to allow for ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Clarification was being sought from the government on the process to transfer city status and the mayoralty from the district to a new entity. The council was unambiguous in its intention to protect these statuses and was determined to get the process right.
- (b) Further clarification was sought on the process for the review and the timeline for upcoming decisions. It was stated that the forum would provide views on asset transfers which would then be considered by the

licensing and regulation committee. The full council meeting on 7 October was identified as the point when the town council would be established and asset transfers agreed. It was noted that the updated timeline allowed more time for the licensing and regulation committee and the forum to consider the identified assets.

- (c) A question was asked regarding the indicative budget figures and the timing for confirming responsibilities for each element. It was clarified that the process would follow the standard budget-setting timetable for the Winchester Town Forum, with the budget typically considered in November, but not formally agreed until February of the municipal year.

Debate on this item was taken at the time of the consideration of Item 9, and the matters raised were as set out in that item below.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be received, and the comments raised by the forum, as summarised above, be noted.

9. **ASSETS TO TRANSFER TO NEW TOWN COUNCIL (REPORT)**

Patrick Davies addressed the Forum on this item. His comments are summarised below:

- He raised several concerns regarding the proposed asset transfer and the Community Governance Review (CGR) process and stated that the matter only reached public notice when the agenda for the current meeting was published.
- He criticised the use of CGR working groups that meet in private, arguing that a major issue such as this should have had public involvement from the outset.
- He described the lack of public transparency in the exercise as scandalous, asserting that open local government requires such meetings to be held in public.
- Mr Davies highlighted perceived irregularities in the handling of the Town Forum, noting that the chair was only re-elected in mid-August despite the municipal year beginning in May.
- He claimed that the process had been handled privately and secretly within a single party group.
- Mr Davies suggested the process had been "bungled from start to finish," citing the officer's update that the decision would no longer be going to Council the following week.
- He argued that the current trajectory would result in a "complete muddle" for Winchester residents rather than a clear-cut unitary authority.
- He characterised the proposed new body as a "glorified parish council" that would take significant resources from the public without a good reason and maintained that the functions of the proposed council should be carried out by the unitary authority, as intended by legislation.

- Mr Davies referenced extensive personal knowledge of existing parishes in the district, describing most as "glorified talking shops" that struggle to attract members.
- He pointed to the lack of contested seats and the high number of vacancies (24 seats) in recent local parish elections as evidence of low public interest and stated that there is no public demand for "tin pot parishes" in the city of Winchester.
- In conclusion, Mr Davies suggested that Winchester town should have a governance setup where local matters were managed by a committee of the unitary authority.

The Strategic Director drew members attention to the draft list of assets for potential transfer to Winchester Town Council, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

The forum proceeded to ask questions and comment on the following matters which were responded to by the Strategic Director, as summarised below.

- (a) A question was asked regarding the potential impact on residents if cemeteries were moved to unitary control and whether residents would notice any difference in service. It was noted that residents currently received discounted burial rates at Magdalen Hill Cemetery, and there was a possibility that these discounts would not continue under unitary control, although the availability of cemeteries would remain unchanged.
- (b) Further clarification was sought regarding the future management of cemetery costs. It was stated that the cost of cemeteries would be determined by the district and eventually the unitary council, rather than by the Town Forum. In addition, it was also noted that the principal cemetery was located outside the town boundary.
- (c) A question was asked to confirm whether the transfer of North Walls Recreation Ground and River Park included the new pavilion at River Park. It was confirmed that the new pavilion at River Park was included in the list of assets for potential transfer.

During debate, the forum made reference to a number of points including:

- (i) Local Service Provision: The importance of providing local services at a local level was highlighted as a primary aim of devolution and a benefit of parished areas.
- (ii) Protection of Assets: Concerns were raised that a unitary authority might reduce local services, such as closing public toilets or neglecting open spaces, to cover other costs. A town council was viewed as a way to protect these assets for Winchester.
- (iii) A Voice for the City: It was argued that Winchester required its own voice to compete with other towns within a large unitary authority of approximately 450,000 people.

- (iv) Historical Continuity: Reference was made to Winchester's history of local governance spanning over 900 years, and the necessity of continuing a body dedicated to the city's growth and success was emphasised.
- (v) The Human Element: The debate included the point that local councillors could provide more detailed attention to the needs of individuals and groups than councillors representing a much larger unitary area.
- (vi) Consultation Support: It was noted that a significant majority of people consulted supported the creation of a town council for stronger representation and to safeguard the city's identity and mayoralty.
- (vii) Financial and Operational Viability: The transfer of a meaningful set of assets, such as those listed in the draft list including allotments, public conveniences, and sports facilities, was described as essential for the viability and success of the new town council.
- (viii) Local Responsiveness: It was stated that a town council would be a more responsive custodian for cherished local spaces like wildflower meadows and sports provisions compared to a large regional authority.
- (ix) Community Engagement: A town council was described as a vehicle for community groups to connect with, which could generate energy and improve local areas while saving costs.
- (x) Wider Roles: Suggestions were made that the town council could take on responsibilities for twinning relationships and "city of sanctuary" aims.
- (xi) Election Candidates: Confidence was expressed that there would be sufficient interest from a diverse range of candidates to fill positions on a future town council.
- (xii) Localisation: The creation of the council was seen as an opportunity for localisation, allowing elected members to decide what that meant based on the views of their residents.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report, including the draft list of assets for potential transfer to Winchester Town Council, as set out in Appendix 1, be received, and the comments raised by the forum, as summarised above, be noted.

10. **INFORMAL GROUP - VERBAL UPDATES**

The Forum received individual updates from the Chairpersons of various Town Informal Groups, where available. Each summarised the work that had been carried out by the respective groups since the last meeting of the forum had taken place.

Councillor Murphy – Streets and Spaces Informal Group

Progress updates from the group were as follows:

- (a) Speed Indicator Devices – the group were due to meet officers next week to discuss progress and potential timing towards delivery.
- (b) Winchester BID – It was noted that Sarah Davis of BID was due to provide an update at the next meeting of the forum in September. The

latest barometer of business report reflected how much Winchester was thriving and the low vacancy rate across the city centre.

An update was given on behalf of Councillor Batho re: Youth Provision

Progress updates from the group were as follows:

- (a) Youth Options had been contracted to undertake a consultation with young people during August and September, with the initial steering group for the project due to take place on 24 August 2026.

Councillor Tippet-Cooper – Culture Informal Group

Progress updates from the group were as follows:

- (a) The Buttercross – The additional funding to repair the Buttercross was considered at the last meeting of Cabinet. The current expectation was that the restoration would be completed in early December 2026 and the council's social media feed provided an update of the amazing work that was being carried out on this project.
- (b) Hyde Abbey Gateway – scheduled monument consent had been granted by Historic England during early 2026 and the council were now seeking quotes for the work to take place with the project split into two parts; firstly, repairs to the gateway itself and secondly, the surrounding landscape, with gateway repairs due to commence this year.

Councillor Aron - Grants and Community Empowerment Informal Group

Progress update from the group including:

- (a) Members of the forum were asked to continue to encourage charities in the local area to apply for grant funding that was available, subject to the application process

RESOLVED:

That the updates received from the Town Informal Groups as set out above, be noted.

11. TOWN FORUM INFORMAL GROUP APPOINTMENTS AND WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2026/27 (WTF344)

The Forum considered the work programme and its appointments to the Winchester Town Informal Groups for 2026/27, as set out in the report and its appendices.

The Chairperson emphasised the importance of the work undertaken by the informal groups and provided an overview of the positive results achieved and ongoing projects, as a consequence of the work by the groups during the previous municipal year.

RESOLVED:

1. That the items listed in Appendix 1 and 2 of the report be noted, the 2026/27 work programme be approved and authority be delegated to the Strategic Director, in consultation with the Chairperson, to further set the detailed work programme for the municipal year.
2. That the informal groups, as set out in paragraph 11.2 of the report, be re-appointed for 2026/27.
3. That the membership of the Forum's informal groups for 2026/27 be approved as stated above, and appointed as set out below:

- (i) Winchester Town Forum (Streets and Spaces) Informal Group
Cllrs: Murphy (Ch), Aron, Batho, Eve, Tod, Thompson and Westwood
Lead Officer: C Williams
- (ii) Winchester Town Forum (Climate and Open Space) Informal Group
Cllrs: Eve (Ch), Batho, Murphy and Learney
Lead Officer: R Smith
- (iii) Winchester Town Forum (Culture) Informal Group
Cllrs: Tippet-Cooper (Ch), Eve, Morris and Thompson
Lead Officer: A Gostelow
- (iv) Winchester Town Forum (Grants and Community Empowerment) Informal Group
Cllrs: Aron (Ch), Batho, Becker, Eve and Wise
Lead Officer: S Lincoln
- (v) Winchester Town Forum (Transition to Town Council) Informal Group

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NB: Name changed from 'Community Governance Review' Informal Group on 22 January 2026 and merged with Winchester Town Forum (Account) Informal Group comprising of existing membership of both groups.

Cllrs: Batho (Ch), Learney (retains leadership for town account financial activities), Aron, Eve, Morris and Thompson

Lead Officer: D Kennedy and G John/S Hendey

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 7.55 pm

Chairperson