

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

Thursday, 11 September 2025

Attendance:

Councillors
Westwood (Chairperson)

Eve
Aron
Batho
Becker
Learney
Morris
Murphy

Reach
Scott
Tippett-Cooper
Thompson
Tod
Wise

[Full video recording](#)

1. **APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies received at this meeting.

2. **DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS**

Councillor Batho declared a disclosable pecuniary interest concerning agenda item 8 (Update from Stagecoach) as an employee of Stagecoach. He left the room during the consideration of this item taking no part in the discussion thereon.

Councillors Tod declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of various 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.

3. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements made at this meeting.

4. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 12 JUNE 2025**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 June 2025 be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Ian Tait spoke during public participation and a summary of his comments are set out below.

In addition, Edna Boden spoke during item 6 (Winchester Bus Services) and a summary of her comments are set out under the relevant minute below.

Ian Tait

He queried the delays in cleaning and repairing the Buttercross as he had previously been advised this would take place during the summer months, subject to weather conditions and contractor availability. He also asked why there had also been delays to improvements at Hyde Gate and why there were no updates on the website regarding these delays. Finally, he expressed concern about the current condition of the former River Park Leisure Centre (RPLC) building.

Councillor Tippet-Cooper provided an update regarding the Buttercross and Hyde Gate and it was agreed that the council's website be updated to outline the current situation. An update was also provided on the current consultation regarding the future of the RPLC building.

6. **WINCHESTER BUS SERVICES (VERBAL UPDATE)**

Edna Boden spoke during public participation regarding this item and a summary of her comments are set out below.

Mrs Boden spoke in opposition to the withdrawal of the number 4 bus service which had provided a crucial link for Fulflood residents. She emphasised that the steep hills in the area made it very difficult for anyone with mobility issues to access the alternative bus services along the Romsey Road or Stockbridge Road. This had resulted in residents having to pay for taxis instead. She advised that a petition had been submitted to Danny Chambers, MP and requested that Stagecoach reinstate a regular service on the route (for example, twice per day) with a smaller bus.

Councillor Westwood thanked Mrs Boden for her comments and outlined the action the council was undertaking, included contacting Hampshire County Council (HCC) regarding the potential for the route to be classed as socially necessary and also the possible alternative use of community transport providers.

Councillor Westwood welcomed James O'Neill, Commercial Director for Stagecoach South to the meeting who provided an update on the latest position regarding Winchester bus services. He advised that HCC had also been invited to attend but unfortunately no officer had been available. However, HCC had agreed to a joint meeting with the city council, Stagecoach and the Cabinet Member and the discussions of the Forum would be passed to this joint meeting.

James O'Neill provided an update which included details of the following:

- a) In the Winchester area, Stagecoach ran just under 50 vehicles, employed approximately 150 staff, and carried around two and a half million passengers annually. He noted that most of the buses operated on a commercial basis without subsidy.
- b) During COVID, the government had provided temporary funding to assist the network's recovery but most of those funding streams had now stopped.
- c) Winchester was experiencing the slowest recovery of commercial passengers of all Stagecoach South's regions. While student numbers remained relatively strong, other routes, particularly the Park and Ride, were carrying far fewer passengers than before.
- d) Specific government-funded schemes had been used to add journeys to service 66 to Romsey, service 64, and to create a new hourly service to Andover, which included a new Sunday service. The expectation was that this "kickstart funding" would help operators create commercially viable services within two to three years.
- e) He acknowledged the significant funding pressures faced by local transport authorities like HCC and as part of the HCC's 2025 savings programme, contracts for some services Stagecoach ran (specifically the 61 and 46 routes) ended in August and were not renewed.
- f) Regarding the number 4 service, he explained its revenue only covered approximately 75% of its running costs and despite efforts to attract passengers through fare caps and promotions, it remained significantly unprofitable.
- g) The number 7 service was altered to provide two journeys a day for Teg Down and four journeys a day for Sparsholt village. A separate, more frequent service to Sparsholt College on college days was continued.
- h) He outlined the process for making these commercial changes, stating that Stagecoach must give 10 weeks' notice to the local authority. For this service change, which started on 1 September, HCC was notified in June, giving them a four-week window to review the plan and decide whether to provide funding.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and comment on the following matters which were responded to by James O'Neill:

- a) Whether account had been taken of the time of the year and corresponding weather and temperature fluctuations influencing bus usage?
- b) The frequency of consultation between Stagecoach and HCC, and whether Stagecoach would suggest to the HCC that bus services be subsidised in response to customer pressure regarding routes that were no longer deemed commercially viable.
- c) The possibility of new bus routes, for example along Chilbolton Avenue where substantial development had occurred, but no bus service previously had existed, especially following the withdrawal of the number four service.
- d) Concern about the current consultation process for changes to bus services, specifically the number 4 route, with the view that placing notices on bus stops seemed inadequate and suggesting that earlier communication might have encouraged more usage. There was concern about the lack of direct communication with ward councillors regarding service cuts and the possibility of providing residents with more advanced notice and improved communication regarding future bus service changes.

- e) Whether there would be scope for installing a bus stop for the improved 69 service between Winchester and Fareham to serve the Winchester Sports and Leisure Park?
- f) The commercial reality of operating smaller buses compared to full-sized buses.
- g) Did Stagecoach have any specific proactive requests for the Council, particularly concerning support for new developments and accelerating service establishment.
- h) The extent of damage caused to bus services by disruption from roadworks and whether the council, potentially in collaboration with the HCC, could assist in mitigating the impact of roadworks, for instance, by raising awareness or supporting service recovery.
- i) Whether it would be feasible to introduce a less frequent service for the Fulflood area, similar in frequency to the Number 7 that serviced Teg Down, possibly by adapting an existing route.
- j) Whether Stagecoach had information regarding the known social impact of bus services, particularly concerning their importance in enabling independence, school access, and their potential link to long-term social care costs. Whether HCC requested information regarding the social value and impact of bus service cuts when making decisions.
- k) Further clarification was sought on the source of information used by HCC for impact assessments.
- l) The possibility of establishing a consistent schedule for the number 7 bus service throughout the day to avoid customer confusion and minimise duplication with the number 3 bus service, thereby enhancing commercial viability.
- m) Whether any other bus services were currently under review for commercial viability, so that customers could be informed.
- n) Whether any pricing structures would better encourage fare-paying passengers, particularly families, to use buses instead of cars?
- o) Whether there were any specific actions that could be taken by the council, despite not being the transport authority, to help improve the success of bus services in the city.

At the conclusion of debate, the forum thanked James O'Neill for attending the meeting to provide an informative update on the latest position.

RESOLVED:

That the update be received, and the comments raised by the committee, as summarised above, be noted.

7. **WINCHESTER TOWN ACCOUNT FINANCIAL PLANNING 2025/26** (WTF340)

Councillor Learney introduced the report in her capacity as Chair of the Town Accounts Informal Group. Councillor Learney advised that the report considered the medium-term forward-looking projections prior to the budget setting process assuming annual 3% increase in the town charge. She highlighted that the night bus budget was no longer required as the number 3 evening buses now have enough passengers to be fully commercial. The other area of cost-saving was in

bus shelter cleaning and maintenance which had been taken on by the county council, with the exception of those connected to the park and ride service. Consequently, the target level for reserve balances could now be met. However, she highlighted some significant future cost increases expected including increasing costs for public conveniences, the renewal of the grounds maintenance contract and other uncertainties relating to the impact of local government reorganisation (LGR) and the community governance review (CGR).

The forum proceeded to ask questions and comment on the following matters which were responded to by Councillor Learney.

- a) Whether opportunities should be taken to spend some of the substantial reserves in the town account?
- b) If there was an opportunity to use funds to unlock other sources of money such as from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds, for example by commissioning work that could then be used in a bid for significant capital investment to address issues within the town area.
- c) Whether the town account would serve as a useful guide to the financial viability of a potential future town council (dependant on the results of the upcoming CGR).
- d) In relation to the income and expenditure for cemeteries (paragraph 12.18 of the report) had progress been made on reviewing charging for burial services and whether there was a way to reduce the deficit.

RESOLVED:

That the financial projections in Appendix 1 of the report be noted and the budget timetable for 2026/27 be agreed.

8. **INFORMAL GROUPS - VERBAL UPDATE**

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 over the previous two-month period.

Councillor Eve - Climate and Open Space Informal Group

Progress updates from the group included:

- a) River Park - the bridge had opened connecting River Park, Devil's Island to the Winnall Moors.
- b) Funding was approved for an accessible perimeter path for Devil's Island.
- c) The new pavilion was progressing well and he thanked residents for their ideas and input over the years.
- d) Good progress was being made with Allegra's ambition at the Winchester Sports and Leisure Park.
- e) The play park programme was progressing with Chaundler Road play park and looking ahead to the next year and the rolling 5-year programme.

Councillor Tippet-Cooper - Culture Informal Group

Councillor Becker gave a progress update from the group on behalf of Councillor Tippet-Cooper who had left the meeting earlier, including:

- a) Noting the update regarding the Buttercross and Hyde Gate provided under the public participation section of the meeting above.
- b) An archaeologists report had been commissioned on the wall at the rear of Hyde Gate which had collapsed a number of years ago. The report would feed into application to rebuild the wall which was a listed structure.
- c) Work had taken place to remove instances of graffiti on Wolvesey Castle.
- d) Longer term repairs to Kings Gate were also being considered.

Councillor Aron - Grants and Community Empowerment Informal Group

Progress updates from the group included:

- a) Welcomed the predicted budget forecast and the consequential possible review of the level of community grants funds.
- b) The Group would be meeting on 29 September to consider policy and grant applications with the aim to increase the diversity of groups making applications.
- c) She asked that councillors remind organisations, particularly smaller groups, of the availability of these grants.

Councillor Batho - Community Governance Review (CGR) Informal Group

Councillor Becker first gave an update from the CGR Task and Finish Group which had been appointed by the Licensing and Regulation Committee on 16 June 2025.

- a) The cross-party working group had met twice and was close to agreeing the draft CWR terms of reference (TOR) and the consultation plan for that review. The TOR would be considered by Licensing and Regulation Committee on 29 September and it was anticipated that the first stage of consultation would launch in October.
- b) The consultation was likely to include letter drops, a social media campaign and drop in events at various locations both within the town and those areas adjacent to the town that could also be affected by CGR review. She requested suggestions from councillors for potential venues for these drop-in events.

Councillor Batho also gave an update from the Town Forum appointed CGR Informal Group, including the following:

- a) The group would be investigating other local councils or town councils that had already undertaken the CGR process.
- b) Investigations would include ensuring that the mayoralty was protected through the process.
- c) Town accounts were being examined with the aim of achieving a financially viable town council from day one, should that be the results of the CGR.

RESOLVED:

That the update received from the Town Informal Groups, be noted.

9. **WORK PROGRAMME 2025/26**

RESOLVED:

That the work programme for the remainder of 2025/26 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 8.15 pm

Chairperson