

# Public Document Pack

## **WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM**

**Thursday, 23 January 2025**

Attendance:

Councillors

Reach (Chairperson)

Batho  
Aron  
Becker  
Eve  
Learney  
Morris

Murphy  
Scott  
Tippett-Cooper  
Thompson  
Westwood

[Full video recording](#)

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### 1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies of absence were received from Councillors Tod and Wise.

### 2. **DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS**

No declarations were made at this meeting.

### 3. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairperson announced that new interpretation boards for the Nunnaminster had recently been installed and that the area had been cleared and cleaned.

### 4. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 11 NOVEMBER 2024**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 November 2024 be approved and adopted.

### 5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Three members of the public addressed the Forum during public participation. A summary of their comments as set out below:

Paula Ferguson

Expressed support for the governance review and concern about the potential loss of representation for the central city wards under local government reorganisation. She queried how residents would be involved in the review process.

Ian Tait

Raised concerns regarding the delay in cleaning and repairing the Buttercross, the harm caused by pigeon droppings, and the state of commercial refuse bins in Hammond's Passage and Parchment Street. He also noted that the Buttercross was being used as a bird table despite being covered by CCTV and that this was absurd given plans to use anti-pigeon gel.

Caroline Kirkman (Volunteer Director, Unit 12)

Provided an update on the development of Unit 12 as a community hub, highlighting the various activities and services offered. She mentioned the need for a permanent ramp and the desire to open a community cafe. In addition, Councillor Tippet-Cooper reported that all volunteers had made an astonishing contribution to the work of Unit 12.

6. **WINCHESTER TOWN ACCOUNT BUDGET FOR 2025/26 (TO BE RECOMMENDED TO CABINET) (WTF336)**

Councillor Learney introduced the budget report, noting the need to recommend a budget and town charge to Cabinet. She emphasised that the government devolution agenda required a reassessment of financial strategy and that a target reserve of 20% of net expenditure was now considered sensible.

The forum noted that the financial projections reflected a 3% increase in the town precept which could increase further depending on the City Council tax charge and recognised that every 1% increase in the charge increases income by £13,000.

Councillor Learney emphasised that the town charge remained lower than that of market towns, and that the financial position was slightly better than that forecast in November. As a result, it was therefore proposed that the £2,500 reduction in the grant to the Winchester Citizens Advice for this year be reinstated.

In addition, the formal acknowledgement of the £500 contribution from Littleton and Harestock Parish Council towards the night bus service was also proposed.

The forum proceeded to ask questions and comment on the following matters which were responded to by Councillor Learney and the Finance Manager (Strategic Finance).

- (a) A question was raised about the rationale for increasing the town reserve balance. Councillor Learney emphasised the need for good practice and the possibility of extra expenditure due to local government reorganisation.

- (b) A query was raised about what would happen to the town forum reserve if a town council were established. It was noted that the financial position of a new town council would be a key consideration, and reserves raised through the special charge should be spent on the town, not the wider district. It was noted that the transfer of assets would be subject to negotiation.
- (c) It was noted that the Town Forum was subject to a capping limit and that the Town Forum must be prudent now to avoid debt in the future.
- (d) A correction was made to item 11.7 of the report, noting the precept increase was £4.70 and not £1.58 as referred to within the table.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Town Forum:

1. Agrees the draft budget for 2025/26 and the indicative projections for the strategy as shown in Appendix 1;
2. Approves an increase in the target minimum Town Reserve balance from 15% to 20% of annual net service expenditure;
3. Agrees a one-off budget for 2025/26 of £2,500, funded by the Town Reserve, to be allocated to additional funding for Winchester Citizens Advice;
4. Recommend to Cabinet that the council tax precept in the Winchester town area should be the maximum allowed within the overall referendum requirements; and
5. Agrees to request a contribution of £500 towards the night bus service from the Littleton and Harestock Parish Council.

**7. REQUEST FOR GOVERNANCE REVIEW (WTF337)**

The Chairperson introduced the report, highlighting the potential implications of local government reorganisation and the need to explore establishing a town council for central Winchester.

Following the Deputy Prime Minister's announcement on local government reorganisation, the Forum recognised this could lead to the amalgamation of districts and a target population of around 500,000 people.

The impact of this could mean that the City of Winchester may find that decisions relating to important local matters could be made by an authority located between 20-50 miles away.

The forum discussed the need to ensure that the residents of the city have a voice and that local decision-making was retained.

The Forum agreed that a request be made to the Winchester City Council to consider a community governance review and proceeded to ask questions and comment on the following matters which were responded to by the Chairperson and the Strategic Director.

- (a) Councillor Scott asked about who would undertake the review. It was noted that the Licensing and Regulation Committee agreed the scope of the review and that this could be resourced by either consultants or existing staff. The review would take 12 months to complete, and it was considered this review would be more complex than the review of North Whiteley.
- (b) There was a discussion about ensuring that the Town Forum has input into the review process and that local community leaders and representatives participate.
- (c) It was emphasised that the process needs to prioritize residents' views. An informal working group of the town forum was suggested.
- (d) It was noted that the decision on the review will be taken by the Full Council.
- (e) The Strategic Director outlined a possible timetable for a community governance review based on the North Whiteley model with four months of preparation and consultations and with a final decision from Full Council. It was noted that greater engagement would be needed than in the North Whiteley review.
- (f) It was noted that any consultation would need to go out to the residents, not just wait for them to come to the council.
- (g) There was a discussion about the need for any governance review to focus on the simple point of whether residents want an elected town council and also to consider what the duties of the town council would look like.
- (h) A question about the sequencing of the review was raised, given the uncertainty of the government's intentions for local government reorganisation. It was noted that the decision to undertake the review did not start the clock but that the formal publication of the terms of reference does.
- (i) There was agreement that the Town Forum has done good service but may be at a natural conclusion and that a review is healthy irrespective of what the government wants.
- (j) A question about what assets would fall to any new structure and whether that would be decided by the review was raised. It was noted

that any new authority needs to be sustainable and that the assets need to be those that matter to the residents.

- (k) It was suggested that the 2019 Governance Review (Report WTF282) be circulated to members.

At the conclusion of debate, the forum agreed an amendment to the recommendation to include the unparished area of Winchester.

RESOLVED:

That the Town Forum agree to make a request to Winchester City Council to consider undertaking a community governance review with a view to establishing a town council covering the unparished area of Winchester.

## 8. **INFORMAL GROUP - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Forum received individual updates from the Chairpersons of various Town Informal Groups, where updates had not already been provided within the items considered above. Each summarised the work that had been carried out by the respective groups over the previous two-month period.

### **Councillor Tippett-Cooper – Culture Informal Group**

Progress updates from the group included:

- (i) The Buttercross - Restoration works were progressing. Historic England consent for the work had been granted and quotations have been sought. The work was anticipated to be carried out in the summer and would take between 12-16 weeks to complete.
- (ii) Hyde Abbey Gateway – The report on the Hyde Abbey Gateway was completed and would be published online.

RESOLVED:

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

## 9. **WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25**

It was noted that the forward business for the next meeting was blank, pending the outcome of discussions at this meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme for 2024/25 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 8.00 pm.

Chairperson

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