

Salisbury City Council

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Minutes

Meeting of : **Full Council**
Date : 13 January 2025
Meeting held : The Guildhall
Commencing at : 6:30pm

Present:

Chair: S Hocking

Vice Chair: Cllr E Rimmer

Cllrs: S Charleston, V Charleston, C Corbin, T Corbin, B Dalton, A Hoque, T Last, C McGrath, A Riddle, S Rideout, R Rogers, P Sample, C Stanway, I Tomes and J Wells.

Officers: Asa Thorpe, Steve Bishop, Sarah Gregson, Marc Read, Matt Hine, Tracy Adams and Penny Muxworthy

There were 10 members of the public present and 1 member of the press in attendance.

The Chairman welcomed everyone and confirmed this meeting was being live-streamed.

1. Apologies:

Apologies were received from Cllrs J Bolwell.

Not present: Cllr C Hibbert

2. Public Questions/Statement Time:

Three public questions/statements were received in writing, by email, regarding allotments. They were:

I think a 25% increase is a bit harsh in one hit. Could this not be staggered, for example a 15% increase for 2025 and maybe another 10% in 2026. No doubt Council Tax will be raised again and if you have an allotment I think in a lot of cases this would be holders who don't have gardens or monies to have one and who are no doubt very grateful to the council for having somewhere but the increase may affect some.

Justin Saint

I am writing on behalf of the Allotments and Gardens Association Salisbury 300 members to express our concern over the proposed 25% increase in allotment rents. This increase will put the cost of a 10 rod plot up to £115 which may make it unaffordable to many plot holders. Has the council considered how this will impact on those with low incomes, many of whom are trying to provide affordable healthy food for their families? In addition to growing your own food there are health and welfare benefits, often overlooked but well documented by voluntary organisations and allotment holders themselves. I understand that charges have to go up but before introducing this steep rise in rents have the council considered alternative ways of making payments as January is a difficult month to find extra cash for those on tight budgets? For example would they consider quarterly or monthly payment? Is the council considering introducing ways to reduce cost so that plot holders will not be faced with large increases year on year? For example is the cost of water provision, which is often mentioned as one of the significant costs to the council? We, as an environmentally active organisation have suggested several rain collection schemes in the past that would be cheap to implement and could reduce the annual water bill. How will the council reduce the number of uncultivated plots to improve rental income from all sites? Thank you for considering these questions on behalf of our members.

Lindsey Bellringer, Committee Member, Allotments and Gardens Association Salisbury

I understand the council meeting on 13th January will address the proposed increase in allotment fees, and I would like to formally object to this increase. I also request that the concerns of tenants be considered before any final decision is made. The justification provided for the 25% fee increase is rising maintenance costs. However, I challenge this explanation, as no maintenance work has been carried out at our allotment site, Site D.

Self-Maintenance Efforts: *Tenants, including myself, maintain the grass areas in the car park, and the council did not cut the hedges along the road to the site throughout last year. This makes it difficult to understand how maintenance costs could justify such a significant increase.*

Flood Damage Costs: *Tenants have incurred additional personal expenses repairing damage caused by persistent flooding, including replacing structures and replenishing soil and compost. These costs are not reflected in the proposal.*

If the proposed increase is implemented, I request a detailed outline of the specific improvements or benefits that the additional funds will provide for Fisherton Site D. While we are willing to contribute fairly, it is essential for the council to offer transparency and a clear justification for this substantial fee increase.

I am confident that other tenants share these concerns and are prepared to provide supporting evidence.

Matthew Vass

In response it was confirmed that:

Officers were considering when rental payments were invoiced, although quarterly payments would incur increased administration costs.

Allotment income had not met allotment costs. As such, allotments were subsidised by all council tax payers.

Compensation for flooding was given to some plot holders in 2024 after discussion at Full Council.

The Council would welcome having a greater partnership with the Allotment Society.

Two Public questions/statements were received in writing, by email, on behalf of Street Pastors and Pub Watch, regarding the provision of public toilets, particularly in the Market Square. They were:

I feel I must complain in the strongest possible terms about these proposed closures. Whilst I appreciate that the council does not have a duty to provide these facilities and has a need to make significant savings, I cannot see that closing public conveniences can possibly enhance the offer that Salisbury provides to tourists, residents or businesses. Having attended Pubwatch yesterday, most of these businesses were unaware of these proposed changes and the direct effect that this will have on their establishments. In other cities that have chosen to take similar decision, the shops and venues have been consulted and even involved in providing a solution via community toilet partnerships. You already are aware of the difficulty of the defilement of toilets after hours, but removing this facility can only result in this defilement transferring into street fouling.

Brian Percey

I personally don't think the general public using the disabled loo is a good idea. I had to take a dear friend and ex councillor in there when she was in a wheelchair and we had to touch every part of the railings and walls. It would be horrible to think that some of these vulnerable people had to use loos used by everyone in town. That is my personal feelings towards it. I walked the Purple Flag inspection every year for over 10 years and lack of public loos was universally brought up by every outside inspector.

Amanda Newberry

A representative from the Chickpea Group also spoke, saying that the Council's relationship with local hospitality outlets had diminished. Expecting them to bear consequences of closing public toilets was unfair suggesting some alternatives: Enhance the visitor experience; open the Guildhall toilets for public use; have more street cleaning.

In response it was confirmed that:

The Administration will debate and address these matters in their Budget proposals.

3. Councillor Questions/Statement Time:

There were no Councillor Questions/Statements:

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting:

Minutes of the last meeting, held on 04 November 2024 had been circulated. These were taken as read and

Approved by all

5. Declaration of Interest:

There were no declarations of interest.

6. Dispensations:

There were no Dispensations requested.

7. Chairman's Announcements:

The Chairman reminded Councillors of the importance of using appropriate language, particularly when discussing toilets, given that this is a public meeting, in person and is being streamed.

Since the last meeting the Mayor has:

- Bestowed UK citizenship on 30 people from all corners of the earth.
- Attended the opening of Sarum Lights at the Cathedral, Friary Creative Youth Clubs' gallery exhibition at 5 Rivers Leisure Centre, the Ukrainian fair on the Guildhall Square, the 5th Anniversary of the Salisbury Repair Café, Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day services on Square, Christmas begins in Salisbury on the Guildhall Square, and did a "MC Mayor" slot on Radio Odstock's rock show.
- Met with Members of the Xanten Twinning Association who were hosting a number of Xanten visitors, the Salisbury District Scouts Scrap Heap Challenge, Salisbury EcoHub Alliance AGM.
- Visited our twin city of Xanten – interestingly they have similar issues to that which we face in Salisbury, Central Car Park turned into a Market Square, permanent Stage, increasing property prices pushing younger people out, cost of parking and so on, and it's their 800 anniversary in 2028.
- Attended the St Francis 10th Scout Groups 70th Anniversary – Shiphams fish paste sandwiches included, Dance 60's Christmas sharing event and performance, attended Salisbury BID's Christmas evening at Cote Brasserie, Wilton Rotary Christmas Dinner, Alzheimer Support Christmas party, Alabare's carol service at the Methodist Church – top piano playing Cllr Jo King – BWS and SWGS carol services at the Cathedral, Shop Mobs Carol Service in the Maltings, Cancer Research carol Service, Carols for Busy People and the Candle Light Services all in St Thomas Church.
- And with Cllr Broom went to see John Pendle who many of you will know who was in hospital over Christmas and needed some cheering up.
- Both I and the Mayoress have also "chained up" on plenty of occasions to visit the market traders, local shops, and other events in the City.
- First outing of the New Year was to Britford Fishery to talk about winter water levels and river pollution with the Fishery Manager.

The Mayor also reminded everybody that this is the most important meeting that this Council has every year as we determine, by law, how much Precept tax our residents will have to pay next year. As such the Chairman was expecting everybody present this evening to stay for the duration and not slope of early unless they have a cast iron reason for doing so.

8. Administration Leaders Report:

Cllr A Riddle provided an update on behalf of the Administration Leaders saying:

Good to have such harmonious atmosphere in last week's F & G discussions about the upcoming budget. It's good for Salisbury to have councillors able to work together. Hopefully it will continue this evening.

Work on the budget began early last summer and has been consuming almost all our administration's time lately. Having listened to our residents' concerns about the cost of living we were delighted to be able to recommend an increase in the city's part of the council tax precept of just 35p a week for a Band D property.

Individual elements of our proposals had naturally attracted comment and would be dealt with later during this meeting.

There were two upcoming events in our civic diary: The first is Holocaust Memorial Day on Monday January 27 - details of how to register to attend or take part are on our website. Then on February 2, we have our Charter Sunday service at St Thomas's, which is open to all.

Next month also sees the latest appeal hearing over plans to develop housing on Old Sarum airfield. Although the airfield has lain outside the city's official boundary since the abolition of the district council back in 2009, it is still very much Salisbury's airfield, with a hugely important role in our city's history, so in my personal view, its future is still very much our business. The current development proposals have been opposed by this council.

Another very important development – after six years of hard work, a referendum on the Neighbourhood Plan is currently scheduled for February 27. This is a vital opportunity for the people of Salisbury to have as much say as the law allows them over what we want to preserve in our community and how we would like to improve it. If the result of the referendum is to approve the Plan, we will be entitled to a much bigger share of Community Infrastructure Levy money, to be spent on local projects by this council. This is a levy which developers must pay to help compensate for the effects of development within our boundary, and the city's share would rise from 15% to 25%. It has been a huge task to get to this point for some current and previous councillors, but most notably for a dedicated team of volunteers from our community sharing their various areas of expertise, and we are enormously grateful to them. They are a great example of one of my pet themes - joint working for the benefit of the community.

A few of the latest highlights from our officers:

- Our very popular car boot sales are going monthly, weather permitting, throughout the year, starting on the third Sunday in February.
- Our ShopMobility scheme has linked up with South Western Railway in an innovative passenger assistance scheme. This enables someone with mobility issues who is travelling to Salisbury by train to be met at the station with a suitable mobility aid.
- We've planted 60 cherry trees in Churchill Gardens in the new landscaped area that replaced an expanse of concrete slabs.
- We've welcomed four new CCTV volunteers who are undergoing training. Thank you to them.
- We've acquired a very welcome chewing gum remover gun which should help keep the city centre looking smart! We've also replaced 20 more general waste bins around the city with dual recycling bins.
- The Crematorium roof has been replaced on time and on budget.
- Our communities team had a very busy Christmas period. They connected 80 local people on low incomes to the Wiltshire Creative Panto Ticket Scheme, and worked with local businesses and volunteers to run Bring a Tin to Work and The Great Salisbury Toy Appeal, distributing more than 300 toys to local children.
- Our Guildhall team did a fantastic job of hosting the sensitive inquiry into the death of Dawn Sturgess, and have received a letter of thanks from its chairman.
- As well as working on our Remembrance and Armistice events, our corporate services team have been reviewing our phone and IT contracts and starting to plan for May's local elections. Not long now!
- We've continued to invest in training for our staff. Recruitment and retention, along with payroll matters, have continued to keep our head of Human Resources Tracy Adams very busy.

And finally our Chief Executive and our finance team, under RFO Steve Bishop, have done an amazing job in helping your elected representatives to get to grips with financial reality and put our affairs in order, for which we are very grateful.

9. Referral of Minutes:

Minutes taken since the Full Council meeting on 04 November 2024 were considered. It was noted that the minutes for last week's Finance and Governance Committee (6th January) are still being reviewed by the Committee Chair.

Events, Markets & Grants	07 October 2024
Environment & Climate	14 October 2024
Planning and Development	21 October 2024
Finance & Governance	28 October 2024
Planning and Development	18 November 2024
Personnel	25 November 2024
Community Services	02 December 2024
Environment & Climate	09 December 2024
Planning and Development	16 December 2024

These were taken as read and **Approved by all**

10. Committee Reports:

The Committees' Chairmen provided updates as follows.

- a. Cllr J Wells, Chairman of Environmental & Climate – Nothing significant to report since December meeting. The winter maintenance programme is under way.
- b. Cllr C Corbin, Chairman of the Community Services committee, thanked the whole team, saying there no updates additional to that in Item 8.
- c. Cllr T Corbin, Chairman of the Planning & Development Committee, reminded all councillors that they can attend this, the busiest, committee which meets 4-weekly.
- d. Cllr B Dalton – Nothing to report.
- e. Cllr A Bayliss, Chairman of Finance & Governance – continue Budget Monitoring. Welcomed the detailed s106 funds' report.
- f. Cllr S Charleston, Chairman of the Events, Markets, & Grants subcommittee – no meeting.

11. Outside Representatives:

There were no outside representative reports.

12. Interim Internal Audit Report for 2024/25:

Steve Bishop, Responsible Finance Officer (RFO), presented the Internal Auditor's Report for 2024-25 year, along with their recommendations and actions being taken by the finance team to resolve any issues.

Steve Bishop confirmed that full bank reconciliations will be completed by year end (March 2025), and all currency references should be £s sterling.

It was Recommended and **Resolved** that the Council notes the completion of an interim audit and considers the audit findings.

Approved by all

13. 2024/25 Budget Monitoring Report to the end of November:

Steve Bishop, RFO, presented the 2024-25 Budget Monitoring Report to the end of November 2024 highlighting Appendix A figures:

Figures' column 1 = Whole year Budget;

Figures' column 2 = Whole year's Budget adjusted to end of November;

Figures' column 3 = Actual expenditure/income to end of November;

Figures' column 4 = Variances between 2 and 3. Red is a good, positive variance (less expenditure/greater income); black is negative variance (greater expenditure/lower income). Larger variances are explained under Paras 4 and 5

It was Recommended and **Resolved** that:

13.1 The Council notes the financial position at the end of November 2024 and officers' explanations of the significant variances.

13.2 The Council notes the low level of the general reserve which continues to be in breach of the Council's stipulated minimum level.

13.3 The Council considers the General Reserve position and officers' predicted year-end outturn as part of its deliberations in order to approve the 2025/26 budget and medium term financial plan.

A vote was taken and **approved by all**.

The Chairman introduced Items 14 and 15 with a reminder that:

- There is a legal requirement to agree and approve a 2025-26 Budget and 2025-30 Medium Term Financial Plan.
- The agreed Precept needs sharing to Wiltshire Council in good time.
- Both the Conservative/Opposition and Administration have tabled Budgets.

14. Conservative Group's Proposed Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan for 2025/26:

Cllr J Nettle presented the Conservative Group's proposed Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan, as tabled in advance.

Cllr Nettle thanked all Conservative councillors for their input, along with the CEO, RFO and SMT members for facilitating efforts to draw these budgets together.

Cllr Nettle highlighted that it had been difficult to challenge a good budget from the Administration, especially given they achieve 0% precept in Yrs 4 and 5. However this Group felt the Administration's budget lacked imagination and felt that residents were not getting what they wanted.

Some of the similarities included:

- £10k for a public/residents' consultation
- £20k for a trial stage
- Most bids and savings suggested by officers

Some of the significant differences included:

- £250k for a splash park – for officers to explore options making provision for families.

- £350k scheme to raise and protect Churchill Gardens car park – figures were indicative, not fully costed.
- £350k for a multi-use artificial pitch in the Bemerton area.
- Reviewing the Council's cultural grants and abolishing the £63k annual grants to the Salisbury Museum and Salisbury Playhouse.
- Lower increases to tree surgery budgets, it was half of that proposed by the administration.
- Closure of Market Square toilets, keeping Central car park and accessible toilets open.
- Cyber security – no investment puts the council at risk of potential ransom attacks.

The Conservative Group were congratulated on doing and presenting an alternative budget. However, there were significant disagreements on timings and the speed of repair to the general reserve.

Full Council was recommended to:

- 14.1. Consider the Conservative Group's 2025/26 Budget Proposal and the Administration's 2025/26 Budget Proposal, in order to approve the revenue and capital budgets, and fees and charges, for 2025/26.
- 14.2. Approve a precept of £5,943,766.
- 14.3. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive Officer to make changes to fees and charges, as required for the efficient operation of Council services, provided that all fees and charges continue to be annually presented to Full Council for approval as part of the budget-setting process.
- 14.4. Amend Financial Regulation 3.6 to state "The RFO shall maintain the General Reserve at the levels set out in the Council's approved Medium Term Financial Plan, which must never drop below £400,000 and must aim to reach the equivalent of two months' gross expenditure * in the timescale set out."
- 14.5. (* equivalent to approximately £1,450,000 based on 2025/26 draft budget.)

Proposed by: Cllr J Nettle

Seconded by: Cllr J Broom

A vote was taken and accordingly was **defeated**, by majority.

15. Administration's Proposed Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan for 2025/26:

Cllr V Charleston presented the Administration's proposed Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan for 2025-26 and 2025-30, thanking councillors and officers for their hard work over the last few months to reach this budget.

Cllr Charleston said that there is no denying that this administration had weathered some difficult financial times since the 2021 elections. A refresh of our senior management team had uncovered challenges in the past few months, including historic annual overspends and a concerning gap in our general reserves. Officers were thanked for their hard work to rectify this.

While this budget was criticized for being 'Business as Usual' at 6th January Finance & Governance committee, Cllr Charleston reminded councillors what BAU has achieved in the last four years –

- A commitment to the environment: recycling bins, electric vehicles, and an ambitious £230k investment in solar energy next year.
- Fostering a lively city: a calendar of events, a sold out 'Santa's grotto' and plans to buy an ice cream van and outdoor bar this year.
- And a clean and tidy city: well maintained parks and playgrounds, clean streets, and pocket parks.

This budget continued the work of this administration. It was prudent, responsible, and sensible.

- It continued all current services and enhanced some – such as adding to our grounds team.
- It ensured we continued to support our arts, and community grants and uplifts our work for the most vulnerable via the Pantry and lunch clubs.
- It will continue to invest in the foundations of this council: cybersecurity, a real and constant threat, looking after our staff with pay and job review.

Over the past week we, the Administration, had listened to concerns from residents that were raised after the Finance and Governance meeting in relation to toilets. The **Market Square toilets** were being closed to the public due to safety concerns, for which the Administration does not apologise. However, mitigations include:

- the provision of new signage to the next closest toilets,
- continuing to enable market traders and vendors to use the toilets on market and event days,
- making the accessible toilet open to all
- and asking officers to work on plans for new facilities on the Square.

Proposed Amendment (1) – relating to public toilets.

In response to residents' queries and concerns the Administration Group Leaders discussed plans about the Market Place public toilets. The Administration Group Leaders proposed:

- Open the Accessible toilet to all.
- Open the underground night toilet for market traders and vendors on market and event days.
- Close the underground toilets to the public.
- Erect more, and clearer, signage to other public toilet facilities in the city.
- Develop a comprehensive costed plan for facilities on the square.
- This will reduce savings by £10k.

Proposed by: Cllr V Charleston

Seconded by: Cllr A Bayliss

A vote was taken and accordingly was **carried**, by majority.

Proposed Amendment (2)

To close the Central car park toilets for one year and re-open when financially viable.

Proposed by: Cllr A Hoque

No seconder

Not debated

Considerations raised included:

- Ensuring the Accessible toilet do not encounter the same difficulties as the public toilets.
- Radar keys freely available to purchase online by anyone (not just the disabled). A 'blue' light would further reduce drug-users' use.
- Active consideration of a 'community toilet scheme' (eg Spend-a-penny), highlighting that this also encourages people to use other facilities/opportunities in partner businesses.
- Temporary provisions for large-scale events must be considered.
- Central car park toilets are 'gateway' toilets for visitors and include baby-changing facilities.
- Distance between Central car and Coach park toilets may be too great for many disabled.
- Cost to keep Central open = £3.50/household, which most was happy to pay.
- Keeping them open costs £56k/year – funding would need considering if Precept to remain at the proposed 4.99% (ie lose something else in budget).
- Salisbury City Council only manages the Central car park toilets; the building is owned by Wiltshire Council (and could be taken back any time).

Proposed Amendment (3)

Keep Central car park toilets open, especially for the disabled and baby-changing facilities.

Proposed by: Cllr C Taylor

Seconded by: Cllr A Hoque

A vote was taken and accordingly was **defeated**, by majority.

As to the **allotments**, we are asking our allotment community to cover the cost of their allotments to the tune of £115/year for a large plot. This is currently subsidised by people who do not have allotments. Cllr V Charleston / has already outlined some suggestions for how we can work closer with the allotment association to make this service fair to all.

The hardest part of budget setting is balancing ambition with the ask to residents. This year we are asking households for an extra 35p a week this year and aims to ask for no increased contribution by years four and five – whilst ensuring we responsibly meet our general reserves policy.

Considerations raised included:

- Amend payment schedule to lessen the impact from January invoicing
- Invoicing/paying 3-monthly has additional administrative costs
- Consider better management of un-worked (but paid-for) plots
- Consider better and similar management of all sites
- Budgets are about compromises among individuals, never with 100% agreement

Point of Order

Cllr B Dalton raised a Point of Order relating to the running of the Agenda by having both a Conservative/opposition Budget Proposal, and an Administration Budget Proposal on the full council agenda. He stated that the Finance & Governance meeting which had met the week before to discuss these two budgets, should have rejected one and approved the other as a recommendation to full council.

He mentioned that he would have expected the Conservative group to table amendments to the administration's budget at full council, which is typically what occurs.

The Chairman noted that the Administration, of which Cllr Dalton's group is a part, set the Agenda for Full Council, so it was perfectly within their remit to have only the Administration's Budget on said agenda, but they chose to add both.

15.1 Cllr V Charleston therefore **proposed the Substantive administration budget, both revenue and capital budgets and fees and charges for 2025/26, with the inclusion of the carried Amendment (1) from Administration Group Leaders:**

- Open the Accessible toilet to all.
- Open the underground night toilet for market traders and vendors on market and event days.
- Close the underground toilets to the public.
- Erect more, and clearer, signage to other public toilet facilities in the city.
- Develop a comprehensive costed plan for facilities on the square.

This will reduce savings by £10k

Along with recommendations that Full Council to:

15.2. Approve a precept of £5,943,766.

15.3. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive Officer to make changes to fees and charges, as required for the efficient operation of Council services, provided that all fees and charges continue to be annually presented to Full Council for approval as part of the budget-setting process.

15.4. Amend Financial Regulation 3.6 to state "The RFO shall maintain the General Reserve at the levels set out in the Council's approved Medium Term Financial Plan, which must never drop below £400,000 and must aim to reach the equivalent of two months' gross expenditure * in the timescale set out."

15.5. (* equivalent to approximately £1,440,000 based on 2025/26 draft budget.)

Proposed by: Cllr V Charleston

Seconded by: Cllr A Bayliss

A vote was taken and accordingly was **carried** by majority.

16. Matters, if any, which by reason of special circumstances the Chairman decides should be discussed as a matter of urgency for information only. Please note that the Council cannot lawfully consider or determine any matter which is not specified on the Agenda of this summons

The meeting closed at 21.30