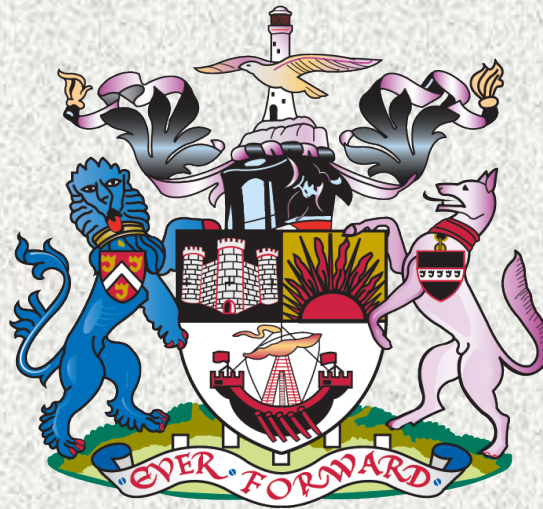


WESTON-SUPER-MARE TOWN COUNCIL



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THE 24th ANNUAL REPORT

1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024

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POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE - REPORT OF THE CHAIR FOR 2023/2024

The Policy and Finance Committee is responsible for the council's overall financial management and has closely monitored expenditure and income through the year with detailed monthly reports, considered auditor reports and scrutinised and approved its annual accounts.

Finance

Our main focus over the course of the last year has been to address key financial decisions that affect our service and project delivery. In doing so we have fully reviewed and approved our Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2024/2025. The committee were pleased to note the conclusion of the NNDR refund for Weston Museum following a 6-year appeal process, this resulted in a subsequent addition to our General Reserve Balances in the year. We have undertaken significant reviews of all virements from our revenue budgets to Capital Reserve budgets, totalling £124,040, which aim to enhance our headquarters, environmental initiatives, and more.

Governance Updates

Moving on to governance, we have several updates following our latest reviews. We've made changes to our rolling 10 – year strategy as a result of annual review and have integrated the feedback from the "Your Town, Your Voice" survey into our 2024/2025 budget process. We are pleased to have a new membership with NALC/ALCA and have been consulting with them on a revised social value policy to ensure all council contractors uphold the Real Living Wage and important other factors. These adjustments are crucial for our town's operational integrity and values.

Final Year Accounts 2022/23 and Procurement during the year

We've concluded our financial year with positive outcomes. The Final Interim Audit Report and the Year End Accounts for the year ending March 31, 2023, have been approved, showing our commitment to transparent and responsible fiscal management. On procurement, we've appointed multiple contractors in particular within our professional services teams to support our service teams as and when specialist knowledge is required.

Business Reviews and Opportunities

Following recommendation from various committees we have been diligently reviewing business models including the Blakehay Theatre, Tourism and the Waterpark operations, to enhance financial performance and importantly community service. We're also exploring new opportunities alongside North Somerset Council, such as managing a market in Weston and initiating community-driven projects at the Old Town Quarry with substantial community investment following final negotiations of the asset transfer to us.

TOURISM AND LEISURE COMMITTEE - REPORT OF THE CHAIR FOR 2023/2024

The Tourism and Leisure Committee deals with all aspects of tourism in the town together with the Town Council's parks, play areas (including the Water Park) and outdoor sports and leisure facilities.

Tourism and Information Services

Our tourism sector is vital to our town's economy and community life. Our aim is to make Weston a welcoming and exciting place for both residents and visitors. Initiatives we have been working on over the last financial year include;

- adoption of a new partnership programme that will be implemented immediately to enhance our collaboration with local businesses and stakeholders.
- exploring the option of a pop-up Visitor Information Centre (VIC) within the Sovereign Centre for the upcoming school holidays. This initiative is designed to boost tourism

during a peak period and will be funded from existing marketing budgets to ensure financial prudence.

- a new charge of £99 for a 'new partner' programme has been approved, which will be introduced this summer as a one-time offer to encourage more businesses to join our partnership programme.

These initiatives in business reviews and tourism services are designed to ensure sustainability, enhance visitor experience, and drive economic growth. We are committed to implementing these plans carefully and effectively, with a constant eye on fiscal responsibility and community benefits.

Parks, Play Areas

Our commitment to recreational and community spaces continues. We're planning the installation of an adult gym and reviewing our play areas to create inclusive and engaging environments and will be developing a Play Strategy over the next year to have a consistent approach to how we manage and invest in play equipment. We're also focusing on maintaining the Waterpark to provide enjoyable and safe recreational opportunities and have approved the Waterpark Operational Business Model and Feasibility Study to be included in our 2024/25 budget. This study will guide us in making the Waterpark a more efficient and appealing destination for both residents and visitors.

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE – REPORT OF THE CHAIR FOR 2023/2024

This Committee monitors the operation of the Town Council, ensuring a high standard of provision. It considers their further development and the development of other facilities. The Committee is responsible for the Council's Community Programme.

Our community services committee has worked across many community initiatives over the course of the year these include

Community Safety

- we've taken serious steps to enhance community safety, starting with a directive for the Town Clerk to write to the Police Chief Constable, expressing our concerns regarding the management of unauthorised encampments in early summer 2023.
- the renewal of our Service Level Agreement with North Somerset Council for the provision of a dedicated Community Response Officer for another three years, contingent on annual reviews and budget approvals.
- our CCTV operations are set for an upgrade, with a budget allocated to enhance the system at Castle Batch park. This move will improve our monitoring capabilities, ensuring our public spaces remain safe and well-managed.

Community Partnerships

On the partnership front, our collaboration with local organisations like the YMCA, Citizens Advice North Somerset, The Town Centre partnership and Somewhere to Go will continue, with new funding and support aimed at enhancing their community services via new and reviewed Service Level Agreements that will come into place in 2024.

Cemetery Services Enhancements

In our cemeteries, we're extending the duration of cremated remains plot deeds at Milton Road Cemetery to align with other burial deed durations, ensuring fairness and continuity for everyone.

Community Events

We're also proud to foster our own community events, notably through a partnership with Super Culture and the Literary Festival 2023. While not expected to profit, any income raised helped to cover event costs, supported by a grant from the council's event budget. In addition, the Wellbeing Events summer programme at Ellenborough Park West has been delivered with local groups delivering a varied programme funded via Natural England.

Small and Voluntary Grants

The Small and Voluntary Grant Scheme remains a popular and well used scheme with the maximum award of a £1,000 at the committee's discretion. Awards for 2023/2024 were;

1. Girlguiding £500
2. Weston Hospicecare £1,000
3. Together Pussy Cat CIC £1,000
4. Donate a Defib £1,000
5. North Somerset LGBT+ Forum £1,000

HERITAGE ARTS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE - REPORT OF THE CHAIR FOR 2023/2024

To deal with all heritage, arts and culture related issues, including but not limited to the Weston Museum, The Old Town Quarry and Blakehay Theatre.

Heritage, Arts, and Culture Committee

Our Heritage, Arts, and Culture Committee is actively working to enrich our town's cultural offerings. We're continuing to support local arts through community grants and are planning the next phase of our Blue Plaque program to celebrate our rich history. Alongside overseeing our existing services at Weston Museum and the Blakehay Theatre, The Old Town Quarry's refurbishment is another major project we will be delivering in 2024 to enable it to remain a vibrant cultural hub following the transfer of asset from North Somerset Council.

Old Town Quarry Development

Moving on to the Old Town Quarry, we are on the brink of a transformative development for this historic site. We are delighted to have been successful and been awarded a Community Ownership Grant of £699,992, which together with some capital investment from the Town Council will be dedicated to the refurbishment and sustainable development of the Quarry. This project is not just about preserving our heritage but making the Quarry a vibrant part of our community life and culture.

Community Events Grants awarded 2023/2024

The committee had a busy year with applications to support the larger community events in the Town. Awards made in 2023/2024 were

1. Steepholmers Shanty Band £2,000
2. Theatre Orchard – Glow event 2024 £22,000
3. Knife Angel programme of events in May 2024 £10,000
4. Weston Wallz – Street Art Project 2023 £20,000

UPDATES FROM SERVICE AREAS

BLAKEHAY THEATRE

The Blakehay Theatre is an intimate venue at the heart of Weston-super-Mare's cultural life, serving as more than just a traditional theatre. The Theatre has a vision to encourage and promote a lifelong interest in the arts, and to support the development of creativity within the local population in an accessible and inclusive way.

The Blakehay's primary purpose is to support and promote arts and culture in the town, acting as a creative hub and inclusive cultural home. In 2023/2024, the Theatre celebrated a 25% increase in performances compared to the previous year, underlining its commitment to expanding access to the arts.

The Theatre aims to

Curate a diverse, engaging line-up that contrasts with the town's more mainstream entertainment options and attracts new, younger, and more diverse audiences beyond the typical theatregoers whilst also highlighting local talent and to build a sense of community.

In 2023/2024 this consisted of a diverse programme of performances, from comedy to the first year of an alternative Christmas offering, live music, drama and musical theatre.

Provides performance space and development opportunities for local artists, companies, and organisations.

In 2023/2024 the Theatre welcomed performances from fifteen local companies, both amateur and professional productions. Six of these companies were new to the Theatre this year.

Offer a diverse, community-driven program of classes, events, and collaborations with other local venues.

The theatre worked with venues across the town to promote 'Beautifully Proud' month in June 2023, celebrating inclusivity and diversity with programs of events. The Theatre also worked with Super Culture promoting and supporting the Glow event and Weston Museum with their Quentin Blake Exhibition.

Classes and Workshops for all ages, abilities and interests are held in the Theatre for all to attend and this continues to grow with new classes being added all the time.

Celebrating the power of theatre to inform, challenge, entertain and inspire people, the Blakehay Theatre is positioned to be a driving force in cultivating Weston-super-Mare's artistic identity and expanding access to the arts and grow in 2024/2025.

CIVIC FUNCTION

Weston-super-Mare has had a Mayor since 1937, when the Town was granted Borough status. The Mayor is the Town Council's chair, ceremonial figurehead and the first citizen of the town of Weston-super-Mare. In 2023/2024 The Mayor, Councillor Ciaran Cronnelly has been supported by Deputy Mayor, Councillor John Crockford-Hawley.

During the year, the Mayor has attended 251 events and the total events attended by the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Leader are 278 to 17th April 2024, including charity and business openings. The Mayor hosted The Lord Mayor of Hildesheim, Ingo Meyer in the summer and further deepened the two town's relationship with our twinned town by supporting the first business twinning in December. The Youth exchange which had a 4-year hiatus due to Covid-19 also began again with 37 students travelling to Weston-super-Mare in the spring. The Mayor and Mayoress travelled to Hildesheim in December with a scout leader to lay the foundations of the first organisation-to-organisation exchange.

Highlights were 40 Commando exercising The Freedom of The Town in June 2023 and The RNLi Weston being granted The Freedom of The Town in November 2023 and subsequent celebration in The Spring.

The Mayor's Charity this year is Weston Food Bank whose role is to support residents in food poverty.

In light of the ongoing cost of living crisis The Mayor ran a Marathon around the boundaries of the Town to raise money for his charity instead of holding the annual ball.

GROUNDS SERVICES

ALLOTMENTS

The Town Council continues to meet demand for allotments with the provision of 6 sites around the town at Hutton Moor, Rectors Way (off Drove Road), Bournville, Lower Kewstoke Road, Church Road and Old Mill Way. Day-to-day management of the allotment sites is delegated to the Weston Allotment Club while the Town Council assists with major work required.

CEMETERY

A review of the current maintenance programme has been undertaken by the Grounds Manager to develop a revised sensitive programme taking into consideration the significant wildlife and arboriculture needs of the site. We continue to explore areas for burial uses in the current location. Ongoing works to ensure all historic documents are digitalised is still underway.

PARKS AND PLAY AREAS

Further progress has been made in delivering a programme of works for refurbishing play areas. The Castle Batch SEND play area has received continued positive feedback and ongoing work continues with local residents in the area to ensure its longevity. The council has resolved to carry out a play strategy to review all Weston Town Council play area facilities and from there develop a programme to deliver the most suitable play areas in partnership with the community.

STREET FURNITURE

The Town Council continues to operate a dog waste service across multiple parishes and has installed additional bins in the town.

The Grounds department have restored benches across the town and re-purposed them and installed them in other areas across the town.

WATER ADVENTURE PLAY PARK

This popular summer attraction had a successful season, with the satellite Visitor Information Centre welcoming thousands of visitors to the park. The Grounds Team operated seven days a week throughout the season ensuring it was open for residents and visitors. The site received multiple TripAdvisor reviews from the public who were impressed by this facility. We look forward to another successful season in 2024.

TOURISM & INFORMATION SERVICES

By providing visitor destination marketing, the Council is supporting the local economy and jobs by increasing visitor numbers to the town as well as promoting what is happening to residents. The Tourism team deliver several key functions including destination marketing to a global audience via the Visit Weston website as well as comprehensive social media. The seasonal Visitor Information Centre (VIC) has been located at the Water Park on the seafront for the last 3 years, supported by a team of Weston Welcomers who position themselves in key locations around the town such as the railway station and the promenade coach drop-off points.

The Visit Weston website is continually updated and it continues to be ranked no. 1 when searching for Weston-super-Mare via Google (Google holds 80% of searches globally). Features include an events submission facility for event organisers to publicise and promote events. We continue to work with our partners to attract national influencers and bloggers to the town.

Visit Weston continues to develop strong working partnerships with partner organisations to support the Town Council's resolutions to develop cultural events in the community.

WESTON MUSEUM

Weston Museum celebrates the history of Weston-super-Mare and its surrounding areas from prehistoric times to the present day, using the distinctive historic building that houses the Museum and the diverse Museum collection of North Somerset Council. Through inspiration, learning and enjoyment, we will help the local community and its visitors to understand their past and ask questions about the present and future.

Over the past year we have seen visitors coming to the Museum specifically to view the temporary exhibitions in the William Mable and Community Gallery spaces. The exhibition calendars for each have attracted a wide range of visitors throughout the year and have given us the opportunity to tie in talks and events to further increase footfall. The hugely popular Dr Who exhibition, which we were delighted to be able to extend, has attracted visitors from all over the UK and a few from outside.

The growing reputation of Clara's Café continues to attract visitors to the Museum. We have seen a considerable rise in lunch and afternoon tea bookings as well as functions and events which we are now able to cater for in-house. The shop has also seen an increase in repeat customers this year with the focus seeming to be on locally crafted/handmade items.

Our learning and community engagement team have continued to work closely with members of the Heritage Action Zone team from North Somerset to facilitate events, produce resources for schools and highlight Weston's history and heritage through community engagement.

We aim to grow on the past year's successes as we go into 2024/25 with a full calendar of functions, events, exhibitions and learning for our visitors to enjoy.

YOUTH CAFÉ AND YOUTH SERVICES

YMCA Dulverton Groups partnership with the Town Council has continued.

Based at the YMCA Weston-super-Mare on Bristol Road Lower, the youth and community café is open for youth sessions and local community groups and is now under the new name YMCA Youth Hub. This change in name was to encourage more young people to use the facilities available.

2023 saw the YMCA Dulverton Group continue to build up its youth & community team and spent the later end of 2023 reviewing their services; in a bid to offer more for the young people of Weston-super-Mare. Some of the youth workers met with Community Response Officers and carried out shadowing sessions in the town centre, meeting the young people and finding out what youth services they would like to see.

From the response, two new youth drop-in sessions have now started in the Youth Hub which offers a safe space for young people to meet and learn new skills and more are planned for 2024.

The space was also used by other services that YMCA Dulverton Group offer such as the homelessness prevention services and our supported housing services.

The YMCA residents regularly use the space to socialise and cook as a group and this was very relevant during the Ramadan celebrations. Many of the residents and local refugees came together to cook and eat during the early hours each day. It has now become a safe space for them to meet with friends.

The youth centre at St John's (Bournville) continued to offer the south ward area a safe space for young people to meet. By working together with partnerships like South Weston Activity Network, Violence Reduction Partnership and Culture Weston we have been able to support a greater number of activities for young people and family community projects throughout the holidays.

A new group for 16–21-year olds started in October at the youth centre and quickly became a great success. The aim was to offer the young people of Weston-super-Mare, who were too old for other youth provisions (and likely to turn to anti-social behaviour) an opportunity to meet and learn new skills, and eventually move on to either education, employment or training.

During our youth sessions throughout the year, we have seen a rise in the number of young people experiencing mental health issues, and in some more extreme cases have seen evidence of young people inflicting harm on themselves. In response to this we have supported those individuals to seek professional help and invited a mental health charity to come in and run some sessions to help the young people develop an understanding of mental health coping strategies. Our aim is for the young people to feel equipped to better cope with their own mental health issues and be in a position to support their friends through difficult periods also.

The Youth Council has seen a lot of new members joining, resulting in a very proactive group. They have attended lots of events throughout the year such as school community breakfasts and Town Council meetings and they are looking forward to their planned mental health awareness day for young people in 2024.

We aim to continue to grow our youth service provision at the Youth Hub throughout 2024 so young people have a safe environment to meet new friends, learn new skills and become positive and active members of their local community.

WESTON-SUPER-MARE TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET 2024/2025

Cost Code	Expenditure £	Income £	Net £
Allotments	£21,967	£400	£21,567
Blakehay Theatre	£333,075	£99,224	£233,851
Capital Projects	£200,000	£0	£200,000
Civic Support	£155,868	£0	£155,868
Community Services	£566,582	£0	£566,582
Democratic Representation	£178,753	£0	£178,753
Environmental	£106,524	£0	£106,524
Museum	£544,396	£164,490	£379,906
Milton Road Cemetery	£180,405	£49,500	£130,905
Old Town Quarry	£46,683	£0	£46,683
Other Costs & Income	£58,042	£20,000	£38,042
Parks & Play Areas	£358,049	£0	£358,049
Planned Maintenance	£176,550	£0	£176,550
Planning	£12,645	£0	£12,645
Strategic Planning	£68,733	£0	£68,733
Street Furniture	£99,896	£14,989	£84,907
Toilets	£65,543	£0	£65,543
Tourism	£357,473	£139,000	£218,473
Youth Activities	£92,258	£0	£92,258
TOTAL	£3,623,442	£487,603	£3,135,840
PRECEPT 2023/2024			£2,936,237

WESTON-SUPER-MARE TOWN AND WARD COUNCILLORS AS AT MARCH 2024

<p>Labour John Carson, South Worle Annabelle Chard, Winterstoke James Clayton, Bournville Ciaran Cronnelly, Winterstoke Catherine Gibbons, Bournville Simon Harrison-Morse, Milton Owen James, South Worle Hugh Malyan, South Worle Alan Peak - Bournville Robert Skeen, Milton Timothy Taylor, Milton Helen Thornton, Uphill Richard Tucker, Milton Charles Williams, Winterstoke</p> <p>Conservative Marc Aplin, North Worle Roger Bailey, Uphill Gill Bute, Uphill Peter Crew, South Worle Justyna Pecak-Michalowicz, North Worle Marcia Pepperall, North Worle Lisa Pilgrim, Worlebury John Standfield, Mid Worle Martin Williams, Worlebury</p>	<p>Liberal Democrats Ray Armstrong, Hillside Mike Bell, Central Joe Bambridge, Worlebury Mark Canniford, Hillside Jemma Coles, Mid Worle John Crockford-Hawley, Hillside Robert Payne, Central Caroline Reynolds, Central</p> <p>Officers of the Town Council The Town Clerk – Sarah Pearse Assistant Town Clerk – Fay Powell</p> <p>Contact details for councillors and officers are on the Town Council's website www.wsm-tc.gov.uk</p> <p>CONTACT: Weston-super-Mare Town Council, Grove House, Grove Park, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 2QJ Tel: 01934 632567 Email: admin@wsm-tc.gov.uk</p>
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