

HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE 3rd June 2014

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present : The Right Worshipful the Mayor and Councillors Toon, Oliver, Chave, Chappell, Michael, Boulter and Councillors Edwards and Kenyon who are not members of the Committee

Officers Attending : Steve Kerry Town Clerk, Lesley Bruton Finance Officer and Richard Ball and Clive Hall of Herefordshire Council

F2014/15.11 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

Although the Chairman Councillor Tawn was present, he had indicated as he was now Mayor he wished to relinquish the Chair of this Committee. The Vice Chairman, Councillor Anna Toon presided at this meeting.

Councillor Toon reported that Councillor Wilcox had written to her about a concern about the application of Standing Order 39 which states that Committee members hold office until the Annual Meeting of Council, which had occurred. The Clerk's view was that the agreement of Council to the calendar implied a suspension of the Standing Order, which should have been recorded explicitly as such, and that the meeting did not breach statute law. Councillor Toon had spoken to the Monitoring Officer who agreed no statute was being broken but was concerned that the Council could be at risk of challenge if it operated outside its Standing Orders without a clear decision. On the basis that any controversial matters would be referred to Council for ratification, and that Governance and Procedures Committee would be asked to clear up the position permanently at its next meeting, Councillor Toon asked members of the Committee if they were prepared to continue. Members agreed to continue the business of the Committee.

F2014/15.11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Brian Wilcox.

F2014/15.12 SUBSTITUTIONS

The Town Clerk reported none. Councillor Kenyon indicated that he understood he was substituting for Councillor Tawn as a committee member as he was now Mayor and attending ex-officio. The Clerk advised that a member could only be a substitute for someone who was absent from the meeting and that the Mayor did not have two votes on a committee of which he was an elected member before being appointed to the Mayoralty.

F2014/15.13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

F2014/15.14 SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA ITEM – BELGIAN FLAG

The Chairman proposed to take the supplementary item first as Mr Dove who was presenting information about the topic had to leave early. This was agreed.

Mr Dove briefly recounted the history of the Belgian refugees in Hereford and the contribution the Council had made to their care and wellbeing. The flag, now displayed in a case with the Union Flag showing, with the plaque originally mounted on the Belgian side now moved, had decayed badly and he proposed, at his expense to fund a replica flag and a wall plaque in brass and mahogany. This would continue the commemoration. He noted with pleasure that a Belgian government representative will be attending Armistice Day this year, as will a descendant of the City Treasurer who had done much of the work to enable the Council to support the refugees.

In answer to questions Mr Dove, who was joined by a colleague who is a conservation expert, confirmed that supplying a replica flag on a pole for display in the Town Hall was the quickest way to produce something. The original flag is badly decayed as a result of light weight silk being used, mounted on a woollen backing which reacts with silk. He would be looking for sponsorship and seeking to raise funds, including contact with Tracy Morris at the City and Dave Tristram at the County Councils, for a full restoration. It was confirmed that we would need Herefordshire Council's permission to install a flag in the building. Some consideration was given to other possible sites for display including the Cathedral and Skylon Park when the former ammunition factory renovation is complete.

Councillor Oliver proposed, Councillor Chappell seconded and it was

RESOLVED

That Mr Dove be thanked for his generous offer which is accepted.

That the Town Clerk explore with Herefordshire Council suitable mounting of the replica flag and plaque.

That Mr Dove contact possible external funders and considers whether to apply to the City Council in due course for a grant to cover any costs of restoration not covered by this process.

F2014/15.15 INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS AND OPTIONS FOR DEVOLUTION OF GRASS CUTTING SERVICES

The Chairman welcomed Clive Hall and Richard Ball of Herefordshire Council who were attending to supply further information on the options outlined in the Town Clerk's paper.

The Town Clerk explained the background to his paper and updated the meeting on discussion held that morning with the same officers who were now before members, plus a manager from Balfour Beatty.

Members raised many issues with the Herefordshire Council officers about the decision to reduce grass cutting, the communication of that decision, the impact on children's play areas, the appearance of the City and on road safety and the options for community groups and individuals to be involved.

Members identified a need for clarification of service schedules to be retained, identification of areas of responsibility and a clear system for prioritising areas where public safety required immediate action.

Councillor Edwards updated the meeting on the outcome of his attendance when Mayor at the Chairs' Briefing question and answers session with the Leader and Chief Executive of Herefordshire Council, which had been almost entirely taken up with a long address by the Chief Executive with very little time for questions. He had raised grass cutting as a priority issue and had not received satisfactory answers.

After considering longer term issues of what services the Council might in due course seek to take over, it was noted that a modified version of the Lengthsman Scheme might be the best way forward, with simultaneous approaches to community groups and individuals prepared to make a voluntary effort. Concern was noted about double taxation, ie the City providing a service at full cost when the County had reduced it even though their services receive grant aid from the government and an allocation of National Non-Domestic Rates.

Councillor Chave proposed, Councillor Michael seconded and it was agreed to add a further recommendation to those in the original paper. This was agreed and is listed below at the end of the resolutions.

Councillor Chave proposed, Councillor Michael seconded and it was

RESOLVED

That the Committee endorses the actions taken by its councillors to seek restoration of the service and/or the involvement of other parties in addressing the urgent need for grass cutting in the City.

That the Committee supports any community group with appropriate equipment, staff/volunteers and insurance already in place that is willing to take responsibility for any public open space, and warmly encourages Herefordshire Council to accept any such offers with alacrity to maintain the appearance and amenity of the City's open spaces.

That the Council supports in principle the notion of seeking other groups and individuals who are willing to offer their time, and possibly equipment, to undertake mowing of public open spaces.

That the Committee supports approaches being made to Balfour Beatty regarding the Lengthsman Scheme Training Programme and the Council's insurers to enable

such groups or individuals to operate, once permission is gained from Herefordshire Council.

That the Committee approves in principle preparatory work being done in conjunction with Herefordshire Council's work on specifying the service required, to draw up a possible contract for devolved service for those areas not covered by voluntary agreements with community groups or individuals.

That the Committee authorises officers and members to undertake negotiations with Herefordshire Council towards a service devolution of grass cutting, subject to an appropriate and reasonable settlement of Herefordshire Council's financial contribution, and verification that the City can afford to take on the service costs.

That the Committee affirms that no final decision on a devolved service can be taken except by resolution of full Council.

That the Committee requests responses in writing to questions raised at this meeting especially of mapping prior to any further discussions on the question of grass cutting.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hall and Mr Ball for attending the meeting.

F2014/15.16 MINUTES

Councillor Oliver proposed, Councillor Tawn seconded and it was

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of 8th April 2014 be accepted as an accurate record.

F2014/15.17 ANNUAL RETURN AND STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Finance Officer presented the annual return and statement of accounts, including the annual return document which was circulated at the meeting. Internal audit will take place on 18th June this year. The Council's financial position is still sound with some underpends which will be carried forward to reserves.

In answer to questions it was confirmed that under spending in Mayor's Expenses can be deployed to parlour improvements, but there is no fixed policy on this. The debt shown from Herefordshire Council for £25,000 has now been cleared. The figure for accruals shows two by-elections for which bills have not yet been received. The Chairman urged County members on Audit and Governance Committee to raise this.

Councillor Chave congratulated the Finance Officer on producing a clear, understandable and concise report, a view echoed by all present. She also noted that a substantial sum rests on the continuing willingness of Herefordshire Council to passport the Local Council Tax Support Scheme money to parishes. The Finance

Officer reminded the Committee that this is highlighted in the section on risk analysis in the report.

Members asked for some enquiries to be made regarding progress on the White House renovation scheme for which a grant of £30,000 is earmarked and held in reserves.

It as proposed by Councillor Oliver, seconded by Councillor Boulter and

RESOLVED

That the Committee notes the outturn position for the financial year 2013/14.

That the Committee approves the carry forwards detailed in paragraph 3 of the report.

That the Committee approves, subject to audit, the Annual Return and Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2014.

That the Committee recommends to Council the Annual Return and Statement of Accounts for approval.

That the Committee thanks the Finance Officer for an excellent report.

F2014/15.18 SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS

The Finance Officer presented a schedule of items paid since the last meeting of the Committee.

In answer to questions it was confirmed that bank charges refers to a standing charge for bankline, not for transaction charges. The invoice for Healthmatic was wholly for the installation of a replacement lock as stated at the time and not for further works which Healthmatic had suggested for the Union Street toilet provisionally costed at £1,400- which had not been ordered. The value for money was an issue for Herefordshire Council who were covering the cost of this item and had a contract with Healthmatic, the City Council did not. The benches in Grandstand Park are not secured to the ground, this will be kept under review to see if it presents a problem. The charges for HR consultancy relate to attending meetings and case specific advice which is not covered by general employment briefings from NALC. Finally the relocation of a map sign refers to the settlement of the long running dispute with the Cathedral over the relocation of a sign.

The schedule was agreed.

F2014/15.19 AUTHORISATION OF PAYMENTS OVER £500

The Town Clerk presented the report and schedule of items paid over a period to demonstrate what items would be affected by a requirement for prior approval.

Councillor Chave proposed accepting the report, noting that it shows the importance of members reading the schedule of payments which is an important part of the control mechanism.

Other members commented that the report shows we have sufficient controls in place and are practising good governance.

Councillor Chave proposed, Councillor Tawn seconded and it was

Resolved

That the Committee notes the report and resolves to consider full draft financial regulations at its next meeting.

F2014/15.20 MANAGEMENT OF INCOME

The Town Clerk explained that this report had been requested at a previous meeting in advance of the annual review of financial regulations. He also reported a discussion with Councillor Wilcox regarding wording which it was felt could be usefully added as part of that review.

Councillor Tawn proposed, Councillor Boulter seconded and it was

RESOLVED

That the Committee endorses the current financial regulations as they relate to income, save that a duty should be placed upon the RFO to make anyone to whom it anticipated to send an invoice aware of the cost at the earliest opportunity.

That the Committee notes that the wording of the Mayoral Handbook is consistent with its previous decision regarding the use of Council staff to support the Mayor's Charity Appeal activity.

That the Committee accepts that the charges, concessions and permitted variations to be set for exhibitors at the Wedding Fayre be included in the appropriate reports to Community Development Committee who's remit includes the oversight of city events.

F2014/15.21 OFFICE MOVES AND LEASE

The Town Clerk recounted the long and unsuccessful history of attempts to gain a lease for the Council's offices, parlour, vaults, garage and storage areas. There was now an opportunity to regularise this, and to achieve much better offices than the attic flats currently occupied by staff. This would also give the Council an assurance about its accommodation which it had always lacked. It was now known that the projected rent for the whole Council holding at the Town Hall would be around £24,000 per annum, inclusive of NNDR, water, gas, electricity and telephone charges; which continues to represent very good value for money provided the offices are usable, properly maintained and accessible. The proposed offices on the

mezzanine level are far superior to those on the second floor in all respects. The higher rent reflected only greater floor area, no premium was being charged for better quality accommodation.

Members commented that they were very pleased that the Council staying in the Town Hall, securing a proper lease at last and moving staff to accommodation which was fit for purpose. It was confirmed that final terms will be reported to Council before signature.

Councillor Oliver proposed, Councillor Edwards seconded and it was

RESOLVED

That the Town Clerk and Finance Officer be authorised, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee to enter into a lease agreement to secure suitable office accommodation for the Council staff and storage, the Mayoral suite and the basement vaults.

That the Town Clerk be authorised to make the necessary arrangements to accomplish the office moves when the space becomes available.

That access to wifi and broadband be secured in the new premises.

F2014/15.22 NATIONAL ALLOTMENT SOCIETY – RENEWAL OF ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

The Town Clerk reminded the Committee that at the end of the debate about re-affiliation to NALC it was decided that all renewals should come to Committee for approval. The report explained the advantages of affiliation for the Council.

Councillor Tawn proposed, Councillor Chave seconded and it was

RESOLVED

That the Council renews its affiliation to the National Allotment Society at a cost of £55-00.

Signed

Dated