

HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING 19th April 2016

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present : Councillors Tawn, Edwards, Lloyd-Hayes, Baker and Dykes

Officers attending : Steve Kerry, Town Clerk; Lesley Bruton, Finance Officer.

F2016/17.01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were noted from Councillors Boulter, Griffiths, Rone and Wilcox

F2016/17.02 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTES

Noted that Cllr Boulter had appointed Cllr Lloyd-Hayes as her substitute

F2016/17.03 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

F2016/17.04 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 8TH MARCH 2016

Two corrections were noted. It was confirmed that Cllr Lloyd-Hayes had attended the meeting as a substitute for Cllr Boulter, and that in the final sentence of minute F2015/16.70 Cllr Tawn's statement about funding non-availability referred to Herefordshire Council not the City Council.

After agreeing these corrections, Cllr Edwards proposed, Cllr Lloyd-Hayes seconded and it was

RESOLVED That the minutes of the meeting held on 8th March as corrected be confirmed as an accurate record and be signed by the Chairman.

F2016/17.05 SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS

The Finance Officer presented the schedule of payments since the last meeting. In answer to questions the Finance Officer stated that the fee from John Finch was for upgrading the server, the Council has only been charged once for the Saxon Gate election (Herefordshire Council have not charged for the poll that was countermanded because of errors by the Presiding Officer) and the Cityscape Maps notice boards are a metal design of considerable strength and longevity, approved for general use by committee.

The schedule was noted.

F2016/17.06 BANK RECONCILIATIONS

The Finance Officer presented reconciliations for all the Council's accounts. In answer to questions it was confirmed that the payment to Adzor was for the Town

Hall lobby to have a Christmas tree and that Neopost invoices referred to the franking machine.

The reconciliations were noted.

F2016/17.07 UPDATE REPORT ON PROGRESS IN OPENING A TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

The Town Clerk introduced his report adding that although an external repairing lease was less desirable because of the additional liability it was most unlikely that the landlord would agree to alter his position on that. The Council's interest could be protected by a survey to assess the property and establish current condition and by a suitable insurance policy once the survey was completed. The Clerk added that after a good deal of thought he had decided to recommend to Committee that the operation of the TIC be outsourced to an industry experienced provider rather than as a council service.

Considerable discussion followed, focussing on two main areas of concern : how best to ensure the Council gets best value for money from the investment it will be making in the property, and how to manage the process for appointing a managing agency to run the TIC for us.

Cllr Edwards expressed concern that the Town Clerk's position in negotiation should be protected by close liaison with the Finance Officer and Chairman of the Committee and that publicity via the Mayor should not give the impression of a done deal. He also felt that experience from Leominster and Ledbury could be usefully harnessed and that anyone seeking to trade from the TIC must make a contribution towards running costs. He also made it clear he fully supported the venture.

The Clerk replied that he thought the Hereford Times had run ahead of the brief the Mayor had given them somewhat, but agreed that communication needed to be controlled especially during a tendering exercise. He also confirmed that he would be reporting to full committee meetings before key decisions such as signing the lease and that reports on these matters would be supported by written statements from the solicitors acting for the Council and the surveyor.

Cllr Lloyd-Hayes also supported the venture and was pleased that the Mayor had done so much to raise the profile of the issue in the aftermath of the closure of the Visit Herefordshire TIC, which she felt was a very poor decision, especially just before Three Choirs. She believed that the Guild of Guides is very keen to get involved and may well provide some volunteers. In answer to a question the Clerk re-affirmed the various roles of committees as this project progresses.

Cllr Tawn affirmed that getting sub-letting rights was vital, and asked that we obtain clarity about any restrictions on the upper floors as sometimes landlords seek to reduce business rates by downgrading these as storage which limits their use. Rather than the restricted list proposed in the report he felt that the service should go to open tender as there may be other potential providers of merit than those

who have so far been in contact with the Council. Offers should be invited from people who can show substantial and successful retail experience as well as knowledge of tourism and visitor support.

Councillor Baker felt that the best option for the City should be sought rather than the cheapest tender. This view was endorsed by the committee.

After the discussion Councillor Edwards proposed and Councillor Tawn seconded revised conclusions to the report and it was :

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Committee notes the progress on the lease and related property issues and confirms that the Council seeks sub-letting rights for an operator on the ground floor and for the upper floor offices. The property must be fully surveyed and an assessment made of its IT links. All conclusions to be reported to Committee.**
- 2. Once the property issues are resolved the Council will issue an invitation for expressions of interest to operate a TIC and develop revenue earning retail activities and commission sales followed by a full tendering exercise that will be reported to Committee.**
- 3. That information be sought and presented to Committee from Leominster and Ledbury Town Councils about their recent experiences of setting up TIC's.**
- 4. Communications on this matter with the press must be through the Mayor and Town Clerk, supported by the Finance Officer and Chairman of the Committee when necessary. It is especially important that communication is tightly controlled during the tendering process.**
- 5. That the outcome sought from the tendering process would not necessarily be the cheapest option but the one offering the best chance of a high quality and sustainable service.**

F2016/17.08 FREEDOM CEREMONY

The Finance Officer presented a summary of projected costs for the forthcoming ceremony to install Toby Hooper QC as a Freeman. It was noted with gratitude that Mr Hooper is providing the afternoon tea at his own expense after the event. It was also confirmed that a survey via the larger councils' clerks' network had confirmed that charges for the vellum scroll were competitive.

It was proposed by Councillor Lloyd-Hayes, seconded by Councillor Edwards and

RESOLVED That the proposed expenditure is approved and that the Finance Officer is authorised to draw funds from the Freedom Ceremonies reserve to support this event.

F2016/17.09 ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman (next meeting)

2015/16 Annual return and presentation of accounts (next meeting)

Progress with High Town refurbishment (next meeting)

Update on Tourist Information Centre (next meeting)

City of Culture – possibly a matter for presentation to full Council

Progress with the refurbishment of the Butter Market

F2016/17.10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

7th June 2016

There being no further business the meeting closed at 7.15 pm