**HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL**

**FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE**

**Members of the Committee :** The Right Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor Len Tawn (Chairman) and Councillors Sharon Michael, Laura Hall, Martin Baker, Susan Boulter, Paul Rone, Phil Edwards and Brian Wilcox (one vacancy)

**Minutes of the meeting held on 14th July 2015 at 6 pm**

**Present :** Councillors Len Tawn, Sharon Michael, Susan Boulter, Martin Baker, Phil Edwards and Brian Wilcox.

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

**F2015/16.9 Apologies for absence**

Apologies were noted from the Mayor and Councillors Paul Rone and Laura Hall

**F2015/16.10 Substitutions**

None

**F2015/16.11 Declarations of Interest**

None

**F2015/16.12 Minutes of last meeting**

It was proposed by Councillor Edwards, seconded by Councillor Boulter and

**Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of 4th June be confirmed as an accurate record and signed accordingly by the Chairman**

**F2015/16.13 Internal Audit report 2014/15 Final Update**

The Town Clerk presented the report of the Internal Auditor, drawing members’ attention to the fact that it confirmed that the Council’s records and processes were entirely satisfactory. Members congratulated the Finance Officer on this outcome. It was noted that the reference to bank reconciliations refers to the Royal Bank of Scotland up to March 31st 2015.

Members noted the report.

**F2015/16.14 Schedule of Payments**

The Finance Officer presented the schedule of items paid since the last meeting of the Committee. In answer to questions it was stated that a second payment of £5,000 has been made to Friends of Castle Green in respect of the three events they run on behalf of the Council was on the schedule, and that the level of Mayoral attendance at three Choirs varies from year to year, only the opening and closing events being regarded as obligations to attend. Finally a reference to “former Mayor’s expenses” refers to the immediately previous Mayor as the Mayoral Year changes after the start of the Financial Year, with a Mayoral year running from May to May, hence being in two financial years.

**F2015/16.15 Bank Reconciliation**

The Finance Officer presented reconciliations for each account held by the Council for May and June, signed by the appointed member Councillor Wilcox. It was noted that Lloyds Bank have been authorised to take information from Royal Bank of Scotland to enable transactions to be transferred but had not yet completed this process. The Finance Officer had already been in touch with them to request prompt completion so that the RBS accounts could be closed.

It was confirmed that the grant cheque for Services for Independent Living in respect of Hereford Shopmobility had not yet been presented.

The reconciliations were noted.

**F2015/16.16 Quarterly Revenue Budget Monitoring Report**

The Finance Officer presented the report for the period up to 30th June 2015. In addition the Finance Officer reported that Herefordshire Council would not be charging National Non-Domestic Rates for the public toilets operated by the Council, which would generate a saving of £3,600. It was noted that this point would need to be covered in future discussions should any more toilets be transferred to the City Council. It was also noted with some concern that despite a work programming meeting in February regarding their works to High Town there had still been no call from Herefordshire on the City’s pledged £10,000 contribution and no sign of any permanent repairs or reinstatement to damaged lettering. The Clerk will pursue this, again, with Herefordshire Council.

It was proposed by Councillor Tawn, seconded by Councillor Wilcox and

**Resolved that :**

**The Committee note the contents of the report.**

**The Committee notes the expenditure to 30th June 2015.**

**The Committee approves the proposed actions regarding over and underspends forecasted as set out in the body of the report.**

**F2015/16.17 Transfer of Services Update**

1. The Town Clerk presented a report based on recent negotiations with Herefordshire Council’s officers. He confirmed that he had stated at the start that without assurance that the Local Council Tax Support Grant monies continuing to be passported to the parish council, no service transfers could be contemplated. Members strongly endorsed this view and the recommendations at the end of the report were modified to reflect this as an absolute condition of continuing discussions.
2. It was noted in discussion that tourism brings in some £650m to the county and is by far the largest earner – comfortably exceeding agriculture and industry and yet it receives scant support from Herefordshire Council. Services provided by Visit Herefordshire, now part of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce had been drastically reduced and in the absence of funding from the principal authority and continuing doubts over sponsorship income for major events like Flavours of Herefordshire it was hard to see that position changing. The case for a visible on-street tourist information presence was strong. Various locations were discussed including the annexe offices to the Town Hall, the butter market and the Old House.
3. On the issue of King George’s park there was agreement in principal to making this the priority for consideration for a service transfer although a reserve capacity to consider other sites which were not supported by community groups should be retained if possible. In considering a transfer of a major asset such as the park members indicated what they would need to see resolved through investigation and discussion and the recommendations in the report were strengthened in this area to reflect that requirement.
4. It was also noted that the previous issue of the City Council looking after pruning and maintenance on footpaths (ie those paths not part of the highway) should not be lost in consideration of the park and the recommendations were adjusted to highlight that continuing interest.
5. The Town Clerk updated the meeting on concerns raised regarding Hereford in Bloom, the performance of Balfour Beatty Living Places in their support role and the approach taken by the current HiB Chairman to seek to review this in one meeting in September. Members felt that while a gathering of all concerned parties then might be beneficial, it would also be helpful for the Clerk to pursue a tri-partite solution with the current In Bloom committee, the BID Director and the City Council coming together to give stability to financing the key elements and engaging a local contractor with a high level of personal commitment to provide and water flowers. The eventual aim would be more in line with the year round “floral city” concept than aiming for a single week of competition for an award, although external recognition for success would still be valued.
6. It was noted that any proposals for any service transfer for final recommendation by the Committee to Council will need full analysis of assets, staffing, equipment, stock condition, liabilities, opportunities and risks to enable a fully informed decision to be made.

After a wide ranging discussion, including amendments to several of the recommendations the Chairman proposed, Councillor Edwards seconded a series of revised recommendations. As a result it was :

**RESOLVED**

1. **That any consideration of service transfers must be based on a clear assurance that the Local Council Tax Support Grant paid to Herefordshire Council by the Department of Communities and Local Government must continue to be passported to the City Council.**
2. **That the Committee resolve that the Council should investigate the possibility of taking over the maintenance of King George’s Park and Bishop’s Meadow, together with the maintenance of footpaths not adjacent to the highway and support community groups taking over the other City parks to bring them under local management.**
3. **That the Clerk should seek clarification of funding and staffing implications for such a transfer and bring a further report to the committee and Governance and Procedures Committee if a transfer is proposed.**
4. **That at a later date, Committee will resolve whether to recommend a transfer of the park and footpaths to the City for final decision of Council, noting the information requirements listed at sub-paragraph 6 above.**
5. **That the Committee approves maintaining the position set out previously by Council on public toilets of taking over units which would otherwise be closed and seeking clarification from Herefordshire Council of their intentions regarding any closures in time for consideration within our budget-setting process.**
6. **That the Committee endorse the recommendation that the Clerk works with the Business Improvement District Director, Visit Herefordshire and the Chamber of Commerce to clarify what options are available, and what funding, for an effective and visible tourism support presence within the City.**
7. **That the Committee mandates the Clerk to discuss with the BID Director and Hereford in Bloom a long term strategy for moving towards a floral city.**

**F2015/16.18 Items for Future Meetings**

CCTV to be followed up for the next meeting

Date of next meeting : Tuesday 22nd September 2015 at 6 pm

Signed …………………………………………

Dated …………………………………………