**HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL**

**FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE 22nd September 2015**

**MINUTES OF MEETING**

**PRESENT :** The Right Worshipful the Mayor and Councillors Edwards, Lloyd-Hayes, Rone, Tawn and Wilcox

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

**F2015/16.19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Baker, Boulter, Griffiths and Michael.

**F2015/16.20 SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillor Lloyd-Hayes was nominated by Councillor Boulter as a substitute.

**F2015/16.21 DECLARLATIONS OF INTEREST**

None. It was noted that Councillor Rone’s membership of the Three Choirs Cttee and attendance at Hereford in Bloom meetings do not constitute disclosable interests in items on this agenda.

**F2015/16.22 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of 14th July were confirmed as an accurate record and signed accordingly by the Chairman.

**F2015/16.23 SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS**

The Finance Officer presented the schedule of items paid since the last meeting. The Chairman reminded members that it is policy for them to read this when it came out with the agenda and address points of detail to the Finance Officer directly. Only those matters that needed to be entered in the minutes should be raised at the meeting.

Councillor Wilcox asked if the release of a grant payment to the Tupsley Whitehouse Project was supported by evidence of progress. Councillor Lloyd-Hayes gave an update, and the Clerk confirmed that the release of the grant had been authorised by the Community Development Committee on receiving a presentation from the group which had satisfied their concerns regarding progress to date. Councillor Wilcox confirmed that this was satisfactory.

The schedule was noted.

**F2015/16.24 THREE CHOIRS SPENDING**

The Town Clerk introduced the report and outlined the history of why the Council has supported this event once every three years, using an annual contribution to a reserve to even out the expenditure. This year had seen additional events including the end of festival choir party and a visit from Les Berriauds dance troupe from Vierzon which had not featured three years ago and had increased the cost of civic receptions etc. These events had been part of the festival in previous years. He confirmed that the stewards lunch was one event, reduced from three in previous years, was for those who gave their time as unpaid volunteers to support the event and had been attended by 110 people. The spending was in two categories, a single grant paid directly to the Three Choirs organisers which supported the free events around the festival and the civic events.

Councillor Edwards recalled an earlier discussion at Council in which it had been suggested that we would reduce the block grant and asked what the detail of that had been. The Clerk and Finance Officer confirmed that a comment had certainly been made and the Council’s representative on the Three Choirs had undertaken to advise them that we would be looking to make a reduction however no detailed decision had been made as to what the new grant would be, and whether the reduction would indeed be on the main grant or on the civic support costs. The purpose of this paper was to get detailed decisions on those points so a budget could be prepared.

Councillor Rone suggested that the event was out of reach of ordinary people, no-one from his ward ever attended it and it should have no support at all from the Council.

Councillor Lloyd-Hayes stated that it was world class event bringing immense prestige to the City and was a very significant boost to tourism every three years, in her view it should be supported.

Councillor Wilcox stated that Hereford do the festival best and felt there should be some reduction in cost. He also asked whether it would be possible to form a joint plan for funding with the other participating cities over a three year cycle. The Clerk advised that this would be difficult and that to his knowledge neither Gloucester nor Worcester, which both had District Council status, made a direct contribution to the event in their cities.

The Mayor supported the view that this was a highly prestigious event and that the stewards lunch was a particularly valuable opportunity to thank those who gave their time to make it all possible.

Councillor Edwards proposed and Councillor Tawn seconded that under paragraph 3.1 there should continue to be a grant, set at £24,000, that under paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3 up to £5,000 from the reserve be used to meet civic costs and that the additional sums spent this year reported under paragraph 3.4 be funded from the Three Choirs reserve.

On being put to the vote there were two in favour, three against and the proposal was lost.

Councillor Rone proposed that there be no grant, and the council should simply cover civic costs. This was not seconded and was not put to the vote.

Councillor Lloyd-Hayes proposed a similar resolution to Councillor Edwards but with a grant figure of £27,000. This was not seconded and was not put to the vote.

Councillor Wilcox stated that he could support Councillor Edwards resolution if it was for one year only because of doubts about other financial matters affecting the city, notably the declining Council Tax Support Grant. Councillor Edwards agreed to re-state his proposal on that basis.

It was then proposed by Councillor Edwards, seconded by Councillor Tawn and

**RESOLVED**

**That the committee agrees in principle to make a grant to support Three Choirs and that the sum planned for 2018 will be £24,000, with £8,000 allocated to the reserve in 2016/17. This to be reviewed annually.**

**That the Council continues to fund the civic reception on the opening day and the stewards lunch using balances held in the Three Choirs reserve which will be carried forward.**

**That the £2,629.22 cost of items not originally budgeted for – the end of choir event and the visit from Veirzon - are funded from the balance in the Three Choirs reserve this year.**

**F2015/16.25 HEREFORD IN BLOOM**

The Clerk introduced the report and explained the history of support for HiB from the Council, in particular the decision two years ago to commit to funding watering rather than a more general grant the use of which was largely determined by the In Bloom local committee.

Councillor Edwards recalled that we had on several occasions told HiB that we would be reducing funding to that element and had often sought more clarity from them about plans, financial commitments, their fund raising strategy and use of in kind support from contractors and volunteers.

In discussion it was noted that there had been several emails from the HiB Chairman making statements about a need for up to £50,000 from the City Council to save the organisation, and also a demand for £10,000 from the county council to fund the planting of perennials due to be delivered soon. Neither had been agreed and members were not prepared to consider such a sum being allocated to underwrite the group without a much more detailed plan including a credible financial strategy. It was also noted that a good floral presentation increases feelings of well being in the city and is appreciate by residents and visitors. Various claims are made about the impact on tourism of reaching gold award standard, which the city has for the last three years, and although it is undoubtedly positive, there is little reliable data to confirm the scale of this effect. It was noted that individuals have been approached to look after flower beds in their areas including on roundabouts, although it was not know if the Hereford Allotments and Leisure Gardens Society had been approached as a body. There are some constraints on working on the highway which need to be covered by training.

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

**RESOLVED**

**That the Committee declines to release £50,000 from reserves for an immediate bailout or underwriting of the Hereford in Bloom trustees.**

**That work continues with the Clerk and Hereford in Bloom committee to establish a much more transparent and sustainable financial position in future.**

**That the Committee agrees to continue to fund watering and agrees to set aside £20,000 as part of its budget strategy for 2015/16 and 2016/17, provided that before funds are released from this sum there is a satisfactory report of activity and progress from HiB to council or a competent committee.**

**F2015/16.26 ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

It was noted that there was no report ready on CCTV due to pressure of other issues. The Clerk was mandated to write to the Police and Crime Commissioner to invite them to the next full council meeting.

Transfer of services – some concern was expressed about progress on this issue. The Clerk reported some difficulty getting consistent and prompt responses from Herefordshire due to reductions and changes in their staffing. The Clerk was mandated to write to Geoff Hughes if problems continued.

Support for Dial-a-Ride. Committee noted with concern that a member of Council had stated at a public meeting that this had been discontinued. It was reported orally that numbers on the buses were well up on those claimed by the member last month. It was agreed that officers would prepare an update for information after four months and present this to the next meeting. This would inform a decision to be taken after the full six months trial was completed.

Date of next meeting Tuesday 3rd November 2015 at 6 pm

Signed ……………………………………………………

Date …………………………………………