**HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF MEETING OF FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE**

**City Council Office Committee Room, Town Hall, Hereford**

**Tuesday 18th July 2017 at 6.00 pm**

**PRESENT:** Cllrs Boulter, Edwards, Nicholls, Stevens (Chairman), Tawn (Vice Chairman) and Wilcox.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Tracy Morriss – Deputy Town Clerk, Lesley Robinson – Administration, Finance & Information Officer.

**FP2017/2018.25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Kenyon, Lloyd-Hayes and Rone. It was noted that Cllr Kenyon was standing down as a member of the Finance and Policy committee.

**FP2017/2018.26 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTES**

There were none.

**FP2017/2018.27 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

**FP2017/2018.28 MINUTES**

The Chairman asked members to approve and confirm the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee held on 6th June 2017.

Cllr Wilcox raised three observations on the minutes of the previous meeting, i.e.

1. Under Item FP2017/18.20 Key Projects – Regarding staffing for proposed museum for the Mayoral support team - The last resolution stated – ‘… to be considered at the next meeting.’ – Cllr Wilcox asked if this related to the next meeting of Governance & Procedures Committee rather than the next meeting of Finance & Policy Committee. The Deputy Town Clerk responded that whilst the resolution had not actually specified which committee, the key project in question related to staffing implications and would therefore be brought to Governance & Procedures Committee, not Finance & Policy.
2. Under Item FP2017/18.21 Completion of Accounts for 2016/2017 - Cllr Wilcox suggested that for clarification some of the wording be amended *from*, ‘…This would be corrected before presentation to Council. Referral to full Council for ratification…,’ *to read*, ‘…This would be presented to Council for ratification…’.
3. Under Item FP2017/18.22 Ward Budgets – There was a *typo*, i.e. ‘… a good audit **trial**…’ *should read* ‘…a good audit **trail**…’.

Members noted the amendments and it was proposed by Cllr Wilcox, seconded by Cllr Nicholls and

**RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the meeting of Finance & Policy Committee held on 6th June 2017 be accepted as an accurate record and duly signed by the Chairman.**

**FP2017/2018.29 SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS**

Members received from the Finance Officer a schedule of items paid since the last meeting of the Committee.

Members had no queries on this and the schedule was noted.

**FP2017/2018.30 SCHEDULE OF CURRENT INVOICES**

Members received from the Finance Officer a schedule of current invoices and were asked to decide if this information would be helpful for the Committee to receive at future meetings.

Cllr Wilcox conveyed his thanks to the Finance Officer for producing this information but questioned that it would be needed for future meetings as it gave recurring information to that already provided on the usual schedule of payments and all invoices were checked when paid. Cllrs Edwards and Stevens agreed.

The Deputy Town Clerk explained that this report was originally provided in response to a previous request by Finance & Policy committee to see payments due to go out as well as those already made.

Cllr Wilcox added that there was no need for this additional report and the Finance Officer would be saved the extra work. All members noted the contents and agreed that the schedule of current invoices would no longer be required going forward.

**FP2017/2018.31 BANK RECONCILIATION**

Members received from the Finance Officer reconciliations for each account held by the Council for May 2017.

The Chairman asked members if they had any questions and Cllr Edwards referred to his previous queries on an unpresented cheque dating back to March 2017 in respect of United in the Community. Cllr Edwards stated he was under the impression that the cheque had been stopped and reissued, then later stopped again, and asked that City Council gets back in touch with United in the Community to find out if this transaction had been completed or was no longer required.

There were no further questions and members noted the schedule.

**FP2017/2018.32 KEY PROJECTS**

Members received the Town Clerk’s report updating the committee on developments with the civic museum and the leasing/freehold of the Town Hall.

The Deputy Town Clerk stated that the report was purely an update with nothing for members to make any decisions on and invited members to give any comments or questions which covered:

* Item 3 (Footpaths and Parks) – A member had been quite vocal in the past in trying to establish between Herefordshire Council and City Council the situation on footways and what we may or may not be taking on - Any footpaths transferred to City Council should be identified definitively as non-highway footpaths – The member had done a lot of voluntary work in his own ward, supported by City Council - There must be more such footpaths in other wards and looked forward to seeing Herefordshire Council’s forthcoming map data list of identified footpaths when issued.

A recent HALC meeting had referred to P3 footpath schemes and some future way of understanding how parishes would take this on – Member expressed that this was an issue Council would need to be careful of.

Any footways which City Council may take on in future would not be ‘Public Rights of Way’ and the City Council would not want to take on either of these.

Many footways very overgrown and hide good surface beneath - Highlighted example of footpath in Putson near Manor House Fish Bar which was totally overgrown and would be quite a wide path if dug back - Suggested that if City Council takes on footpaths, could consider employing someone to look after and maintain them.

Item 3.3 of the Clerk’s report stated that these footways ‘… are not adopted highway …’ but they were footpaths being used by the public out of choice - Keen to have date when list of map data footpaths was expected from Herefordshire Council so that City Council could start to plan – The list would also provide clarification on status of those footpaths.

Cllr Tawn entered the room at 6.17pm and asked to see the Clerk’s report to familiarise himself with details of the current issue in discussion.

* Item 2 (Town Hall) - Happy with the Clerk’s report but, concerned about a specialist survey previously done at the Shire Hall building - Involved very expensive basement work and, twelve months later, there had been an unforeseen problem with basement ceiling – with no blame to contractors but had costed several hundred thousand pounds more to remedy - Wouldn’t want to see similar situation with a survey of the Town Hall building - Need to ensure that surveyors had no easy loophole clauses - Any potential problems or areas not investigated should be highlighted up front.

Following discussions, members agreed that the issue of footpaths was ongoing and would be debated more fully by committee once the map data and list of footpaths from Herefordshire Council had been received.

Members noted the report.

**FP2017/2018.33 QUARTERLY FINANCIAL REPORT ENDING 30TH JUNE 2017**

Members received the report of the accountants for the first quarter submitted via the Town Clerk as Responsible Financial Officer.

The Deputy Town Clerk stated that this revenue budget monitoring report was for information and for members to note the contents.

Members’ questions and comments included:

* Item 5.3.4 (Overspend on insurance) - Questioned whether Council needed to review its’ insurances - When had we last looked at them and was overspend due to one key element or additional insurance?
* Queried if overspend could be due to vehicle insurance – Breakdown of expenditure would have been useful for members to see - Some detail was shown on page one of report’s Appendix - Although no explanation, it stated that vehicles now had full comprehensive insurance cover.
* Item 5.1.6 (Investments/Bank Accounts) – Disappointment expressed that Council hadn’t made planned transfer of funds to CCLA’s Public Sector Deposit Fund to tie up the accounts - Now into mid-July and Lloyds Bank account had only made small amount of interest.
* City Council had taken formal advice on this from an independent financial adviser who advised that we wait until end of financial year - Extra work needed to do this correctly had therefore caused this delay.

Could there be a target date for this to happen, given that Council had a ‘Six Monthly Account’ due for renewal shortly? - Suggested that Council aim for target date of October to resolve the matter.

* The Deputy Town Clerk responded that a report on this could be brought to the next Finance & Policy committee meeting.
* Item 5.7.3 (Table of 16 ward budgets) – Despite member’s several previous requests, an amendment was still required to show ward name as ‘College’ and not ‘College Hill’.
* Item 5.10 (Civic and Ceremonial) – Concerns about state of ceremonial apparel/robes due to moths, wear and tear etc. - Requested that an audit survey of clothing/robes be done - City Council members should be dressed appropriately - Garments also needed to be cleaned periodically and a regular inventory check would help keep all garments in order.
* Item 130 – Appendix page 1 – Administration (‘Agency Worker’) – Queried if that amount would remain on expenditure report - Deputy Town Clerk responded that this related to Administration Officer, Connor Powell, who was initially employed on temporary basis via Hoople, was taken on last month as permanent staff member (via Governance & Procedure committee) and would now be paid directly by City Council – Could be one more outstanding Hoople invoice to be paid but no more after that, except for a one-off ‘Agency Finder’s Fee’ to Hoople in final settlement.
* Item 530 - Appendix page 4 - City Costs (‘Seagull Contract’) – Asked if City Council could spend some of the money committed for this - Noted that contract was still running but none of money had yet been spent.
* Annual meetings attended with Herefordshire Council. Work was being done to alleviate problems associated with gulls. Recorded numbers of gull pairs had dropped.
* Recent meeting with Richard Ball, Herefordshire Council - Gull contract work covered egg removal - Land gulls were protected therefore, Councils could only remove eggs and/or nests.
* Cllr Rone also on board with gull problem and trying to get gull-proof refuse bags for local businesses - Gull contract would not solve all the problems but, no further growth expected in breeding of young which had reached its peak.
* Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP) also experimenting with different collection times for bin bags to alleviate weekend refuse problems - Most problems occurred with resident’s refuse, particularly those with nowhere to store their bins which resulted in refuse bags having to be put out on the streets.
* Item 515 - Appendix page 4 - City Costs (‘Street Scene’) - Litter bins recently requested for Churchill Gardens - Asked if Council could offer more help with litter bins and cleaning from this underspent budget to use the money well.
* Litter bins often full of empty coffee cups which take up a lot of space – An experimental area in the City for constantly overflowing bins where trying out ‘big belly’ bins - Suggested that costs for these could come out of the Street Scene budget.
* As a member of both Council’s, a member had put in a formal complaint to BBLP - Challenged them for not doing what’s in their basic contract, i.e. ensure that litter bins were regularly emptied - Frustrated that bins on Belmont Road still regularly overflowed – Concern expressed that BBLP didn’t appear to have resources to cope when staff were on annual leave – Felt that the service was going downhill - Residents and tourists neither expected nor wanted to see so much litter – Member was waiting for a response from BBLP.
* Existing bins in Churchill Gardens - Not being emptied, in poor state and falling apart.
* Deputy Town Clerk received an email today - Complaints about state of footpath up to the Rowing Club – Rubbish bins overflowing & stench, general overgrowth of pathways.
* Bins not being emptied - Also leads to vandalism, potential to set alight.
* Litter problems – Main issues are gulls and overflowing bins.
* Need to reach agreement with HC to empty bins more frequently.
* Request that City Council write to BBLP, copy to Richard Ball, HC – More strongly worded letter asking that something be done about litter – Currently not acceptable – Is their remit and responsibility to empty bins, pick up litter.
* Local authority legally has a duty of care – High cost of approx. £1 to £1.5 million per year for the service.
* Five local volunteers on litter picking - Feel despondent, don’t want to continue – Frustrated that despite their efforts bins don’t get emptied.
* Some ward residents persuaded not to write to the Hereford Times on litter issue – Fear that information could be used to publicise City Council in negative light.

Members noted the report.

**FP2017/2018.34 TIC SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT**

Members received the report and recommendations of the Town Clerk and put forward their comments and questions to the Deputy Town Clerk, as follows:

* Emphasis on project providing opportunity for Council to be real partners with Rural Concierge/Liz Hill – to help guide and direct how a TIC progresses.
* If Council agreed an SLA with RC – rather than just contributing the start-up costs – would enable Council to have an influence in the TIC.
* Funding is a ‘no brainer’ – City Council needs to show goodwill to RC and reciprocate – Happy to give £5,000 start-up costs and let RC spend it wisely to take a TIC forward.
* Confident that Liz Hill is capable of doing the job - She needs the financial support - City Council should go with it.
* Happy to propose Clerk’s recommendation 2.1 – Unsure about recommendation 2.2 without seeing draft SLA – Deputy Town Clerk responded that attached to Clerk’s report was detailed SLA from Liz Hill – Total costs per year £20,000.
* The need to safeguard taxpayers – Not prepared to commit to £15,000 funding for this year and £20,000 thereafter until can see what RC are doing and producing.
* Council originally budgeted £60,000 – one member strongly objected to that amount at the time.
* Actual sum previously agreed was £80,000 – If Council want TIC to succeed, we need to support it now – not allow it to limp along on shoestring budget – Council would monitor as it goes to determine if TIC was succeeding and if worth continuing to fund.
* Deputy Town Clerk advised that Council could consider awarding funds in two parts - with a six-monthly report or a full annual report before releasing next year’s funding.
* Any equipment purchased with City Council funding under SLA must be identified for return to CC, should the TIC default.
* RC operated by one individual - What happens if the TIC fails? - Must be a six or twelve-monthly clause included with commitment of City Council funding to give assurance that TIC is moving along successfully.
* RC presented at last Council meeting 20/06/17 - Some members missed presentation – Liz Hill had worked very hard on broadening RC into an unofficial TIC – She fully intends to seek crowd funding, not just approaching City Council to fund RC year on year.
* City Council would need to see that RC are sustainable in future years - Incorporate clauses to set a cut-off point for funding – Any money not used would be returned to CC.
* Hereford must have a TIC to get back on map for tourism – City Council cannot run it ourselves so must show RC our support for it.
* Want to see a business plan from Liz Hill to show monthly expenditure - Maybe business plan could be done annually over 3 years - Include degree of merchandising if TIC is profitable.
* Deputy Town Clerk suggested that if members decide to go with SLA – commit to stating they wish to see a full annual report from LH – to include breakdown of money spent plus the plan and vision for following year to be put before members for approval.
* City Council funding could be granted over a three-year period - to be reviewed after then.
* Request for the first report on funding to be six-monthly.
* Suggestion that Council be provided with draft document to talk through at the next Finance & Policy meeting.

Cllr Edwards stated he would second recommendation 2.1, i.e. Council to meet the £5,000 start-up costs for the TIC but felt worried about the RC singular proprietor ‘falling by the wayside’ if Council pledged £20,000 and the project did not work.

Cllr Stevens stated that he was happy to support the release of £20,000 annual cost in two tranches of £10,000.

Cllr Nicholls added that Liz Hill has a contingency plan and the real issue would be the beginning of the tourist season in April next year, therefore, Council should ensure that all is in place for Rural Concierge to be ready for that.

It was proposed by Cllr Wilcox, seconded by Cllr Edwards and unanimously

**RESOLVED:**

**2.1 - That Committee supports the contribution of £5,000.00 start-up costs to Rural Concierge to set up a Tourist Information Centre in the Butter Market.**

**2.2 – That a Service Level Agreement with Rural Concierge be put forward for discussion at the next Finance & Policy Committee meeting with a view to including a six-monthly clause in the funding grant.**

**FP2017/2018.35 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday 5TH September 2017 at 6 PM

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 7.13pm