**HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL**

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

**Tuesday 21st November 2017**

**PRESENT:** Cllrs Boulter, Edwards, Hey, Lloyd-Hayes, Stevens (Chairman) Tawn (Vice Chairman) and Wilcox.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Steve Kerry - Town Clerk, Lesley Robinson - Administration, Finance and Information Officer and Derek Kemp - DCK Accounting Solutions.

**FP2017/18.56 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Dykes and Rone. (Cllr Tawn advised he would arrive late).

**FP2017/18.57 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTES**

None

**FP2017/18.58 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

 None

**FP2017/18.59 MINUTES**

It was noted that the Minutes of the meeting of 17th October correctly recorded Councillor Dykes nominated Councillor Kenyon as substitutes, but incorrectly record Cllr Kenyon as having attended.

With this correction it was proposed by Councillor Edwards, seconded by Councillor Boulter and

**RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of 17th October 2017, as corrected, be confirmed as a true account and signed accordingly by the Chairman.**

**FP2017/18.60 SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS**

The Clerk reported that pressure of work on the Council’s accountants had precluded getting this report ready with the agenda despatch. However, the Council’s Administration, Finance and Information Officer was now trained up to deliver these reports in house. He also asked members to note that the grant payment to Hereford in Bloom was shown in two stages as Community Development Cttee had approved a partial release pending further information which had been subsequently delivered.

In answer to questions from members the following clarifications were provided:

The apparently high price for the step stool was the result of the first line of the expenditure showing on the report, it had been a part of a larger order.

The Council’s accounting system and banking arrangements would enable a change to BACS for payment, which would present some advantages, but also some potential difficulties. The Clerk will look into this further with support from DCK to see if it would be cost effective given the Council’s current volume of payments.

The Schedule was noted by the Committee.

**FP2017/18.61 BANK RECONCILIATIONS**

As with the schedule, the Clerk explained that these were only just printed and the member who checks them against the bank statements had not had the opportunity to do this. The reconciliations for October would be held over and presented with the November and December ones at the January meeting.

**FP2017/18.62 REVENUE BUDGET 2018/2019**

The Chairman proposed to take this item ahead of other business as Cllr Tawn, who was running late, wished to be able to speak on the following item under confidential business. This was agreed.

Cllr Lloyd-Hayes asked for thanks to be recorded to the Clerk for completing the budget during a period of high pressure with some staff missing.

In introducing the report, the Clerk reminded the Committee of their previous decision to increase the precept by 3% to account for inflation. This has been reflected in the figures, which had been amended since agenda despatch to show the TC grant as a recurring item. This had not affected the final budget figures as this had been done by adjusting contributions to reserves. Members raised a number of points of detail as listed below.

The budget to cover for agency staff is to provide cover for the April-June period in the Mayor’s office as the Secretary post is now reduced to part-time. It might be paid to existing staff working additional hours or to an extra person brought in for specific tasks.

The tax base calculation is not expected before mid-December, so this budget will be reported to Council for approval in January, well within the statutory deadline. By then the effects of Community Development Committee’s decision to close the two public toilets and Governance and Procedures Committee’s decision to reduce the Mayor’s office staffing level will have been worked through into amended figures.

Insurance costs have risen, partly due to taking on a newer Mayor’s car which warrants fully comprehensive cover and the roadshow vehicle.

Election costs are thought to be up to date now apart from the recent Hinton and Hunderton by-election.

Councillor Tawn entered the meeting at 6.15 pm.

A considerable discussion took place around the £8,000 per annum paid under Three Choirs which is retained and paid when the festival is in Hereford as a £24,000 grant. Members were very critical of the decision to delete the “Gathering Wave” free event from the programme, and the lack of a replacement event elsewhere. The Clerk reported that he is meeting the organisers of Three Choirs on 22nd November to voice members’ concerns, and he would report to Council as soon as possible on the outcome. This might result in a decision to reduce the grant, but meanwhile no proposal was made to change the budget, which could be reassigned to support other music events if funding for Three Choirs was reduced. The Clerk was asked to remind the organisers of the success of the Shining Choir from Palestine when it had performed and the value of this multi-cultural choir bridging the gap between Palestinian and Israeli children.

Some discussion took place about the implications of taking over the Town Hall, but it was noted that this is covered in the confidential report later on this agenda. This was however noted as major budget pressure to be borne in mind.

On allotments it was noted that members are unhappy with the lack of progress on the lease, and the Clerk was asked to encourage HALGS to move forward on this as soon as possible and to settle their dispute with one of their members as amicably and promptly as possible as impending or threatened litigation might delay matters still further.

If an extra grass cut is organised to supplement Herefordshire Council’s programme this will be funded form Open Spaces, it will not be a budget line on its own.

Noted that the three-year contract for gull control is up for renewal this year and that a meeting is taking place on Friday this week to review outcomes and discuss possible changes to improve control. This might have implications beyond the current level of expenditure.

The Christmas lights switch on had been technically a complete success with a very good crowd, but it was noted that some confusion or missing communication seemed to have arisen in the Mayor’s office – possibly affected by the abrupt departure of a staff member leaving incomplete notes.

The community grants budget shows expenditure of £52,000 so far, suggesting that the budget figure is about right.

CCTV remains an area of concern with both the West Mercia Police and Herefordshire Council committing only one year at a time. Recent reported cuts had not been as severe as first feared and the £9,000 reduction from the Police could be handled with fairly limited changes to monitoring hours, without detriment to the most sensitive times of the week.

Plynlimon Trust continue to provide a minibus through Dial-a-Ride following the cessation to local bus services and this remains well subscribed. In the past the Committee had set a review threshold of £4-50 per journey, at current levels of use it was running at around £2-50 per journey most months.

The budget for toilets was drafted before the decision to close our two units. This will be reviewed before the matter is reported to Council.

The Youth Council now has a budget of £3,000 shown as a separate line.

The civic apparel is not all in good order and the Clerk and Mayor’s Officer will do a stock take to see what needs to be repaired or replaced. If this carries over into the next financial year it may affect the budget.

There is an item under Governance and Procedures for “recoveries” showing income, no-one knows what it is for. The Clerk and Mr Kemp will investigate and report back.

There was a discussion on training for members in various areas and it was noted that when venues are advertised it tends to be those who need it most who are least likely to come forward. As a matter for all members this was referred to full Council for further discussion.

The City Council hires a Custodian for evening meetings, this is shown as a room hire charge. We do not pay to park the Mayor’s car in the car park day to day, it is covered by a permit.

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

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Committee affirms the 3% increase in the Council’s budget to reflect current inflation and notes that this will lead to a Band D tax level of £51-62, subject to any change in the tax base.**

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

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Committee recommends this budget to full Council, but that Council will not be asked to give final approval until the tax base figures are released by Herefordshire Council, so all relevant information is available to full Council.**

After discussion of the confidential item below it was further proposed by Councillor Stevens, seconded by Councillor Tawn and

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Committee recommends an additional 5% increase to cover anticipated costs and risks associated with the transfer of the Town Hall from Herefordshire Council to the City Council during the financial year covered by this budget.**

Noting his position of Vice Chairman of the Herefordshire Council, Councillor Edwards asked for his abstention on this matter to be noted.

**FP2017/18.63 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

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

**RESOLVED:**

**To exclude the press and public in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 s1(2) to enable discussion of the Council’s position regarding negotiations with Herefordshire Council on matters that would lead to a legal agreement, and of staffing implications of proposals and that Mr Kemp be invited to stay to offer professional advice on financial implications.**

**FP2017/18.64 CONFIDENTIAL ITEM - KEY PROJECTS UPDATE**

The Clerk presented a confidential report on recent discussions with Geoff Hughes and Andrew Lovegrove of Herefordshire Council regarding the Town Hall.

In confidential discussion the following points were noted :

Possible moves of Herefordshire services and the implications for the City Council’s use of the building.

Changes to the Museum and Archive Services might give rise to opportunities to display artefacts at the Town Hall.

The importance of retaining the Town Hall as the civic hub of the City.

Works to the Town Hall frontage are due to start in early April with an approximate eight weeks completion.

Car parking arrangements remain under discussion.

A full survey and list of agreed wants of repair and replacement will be required before a final decision can be made.

Overage needs to be resolved satisfactorily.

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

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Committee indicates its continued interest in taking over the freehold of the Town Hall main building and the car park and authorises the Town Clerk to continue to discuss with Herefordshire Council a proposed transfer of the asset back to the City.**

**That in ongoing discussion with officers and/or members of Herefordshire Council the Clerk be joined by Councillor Stevens with Councillor Hey as reserve.**

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

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Committee adds a further 5% to the budget proposals presented elsewhere on this agenda to enable the Council to consider taking over the Town Hall without excessive calls on the reserves and to spread the impact on the Council Tax over more than one year.**

As Vice-Chairman of the Herefordshire Council, Councillor Edwards asked for his abstention on these resolutions to be noted.

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

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Committee receives further reports as a standing item as the detailed issues listed above are resolved and further progress is made with the survey and dates for major works, including the development of a business plan including full risk and financial analysis and comprehensive survey reports.**

**FP2017/18.65 READMISSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

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

**RESOLVED:**

**That the press and public be readmitted to the meeting.**

**FP2017/18.66 ST JOHN’S DONATION**

The Clerk presented a report reminding members of the previous practice of making a donation to the St John’s Ambulance for their invaluable support to the Remembrance Day service.

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

**RESOLVED:**

**That a letter of thanks and a donation of £250-00 be sent to the St John’s Ambulance to express the Council’s ongoing appreciation of their support.**

**FP2017/18.67 ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

Key projects now a standing item.

 City walls will be included as soon as there is any new information.

**FP2017/18.68 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be on Tuesday 16th January 2018 at 6 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.50 pm

Signed …………………………………………………………………………………….

Date ……………………………………………………………………………………….