**HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL**

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

**The Committee Room, City Council Offices, Town Hall Hereford**

**Tuesday 16th January 2018 at 6.00 pm**

**PRESENT:** Cllr Boulter, Dykes, Edwards, Lloyd-Hayes, Stevens (Chairman) and Tawn (Vice Chairman).

**NOT PRESENT:** Cllr Rone.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Steve Kerry – Town Clerk, Lesley Robinson – Admin, Finance and Information Officer.

**FP2017/18.69 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Hey, Nicholls and Wilcox.

**FP2017/18.70 APPPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTES**

None

**FP2017/18.71 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

**FP2017/18.72 MINUTES**

The Town Clerk advised members that the Minutes of the meeting held on 21st November 2017 were in two parts, i.e. confidential and open, the open section covering an abridged version of confidential item FP2017/18.64 regarding the Town Hall key project update.

This was noted and it was proposed by Cllr Edwards, seconded by Cllr Dykes and

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Minutes of the Finance & Policy Committee meeting of 21st November 2017 be confirmed as a true record and signed accordingly by the Chairman.**

**FP2017/18.73 SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS**

Members received the schedule of payments made up to 30/11/17, (the schedule for 31/12/17 would follow).

There were two queries from members and in response, the Town Clerk provided the following clarifications:

Cheque Ref 001015, Herefordshire Council – Staff parking permits – Prices had seemed steep, however, the amount was misleading due to the way invoices had been configured and permit prices had not been increased.

Cheque Ref 001010, Balfour Beatty Living Places – The Christmas Lights maintenance charge was for putting up fencing for the switch on event and cleaning up afterwards.

The Schedule was noted by members.

**FP2017/18.74 BANK RECONCILIATION**

Members received the reconciliation of the Council’s bank accounts up to 30/11/17 (the reconciliation for 31/12/17 would follow).

The Town Clerk reported that Cllr Wilcox had signed off the reconciliation for November up to December but, had not yet seen the one for December.

There were no queries and members noted the reconciliation.

**FP2017/18.75 QUARTERLY FINANCIAL REPORT OF THE COUNCIL’S INCOME AND EXPENDITURE TO 31 DECEMBER 2017**

The Clerk explained that holding a meeting so soon after the quarter end and in a week with a bank holiday in the preparation period had strained resources. The calendar would be reviewed to allow more time between the quarter end dates and committee dates in future. Members had received a summary of the Council’s financial position as at December 31st, the third quarter of the year. The key figure was the summary of expenditure, all income was now received. Expenditure was running just below 75% of budget and the prediction was that the Council would end the year broadly on budget, with no significant deficit or surplus.

We are still carrying very substantial reserves and could therefore make adjustments if required.

Members had no queries and noted the schedule.

**FP2017/18.76 KEY PROJECTS UPDATE**

Members received a brief oral report from the Town Clerk as follows:

Town Hall Museum – The contract is going ahead to have display cabinets installed for housing the civic treasures and the alarm security ‘fogging device’ is now in place, and working although, at test level, the alarm’s fogging device would not be triggered. Urgent repairs are also needed to the ground floor exhibition space where there is leakage on down pipes. There has been no response, as yet, from Herefordshire Council.

Garage door – The long saga is almost over with the contractor due to start work soon on installation of a new garage door – The quote for £2,600 covers secure fixings following asbestos removal from ceiling and replacement of whole door.

City Walls – There had been lots of interest, however, no-one had yet come forward offering any money for this project and a lead agency needs to be agreed, which could be The Hereford BID. A member expressed that authority would be needed to net in private owners and urge them to do repairs as per listed buildings and felt City Council should be strongly lobbying for that. The Town Clerk responded that City Council has no coercive power to do so and could only seek to persuade. It was suggested that this project be introduced as a policy in the Hereford Area Plan, as an immediate need, which the Town Clerk agreed to explore and it was highlighted that the City Wall at St Nicholas Gate was particularly eroded with some huge cracks.

**FP2017/18.77 BUDGET SETTING PROCESS 2018/19**

Members received a brief oral report from the Town Clerk concerning the tax base announcement by Herefordshire Council, and implications for the tax level to be proposed to Council in accordance with the Committee’s previous decisions.

The Clerk reminded members that at the last meeting it was agreed to affirm the 3% increase in the Council’s budget, subject to any change in the tax base. Now that the tax base calculation figure had been received from Herefordshire Council, this means an 8% budget increase, which would actually cost 7.1% on Council Tax payers and, as a comparison, he added that two market towns in the County would be putting increases of around 18-20%. With the tax base figures released from Herefordshire Council, this budget would be recommended to full Council to give final approval at the meeting on 30th January 2018.

Members had no questions or comments and were happy with the existing proposals. Cllr Edwards suggested that, a press release be produced on the City Council Parish Precept 2018/2019, in advance of and for consideration at the next Council meeting at the end of the month, which would inform the public, i.e. the sum per week for the average Band D tax payer and to list City Council’s achievements, thereby giving out a positive message and make this a good news story from the beginning. The Town Clerk agreed to prepare a draft press release for members consideration at next Council on 30th January 2018.

**FP2017/18.78 SKATE PARK SCULPTURES – PROPOSAL FROM HEREFORD COLLEGE OF ARTS**

Members considered the proposal for implementation of the Council’s project to install sculptures on plinths at the Holmer Skate Park.

The Chairman reported that this week had brought about a problem with the plinths in that funding, which was to be provided via Alan Griffiths, was going to be pulled due to the company being taken over by Tarmac, being part of Carillion who had just gone into liquidation. Despite this unfortunate event being bad timing, City Council would not give up on the project and were due to hold a meeting at the Racecourse next Monday.

 A member advised that some advertising of the Skate Park had been included on boxes at the Racecourse, to make it visible to visiting tourists and appeal to families with teenagers.

Members welcomed the College of Arts’ proposed ‘Homefront’ design aspect for the sculptures and were very supportive.

**FP2017/18.79 WEBSITE REBUILD**

Members considered a proposal for a revamping of the City Council website, with an alternative to create a completely new website if the Committee preferred. The Town Clerk reported that both proposals included continuing support and there was a general need to update our website periodically. The quotes were from a local company, Like Radio Limited, who has a good track record of delivering and sustaining the service with good after-support and they have come up with an adaptation of our current website with no need to close it down, being considerably cheaper than the current one and offering ongoing maintenance and training. The Deputy Town Clerk had done all the research on this and is very happy with this quote, therefore a complete new website was not being recommended as it would be far more expensive.

The Chairman asked members for their comments and questions and to consider the options to either re-build the existing website or create a brand new one.

A member questioned the option for integration of YouTube onto the City Council website querying what the cost and benefits might be. In response, the Town Clerk advised that the YouTube option could be utilised for City Council civic events such as Mayor-Making and it could be beneficial to have this facility added now to enable City Council to develop its use later on. It was confirmed that the hosting fee was annual and that the Deputy Town Clerk and our Administration & Information Officer for social media had worked together on this proposal and were confident with the option of the website re-build.

Members agreed they would like to see the website re-build option go ahead first with ongoing support and to monitor the service and how the providing company operates.

The Chairman asked members to vote. All were in favour of the proposal and it was unanimously

**RESOLVED:**

**That Like Radio Limited be appointed to rebuild and update City Council’s current website with the inclusion of a service level agreement for ongoing support and training.**

**FP2017/18.80 ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Town Clerk clarified that Gull Management and Allotments Leasing were both items which were included on the agenda for next week’s meeting of Community Development Committee.

Cllr Edwards requested that City Council follow up with Herefordshire Council on devolution of services to get some formal arrangement in place and ascertain exactly what City Council would be taking on throughout the City. He expressed frustration that, despite previous attempts, this issue had not been resolved so far, whilst other Councils had made progress on similar issues and moved ahead. The Town Clerk responded that in previous situations, Ward Budgets were being used and, although they were designed to be flexible, it was felt they were becoming too flexible and subsequently reducing controls making them weak, which leaves the Town Clerk in a vulnerable position being answerable for budgets. He added that City Council would again approach Herefordshire Council to seek proper information and clarity on this.

Items were then identified for future meetings of Finance and Policy Committee as:

* Devolution of Services from Herefordshire Council
* City Walls
* Ward Budgets

**FP2017/18.81 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday 20th February 2018 at 6 pm

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 18.34pm.

Signed ……………………………………………………………………..

Dated ……………………………………………………………………….