**HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL**

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

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

**Tuesday 20th February 2018 at 6.00 pm**

**PRESENT:** The Right Worshipful the Mayor and Councillors Stevens, Edwards, Boulter, Tawn and Wilcox

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Steve Kerry Town Clerk, Tracy Morriss Deputy Clerk, Lesley Robinson Administration, Finance and Information Officer

**FP2017/18.82 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were noted from Councillors Hey, Lloyd-Hayes, Dykes and from Councillor Wilcox for late arrival.

**FP2017/18.83 APPPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTES**

None

**FP2017/18.84 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

**FP2017/18.85 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

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

**Resolved**

**That the minutes of the meeting of 16th January be agreed as an accurate record.**

**FP2017/18.86 SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS**

The schedule of payments made since the last meeting was presented.

Councillor Tawn asked for details of the payment to Autoservices, The Clerk undertook to supply these in writing after the meeting.

Councillor Stevens asked what the payment of £208-00 on the procurement card to Herefordshire Council was for, the Clerk confirmed it was for a building control fee for works to the garage door. Councillor Edwards stated it was good to see that project completed.

The schedule of payments was noted.

**FP2017/18.87 BANK RECONCILIATIONS**

Bank reconciliations up to 31st January were presented. The Clerk confirmed that Councillor Wilcox had checked and signed the originals after the agenda was despatched.

It was confirmed that after the closure of accounts the Committee will determine if any additional sums can be moved to the higher interest bearing Local Authorities Property Fund (CCLA).

It was noted that there is no news yet on Herefordshire Council’s application for HLF funding to carry out repairs to the Town Hall.

The reconciliations were noted.

**FP2017/18.88 INTERIM INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2017/18**

The Clerk presented the half year report of the internal auditor and was pleased to report that it was an unqualified report, that is the auditor had not found any items which he felt he ought to draw to the Committee’s attention for action.

Councillor Edwards stated that it was a privilege to be a member of a Council that gets this right and that it was a credit to the Clerk and the whole team that through a period of considerable change following the departure of the Finance Officer standards of financial management had been so well maintained. Councillor Stevens echoed this and asked for it to be noted that he was particularly impressed with the section on investments.

**FP2017.1/18.89 KEY PROJECTS UPDATE**

The Clerk presented an update on the key projects being overseen by the Committee.

City Walls now has a home in that it is part of the wider Great Places initiative which has several interested parties involved. He and Councillors Tawn and Stevens had been invited to a meeting which was hoped would kick start this by drawing people with funds, or access to funds, and the will to take action together.

On the civic museum, this is going ahead well with an official opening planned for 10th March. Work was being done to investigate the possibility of bringing the remaining charters into the museum instead of providing a new cabinet for the vault. Further details would be reported when known. Councillor Stevens confirmed he thinks the new layout and cabinets look fantastic. Discussion followed about whether to refer to the civic museum or the heritage suite, the name suggested by the Youth Council. The idea of a suite reflected the fact that there was more than one room, and that it may be possible to use the stairs to display former Mayor’s pictures and other memorabilia to expand the display of collected items throughout the public areas of the building. Some exhibits could be QR coded. It was decided that the whole Town Hall will increasingly be a civic museum as well as a working base for the City Council.

On the question of the asset transfer of the Town Hall, the Clerk apologised that he had not attached the detailed quotation from Hook Mason to the agenda papers. It was circulated at the meeting. Cllr Wilcox objected to being asked to approve an item of this size without prior circulation of the details. The Clerk explained that it had taken several months to get the quote because of the amount of preparatory work needed to verify it, and that as it was well below the estimated cost suggested at the start of the project and was from a firm with an outstanding reputation for the management of heritage buildings he was happy to recommend it to members for approval, waiving the financial regulations and taking the single quotation. Councillor Tawn suggested that as Hook Mason were well known for managing heritage building projects there was little risk to the Council of accepting a single quotation, especially as this appeared to be for a very reasonable price. Councillor Edwards accepted there was an issue about taking a single quote but felt that Hook Mason were a reliable supplier of this type of service and we had been pressing for some time for movement on this issue.

In answer to a question the Clerk confirmed that seeking further quotations would involve going out of the county for specialist supplier and could take several months.

Councillor Edwards proposed, Councillor Tawn seconded and it was

**Resolved**

**That the quotation received from Hook Mason for £11,440 be accepted and that financial regulations be waived to allow a single quotation to be accepted.**

Four members voted in favour, two abstained, none against.

The Clerk reported the proposal to purchase a wall mounted TV screen for the ground floor exhibition room as an addition to the facilities offered there for various exhibitions and displays. The use of the screen for the roadshow had been beneficial for that purpose, although the proposed screen for the Town Hall would not be interactive. There was some discussion of an offer of a donation of a second-hand screen. This would need to be fully up to specification and future proofed if it was to be of use.

After some discussion of the details of the specification and suggestion that we seek the advice of our IT consultant before finally committing to a purchase.

It was proposed by Councillor Stevens, seconded Councillor Tawn and

**Resolved**

**That a large TV screen be purchased for the ground floor exhibition room and installed on a wall mounting, at a cost of not more than £2,000. Officers will check if a free or discounted offer of second-hand equipment would be suitable before committing to a new purchase.**

It was noted that damp and leakages had again caused problems in the exhibition room despite earlier repairs and the same had occurred again in the Mayor’s Parlour. The Clerk would chase up both another patch report to ensure all looks well for the 10th March and a permanent resolution which will almost certainly require repairs to both external rain water pipes and defective brick and stone work.

Councillor Stevens proposed, Councillor Tawn seconded and it was

**Resolved**

**That the Committee notes the information regarding the City Walls.**

**That the Committee notes the progress regarding the heritage suite and civic museum, warmly welcomes the participation of the Guild of Guides and notes the date for a civic opening of the new collection.**

**FP2017/18.90 IT UPGRADES**

The Clerk presented the advice of the Council’s IT consultant as reported by the Town Clerk.

The Deputy Clerk explained the reasons for the increased cost of the support cover, emphasising the improved service now available from additional staff and the benefits of the new equipment being requested, including better back up, a linkage between the server, mains and battery which would give real time alerts of any battery deficiency which could be remedied before it was needed and better protection against power disruption. It was noted that the provider has delivered a very high quality service to the Council for several years and has been extremely helpful in responding to problems, including computer abuse by a former member of staff which has disrupted the changeover to 365.

Members queried the cost increase and whether it was time to re-test the market as other providers are available. Informal research had indicated that companies offering similar services were likely to be considerably more expensive but there was no reason why this could not be firmed up into a market test in the course of the next financial year for a decision to be made earlier in the process about provision from April 2019 onwards.

Councillor Stevens proposed, Councillor Edwards seconded and it was

**Resolved**

**That the Committee authorises the Clerk to purchase the items listed to improve disaster recovery and future proofing at a cost of £1,545 exc VAT.**

**That the Committee authorises the Clerk to extend the Council’s contract with John Finch for ongoing support for 2018/19 at a price of £2,950 exc VAT**

**That competitive quotes be obtained for the ongoing support contract from April 2019.**

**FP2011/18.91 ALLOTMENTS LONG LEASE**

The Clerk presented a report on the issue of the allotments lease and the importance of moving this forward. Messrs Watkins and Rosser from the Hereford Allotments and Leisure Gardens Society introduced themselves and explained their progress with officers at Herefordshire Council to develop a revised constitution and structure for the Society as well as progressing with a long lease that would enable them to lever in external funding.

The Society also commented that they had not had an increase in the base rate for several years, during some of that time inflation had been very low but costs we rerising and they asked if this could be reviewed. The Clerk responded that the Council had put a 3% inflation uplift into the budget for next year and it would be reasonable to pass that on to HALGs in their grant if members wished to do so.

It was agreed that if the lease was now progressing the precise identification of boundaries and the resolution of any areas of unclarity would now be brought forward. In particular the issue of the Holmer allotment retaining wall would be resolved, the City Council being clear that it is the property of either Herefordshire Council or Highways England and does not form part of the allotment according to the site drawings that were done when the allotment transferred back to the City Council. The Rockfield title issue also needs to be resolved.

It was also determined that it was important to progress the lease without becoming embroiled in the dispute raised by one of the tenants, which had been partly resolved by a decision of the Community Development Committee. Any queries raised by that tenant about the constitutional arrangements within HALGS would be picked up in the review of constitutional arrangements and reported to the Committee.

Members expressed the view that the delay had been unfortunate and that the view expressed by one councillor about walking away from the Rockfield site entirely had never been endorsed by a Committee and should never have been taken as the views of the Council as a whole.

As the lease is brought towards a conclusion issues of the ongoing management of the pest control and grounds maintenance contracts would be included as had been previously agreed by the Committee.

It was proposed by the Chairman that the recommendations be voted on as amendments had been discussed individually.

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

**Resolved**

**That the Committee affirms its determination to resolve the issue of a long lease and thanks the Committee of HALGS for their confirmation of an agreement to proceed with this.**

**That work should proceed to have a draft lease ready for approval by the HALGS AGM in 2019 and for approval by Council to allow for the new arrangements to be in place by 1st April 2019.**

**That Councillors Stevens and Tawn be nominated to work with the Clerk on negotiating the lease terms.**

**That the HALGS grant be increased by 3% in 2018/19 to reflect inflation.**

**That any final lease draft will be referred to full Council for approval and sealing.**

**That the Committee will receive further updates on press on this matter.**

**FP2017/18.92** **WARD BUDGETS**

The Clerk reminded the Committee of the history of ward budgets which had started when all but one ward was multi-member to avoid every item of expenditure being brought to Committee. All items were in any case reported in schedules of payments to Finance Committee and this would continue so there was no reduction in the ability of members to scrutinise expenditure. The issue was the lack of clarity about what ward budgets were for and how they should be spent, and the widely differing needs of each ward which meant an allocation of funds based on population had no real validity.

Having tried several versions of ward budgets, the Clerk was recommending to Council that they be replaced with a simple delegation of authority to the Clerk and in his absence the Deputy Clerk to approve items up to £500-00 from the street scene or parks and open spaces budgets that met certain criteria.

Two officers had met with the Chairmen of this Committee and Community Development and the criteria that had emerged were that

Items must be of community benefit,

Items must be non-movable (portable items such as mowers could be purchased through grants to the community groups who would use them)

Ongoing needs like fuel for grounds maintenance should be covered by service level agreements and grants

Items must be purchased by the Council using purchase orders, and all invoices addressed to the Council for payment

Members requesting items for purchase under delegated authority must do so by email and state the community benefit to be achieved.

This route will not be used to supplement programmes or projects that are already subject to a Council grant.

No payments will be made unless they have been previously authorised by a grant awarded by Committee or under a delegated decision of the Town Clerk”.

The criteria will be brought to the attention of the whole Council to ensure all members are aware of the new process.

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

**Resolved**

**That the allocation of funds to ward budgets be returned to the street scene and parks and open spaces budgets.**

**That the Clerk, and in his absence the Deputy Clerk, be authorised to approve items up to £500-00 from these budgets that meet the criteria above.**

**That the new criteria be drawn to the attention of all members.**

**FP2017/18.93 LATE AND URGENT ITEM - SKATE PARK PLINTHS**

The Chairman explained that following the collapse of Carillion the contractor who had offered to build the plinths pro bono was now unable to do so. The sculptures were being prepared and the plinths must be ready. Due to this unforeseen circumstance he asked the Committee to accept a late and urgent item. This was agreed.

The Clerk presented his report noting that the contractor was Alun Griffiths not Alun Williams as stated. The cost of the two plinths was estimated at around £6,000 and that while the Chairman was continuing to attempt to source another pro bono supplier, and other staff and Councillors were making similar enquiries, it was necessary to have an agreement to provide funding in order to ensure this project would go ahead.

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

**Resolved**

**That the Clerk be authorised to commission the construction of two plinths to the specification required by the planning consent at Holmer Road skate park at a cost not exceeding £6,000.**

**FP2017/18.94 ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

None other than the routine items identified at this stage.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday 17th April 2018 at 6 pm

The meeting was closed at 20.25pm

Signed ……………………………………………………………………………………

Dated …………………………………………………………………………………….