

HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL
FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE 16th July 2019

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present : The Right Worshipful the Mayor, Cllr Kath Hey and Councillors Clive Butler, Cat Hornsey, Aubrey Oliver, Paul Stevens, Diana Toynbee and Brian Wilcox.

In attendance : Steve Kerry, Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

At the start of the meeting the Chair reminded all present of the fire evacuation procedure and confirmed that the new fixed recording system would be in operation for the first time.

FP2019/20.22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were noted from Councillor Susan Boulter

FP2019/20.23 SUBSTITUTIONS

None

FP2019/20.24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

FP2019/20.25 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Oliver had reported a couple of minor errors to the Clerk which did not materially affect the outcome of any matters. These would be written into the final version. It was then proposed by Councillor Wilcox, seconded by the Mayor and

RESOLVED That, subject to typographical corrections noted, the minutes were accepted as a true record and be signed accordingly by the Chair.

FP2019/20.26 SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS

Councillor Oliver raised the issue of the Council trading with Amazon and spoke of his concerns about the business practices and ethics of that company. It was agreed that Amazon should be used as a purchaser only if local suppliers had not been able to meet the need and as a last, rather than a first, resort.

Councillor Wilcox raised the amount spent on the Mayor-making dinner this year, making it clear he did not wish to make any personal criticism of the current Mayor but was concerned that the event was becoming expensive. The Chair noted that ex-Mayors often seem keen to reduce spending in subsequent years to their own time in office. The Mayor reported that she had not been able to use our regular caterer and a market search had meant that the lowest offer available was above the recommended level. The Clerk added that the Mayor had made savings in other areas, by not hiring tables, using house wine rather than a named brand and economising on table decorations. As a result, the event as a whole had been within the budget. The merits of buffet catering were discussed and the Mayor indicated that she favoured buffet style catering at most events but not at the most formal civic occasion of the year.

Councillor Butler queried the difference in VAT charged on two npower accounts and Councillor Oliver the overall cost of power for the Christmas lights. The Clerk explained that npower had missed the charging for 2017 and therefore we had two bills this year. The VAT anomaly would be investigated and members advised by email of the outcome.

The schedule of payments was noted subject to the Clerk following up the VAT. query.

FP2019/20.27 BANK RECONCILIATION

Members noted that the issue of the outgoing Mayor's personal expenses covering two financial years could cause a problem in accounting for items. A concentration of twinning events towards the end of the last financial year and into the next one meant that the current Mayor had inherited a twinning budget which was largely spent before she took office. The Mayor's expenses issue can be addressed by having a portion of each year's expenses budget set to "Former Mayor". The issue of twinning costs is to be the subject of a full review by Governance and Procedures Committee in October, as part of the business plan setting process, so that a clear statement is made of what we cover, and what we don't, and sufficient resources are allocated to fund our commitments.

FP2019/20.28 KEY PROJECTS UPDATE

The Clerk introduced the late report and explained that two key meetings had happened after the agenda despatch deadline, which was why the report been circulated at this meeting.

On the issue of the town hall, the Clerk was very concerned at the lack of records of works undertaken to a listed building and the apparent inability of Herefordshire's Property Service to respond to this query. Subject to expert legal advice he would be prepared to recommend the asset transfer if the County Conservation Officer was able to certify in writing that there were no works of remediation required to address any failures to complete works to listed building standards before the Council took over the asset. It would be preferable to have documents to show each item of work had been checked and was compliant.

Members noted with concern the lack of replies to other requests, notably the Clerk's email asking for confirmation of the completion of the works to the frontage and the technical specification of what was actually done.

The Clerk and Mayor reported their conversation with the new cabinet member Cllr Davies and her expressing willingness to move this issue forward. Councillor Wilcox asked that a formal delivery plan with an end date be agreed, which the Clerk said would be a marked improvement on the current position with Herefordshire Council.

On the issue of the allotments transfer, the Clerk reported that it had been very surprising to discover that the Holmer site was unregistered land, as it had been conveyanced at least five times and none of the solicitors involved, including two former Town Clerks, had spotted this. A review was taking place to make sure the Council had registered title to all the other sites. This was not yet a major problem but could cause a delay if all the sites were unregistered.

The Chair asked that the issue of weeds returning to the City Walls at Gunners Lane be taken up as a matter of urgency as last year's good work was being largely undone through neglect. There was still no response from Highways England on the grant application.

The Chair then read the new recommendation regarding the town hall and it was proposed by Councillor Stevens, seconded by the Mayor and

RESOLVED

That the Committee notes the report.

That the Committee confirms that, in addition to the previous requirements concerning wants of repair, an acceptable position regarding any future risks arising from works done to the town hall and its listed status must be resolved before an asset transfer can be agreed.

FP2019/20.29 ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

In addition to a further key projects update, the Clerk reported that he and the Chair had done a brief review of the reserves and how they were described and at the next meeting a proposal would be brought forward for more items to be described as general reserve and attributed reserves to be up to date and linked to current projects. At the same time the asset register would be updated and some old assets of no residual value would be removed. Councillor Stevens thanked Councillor Oliver for raising these matters when the accounts were reviewed at the last meeting.

FP2019/20.30 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 10th September 2019 at 6 pm at the Town Hall

Signed

Date