

HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING 21st January 2020

Present: The Right Worshipful the Mayor and Councillors Boulter, Butler, Dykes, Foxton, Hornsey, Hunt, Kenyon, Milln, Oliver, Powell, Stevens, Tillet, Tonybee, Tyler, and Williams

Attending: Steve Kerry Town Clerk and Tracy Morriss Deputy Town Clerk

C2019/20.67 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were noted from Councillors Andrews and Wilcox.

C2019/20.68 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were made at the start of the meeting.

C2019/20.69 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No members of the public were present

C2019/20.70 MINUTES

A previously noted spelling correction had been included in the copy for the Mayor to sign. There being no other corrections it was proposed by Councillor Milln, seconded by several members and

RESOLVED That the minutes of the meeting of 29th October 2019, as corrected, be agreed as an accurate record and signed accordingly by the Mayor.

C2019/20.71 BUDGET, PRECEPT AND COUNCIL TAX

The Clerk summed up the process of asking committees to set out objectives for a business plan, bringing that plan to Council for approval and then asking Finance and Policy Committee to work out in detail how to fund that business plan. This has resulted in a proposal to make a substantial draw on the accumulated reserves of the Council to fund asset and service transfers or partnership working with Herefordshire Council, and to have a 5% council tax increase. The favourable movement of the tax base had added to the value of that tax increase. The proposed services for activity by the City Council included, but were not limited to parks and open spaces, street cleaning and some elements of maintenance such as weed removal, enforcement, public toilets as well as a new events programme and a new Tourist Information Centre. In addition, in recent discussion it had been stated that if the Town Hall transfers to the City Council it is the intention of Herefordshire Council to remove their staff including the elections and registrars of births, deaths and marriages, and the Coroner's staff from the building. Together with the removal of the telephone and IT hub this would both add to the capital cost and reduce the revenue income of the City Council. It was therefore appropriate this year to budget for both a draw on the reserves and a tax increase. Drawing on the reserves was not a long-term option, and in future years it would be suggested that progressive tax increases set at modest levels would remove the need to make further reductions. It was important to retain

substantial reserves precisely so the Council could respond to initiatives like the new business plan without heavy costs falling on tax payers in a single year.

The Clerk also corrected a statement in the paper supporting this item, there had been in fact one tax increase in the last three years, not that this was the first one proposed for three years. He reminded the Council of the mandate given to him by the Finance and Policy Committee and confirmed that this budget met the mandate as stated.

In discussion, members noted that as had been the case in many previous years, the Council is again projecting to underspend its budget by March 2020. Noting that there was still some uncertainty about the final outcome, with some large grant applications due to be considered before the end of the financial year for example, it was still likely that the draw on the reserves proposed in this budget would be largely offset by a payment into reserves from the underspend this year. In this case several members challenged the assumption that a 5% increase was necessary to provide a balanced budget.

In answer to a specific question about the increase shown in administration, the Clerk explained that this was because the £150,000 budget for asset and service transfers had not been divided up between likely areas of spending, such as parks, street scene or the Town Hall. It had to go somewhere in the budget and until it was allocated it would be shown under administration.

In answer to a specific question about staffing costs the Clerk confirmed that these are spread across several areas of the budget and he would be able to provide that detail for the member both as a cash figure and a percentage of overall costs by email after the meeting.

The Clerk also confirmed that the underspend was projected and would only be finally confirmed when accounts were closed. In answer to a question the Clerk described the process by which Council makes a declaration tonight of its budget and precept requirement which he then passes on to Herefordshire Council as the billing authority, with responsibility for collecting the tax. It is not possible to await the outcome of talks with Herefordshire about service and asset transfers and set the budget. There is a timetable for declaring the Council Tax which must be met by a decision at this meeting, or very soon afterward by calling an additional extraordinary meeting, which was not something he would recommend except in an emergency.

It was also noted that the Finance and Policy Committee had considered the uncertainties around service and asset transfers, and the projected underspend this year in making their assessment. It was important to avoid putting undue pressure on the council tax in future years by not correctly balancing the use of reserves and an increase now. The Committee's assessment, with only one abstention, had been that a 5% increase now was reasonable and affordable, at only £2.67 per annum on the Band D demand.

Noting the uncertain timing of the completion of talks about asset and service transfers or partnership working, although it was confirmed that a meeting had taken place with Herefordshire's cabinet which had been extremely positive, and that the decision to take over the Town Hall was also awaiting clarification of a lengthy list of significant wants of repair identified by the Council's surveyors. A member suggested

that too much money was being put aside for potential future projects and this was why the Council had accumulated large underspends in the past.

Initially, Councillor Kenyon proposed reducing the increase to 2.6% to align with inflation, but the Clerk asked that it be revised to 2.5% to make it easier to calculate the effect of the change, no notice of the amendment having been given. It was then proposed by Councillor Kenyon, seconded by Councillor Tillett and with six members voting for, four against and five abstaining

RESOLVED That the proposed Council Tax increase be limited to 2.5%.

The Clerk applied this to the proposed budget and, subject to final checks taking into account the effect of a reduced budget on the tax base calculation announced the result as

A budget of £1,087,519

A precept requirement of £897,500 annum

A Band D council tax level of £54.67 an increase of 2.5%

C2019/20.72 LOCAL ELECTRICITY BILL

The Clerk reported that he had received the attached item as a proposal from the sponsors of the Bill which would allow local authorities to generate electricity and sell it to the grid. The item was presented to members to see if they wished to support this in principle, there was no specific proposal in the local area.

Members generally spoke in support of this idea and it was noted that Hull and York have introduced community power generation as examples and have seen both environmental and financial benefits.

It was proposed by Councillor Oliver, seconded by Councillor Tyler and with one vote against

RESOLVED That the Council supports the proposed local electricity bill in principle.

C2019/20.73 LARGE GRANT APPLICATIONS

As Chair of the Community Development Committee, Councillor Kenyon reported the discussion of that Committee on the grant application from Hereford River Carnival for £10,000. There being no questions from members

It was proposed by Councillor Kenyon, seconded by Councillor Stevens and unanimously

RESOLVED That the recommendation of the Community Development Committee that a large grant be made to the Hereford River Carnival of £10,000 is approved.

In the same role, Councillor Kenyon also reported the discussion of Community Development Committee on the grant application from United in the Community for £10,000. This had been recommended provided a business plan was provided to support it. A plan had been sent and the Clerk had notified members of its arrival. Several members had inspected the plan. The Mayor confirmed that she has read it and found it to be an impressive document.

It was proposed by Councillor Kenyon seconded by the Mayor and unanimously

RESOLVED That the recommendation of the Community Development Committee that a large grant be made to United in the Community of £10,000 is approved.

C2019/20.74 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

The Clerk explained that this item is for the information of members. It is up to each committee to agree the date of their next meeting and they have the discretion to either cancel a proposed meeting if there is no business or to call an extra one if business requires it. The schedule for council meetings was designed to ensure that each meeting would have at least one significant decision reserved for council to make.

The calendar was noted.

C2019/20.75 MAYOR-ELECT AND DEPUTY MAYOR-ELECT

Councillor Powell spoke in support of the current Deputy Mayor, Councillor Stevens, being nominated as Mayor-elect. He referred to Councillor Stevens going out of his way to support him as a new member and for his excellent initiative in promoting men's mental health in the City. Councillor Williams also spoke to support Councillor Stevens as Mayor elect noting his enthusiasm for promoting a significant new event in the City's calendar.

It was then proposed by Councillor Powell, seconded by Councillor Williams and

RESOLVED That Councillor Stevens be recognised as Mayor-elect for the Municipal Year 2020-2021.

Councillor Stevens thanked members for their support, recalled that his father had been a Liveried Man of the City for many years and said he was honoured to have been proposed as a future Mayor. He also briefly described the plans for Applefest, a new event to recognise the importance of the apple growing and cider making industries in Hereford.

Councillor Kenyon spoke to support Councillor Dykes as Deputy Mayor-elect noting his active contribution as a City Councillor since his election and his previous service in the armed forces. He believed he would be an effective and energetic Deputy Mayor. Councillor Stevens also spoke in support of Councillor Dykes and confirmed he would be confident of having good support in the Mayoral role with him as Deputy.

It was then proposed by Councillor Kenyon, seconded by Councillor Stevens and unanimously

RESOLVED That Councillor Dykes be recognised as Deputy Mayor-elect for the Municipal Year 2020-2021.

C2019/20.76 MAYOR'S CORRESPONDENCE

The Mayor reported that she had attended the first day of a two day course in mental health awareness today and it had been extremely informative and useful. She urged

all members to take up the opportunity of a one day course on 8th February arranged at the Town Hall.

A meeting had been held with cabinet members at Herefordshire with the Chairs of City Council Committees to move forward on the shared service and asset transfer plans. This had been very positive and options for future developments would be brought to appropriate meetings by the Clerk when plans were firmed up.

Ben Corbet starts as our new Tourist Information Centre Manager on Monday 27th January, bringing a lot of good ideas, and he will be an asset to the team.

The Commanding Officer of 18th Signals Regt has met the Mayor and has offered some artefacts for exhibition in the civic museum.

C2019/20.77 DRAFT MINUTES OF COMMITTEES

In the absence of the Chair Councillor Wilcox, the Vice Chair of Governance and Procedures Committee, Councillor Stevens presented the minutes of its meeting of 26th November 2019. In answer to a question it was confirmed that it would not be possible to organise a Blue Light Services Thanksgiving Service as originally proposed this year, but work would continue towards a service in the Spring of 2021.

Councillor Stevens presented the minutes of Finance and Policy Committee of 12th November. There were no questions.

Councillor Kenyon presented the minutes of the meetings of Community Development Committee on 18th and 19th November 2019. There were no questions.

In the absence of the Chair of Planning Committee Councillor Andrews, Councillor Tyler presented the minutes of the meetings of Planning Committee on 7th November and 5th December 2019 and 9th January 2020. There were no questions.

The draft minutes of Committee were noted.

C2019/20.78 REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

Municipal Charities - Councillor Boulter reported that there had been several meetings and a lunch at Belmont Lodge since the last Council meeting. There had been two Chairs in the last few months and a third one was due to be elected at the next meeting. A programme of repairs and updates had been completed on their properties. The Council has two seats on the Board and it was requested that the second seat be filled.

It was proposed by Councillor Kenyon seconded by the Mayor and unanimously

RESOLVED That Councillor Foxton be the second representative of the City Council on the Municipal Charities.

Market Towns Forum – No meetings to report although the Mayor reported that on Friday she will be discussing the future of the Forum with the County Chair and Town Mayors and a meeting may well come out of that.

Enterprise Zone Stakeholders Group – Councillor Hornsey reported that there is a meeting due tomorrow.

Three Choirs Festival – No meetings to report

Twining Association – Councillor Dykes reported he had had an informal chat with the chairman in his new role as the Council's representative to the Association and would be attending the AGM in two weeks' time.

City Tourism Group – Councillor Hornsey reported no meetings. The Mayor added that Christian Dangerfield had been in touch with her about an initiative to develop a newer and more effective partnership and that she, the Deputy Mayor and Deputy Town Clerk had been to a very useful event at the Green Dragon to launch this. A report would follow in due course.

Hereford in Bloom – No meetings to report

New University Working Group – Councillor Stevens reported that the first cohort of fifty students embarking on the full degree course would be arriving in March.

Close House – Cllr Boulter reported she is due to attend a meeting in a few days' time.

BID Group – Cllr Stevens reported that BID 2 commences in April after the successful ballot. Football was down in December which was not surprising in view of the awful weather for much of the run up to Christmas. It had however picked up well in January.

Hereford Area Plan – In the absence of the Chair of Planning Cttee the Clerk reported that this is in stasis while a decision is made on the southern link road and western bypass and these factors affect the appraisal of key development sites. Cllr Kenyon objected that the core strategy review could take years, the Clerk pointed out that this was true but the reappraisal of the roads was not a core strategy review in itself. Meanwhile he had written to Cllr Harrington to ask that progress be made on non-highway related issues. It was also noted that there was nothing to stop the City Council feeding ideas and suggestions into the Core Strategy review now, as well as during formal consultation.

Community Land Trust – Councillor Milln urged members to take advantage of the presentation available at the Library on this matter.

C2019/20.79 TOWN CLERK'S COMMUNICATION

The Clerk presented a written report of the Climate Change Working Group, now known as CLEANER.

The Gideons have left copies of the New Testament and Psalms which are available in the office for any member who wants one.

The Clerk also presented a written report of the meeting of the County Cabinet and the Committee Chairs.

C2019/20.80 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 3rd March 2020 at 6 pm

There being no further business the Mayor declared the meeting closed at 7:28 pm

Signed

Date