

## HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL

### EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING 14<sup>th</sup> May 2020

#### MINUTES OF MEETING

**NOTE** At the start of the meeting, the Mayor confirmed that this meeting is taking place under the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020. The meeting is being held virtually using Zoom technology. Those listed as present or attending are taking part in the meeting remotely and the meeting is being live streamed for public viewing.

**Present:** The Right Worshipful the Mayor Councillor Kath Hey and Councillors Andrews, Boulter, Butler, Dykes, Hornsey, Milln, Oliver, Powell, Stevens, Tillett, Toynbee, Wilcox and Williams.

**Attending:** Steve Kerry Town Clerk, Tracy Morriss Deputy Town Clerk, Roberta Morris speaking for Hereford Rotary

#### **C2020/21.01 VERIFICATION OF ACCESS TO THE MEETING FOR ALL MEMBERS**

The Deputy Clerk reported that she had contacted all members and assisted where necessary with establishing a Zoom connection. A visual check confirmed those present except Councillor Oliver who had an audio link. A sound check confirmed he could hear and be heard.

#### **C2020/21.02 VERIFICATION OF PUBLIC ACCESS**

The Deputy Clerk confirmed that the notice of the meeting had been issued and members of the public who wished to see the meeting could notify her and be admitted. Through this process Roberta Morris from Rotary was attending. In addition, the meeting was being live streamed. The legal requirements for public access in the regulations had been met.

#### **C2020/21.03 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The Clerk reported that he had received apologies from Councillors Foxtton, Hunt and Kenyon. He added that Councillor Kenyon had asked that members be told he would have had to declare an interest in the main item on the agenda and withdraw. (It was noted that Councillor Tyler was not present and the Deputy Clerk verified that this was not due to an access problem.)

#### **C2020/21.04 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None were made at the start of the meeting. Cllr Hornsey indicated that she may have to declare an interest and withdraw, depending on how the discussion went. She would advise the Mayor if this arose.

#### **C2020/21.05 APPLICATION FROM HEREFORD CITY ROTARY FOR FURTHER FUNDING TO SUPPORT THE DELIVERY OF FOOD**

The Mayor thanked Roberta Morris from Rotary for attending the meeting and asked if she had anything to add to the written submission which had been circulated to all members. Ms Morris highlighted two main points, firstly thanks to the City for the £7,000 donation which had helped them get started. They had only £5,000 of other

funding then so it had been vital. Their funding now stood at £22,000. By tomorrow 400 parcels would have been delivered. She added that City of Hereford Rotary is part of an international organisation and they had now been supported by Rotary UK in making an application for international funding for the Hereford programme. In an average year, the local club raised around £30,000 half of which was spent with local charities and half internationally.

After speaking to Herefordshire Council and HVOSS it had been clear that the local need was to link with the schools to support families whose children would normally get free school meals. With the abrupt closure of schools this had ceased. As the project developed Rotary became aware of the extent of deprivation in the City with wards in the top 10% in the country for deprivation indicators. The scheme was now to provide food parcels to families identified by schools and early years providers who were known to be in need. There had also been some support to veterans, some of 809 parcels now delivered 657 were to the schools listed families, the rest were early years and veterans. Around 43% have gone to the wards with the highest deprivation indicators. Only 11 deliveries have been outside the city boundaries.

After many initial difficulties, the government school meal voucher system is now up and running, although some issues with access remain. Rotary have decided not to extend to schools beyond the city but have offered to all city schools. All schools except Bishop's have responded. There are no expenses other than buying food for which donated funds are used. Support costs are met from individual donations from Rotarians.

A number of questions were asked by members and the questions and answers are summarised below.

**Q** Some £22,000 has been raised so far, has this all been committed or is there a sum yet to be spent?

**A** Only some £300 remains unspent. Rotary have strict accounting procedures and all the donated funds and all the expenditure is shown as a separate item.

**Q** Some schools are federations and include schools outside the city, and children who live outside who come into school how is that picked up?

**A** Rotary had a discussion with the Executive Head who covers Scudamore and stressed the need to identify people within the city and either Rotary or the school deliver to them. So far they have not picked up on children who live in the city but who may attend school outside but this can be built into the future project.

**Q** Noting the good work done initially by Rotary, the Salvation Army and the Food Bank (all of which the Council had supported) how joined up is the programme now and what discussions have taken place with Food Bank and the Salvation Army?

**A** Rotary has been a long-term supporter of the Food Bank. Initially when Rotary offered a delivery service this was turned down. There had been some talk of an idea called Food Bank Plus but this hadn't gone anywhere and was not the project now. There are email contacts weekly and individual Rotarians have made personal donations to the Food Bank. There are also email discussions with Herefordshire Council about around 1,000 children who receive free school meals. Rotary are working closely with Public Health and Early Years staff at the Council. For example,

the package content was based on the Food Bank standard but has been revised in the light of discussion with Public Health.

**Q** How is this co-ordinated with the other food providers – is there an agreement about which organisation supports which households – there are several groups operating and there seems to be a lot of uncoordinated activity.

**A** Rotary have given a grant to Age UK for their work but have kept their focus on free school meals families. There is an issue with shielded groups - some of them have received parcels (not from Rotary) and have not wanted them because other provision is in place. Ms Morris confirmed that she feels the Rotary project is as joined up and coordinated with other providers as it can be.

**Q** Does Steve Vickers (Herefordshire Director of Adult Services) agree that all the households are vulnerable?

**A** No, the listing comes from the schools – if they feel a family is in hardship Rotary don't do any other checks. This is not only linked to free school meals.

**Q** Working with schools is a good idea, how did this come to be expanded to veterans?

**A** Not in the original project, these were added after a meeting with Amy Pitt (Herefordshire Council). The Veterans Support Group were active in this and had asked Rotary for support. Rotary had a donation specifically for this and ring fenced that money so there was no cross over with the Council money for the free school meals element.

**Q** Looking forward, how is the free school meal voucher system working now?

**A** It seems to be working well with only a few glitches – when it started it was a bit of a nightmare for school staff but has got much better. All the supermarkets except Lidl seem to be well able to cope with vouchers and it gives people free choices to get the food they want.

It was noted by the questioner that there does seem to be a lot of confusion still about who is doing what and many organisations have sprung up without much coordination. The Mayor confirmed that she had checked with the Herefordshire cabinet member for childrens' services and they had confirmed that the voucher system does seem to be working smoothly in almost all cases.

**Q** Referring to the overall approach and recalling a scrutiny meeting with Steve Vickers, he had referred to meeting Rotary every two or three weeks. Many other organisations are operating too, for example St Martin's Church are supporting a scheme that delivers 200-220 hot meals every day. Accepting that you don't want to build a culture of dependence, how significant is a delivery of a food parcel once a month, based on the Food Bank weekly parcel, and what do the families do for the other weeks?

**A** The intention was to provide urgent help for families in hardship. The parcel now is quite different, some fresh food but aiming at supplementing key supplies for a month. Families are getting vouchers for children over seven years and the benefits system seems now to be operating better. As for coordination, there are meetings with Amy Pitt frequently – less so with Steve Vickers – and with HVOSS. Ms Morris re-asserted that Rotary are not trying to duplicate or replace any existing provision, the

unwanted food problem is mainly in the shielded group. not their clients and they are seeking public donations but are only approaching statutory bodies for funds.

At this point the Clerk clarified that the deliveries to the homeless in the temporary accommodation were through the Salvation Army, who have not sought any additional funding. He did not have any knowledge of their financial position beyond that they had not sought additional funds from the City Council.

**Q** Does the announcement by the Secretary of State of funding for local authorities including parishes mean there is additional money available to the City Council.

**A** The Clerk clarified that the announcement by the Secretary of State referred to principal authorities receiving funds to trickle down to parishes. He had contacted Herefordshire's Chief Financial Officer who confirmed that this would only come to parishes who were undertaking devolved services and not to support voluntary grants or donations.

**Q** Are the army helping with funding veterans' support

**A** Rotary believe not, at least initially, the support is through a charity the Veterans Support Group and Ms Morris reminded Council that their support of this had been from a ring fenced private donation, not the City Council's money which had been directed to families in the free school meals and reported need categories.

Ms Morris added that analysis had been done today but was not ready to share with Council of exactly where the donations had gone, except that St Paul's, St Martins' and Marlbrook schools were making their own deliveries from packages left in larger deliveries at the schools.

**Q** Would families suffer if the parcels did not continue?

**A** The schools certainly welcome this and are concerned about the problems the families are having. Rotary are not promoting this so it doesn't look like a charity parcel, it could be any food delivery. They have had messages of gratitude, some very emotional ones. Ms Morris can't comment on what would happen if the parcels stopped. It has been a huge logistical exercise to get through GDPR, safeguarding, food hygiene etc and we wouldn't be carrying on if we didn't believe it was necessary.

**Q** What is actually in the parcels, is it enough for a month, is it tailored to needs e.g. vegetarian, halal etc?

**A** It is a set of basic foods most people will eat. With 175 a week to deliver it cannot be too tailored. They have accommodated one Muslim request and some vegetarians. The parcel costs Rotary about £25, retail the same items would come to about £30-35.

**Q** On your assessment the Hereford Academy families cost around £4,500 to support is that in or out of the new application?

**A** That figure relates to information circulated several week ago, have members not got the up to date information? The Clerk clarifies that both information sets were circulated to all members. The question refers to some information in the earlier set, does it still apply? The Academy has 140 children on free meals, so far 69 of these have been referred, the cost of providing them with a parcel once a month is £1,725.

A member commented that he wished to congratulate Rotary on what he thinks has been a brilliant project.

**Q** Reception and Year One children can apply for free school meals from day one of school attendance. A lot of single parents can't get out to shop, even if they have vouchers, and home deliveries are very hard to access. Do families need a shopping service more than they need a food parcel once a month?

**A** The schools identify the families they believe are in serious hardship especially as food prices are rising. We did not aim for a shopping service, not their thing but others are providing this sort of support and it is valuable.

**Q** Whilst we should say well done for a great effort how long is this carrying on?

**A** We don't know, we are looking to see if we can keep going until August. We are seeking longer term funding from an international grant and the discovery of such serious deprivation in Hereford has taken us by surprise. The member confirmed that this cannot go on indefinitely and that hopefully by August the benefits system and meal vouchers will be fully meeting the needs.

The Deputy Clerk added that next Friday (21<sup>st</sup> May) she is meeting representatives of the National Lottery to understand better their funding criteria from new funds that are coming on stream. This in addition to Awards For All, which Rotary have already approached.

**Q** Can we hear more about the extension to early years. This is a really important group and the government has announced key stage one children will be first back to school. Does this diminish the need?

**A** One of the spin-offs of working with families is to get better engagement as key workers are doing some of the deliveries. When we started it was the free school meals group now it is more about families struggling with longer term poverty. As universal credit kicks in and schools open then demand should fall.

The member raising this question commented that they had been very happy to support the initial £7,000 donation but the main consideration now must be ongoing need.

There being no more questions the Mayor asked if there were any specific proposals.

Councillor Wilcox commented that what is happening is great and £10,000 to alleviate hardship is a good idea. Information is plentiful but confusing and sometimes contradictory. He proposed agreeing to set aside £10,000 in principle and remitting to the Finance and Policy Committee in June the task of deciding how to allocate that money when more information was available. We must be sure we are putting our funds in the right place.

Councillor Hornsey seconded this and added that if schools know families are struggling they can do a weekly Food Bank referral.

Councillor Williams proposed, and Councillor Boulter seconded, that the City Council should give £10,000 to Rotary as requested without delay. The Clerk advised that as this was an amendment to the initial proposal it should be voted on first. On being put to the vote there were:

In favour 4      Against 6      Abstaining 4

The amendment was therefore lost.

Councillor Wilcox clarified the wording and then formally moved his proposal, which was seconded by Councillor Hornsey and on being put to the vote there were:

In favour 12      Against 0      Abstaining 2

It was therefore

**RESOLVED**

**That the sum of £10,000 be agreed in principle to be set aside for the relief of hardship.**

**To defer any decision to allow officers to liaise with the Food Bank, Herefordshire Council and the Salvation Army and other organisations in order to provide an efficient, joined up approach to meet the needs of City residents through food or other aid being provided most effectively.**

**That Officers report their findings to the June meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee and that Committee be authorised to determine the application to a total cost not exceeding £10,000.**

There being no other business at his extraordinary meeting, the Mayor thanked everyone for their input, especially Ms Morris for fielding questions on behalf of Rotary and declared the meeting closed at 7:36 pm

Signed .....

Date .....