

HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL
GOVERNANCE AND PROCEDURES COMMITTEE 30th June 2020

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillors Wilcox (Chair), Andrews, Dykes, Powell, Stevens and Williams

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

At the start of the meeting the Chair confirmed that it was taking place under the provisions of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 Sections Four and Five.

GP2020/21.01 ACCESS TO THE MEETING FOR MEMBERS

The Chair confirmed by show of hands that all members could see and hear the proceedings.

GP2020/21.02 ACCESS FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that the meeting was being live streamed and was also being recorded.

GP2020/21.03 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Clerk reported apologies had been received from the Mayor and from Councillor Boulter.

GP2020/21.04 SUBSTITUTIONS

None

GP2020/21.05 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were made at the start of the meeting.

GP2020/21.06 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

It was proposed by Councillor Wilcox, seconded by Councillor Andrews and unanimously

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of 25th February 2020 and those of the extraordinary meeting of 20th March 2020 be agreed as an accurate record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

GP2020/21.07 DECISION MAKING DURING THE COVID 19 OUTBREAK

The Clerk introduced the report, drawing members' attention to the decision of Planning Committee to continue with email consultation to support a delegated decision on routine planning applications, but to move to a Zoom meeting for major applications and presentations by developers. This was, in their view, the most convenient way to dispose of business. The Clerk also confirmed that the temporary legislation effectively suspended Council standing orders on such matters as requiring physical attendance at a meeting, or annual elections for Chair/Mayor, Committee

membership and representatives to outside bodies. Some councils had held mayoral elections, which was still permitted, but it was recommended in Hereford that all offices and appointments due to be elected in May 2020 continue with their present incumbents until May 2021. If by then there was still a lockdown, some form of online meeting could be held to resolve who should be in what positions from May 2021.

Finally, the Clerk reported that he had been asked to add a further recommendation regarding using Zoom in emergencies such as the short notice closure of the Town Hall or a situation like the severe winter two years ago when meetings were cancelled because members were unable to travel even within the City. This would depend on whether the government retained any or all of the current legislation. The temporary legislation currently in force applies until May 2022 unless the government revokes it early.

In answer to a question, it was confirmed that the requirement for members to be physically present is set aside, which could in theory allow for a member who would otherwise send apologies to attend electronically a meeting where others were in attendance. However, the legislation at the moment addresses only two possibilities, either everyone attends a physical meeting, or everyone participates in an online meeting. The hybrid of someone participating in a physical meeting online had not been covered and this had not been tested. There was no recommendation to do this as it was open to considerable debate about when and in what circumstances a member might be allowed to do this. The system for sending apologies and where possible appointing substitutes would continue once meetings were back to physical gatherings.

There being no further questions it was proposed by Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Powell and unanimously

RESOLVED

That the Committee thanks the officers for setting up the Zoom facility and resolves that, except for routine Planning Committee business, this will be the standard form for meetings until such time as physical attendance is possible again.

That the additional standard items regarding Zoom meetings be appended to all agendas using the technology.

That the Clerk continues to review the developing legislation to see if online attendance will be permitted in future and if so, that revised standing orders are drawn up to set out how and when this is to be allowed and managed.

That the appointments of Mayor, Deputy Mayor, committee members and representatives to outside bodies continue until May 2021, but that if the restrictions are still in place in May 2021 a Council decision is made at that time about the appointments.

That in the event that the Council resumes physical meetings, and if the legislation permits, the Council will retain the capacity to hold a Zoom meeting in an emergency, for example if the Town Hall becomes unavailable at short notice, provided that a minimum of 24 hours' notice can be given of a change in the arrangements.

GP2020/21.08 STAFFING DURING HOME WORKING

The Clerk introduced the report explaining that it was largely for information although there were some resolutions to be considered. Staff had been redirected to home working at barely two days' notice, and had proved extremely adaptable in the circumstances. The level of support to enable this from the Council's IT supplier and contractor had been vital and had been delivered to an extremely high standard, with a rapid response to problems that had arisen as well as helping with the initial set up. Most staff were engaged on duties similar to their normal work although there had been a willingness to take on new tasks too. Those staff without tasks at present had indicated they would be very happy to undertake any roles that would be useful, and this flexibility would be helpful going forward.

The Chair confirmed that he was happy with the way staff had adapted and had taken the opportunity to address some long outstanding matters, for example the Mayor's Officer had used the time at home to work through the back log of Mayors' scrapbooks. It was suggested that the invitation to members to suggest projects that staff could undertake from home be circulated to all members of Council and that the Clerk distribute any such work among staff to try and ensure everyone has some work to do, especially those currently without any regular duties.

Councillors noted how well the staff had responded to an unexpected and unusual situation being imposed on them at short notice.

It was proposed by Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Dykes and unanimously

RESOLVED

That the Committee notes the arrangements for staff to work from home and thanks them for their willingness to adapt to difficult circumstances and remain effective.

That the Committee notes that the disruption to the Council's regular activities inevitably means that some staff are without tasks at present and thanks them for their willingness to undertake work outside their job descriptions as and when required to support the Council and its revised workload.

That the Committee places on record its appreciation for John Finch Computers in setting up and supporting, at very short notice, an effective home working system.

That members send the Clerk their suggestions for any one-off projects that could usefully be undertaken at this time by staff who otherwise are short of tasks.

GP2020/21.09 RETURN TO WORKING IN THE TOWN HALL

The Clerk introduced the report and emphasised that the key question on this topic, when, currently has no answer. The Town Hall is closed to the public but the Registrars and Coroner are working there and seeing members of the public by appointment. There is no general facility for callers and the front desk is closed. City Council staff are visiting singly to collect post and process invoices etc. There is a legal requirement for offices to re-open only when there have been adequate risk assessments. There is copious advice available including material accessed from the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health by the Chair who is a retired member. The Clerk is working with

officers at Herefordshire Council to make sure there is a common and consistent standard throughout the building when it reopens.

The Tourist Information Centre can operate as a free standing public service even when the Town Hall is closed. The TIC Manager has prepared two risk assessments, one for "Saturday service" when the Town Hall is closed and one for when it is open. It would be perfectly possible for Saturday style working to take place on other days of the week, possibly from mid July if the visitor numbers start to pick up. At present we do not have a date for reopening the museums and the library from Herefordshire Council; this is being sought.

When the offices reopen it may be necessary to vary the hours and working practices of the office and Mayoral suite cleaner to ensure full sanitisation is in place before the start of work and to limit contact as far as possible to assist with epidemic control.

In answer to questions from members it was confirmed that the plan to recruit apprentices to work in the TIC had not started to be implemented when the lockdown happened. In the early stages, council staff currently without tasks would be asked to support the TIC Manager for example controlling the door to moderate visitor numbers, assisting with wiping down surfaces etc. Once the service was able to operate normally, the apprentice scheme would be invoked and that the Care Leavers service at Herefordshire Council would be specifically advised of this and asked to encourage youngsters leaving care and looking for work and training opportunities to apply.

It was then proposed by Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Powell and unanimously

RESOLVED

That the Committee notes that home working is sustainable for the time being.

That the Committee agrees that joint working with Herefordshire Council is necessary to have a common standard throughout the Town Hall.

That all working arrangements whether in the public parts of the building or within the Council offices must be guided by an informed and professionally competent risk assessment.

That the Tourist Information Centre may open when tourist demand justifies it as a free standing service within a closed Town Hall or in a Town Hall operating limited public access, subject to a satisfactory local risk assessment being in place.

That risk assessments will be drawn up using all the professional guidance available.

GP2020/21.10 PROPOSED CONFIDENTIAL STAFF SUPPORT SERVICE

The Clerk explained that this is a common practice in larger organisations and had been introduced recently at Herefordshire Council through their HR provider Hoople. Hoople did not actually provide the counselling, that was from a wholly independent source. The City Council had seen some staff absence over the years due to issues of anxiety and stress, and a service like this could be helpful in reducing that, as well as

nipping issues in the bud that might otherwise have to dealt with by more formal, and more confrontational, procedures.

The Chair added that this had been introduced at South Herefordshire District Council when he was an officer there. There had been a regular report of how many had accessed the service, and within a larger organisation it was possible to say from which area. This had been very useful. Within a smaller team such as the City Council a six monthly statistical only report to indicate the level of use would be helpful, but nothing must be reported that in any way undermined staff confidence in the confidentiality of the service.

The Clerk asked members to note that the proposals allow for signing up with the existing service if that is open to us, but also to seek something privately if it is not, and set a cash limit.

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

RESOLVED

That the Clerk is authorised to seek to subscribe the City Council to the Herefordshire Council confidential staff support service at a sum not exceeding £500 per annum.

That if this is not possible, the Clerk is authorised to enter into an agreement with a suitably qualified provider other than Herefordshire Council for a similar service at no more than £500 per annum.

GP2020/21.11 ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

- Risk analysis (non financial risks) annual report, to be forwarded to Council
- Standing Orders annual review, to be forwarded to Council
- Staffing implications of the business plan

GP2020/21.12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

29th September 2020 (Members expressed the hope that this would be a physical meeting rather the online, this will be clarified when the agenda is published.)

There being no further business the meeting closed at 6:33 pm

Signed

Date