

**HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL**  
**COUNCIL MEETING 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

**MINUTES OF MEETING**

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

**Attending:** Steve Kerry Town Clerk, Becci O'Reilly Committees, Events and Contracts Officer. As listed below at the appropriate place, also attending presenters of grant applications who attended for their item.

The Mayor confirmed that the meeting is being held under the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 Sections 4 and 5

**C2020/21.61 CONFIRMATION OF MEMBER ACCESS**

The Mayor confirmed that all members could see and hear the proceedings and could be seen and heard.

**C2020/21.62 CONFIRMATION OF PUBLIC ACCESS**

It was confirmed that the meeting was being live streamed and was being recorded.

**C2020/21.63 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

It was noted that all members were present and there were no apologies.

**C2020/21.64 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Kenyon declared a non-pecuniary interest in the item from Knife Angel as he has been supporting and advising the group and may be considered to have pre-determined the matter.

The Mayor declared a non-pecuniary interest in the knife Angel item as she is a member of the Steering Group and may be considered to have pre-determined the matter.

**C2020/21.65 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No questions or applications to speak had been received from members of the public.

**C2020/21.66 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

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

**RESOLVED That the minutes of the Council Meeting of 17<sup>th</sup> November 2020 be accepted as an accurate record and signed accordingly by the Chair.**

**C2020/21.67 LARGE GRANTS**

The Mayor confirmed there were three large grant referral items to be considered.

#### **C2020/21.67a CLIMB THE TREE – GRANT VARIATION**

The Mayor welcomed Jody Miles and Joe Foster to the meeting. Councillor Kenyon presented the item on behalf of Community Development Committee which was to vary the purpose of the grant to enable a subsidy to be offered to City residents needing to use the proposed contact centre, and who were in difficulty covering the cost. The presenters added that they had been sorry not to be able to attend the previous meeting, and that they now had sufficient funds for resources – the purpose for which the grant was given. They sought, as described, to respond to the comment about the City Council spending for the benefit of city residents by making use of the Council's grant to offer direct support to city families. This would be in the form of one free use of the contact centre. It was noted that the only alternative centre for contact visits is in Bromyard and the cost and inconvenience of travel was prohibitive for many. Residents will be asked to produce a council tax bill and agree that their details will be kept for monitoring. Climb the Tree would report on numbers using the centre to Council periodically. Although Covid has stopped referral at the moment there is no doubt the need is there and growing.

There being no further questions or comments it was proposed by Councillor Kenyon, seconded by Councillor Wilcox and by majority with three abstentions

**RESOLVED That the request to vary the large grant of £5,000 to enable a subsidy to be offered to city residents using the contact centre is agreed.**

#### **C2020/21.67b FRIENDS OF CASTLE GREEN PAVILION - RENEWABLE HEATING SYSTEM**

The Mayor welcomed Katie Bott and Martin Foster to the meeting. Councillor Kenyon introduced the item which is for a grant towards the cost of installing a sustainable energy heating system using water from the River Wye, and to recommend its acceptance on behalf of the Community Development Committee. The Friends gave further details of the proposal. In discussion it was noted that this is an important and innovative proposal, the first use of the river for this purpose and that the scheme does have potential to expand to provide heat to other sites such as Cathedral School buildings, subject to larger and more powerful pumps being fitted. For now it is restricted to the Pavilion as that is the building ready to go. Once funds are agreed, work can begin straightaway, and some of the other funding is time sensitive so a prompt start is essential. The scheme will work regardless of variations on river water temperature, it only requires a temperature inversion to work. If the river dries out completely or freezes solid, neither of which are likely, it would be compromised. The total cost is high compared to other installations such as low energy electric radiators, but, once installed, running costs are minimal and the system should last at least 20 years, possibly longer. The only wearing part is the pump that will require regular maintenance. Setting fuel costs saved over twenty years plus the environmental benefits of a non-carbon sustainable system more than justifies the outlay.

There being no further discussion it was proposed by Councillor Kenyon, seconded by Councillor Hornsey and by majority with two abstentions

**RESOLVED That the recommendation of Community Development Committee that a large grant of £7,000 be awarded to the Friends of Castle Green for the Pavilion Renewable Heating System is agreed.**

Councillor Milln asked for it to be noted that he had abstained having realised that he had a non-pecuniary interest which he now declared as a member of Friends of Castle Green, as his membership might give rise to a concern that he had pre-determined the matter.

**C2020/21.67c KNIFE ANGEL – LARGE GRANT AWARD IN PRINCIPLE**

The Mayor welcomed Alison Davies, Meryl Cain and Dave Tristram to the meeting. The Mayor explained that this item is to consider a large grant application which due to time constraints was being brought to Council rather than going through Community Development Committee first. Alison Davies introduced the application and gave background information including her personal loss through knife crime in the USA. The Knife Angel is important in raising awareness of the drastic consequences of carrying and using knives, but much more than that it provides a catalyst for community groups to work on crime diversion projects, workshops on knife crime and related issues such as drug abuse and domestic violence and has a lasting legacy of community benefits. This is being captured in this scheme by joint working with Hereford and Ludlow College and the City Youth Council running a conference for young people and ongoing projects. The grant is to help with night time security. At night people gravitate towards the Angel and it becomes a place where discussions can be opened up with people who have not sought help before. Dave Tristram added that the application is for a maximum of £18,000, some of which is a returnable deposit which should come back to the Council at the conclusion of the project, some of which is to cover contingencies which again may not be needed. The night security element was £13,000. There should be knock on benefits for businesses in the City from the number of people who come to see the Angel and stay to browse in the City. It is hoped at least 100,000 visitors will come.

In lengthy discussion a number of points were raised by members. These included the wisdom of arranging the event for June this year which is dangerously close to anticipated dates for the release of lockdown and that those dates might well slip. Even if it was legally possible was it right to encourage a large gathering while infection remained a significant risk? It was explained that a decision will be made on 1<sup>st</sup> May to continue or postpone to September. Some members felt this was too late and that a decision now to postpone to September, if not 2022, would be wiser.

There was also concern about the completeness of the details in the application and some discrepancies between the budget sheet and the application. The Mayor asked for clarification on what level of detail was necessary to ground a decision. The Clerk explained that members needed to decide if they had sufficient information to be able to make a sound decision; that was their judgement. If they did they could resolve to award an amount of money; if they did not feel they had sufficient clarity they ought not to award anything and consider whether the item could be deferred, perhaps to Committee.

Some members were concerned that the established processes of a committee scrutinising the detail and the matter coming to Council for a final decision was not being followed and did not see a good reason to depart from that practice. The timescale of meetings and the need for a decision was partly the cause of that. It was

also noted that although several groups had expressed support they had not so far done anything tangible, the only one so far being the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Some members felt the contribution sought from the City Council was disproportionately large. On a positive note it was noted that June has long light evenings and is a good time for an outdoor exhibition. It was new and unusual and somewhat different to the cosy image of a cathedral city, perhaps we need something “edgy” to make an important point about real life. The security figure concerned some members especially as it was not supported by a quote that had been included in the submission of documents.

After discussion the Clerk advised that there were three possible resolutions. Members could agree funding, reject funding or authorise Community Development Committee to resolve the matter at a level to be awarded if this was beyond the normal delegated authority limit of £3,000. It might be appropriate to decide first if members insist on a delay to at least September as a condition of any funding.

There was further discussion of the practicality of a delay versus going for June, and the extent to which the Council ought, or ought not, to try and second guess the decisions of the Steering Committee who were a serious and reputable group well able to run this project.

It was proposed by Councillor Williams, seconded by Councillor Toynbee that the grant be awarded as requested for £18,000. On being put to the vote this was lost by twelve votes to two with two abstentions.

It was proposed by Councillor Wilcox, seconded by Councillor Foxton and by a majority of ten in favour, none against and with six abstentions

**RESOLVED That the matter be referred to Community Development Committee for full consideration of a completed application, that the Steering Committee be asked to reconsider the date of the exhibition before 1<sup>st</sup> May and that Community Development Committee have delegated authority for Council to award up to £10,000.**

It was proposed by Councillor Powell, seconded by Councillor Hornsey that the wording remains the same as the previous resolution but the amount be limited at £18,000. On being put to the vote this was lost by nine votes to four with three abstentions.

It was proposed by Councillor Kenyon, seconded by Councillor Williams that the wording remains the same but the amount be limited to £13,000 to cover the security cost. On being put to the vote this was lost by ten votes to two with four abstentions.

The matter was concluded with the resolution as set out in bold above. It was confirmed that the date for Community Development Committee to review this application was 8<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

## **C2020/21.68 2021/22 BUDGET PRECEPT AND COUNCIL TAX LEVEL**

The Clerk introduced the report proposing a precept and council tax level. The mandate had been to cease drawing on reserves for revenue spending whilst achieving a zero tax increase. This had required some savings to be found in areas

which would not have a negative impact on the community. However, a further issue had arisen which was the reduction in the tax base. This is because the rising number of people receiving council tax benefit means that the equivalent of Band D properties in the city has gone down, the first time this has occurred since the method of calculating the base had been altered by the government several years ago. It was no longer possible to deliver a balanced budget without using reserves unless council tax went up. The Finance and Policy committee had indicated that the priority was to achieve a zero tax increase so calls would now be made on reserves. This was possible as the council holds reserves above the minimum level recommended for prudent fiscal management.

Councillor Stevens, the Chair of Finance and Policy Committee added that the Committee had accepted the need for a zero tax increase as a priority given the hardship faced by many in the community. Drawing on reserves was not a viable long term option but this was not the right year to correct that. He thanked the staff who had worked hard to redraft the budget in the light of changing circumstances.

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

**RESOLVED**

**That Council approves a total expenditure budget of £1,055,385 and a precept requirement of £853,820.**

**That Council agrees to maintain the Band D level of £54.67 delivering the previous mandate for no increase in council tax this year.**

**C2020/21.69 INVESTMENT STRATEGY**

The proposed budget strategy was presented. The Committee, Events and Contracts Officer explained that it was an audit requirement that this be reviewed annually. There were few options for change as the Council was required to invest in British banks and to use secure deposits and investment arrangements. Yields were generally low during a recession.

There being no comments it was proposed by Councillor Stevens, seconded by Councillor Tillett and unanimously

**RESOLVED That the investment strategy as set out in the report is accepted.**

**C2020/21.70 ANNUAL RISK ANALYSIS**

The Clerk reported that he had presented the financial risk analysis as an adjunct to the budget to Finance and Policy Committee. Normally this would be followed by a presentation of non-financial risks to Governance and Procedures Committee and a combined report to the next meeting of Council. The Governance and Procedures meeting last week had been wholly for confidential staffing items and it would not have been appropriate to deal with the risk report, which is a public document at that meeting. Thus a report would go to G&P Committee in February and the combined report to Council on 9<sup>th</sup> March.

This was noted.

## **C2020/21.71 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS**

The Committees, Events and Contracts Officer presented a revised calendar. The new Climate and Biodiversity Sub Committee was planned to meet on Thursday which did not clash with Youth Council or Planning Committee until May. Thereafter, when the Finance and Policy and Governance and Procedures Committees were planned to combine there would be a spare Tuesday in the programme.

The revised calendar as noted.

## **C2020/21.72 FINAL 2019/20 EXTERNAL AUDIT**

The Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer reported that the external audit had delivered an unqualified, that is no problems or issues to draw to the public's attention, report. There had been some last-minute adjustments to the presentation of some of the information which had been completed in time and had been made public. This meant that in the year when the Council had to make fundamental and wholly unexpected changes to many of its procedures to operate during lockdown both the internal and external audits had been clear.

## **C2020/21.73 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Mayor made a personal statement:

"Firstly, I'd like to say hello to anyone out there on Facebook watching the live stream of this meeting. I'm very impressed that you have lasted this long into the meeting!

I hope you are able to get a flavour of the business we conduct. Local Government can be a strange world to the uninitiated, and I hope that those of you who have accessed City Council meetings over the last year have found it useful to gain an insight into the variety and scope of the issues we deal with.

As we again sit here on Zoom in our strange electronic worlds, we are reminded that we are in another lockdown and still in the grip of a terrible hard-hitting virus. Experience of Covid-19 has been very close to home for me lately, and it has made me reflect on the impact it is having on so many families in the city and the wider county.

This evening I would like to say that my thoughts go out to anyone who has lost a loved one, has a loved one who is seriously ill, has suffered financial hardship or a family breakdown during a very difficult year.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank every single person who is working in a voluntary or paid capacity towards the cause of helping others during the Covid-19 crisis. NHS workers, teachers, care staff, retail staff, transport workers...the list is exhaustive. A big thank you from Hereford City Council for all that you have done and are continuing to do. I would also like to reiterate my thanks to the City Council staff for their continued hard work and commitment to making sure the wheels of local government keep turning.

Thanks also go to all of my fellow City Councillors for their support over the last year. Special mention has to go to my Deputy Mayor councillor Paul Stevens for his unending support to me, despite having overcome serious illness himself in the last couple of months.

I hope everyone is able to stay safe and well in the coming months as the vaccine is rolled out and we look towards a more positive future.”

**C2020/21.74 DRAFT MINUTES OF COMMITTEES**

**The following draft committee minutes were received and noted.**

Governance and Procedures Extraordinary Meeting for confidential business 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Finance and Policy Committee 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Community Development Committee 19<sup>th</sup> January not ready for circulation, these would go to the March Council Meeting

Planning and Highways Committee 3<sup>rd</sup> December, noting that “no councillor responses received” should in fact read “no objections forwarded to the Planning Authority”

Youth Council 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020. The subsequent meeting of 21<sup>st</sup> January minutes were not ready for circulation and would go to Council in March

**C2020/21.75 DESTINATION BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT – PRESENTATION**

The Mayor introduced Mo Aswat from the Mosaic Partnership. Mr Aswat gave a presentation on the proposal for a BID to cover all the areas of the county not already in one, i.e. the Hereford BID which covers the city centre only. It is intended to use the funds raised from an additional precept to support measures that will enhance tourism by improving the visitor experience. There are currently seven such destination bids being considered in the UK. The plan is for a 1.5% additional level on National Non-Domestic Rate (business rates) which will raise around £637,000, or just over £3m over the five years of the plan. Areas of possible investment drawn from initial consultation will have to be changed as this sum will not address the highway repair and IT connectivity matters raised as priorities by the businesses who have been consulted. The summary business plan will be completed in March and after further consultation the final version will be completed in April. The ballot is planned for June.

Members raised a number of questions – firstly, was it prudent to try and do this in June just as many businesses in the hospitality sector would either be hanging on waiting for the end of lockdown or just emerging from their worst period of business in a lifetime. In addition members asked if the high priority areas were outside the reach of the scheme as the amounts required to address them were far beyond what could be raised by a levy of 1.5%, would there be a sufficiently attractive package of measures to make a positive result likely. Mr Aswat drew attention to his company’s 100% record in producing successful BID proposals, and that several were progressing during the Covid recession. If indications were unfavourable they would recommend that the ballot be postponed rather than run it and fail. Members expressed some concern that Herefordshire Council might be using the proposal to raise funds for items they should have covered in any case.

The City Council has a representative on the steering group for the destination BID and at the moment Councillor Stevens is covering that role informally. It was proposed by Councillor Toynbee, seconded by Councillor Boulter and with one abstention

**RESOLVED That Councillor Stevens represents the City Council on the steering group or board for the destination BID.**

The Mayor thanked Mr Aswat for a concise and very informative presentation.

**C2020/21.76 STRONGER TOWNS FUND BIDS**

The Clerk presented an oral update on the two bids the City Council had put forward to the Stronger Towns Fund. The first one, for a community arts hub in the Town Hall had not made the cut for further consideration. It was particularly disappointing that despite the obvious merit in joining this with the complimentary bid for a major investment in the Broad Street Museum this had not been picked up by the Board even though the consultants had noted it. The proposal did not seem to have been given very thoughtful consideration before it was down rated.

The bid for a community electric bus service had been more successful and was now part of the Town Investment Plan, which is the list of projects up to £25m in total value going forward for consideration by the government. This process had been very well supported by the Herefordshire Bus Forum and enthusiastically advocated by the Mayor and Councillor Stevens. The Clerk noted that Herefordshire Council had initially tried to monopolise the list with their own projects and had left it far too late to open up the matter to community contribution. There was no satisfactory explanation for this and it has been an uphill struggle to get bids ready to compete for funds. Despite this the final list was balanced and was not dominated by county council items.

Councillor Tillett expressed disappointment that with connectivity being a key theme, and the lack of such connectivity across the river into south wye being noted, the scheme as proposed barely addressed this issue, whereas as originally set out it did. It was explained that under current law it is impossible to run a subsidised free public transport service that competes with commercial routes. The Council had insisted, in the face of some opposition, that the route would cross the old bridge and pick up at the swimming pool where it would connect with existing buses. It would also not be going round the northern suburbs for the same reason.

The report was noted and members expressed interest in further reports as to how the scheme develops in detail.

**C2020/21.77 REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE BODIES**

The Mayor announced that in future this would be on an exception basis i.e. any members with items to report should send information to the Clerk, otherwise it would be assumed there was nothing new to say.

Councillor Boulter was thanked for submitting her written report which had been circulated to members. Councillor Tillett added his thanks to Close House for the work the Epics are continuing to do helping at the Kindle Centre food kitchen and with deliveries.

Councillor Hornsey informed members she hadn't heard from the group but is assuming that this year's Three Choirs Festival, due to take place in Worcester, is likely to be postponed again.

**C2020/21.78 TOWN CLERK'S CORRESPONDENCE**

The Clerk reported the development of some plans to plant wild flower beds in two parks and asked members to consider if there were other areas that could be suggested. Planting would usually require the permission of Herefordshire Council as most of the land involved is theirs, but this is unlikely to be a problem. Seed had been ordered for beds in Aylestone Park and the Quarry and a local volunteer had agreed to scrape the grass away and prepare the ground at no cost.

The Clerk reminded members there is a vacancy on Community Development Committee following the resignation of Councillor Butler and if anyone wished to be nominated to the Committee they should make that known so it was on the agenda for the next Council Meeting.

**C2020/21.79 LATE AND URGENT ITEM – DISPOSAL OF THE ROADSHOW VEHICLE**

The Clerk reported that when the vehicle was taken for MOT it was found to be beyond economic repair. Even after spending over £1,800 it would just pass MOT, it would not have much useful life and would not be an attractive offer to a voluntary group. This had become known after agenda despatch and the urgency was that a time limited offer to scrap the vehicle had been received. A decision was required now to avoid incurring unnecessary costs. He asked for a decision on accepting the late and urgent item.

It was proposed by Councillor Stevens, seconded by Councillor Wilcox and by fourteen votes to nil with two abstentions

**RESOLVED That the additional item be admitted to the agenda as it was urgent and could not have been circulated with the main agenda.**

It was then proposed by Councillor Stevens, seconded by Councillor Wilcox and by ten votes to two with four abstentions

**RESOLVED**

**That Council notes that the vehicle is beyond economic repair, that no offers to take it have been received from any local groups and that it should now be disposed of at the lowest possible cost.**

**That the offer from Mifflin Motors to scrap the vehicle free of charge is accepted.**

Councillor Kenyon declared he had abstained as he has a possible non-pecuniary interest as he is a long standing friend of the proprietor of Mifflin Motors.

**C2020/21.80 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2020 at 6 pm**

In closing the meeting just before 9 pm the Mayor thanked all members and the staff for their contributions to a very long meeting.

Signed .....

Date .....