

## HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL

### GOVERNANCE AND PROCEDURES COMMITTEE 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020

#### MINUTES OF MEETING

**At the start of the meeting the Chair, Councillor Wilcox, confirmed that this meeting took 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**

**Present:** The Right Worshipful the Mayor Councillor Kath Hey and Councillors Andrews, Boulter, Powell, Stevens, Wilcox and Williams.

**In attendance:** Steve Kerry Town Clerk and Becci O'Reilly Committees, Events and Contracts Officer

#### **GP2020/21.13 CONFIRMATION THAT ALL MEMBERS ARE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE**

The Chair confirmed that all members of the Committee could see and hear the proceedings and could be seen and heard.

#### **GP2020/21.14 CONFIRMATION OF PUBLIC ACCESS**

The Committees, Events and Contracts Officer confirmed that the meeting was being live streamed on Facebook and recorded.

#### **GP2020/21.15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The Clerk reported apologies had been received from Councillor Dykes.

#### **GP2020/21.16 SUBSTITUTIONS**

None.

#### **GP2020/21.17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

#### **GP2020/21.18 MINUTES**

It was proposed by Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Stevens and

**RESOLVED That the confidential minutes of the meeting of 25<sup>th</sup> February and the minutes of the meeting of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020 be agreed as an accurate record and signed accordingly by the Chair.**

#### **GP2020/21.19 MERGER OF COMMITTEES**

The Clerk introduced the report and explained that after discussion with the Chair and Vice Chair, who were also in opposite order the Chair and Vice Chair of Finance and Policy Committee, it had been noted that, as described in the report, both committees had had a series of very short meetings. Both committees dealt with the internal administrative work of the Council, one on finance, contracts and property the other on staffing and procedures. There could be some synergy in bringing those two areas together. The area of civic and ceremonial work was somewhat anomalous but there was no proposal to create a separate committee for that and it was suggested that the range of work could be handled by a single

committee. It was noted that there are currently eight members of both committees, and four councillors are on both.

The Clerk went on to explain in some detail the role of the Employment Panel. It was confirmed that this would meet as and when necessary, it would not have a fixed timetable. The new main committee would probably meet at least six times a year, possibly up to eight times so the aggregate of meetings would be less than that of the two separate committees.

Finally, the Clerk reminded members that there was the option of making no change if the current arrangements were in fact seen as satisfactory, and if the only issue was shortness of meetings and in fact the remits were incompatible the alternative would be fewer meetings of two committees going forward.

It was confirmed by the Chair that both committees have seemed a little underemployed for some time and he felt there were linkages between most of the issues that a combined committee would deal with, which could be expressed in a provisional title of Policy and Resources.

Councillor Stevens, Chair of the Finance and Policy Committee added that the working of that committee has become very streamlined in the last two or three years and he supported the proposal for a merger of the two committees. He also strongly supported the creating of an Employment Panel with membership determined at the start of the year as suggested in the report.

After some discussion of the revised committee dates which have changed for several meetings it was noted that after the date of the next meeting of this Committee is agreed officers will circulate a revised calendar with all the updates for clarity.

The Clerk explained in answer to questions that the process would be to refer this to Finance and Policy Committee. They too would be asked to approve a proposal in principle. This would go to Council, again of approval in principle. The Clerk would then work through the terms of reference and any necessary amendments to standing orders or financial regulations and any other policies and present that finished piece of work to both committees. Council would, if both committees agree, be invited to approve a new structure which would take effect from May 2021 when members would be elected to all to the Council committees.

It was then proposed by Councillor Boulter, seconded by Councillor Williams and unanimously

**RESOLVED**

**That the Committee agrees in principle to a merging of this Committee with Finance and Policy Committee to take effect from May 2021.**

**That subject to agreement from Finance and Policy Committee this proposal is forwarded to full Council for approval.**

**That once Council approval is given the Clerk draws up detailed terms of reference for the new committee, including an appropriate title, for comment by both the current committees before final approval by Council.**

**That the terms of reference and recommendations to Council include an Employment Panel as outlined above.**

## **GP2020/21.20 ACTIVITY DURING LOCKDOWN AND HOMEWORKING**

The Clerk introduced the report and referred to the sudden and dramatic changes forced upon the Council, both on staff who were unable to continue to work from the offices, and on members who had accepted an emergency delegated decision-making protocol when meetings were first banned due to the Covid 19 regulations and then to incorporate zoom meetings into the Council's practice. None of this had been planned or even seriously considered before, in his own experience the Clerk had only ever worked from home for an isolated day once in a long while. Despite this several key targets had been met, the accounts had been closed and all papers sent for external audit on time, democratic decision-making had taken place, and emergency support had been given to food projects across the City during the first lockdown. In addition some important new initiatives had been taken forward, the Tourist Information Centre was open six days a week, which was the expected level of opening before the pandemic, a new website had been launched and investigations were continuing into internal savings and improvements such as a new IT link to better support remote working and the scrapping of the unreliable and expensive franking machine. He had hugely appreciated the flexibility and adaptability of staff who had taken on either new roles or continued their previous roles in completely new and untried circumstances. He drew members' attention to paragraph 9.4 of the report, which refutes the claim that local government is slow moving, can't handle rapid change and is bound by bureaucracy and tradition, especially in the civic parishes. Hereford City Council had emphatically proved that was not the case which was a credit to both the staff and members who had fully played their part in dealing with so much change so quickly.

The Chair added that members and officers had worked together very well to adapt to new ways of working and to enable important matters to be decided and progressed. He also formally reported to the Committee that the Deputy Town Clerk is now on extended sick leave and that arrangements were already being made to cover her workload with staff again changing their roles to meet the Council's needs. He was grateful to staff for their willingness to adapt. He also suggested, which was agreed without a vote, that he and the Clerk write to the Deputy Clerk expressing the good wishes of colleagues and members for a full recovery.

Councillor Andrews endorsed the appreciation of staff who have stepped up to new challenges in an impressive way. Her query about arrangements for Remembrance Day could not be resolved at the meeting and the Clerk undertook to circulate members of council with an update when he had received one from the Mayor's Officer who was leading on this.

It was agreed that members note the report and endorse the thanks expressed to staff for their flexibility in responding to new and unusual demands.

## **GP2020/21.21 POLICIES**

The Clerk explained that the work of reviewing policies and ensuring there was a full suite of up to date items required constant attention. Recently, fresh draft policies had been obtained from Hoople regarding the new concept of paternity leave for birth and adoption support and revision to the already extant maternity and adoption leave policies. The suggested drafts were up to date and legally competent and he recommended their acceptance by the Committee.

The Chair asked if time off in lieu could be inserted as an option where appropriate which was agreed without debate.

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

**RESOLVED That the draft policies for Maternity and Adoption Leave and Birth and Adoption Support (Paternity) Leave, with the addition of an option for Time Off In Lieu where appropriate be endorsed and accepted by the Council.**

#### **GP2020/21.22 APPOINTMENT OF A CLEANER**

Before this item was discussed the Chair asked members to note the sad news of the death of our long serving cleaner Janice Pugh, tribute having been paid to her at the last general Council Meeting.

The Clerk reported that his report had been written at a time when it was thought likely that we would shortly be returning to the offices and normal working. A draft job description and person specification had been adapted from a Hoople model used widely in public buildings, schools and hospitals and the remuneration had been verified as within the industry standard range. The JD and PS had been circulated to members shortly before the meeting, for which the Clerk apologised and any comments from members could be incorporated into drafting changes, unless they were fundamental.

It was noted that the demands on the cleaner could include either a visit to the Tourist Information Centre every day, a three hour deep cleaning session once a week, or a combination of a single visit to the TIC and the Mayor's Parlour once a week. The Mayor asked if at least one visit could be to do a deep clean of the Parlour, which is within the flexibility written into the JD and can be organised. Staff working from time to time in the offices and those who work in the Parlour or the TIC are currently wiping down surfaces and observing Covid control guidelines, and this must continue.

It was suggested that in addition to the recommendations at the end of the report, the Clerk be given authority to increase the hours up to the maximum of fifteen in the proposal as and when staff return to normal office working, and that this would not need to come back to committee again.

Councillor Powell raised the issue of unconscious bias in recruiting and the Clerk confirmed that at present we are seeking CVs which will include names, schools etc from which ethnic origin and gender might well be identified. It would be possible in future to ask Hoople who handle our recruitment administration to delete such information at short listing stages so names only become known once decisions are made. Some traditionally requested information such as date of birth, country of birth etc that often appears on forms for no obvious reason could be deleted in line with best practice in other equally opportunity employers.

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

#### **RESOLVED**

**That the Council proceeds in principle with the appointment of a cleaner, on the job description and person specification circulated separately to members (with any amendments from members included), initially for three hours a week, focussing on the TIC with some attention to the Parlour.**

**That the Clerk has delegated authority to increase the hours if necessary to respond to levels of use of the TIC and Parlour up to five hours a week.**

**That the appointment be made by the Clerk unless a conflict of interest arises in which case another officer will be delegated to perform this role.**

**That the Clerk be authorised to increase hours up to the contracted fifteen per week as and when staff return to normal office working.**

#### **GP2020/21.23 REFERRAL FROM COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

The Clerk reported that at Community Development Committee members had resolved that the support previously agreed for Hinton Community Centre, which had been delivered by the Council employing the Centre Manager for twelve months, should now be extended for a further twelve months. The issue of the Governance and Procedures Committee was whether to deliver that by way of extending the existing temporary contract to the incumbent employee or to adopt some other means of delivery. The option of finding employment by another body had been considered last year but this created some complex legal difficulties and so the decision had been to employ the Centre Manager as a council staff member on a temporary contract while the Centre trustees resolved the longer term provision. The disruption of the Covid 19 outbreak, and the range of new and important activities undertaken at the Centre had prevented that work from proceeding and another year of support had been requested.

The Chair read elements of a letter from Councillor Oliver as they affected the decision this committee was being asked to make, and confirmed that the post was part time and how Mr McNally spent his free time, including voluntary work at the centre, was his business. He was not being paid overtime or additional hours.

Several members spoke of the good work done at the Centre, how well it had supported the community through the Covid outbreak and the sterling efforts of the Centre Manager who had proved to be an extremely effective member of our staff.

It was also noted that with several changes to staffing arrangements recently it would now be timely to do a full staffing review as part of the budget setting exercise and that staff appraisals should be brought forward, starting with the Clerk, to enable that.

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

**RESOLVED That the Clerk is authorised to confirm to the Centre Manager and the Trustees of Hinton Community Centre an extension of the current contract to terminate at the new date of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. All other terms to remain as at present.**

#### **GP2020/21.24 NATIONAL PAY AWARD**

The Clerk reported that the national negotiating body had approved an increase in salaries of 2.75% across the board. The Council had entered into a contractual obligation to recognise national conditions of service and remuneration and that the Council's payroll provider, Shropshire Council, had already processed the award and the back pay. The purpose of this report was to meet the audit requirement that members be advised of changes to remuneration. The full details of posts and their salaries would be reported to members as part of the annual budget setting exercise.

Members noted the report.

**GP2020/21.25 STAFF COUNSELLING SERVICE**

The Clerk introduced the report which updated members on progress since the decision to investigate the provision of a counselling service. Upon enquiry to Hoople it was clear that the current ad hoc provision from local counsellors was more cost effective and responsive than the occupational health services used by Hoople from the NHS, and that with rising demand for NHS services this gap might well widen. Accordingly, the report recommended continuing to provide counselling from local registered and qualified providers as part of the overall approach to reducing sickness absence and supporting wellbeing.

The Clerk added that he had been asked to consider including support with cessation of smoking in this proposal. Members commented that this could be managed within a general support for anyone struggling with an addiction, but that smoking support was available free from GP's. There was no proposal to amend the original recommendation.

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

**RESOLVED That the Town Clerk continues to use local qualified providers of counselling services as and when necessary to support staff wellbeing and reduce sickness absence.**

**GP2020/21.26 ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

Updated sickness absence and health and safety policies and procedures

Risk analysis annual review (joint with Finance and Policy Committee for referral to Council)

Standing Orders annual review for referral to Council

Staffing implications of the annual business plan and staff restructuring

**GP202/21.27 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Chair explained that it had been suggested that the meetings should be better spaced out. It was agreed without a vote that the date of the next meeting would be Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020 at 6 pm.

There being no other business the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.13 pm

Signed .....

Date .....