

HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL
COUNCIL MEETING 22nd June 2021

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present The Right Worshipful the Mayor Councillor Paul Stevens and Councillors Andrews, Boulter, Foxton, Hey, Kenyon, Milln, Oliver, Owens, Tillett, Tyler, Wilcox, Williams (part).

Attending Steve Kerry Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

Before the meeting the Mayor invited the Diocesan Ecumenical Officer who was introduced by the Chaplin, Revd Andy Morgan, to say prayers.

C2021/22.26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were noted from Councillors Carwardine, Dykes, Hornsey, Powell and Toynbee.

C2021/22.27 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

C2021/22.28 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Mayor explained that the sponsors of Hereford 2030 had got in touch after the agenda had been prepared, but he felt that what they had to say would be of interest to members. As no decisions were required, this was an information item, he and the Clerk had agreed it could be taken as public participation.

The Mayor invited Mark Thomas and Christian Dangerfield from Herefordshire 2030 who had a presentation, the slides had been copied to each member at the meeting. The project is designed to address historic and prolonged decline in the economy through three streams, the economy itself, education and the environment. Christian was the lead on the economic stream and the majority of the presentation had that focus. Each stream would produce a report which would be drawn together into a single coherent document. The presentation showed how economic development in the County had lagged behind other parts of the UK to an alarming degree and that urgent attention was necessary. Closing the economic gap would need around £100m per annum of extra investment until 2030, and a weak economy causes high levels of deprivation. Although the county had some of the most affluent areas of the country, it also had some of the poorest, and this was mirrored in the City too. Building a diverse, sustainable, carbon neutral economy on the present foundations would not be easy. Part of the solution would be to develop a meaningful public/private sector partnership for economic regeneration, align the local economy with major trends, rebrand the county as a centre of learning, creativity and innovation (building on existing technology entrepreneurs operating in the area), developing new sources of funding and investment and building the skills base. It was noted that just building the skills base without well paid jobs would mean simply training people to leave the county, a trend which was very clear in the demographic data at present.

The presentation concluded with a set of targets for delivering three economy reports – the last of which would be published in November 2021 and the three would cover what had happened, how to fix it and 2030 and beyond.

In answer to a number of questions the following additional points were made. The project is about forming links with people who will do the actual regeneration, charities, voluntary groups, business and public bodies, it is not funded as an economic development agency in its own right. A number of business people had already given some free time to developing the project. It is acknowledged that there is a small pool of people who seem to be involved in everything and widening the volunteer group and spreading the load, as well as confirming accountability would be important as the project develops. To this end representation from the City Council would be warmly welcomed. Some of the existing volunteers were well known, others were quite new and some were from out of county bringing specific expertise, so it is a balanced, and growing, group. A volunteers' forum was planned for September.

There was a sense of déjà vu, why would the outcome be different from previous attempts to rebrand or reinvent the county? The unique point here was to align education and training, economic development and investment and the green issues into a single plan, other ventures had failed by focussing on one element to the detriment of the others. It was noted that some of the information on graphs appears to show the county is actually doing quite well and needs to be handled carefully in order to avoid undermining the key message. There was a need to raise wage levels and challenge poor employment practice such as zero hours contracts which held down earnings. There is an encouraging anomaly in that while several economic areas are under-performing against national averages, IT is actually doing very well, it is vital to understand why and build on that.

The feeling of being a poor relation to Worcestershire dates back to the old Hereford and Worcester combined county, where the emphasis was on population not size and therefore resources were skewed. This has not been satisfactorily addressed since the county became a unitary authority in 1998. The situation has also worsened due to the bias towards investment in Wales just across the border under the Barnett formula.

The Mayor thanked Mark and Christian for their presentation and for dealing with the questions and subsequent discussion He felt it was an extremely useful debate for the City to be in at the start of, and noted that, so far, the County Council had not communicated anything about this to its members, which he found surprising. The question of City Council representation on the volunteer oversight group could be dealt with on the item later on the agenda regarding reports from outside bodies.

It was noted that Councillor Williams had joined the meeting during this item.

C2021/22.29 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Regarding the minutes of 18th May 2021, it was noted that the representatives to Three Choirs were Councillors Hornsey and Foxtan, not Boulter. With that correction it was proposed by Councillor Kenyon, seconded by Councillor Boulter and unanimously

RESOLVED That the minutes of the meeting of 18th May 2021 (Annual Meeting of Council) be accepted as an accurate record and signed accordingly by the Mayor.

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

RESOLVED That the confidential minutes of the meeting of 18th May 2021 be accepted as an accurate record and signed accordingly by the Mayor.

C2021/22.30 RIVER CARNIVAL SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

The Mayor invited Councillor Kenyon to present this item, referred from Community Development Committee. It had been unanimously supported at that Committee and he was happy to recommend it to Council.

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

RESOLVED To agree the draft service level agreement recommended by Community Development Committee in respect of the river carnival

C2021/22.31 PAST MAYOR'S BADGE

As most of the ceremonial side of the annual meeting of council had been held in abeyance due to Covid restrictions, the former Mayor had not received her badge. The Mayor presented the Former Mayor's Badge to Councillor Kath Hey and thanked her on behalf of the whole Council for her two years in the office during very difficult and challenging times.

C2021/22.32 FINAL INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

The Clerk was pleased to report that the Council's internal auditor had completed his final report for the financial year 2020/21 and there were no recommendations or points for action. He had signed the relevant part of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return to confirm that the Council had adequate internal controls of its financial matters.

In answer to a question, it was confirmed that the Council has used the same audit firm for some years but that every three or four years they change the individual who does the audit.

Adding congratulations to the staff involved in managing finance at the Council it was proposed by Councillor Hey, seconded by Councillor Andrews and unanimously

RESOLVED That the Council accepts the internal audit report and thanks the staff involved in managing the Council's financial matters for their work.

C2021/22.33 CLOSURE OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2020/21, REPORT ON VARIANCES AND COMPLETION OF ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN

The Clerk presented the completed annual accounts for the financial year. He reported that three queries had arisen at Policy and Resources Committee and two had been resolved at the meeting. The outstanding question was regarding the financial contribution for the bridge where the Council had part-funded this with the Friends of the Country Park. As it had not been coded as a grant it was technically the purchase of an asset and so it appeared that we had added a share of the bridge to the asset register. This was correct in the year of accounting but would need to be sorted out with a simple journal entry this year, as the Council did not in fact own part of the bridge and had no liability for it.

It was noted that work is already underway to re-value the civic treasures and so to have a fully up to date asset register in 2021 which would be reflected in the closed accounts for the year 2021/2022 in due course.

It was then proposed by Councillor Oliver, seconded by Councillor Tillett and unanimously

RESOLVED That the accounts for 2020/2021 be accepted.

The Clerk then explained the purpose of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return and the questions which were set out for members to answer. He recommended acceptance of the pro-forma as set out in the agenda papers as the accounts had now been agreed and the statement of the Internal Auditor was attached.

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

RESOLVED

That the AGAR for 2020/2021 be agreed as set out and signed accordingly by the Clerk/RFO and the Mayor.

That the AGAR and accounts be published for the statutory public consultation period.

C2021/22.34 SKATE PARK LEASE

The Clerk explained the background to this long-running issue. The skate park was involved in a Stronger Towns Bid and the charity that operates it, Wheeled Sports 4 Hereford (WS4H) were negotiating an asset transfer from Herefordshire Council. Herefordshire are the freeholders and we hold a lease, as WS4H were not at the time this was set up a fully constituted body. We then sub-lease the facility to WS4H. At the appropriate time the City Council would surrender its lease, which is not possible until the asset transfer is ready as that would leave WS4H with no tenure at all. The purpose of the proposed resolution was to enable that surrender to happen at short notice, as and when Herefordshire had completed the legal formalities for the asset transfer.

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

RESOLVED That the Clerk is authorised to sign and apply the Council seal to a surrender of the lease on the Skate Park as and when it would be necessary to do so to facilitate the asset transfer by Herefordshire Council of the skate park to Wheeled Sports for Herefordshire.

C2021/22.35 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor advised members that face masks with the city crest are now available from the Mayor's Officer.

It had generally been a quiet time for official functions as Covid was still affecting many activities. The Mayor had attended the opening of the Knife Angel exhibition and the raising of the flag for Armed Forces Week. On 24th June the Town Hall would be illuminated in green to celebrate St John's Ambulance Day.

The Mayor had attended the Youth Council recently and been greatly impressed with the youth councillors and their energy and enthusiasm. He heard that there is some concern about how safe the city is for young people to move around in at night, and he would be meeting the new police commissioner for the county soon to discuss this and other concerns. County lines and the level of crime associated with drug trading within the city was another high priority.

A discussion took place around the unfortunate delay in Herefordshire Council raising the LGBT Awareness Month flag on the Town Hall so it went up at the same time as the start of

Armed Forces week. It was important to observe both properly and the Clerk would discuss this with Herefordshire Council to ensure both matters were appropriately recognised.

Pigeons continue to be a major problem at the town hall and the spikes on the frontage are completely ineffectual. We will continue to discuss this with Herefordshire Council. We will be discussing the possibility for permanent lighting at the next meeting of Community Development Committee.

C2021/22.36 MINUTES OF MEETINGS

The minutes of the meeting of Climate and Biodiversity Committee of 8th June were noted.

The minutes of Community Development Committee of 7th June were noted.

The minutes of Planning Committee of 29th April and 27th May were noted, with an additional note that a long standing application for student accommodation at the bottom of Widemarsh had now been added to with an additional application for the same purpose.

The minutes of the Youth Council of 22nd April were noted.

C2021/22.37 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

Comments are only minuted where there was something to report.

Municipal Charities – Councillor Boulter reported a meeting two weeks ago of the trustees, all was in good order.

Close House – Councillor Hey reported that Close House had been in touch and she was now acknowledged as the Council's representative taking over from Councillor Boulter as the former mayor. She suggested that she and Councillor Boulter attend the next meeting to do a formal hand over. Councillor Kenyon added that there was a soap box derby with box from Close House and one from the Youth Council and the Clerk had agreed to have printed Council logos made for the carts.

Hereford BID – The Mayor had circulated the latest newsletter from BID, and added that Ferrous was coming back next spring.

Stronger Towns Bid – Councillor Hey reported that following the announcement of the award of £22.5m from the government the project was in a short period of limbo while the consultants got in touch with the sponsors of projects about the next stages. This would happen very shortly. It was noted that the museum bid would require £10m of match funding from Herefordshire to be viable and it was unlikely in the extreme that any further funding would be available to cover the gap between the government's announcement and the £24m of schemes approved. £1.5m would be sought from reducing the costs of some schemes. It was noted that Parkour is not included in the extreme sports bid, but the cabinet member is known to be keen to try and work it in.

Community Land Trust – Councillor Milln had circulated a written report.

Allotments – Councillor Kenyon reported that good relations had been established with the newer trustees who were keen to move into a more self-managing model in line with the draft Service Level Agreement that has been approved by Community Development Committee. It was noted the discussions are continuing with the racecourse that might lead to more land being made available for allotments.

Herefordshire 2030 – Noting the request for representation on this project the Mayor asked for nominations. Councillor Kenyon proposed, Councillor Andrews seconded and it was unanimously

RESOLVED That Councillors Kenyon and Hey be appointed to represent the city on the Herefordshire 2030 board.

It was noted that the City Council representatives would pursue the issues of equality and environment as well as the economic development that had been the main theme of the presentation.

C2021/22.38 TOWN CLERK’S COMMUNICATIONS

The Clerk reported arrangements for Planning Committee but it was also reported that the agenda had not been sent out by the responsible officer and the meeting would have to be postponed for at least a week.

In answer to a question about sending agendas and supporting papers electronically, the Clerk will circulate all members to request clear expressions of consent to receive all papers for a committee electronically. It would not be possible to keep chopping and changing arrangements depending on the size of documents for example.

C2021/22.39 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

14th September 2021 at 6 pm

There being no further business the Mayor closed the meeting at 7.42 pm

Signed

Date