

HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE 12th October 2021

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: The Right Worshipful the Mayor Councillor Paul Stevens (Chair) and Councillors Kath Hey, Brian Wilcox, Kevin Tillett, Polly Andrews, Diana Toynbee, Cat Hornsey, Sue Boulter, Aubrey Oliver

Attending: Steve Kerry Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer and Becci O'Reilly Administration and Events Manager

PR2021/22.28 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Rob Williams apologised for his lateness.

PR2021/22.29 SUBSTITUTIONS

None

PR2021/22.30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

PR2021/22.31 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

It was noted that in minute 22 regarding the Hereford gift card the reference to an additional requirement for £750 in sales should read "£700 in profits from sales".

With this amendment it was proposed by Councillor Tillett, seconded by Councillor Oliver and

RESOLVED That the minutes of the meeting of 22nd July 2021 be accepted as amended as a true record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

Two members abstained as they had not been present at the meeting.

PR2021/22.32 SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS

The Chair reminded members that it was good practice to raise queries before the meeting so that the officers would be prepared with detailed answers. However, some queries arose at the meeting. It was reported that the bill from Fattorini was for a batch of five previous mayor and five previous consort badges, the first new batch ordered for fifteen years. It was much cheaper to order in batches than year by year. Nonetheless some members were concerned at the cost of the gold badges. The final contract payment to Neil Wain for allotments works had been made in August when the contract terminated. He had also been paid to mow the Bartonhsam Path and would continue to be used to keep the Holmer allotment hedge from obstructing the footway as this needed attention throughout the year.

With this further information provided, the Schedules for 31/7/21, and 31/8/21 were noted by the Committee.

PR2021/22.33 BANK RECONCILIATIONS

Bank reconciliations for 31/7/21 and 31/8/21 were presented. It was not known if the cheques shown as unrepresented at the end of July had now been presented. Again, the Chair reminded members that questions like this are best asked before the meeting so officers can have the information to hand.

PR2021/22.34 COVID PREPARATIONS

The Clerk presented a report stressing that this would only apply if the government both prohibited public meetings and failed to introduce some legislation to permit online meetings. This was the situation faced from March 2020 until May that year, and would be the case if the government declared another lockdown as the permissive legislation for on line meetings was temporary and had expired.

Members commented that the report was helpful and suggested a common sense solution. It was also confirmed that the Council is using every avenue to lobby for the option of on line meetings to be included in future legislation.

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

RESOLVED

That in the event of government restrictions making it impossible lawfully to hold physical meetings which are open to the public, the Mayor and Deputy are authorised to suspend the calendar of public meetings of council and committees and to revert to online consultative working groups to guide delegated officer decisions.

That in the event of restrictions being imposed for shorter period the Mayor and Chair of the relevant committee may decide to replace a meeting which had become unlawful with an online consultation to inform delegated decisions, as the alternative to cancellation.

That decision made under the terms of suspension of meetings as listed above stand as decisions of the Council or its Committees and do not require further ratification before they are acted upon.

That where a formal meeting of Council is necessary in law and there is no provision for this to be held online, every effort is made to facilitate the safe attendance of as many members as possible, for example to agree the budget and precept, to elect a Chair of Council and Mayor and to close the annual accounts.

PR2021/22.35 CODE OF CONDUCT

The Clerk introduced the item. After a brief discussion to clarify the relationship with the existing code of conduct it was

Proposed by Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Boulter and unanimously

RESOLVED

That the Committee proposes a modification of the Code of Conduct to allow members who have declared a non-pecuniary interest to remain in the room and to provide factual information to support members in making a decision.

That the Committee proposes a modification of the Code of Conduct to allow the Clerk to exercise discretion in declaring a dispensation to enable a quorum of members to be maintained to enable a decision to be lawfully made.

That the Clerk drafts a suitable amendment to the Code of Conduct for consideration by Council and, if this is agreed, to inform the Monitoring Officer of the changes.

That any changes are incorporated into the Code for local implementation.

PR2021/22.36 TOWN HALL UPDATE

The Clerk explained that this report was written for three purposes and therefore circulated well before the agenda despatch. There was little further information to add. A meeting would take place shortly with our prospective business partners and after that another meeting would take place with Herefordshire Council to see what progress had been made with repairs and vacating their areas of the building.

Councillor Oliver thanked the Clerk for a very comprehensive report. He was concerned that a possible sale to a third party could lead to the premises being sold on if the venture was unsuccessful – which was acknowledged but there is nothing the City Council can do to control this as we have only a limited leasehold interest at the moment.

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

RESOLVED

That the Committee endorses the work done by the Mayor and Clerk with Councillors Hey, Wilcox and Milln, to try and find a workable solution following the withdrawal of interest by Encore.

That the Committee endorses the Clerk approaching a specialist source for detailed legal advice to protect the City Council's interest and liability and to support the creation of a suitable vehicle for an asset transfer.

That the Committee endorses the approach taken in discussion with potential partners to achieve a longer lease to give the City Council proved security of tenure at the Town Hall.

That the Committee agrees in principle, subject to a more detailed report to full Council in due course for a reserved decision, that a potential solution involving a third party, either as a community asset transfer or a sale by private treaty to a local business partnership, with the intention of maintaining and restoring the civic building and providing for long term occupation by the City Council is acceptable, and should be pursued.

PR2021/22.37 COUNCIL TAX STRATEGY

The Clerk introduced the report. In particular the Clerk explained how changes in advice from the consultants and a reduction in the overall value of the bus scheme had reduced the expected revenue input from the Stronger Towns Fund. In order to find the resources for the first three years match funding he was proposing to use 7% of the £1.7m as a revenue contribution, and find the rest from £60k per annum from reserves and £50k per annum from an annual council tax increase of 5%. Despite inflation running at 4% and rising, he was not proposing any further increase, the only item raising the tax would be the buses which had a clear social value. The percentage translated into a cash increase of £2.70 per annum for a band D payer.

It was noted in a very detailed discussion that the requirement for £150,000 was the worst case scenario based on current information and that sponsorship and advertising revenues might reduce that requirement. It was also noted that good news management around any increase was essential as the government insisted that councils report percentages which

invited a reaction even when the cash sums involved were very small. Many people do not even notice the parish precept but react to the global figure for both councils, police and fire and rescue services without understanding how it is assembled. Despite this some members were very concerned about the PR impact of a percentage increase and the need to explain that this was for a specific project.

The Zipper project had awakened interest in the county around electrification of bus fleets. The Clerk confirmed he was in discussion with Herefordshire Council about how they might be able to contribute to the scheme, but any attempt to make it work into their timetable for infrastructure works or wider bus schemes would not be welcomed. There was little evidence that Herefordshire had passed information about stronger towns bids to the officers working on the Hereford City Centre Improvement Plan, which was very disappointing as clearly these activities needed to have been co-ordinated through Economic Development, who are represented on the ST Board.

It was noted that the plan was to put funds in place the year before it was likely that the buses would be on the road. The Clerk explained that his thinking was that he did not want to be in the position at the final government assessment of saying that the match funding was proposed rather than secured as that might undermine the project.

Members considered having a lower rate of increase and relying on a beneficial movement in the tax base to cover the difference. The Clerk explained the working of the tax base, the likelihood but not the certainty that it would rise, and the timing of any information about its movement from Herefordshire Council. It had always been the practice of the Council not to make any final announcement of its budget until the tax base was known.

It was proposed by Councillor Wilcox, seconded by Councillor Tillet and

RESOLVED

That based on the current economic circumstances facing the City Council and noting the need to create funds to support the electric bus initiative, the Committee directs the Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer to base the budget calculation for the financial years 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25 on a 4% annual increase in council tax, supplemented by any beneficial virement in the tax base.

That the Committee receives a further detailed budget proposal for comment and recommendation to Council in the January cycle of meetings.

At this point Councillor Toynbee apologised that she had to leave the meeting for another engagement. Councillor Williams arrived, giving apologies for lateness due to another meeting.

PR2021/22.38 TUPSLEY FIREWORKS PROPOSAL FOR A DONATION

The Clerk briefly introduced the report and in particular explained that the request had come in too late for a grant application to be considered by Community Development Committee and that the process of agreeing a donation was the same as had been used for decisions regarding flood and Covid responses. Donations fell within the purview of this Committee, grants were a matter for Community Development.

There was some discussion of whether donations should also be within the remit of Community Development. The Clerk advised against this as it might lead to applicants whose grant applications were found to be missing important details suddenly switching, or

members switching for them, to a proposal for a donation. This could be considered again when committee roles and remits are considered by full Council, if there was a wish to do so.

Members commented on the specific proposal regarding Tupsley and a number of points were noted. Firstly, this event was large, had been well run in the past and was well established. Both the date and the need for public liability insurance were foreseeable and there was no case for treating this as an emergency application for funds. Secondly, although the event was very popular with those who attended, it caused considerable disruption in the area and many people, especially those with pets or children who are frightened of the loud fireworks tended to dread it. It was, therefore, somewhat divisive in the local area.

If there was a need for council funding to support this event it should be brought forward for next year's event, in plenty of time, as a grant application to Community Development Committee.

It was proposed by Councillor Wilcox, seconded by Councillor Boulter and

RESOLVED That the proposal for a donation of £500 to fund public liability insurance for the Tupsley fireworks in 2021 is rejected.

Councillors Andrews and Hornsey abstained as their pets' and childrens' reactions to fireworks were so strongly negative that they felt they could not be objective about the merits of this proposal.

PR2021/22.39 HEREFORD PRIDE – RETROSPECTIVE APPROVAL FOR A DONATION

The Clerk introduced the item and reminded members of their legal obligation to take positive actions to improve social cohesion and equality, not simply to prevent unlawful discrimination in their own actions within the Council. Pride had been agreed to be funded last year but was prevented from proceeding due to Covid. This year an event had been organised, but notice of it reached the Council during the summer recess when it would have been unlikely that a quorate meeting could be called. As it had already been decided in the previous year to support the event, the Clerk authorised the release of the £500 planned then for this year's event, and was now seeking the retrospective authorisation of members of that donation. A meeting would be held the day after this Committee with the organiser of Pride to establish whether they wished to apply for a grant possibly a service level agreement for future years so the funding for this event would be less ad hoc.

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

RESOLVED That the Committee endorses the donation of £500 to support Pride 2021 in Hereford and that the donation is funded from the city events budget.

PR2021/22.40 STAFF RESTRUCTURE FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

The Clerk reminded members that the staff restructure exercise had envisaged a full time post of Grants and External Partnerships Manager, and that this post had been offered on assimilation to an officer who had instead opted for voluntary redundancy. This had been agreed, and this left 37 hours of time missing from the establishment. During Covid, with no city events and a very low level of Mayoral activity this had been sustainable but it was now becoming increasingly difficult to develop recovery of services and activities with such a large gap in a small organisation. The opportunity had been taken to review what the

Deputy Town Clerk role had been and it was clear that there were two distinct work streams. One involved grants and external funding, though most of the attention had been on grants coming into the council as applications. There had been close working with officers at Herefordshire Council who advise on external funding, and it was noted, with some regret that this establishment is being progressively reduced as a non-statutory activity as financial pressure grows ever more severe on that Authority. The other element was more routine administration, much of it to do with committee processes notably in support for Community Development Committee, and in the organisation of larger civic and ceremonial events. The increased busyness of the Mayor's office, which had been very rapid once Covid restrictions had been lifted, precluded the Mayor's Secretary from having any spare time to offer support in this area, and so there were two pressures; for advice and support to community groups, especially in the area of funding, and for routine administration which was now being tackled by more highly paid officers who were being pulled away from other duties to undertake tasks that should be carried out by a lower paid officer.

The third element of this review was to evaluate the extremely valuable work done at Hinton Community Centre and to enable that to continue by making the temporary arrangement of funding the Centre Manager permanent, although this could only be resolved in principle as detailed terms would be the subject of consultation with the trustees at Hinton.

In discussion, members broadly supported the idea of having an Administrative Officer to enable those paid higher salaries to concentrate on the more valuable work they needed to do. It was noted that discussions around the Town Hall, and the development of a successful Stronger Towns Fund bid has been extremely time consuming and necessary, and that pressure on that was likely to continue. Also city events would need a substantial amount of work doing on them to recover the programme and enhance it as the country comes out of the Covid pandemic. It was important that cost effective administrative support was provided. It was noted that this was not a suitable area for an apprentice as there was very limited training available and the main need was to relieve other officers of time pressure, and having to train an apprentice would add to this. Apprentices would be sought at the appropriate time, which may now be coming nearer, for the TIC and it was established again that the Council would contact Herefordshire about care leavers and other young people being supported by that Council as a potential source of apprentices.

There was some discussion as to whether the officer working with community groups around grants and other external funding opportunities would be an employee or possibly a retained consultant. Officers favoured the employee model as it was easier to integrate someone into the team if they were on similar terms of engagement but if the best applicant to come out of the selection process made it a condition that some other model such as annualised hours or consultancy be considered it would be. The over-riding concern was however to secure terms of employment or engagement that met the Council's needs; there was a limit as to how far we could go to accommodate the needs of any individual. It was also noted that there is a lot of external funding out there especially for green developments and that it was important that we had someone with the time and skills to seek it out, not just for community groups but also for the Council itself. This would be an important part of establishing a sound basis for funding the electric buses after the first three years.

Finally, it was noted that the workload in the Mayoral Team had increased very quickly and was likely to remain high. Although the hours of the Mayor's Officer were not on the agenda for consideration it was noted that he is routinely working additional hours and that the review proposed when the former Governance and Procedures Committee resolved to reduce this from a full time role should be brought forward to the next meeting of this Committee.

There was a brief discussion of the proposal regarding Hinton Community Centre, but it was noted that more detailed comments should be reserved for the confidential item on this agenda.

It was then proposed by Councillor Williams, seconded by Councillor Hornsey (rec 1), proposed by Councillor Wilcox and seconded by Councillor Williams (rec 2), proposed by Councillor Andrews and seconded by Councillor Wilcox (rec 3) proposed by Councillor Tillett and seconded by Councillor Hornsey (rec 4) and unanimously

RESOLVED

That the post of Grants and External Partnerships Manager be formally deleted from the establishment.

That the post of External Funding and Community Support Officer be established at Local Council Clerks Grade 2 (at standard range) at 18 hours per week, or any variation in the terms of engagement agreed by the appointing panel.

That the post of Administration Officer be established at Local Council Clerks Grade 1 (above standard range) at 37 hours per week and that this be subject to open advertisement and recruitment.

That in consultation with the trustees of Hinton Community Centre, the post of Community Centre Manager be established as permanent within the Council's establishment and as part of the agreement the hours required to perform the role, including wider activities beyond the Hinton Centre itself, be agreed either under delegated authority by the Clerk or a further report to this Committee.

That further consideration of the implementation of the previous recommendation will take place in confidential business at this meeting.

PR2021/22.41 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

As the next item was likely to require the disclosure of personal information about an identified individual in order for it to be properly discussed it was proposed by Councillor Stevens, seconded by Councillor Wilcox and unanimously resolved

RESOLVED That under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 s 1(2) the press and public be excluded to allow the discussion of confidential business.

PR2021/22.42 STAFF RESTRUCTURE – CONFIDENTIAL STAFFING MATTERS

After confidential discussion the process for filling the post of Hinton Community Centre Manager was agreed.

PR2021/22.43 READMISSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was resolved without a formal vote to readmit the press and public.

PR2021/22.44 ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Half yearly financial report – next meeting

Review of staffing arrangements in the Mayor’s office – next meeting

Further consideration of the budget and council tax

Stronger towns fund and town hall asset transfer – ongoing items for progress reports

TIC apprenticeships

PR2021.22.45 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday November 9th at 6 pm.

There being no further business the Chair closed the meeting at 8-05 pm.

Signed

Date