

HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE 18 October 2022

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Bolter (Chair) and Councillors Carwardine, Hey, Hornsey, Oliver (part), Owens Stevens, Tyler, Wilcox, and Williams

In attendance: Steve Kerry, Town Clerk and Dave Tristram, External Funding and Community Support Officer

CD2022/23.38 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None

CD2022/23.39 SUBSTITUTIONS

None

CD2022/23.40 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Hornsey declared a pecuniary interest in the supplementary items regarding Close House as her son is paid for some work there.

Three councillors also declared a non pecuniary interest in the item on the Food Bank as they are unpaid ambassadors for the organisation. Noting the strong links many members have with the Food Bank it was

Proposed by Councillor Tyler, seconded by Councillor Williams and, with the three members concerned abstaining,

RESOLVED That members of the Committee who have a non-pecuniary interest as Food Bank ambassadors be given a dispensation to enable them to take part in the debate on this item and to vote in order to ensure that the widest range of knowledge and experience is available to the committee.

Councillor Oliver joined the meeting at this point.

CD2022/23.41 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Members had received a large number of minutes as there had been several meetings in a fairly short time. The Chair asked if there were any objections to any of them, and there were not. It was therefore

Proposed by Councillor Hornsey, seconded by Councillor Carwardine and unanimously

RESOLVED That the minutes of the meetings of 29 March 2022, 28 June 2022, 25 April 2022 (Grants), 11 July 2022 (Grants), 3/10 October 2022 be accepted as a true record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

CD2022/23.42 FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE FOOD BANK

The Chair welcomed Lucy Hurds to the meeting as a representative of the Food Bank.

Lucy reported that the Food Bank is very grateful for the support given by the City Council in the past. All councillors will shortly receive a note on how to do referrals. The standard

practice is to give out 7 days of food, with 3 meals a day per family member, approximately 100,000 meal portions per year. There were 43 volunteers a year ago, now 110 and rising, which reflects the surge in demand. Yesterday alone 14 new families were referred. The warmer weather (lower heating costs) and the fit and fed programmes had led to a slight reduction in the summer months but demand was picking up fast. About 40% of clients are in work, but find themselves in a crisis, such as a carer who couldn't afford fuel to go to work and therefore lost wages and couldn't afford food for the family. Over the past few months an excess stock of pasta and beans has been shipped to schools for use in basic cookery lessons to encourage independence. The Food Bank does not encourage long term dependency, with a maximum of three weeks' support over six months in most cases. The standard food box offers a balanced diet and comes with a recipe book along with children's toothpaste and brushes for families. The work with schools is going well and will be increased if resources allow.

At this point Councillor Hey also declared a nonpecuniary interest as a food bank volunteer.

In answer to questions the following additional information was noted. The schools' work is aimed at Years 5 and 6, although at the smaller primary schools it may be the whole school or half at a time. Given the fairly healthy financial position of the Food Bank, how could the Council assist? In answer to this it was noted that the group are spending over £1,000 per week, donations are dropping off due to the cost-of-living crisis and although there is some respite from Harvest Festival donations, which are greatly appreciated, this is coming to an end now. There is no immediate need for funds but that could change rapidly.

There is the equivalent of two full time paid staff, everyone else is a volunteer. There is a need for a person to be added to deal solely with incoming phone calls, probably at around 20 hours per week. Some other areas of need such as sanitary products are ongoing, others such as sun cream for children are temporary. The sun cream was funded by a specific grant after an intervention from an A&E doctor who was seeing cases of sunburn at the hospital.

It was noted that the External Funding and Community Support Officer will assist with any future financial needs, including helping with an application to Funds for All and bringing any changes in need or specific new projects to the attention of the Committee.

The report was noted, with many expressions of appreciation for the invaluable work done by the Food Bank. The Chair thanked Lucy for her report.

CD2022/23.43 CLOSE HOUSE ANNUAL REPORT AND LARGE GRANT APPLICATION

In view of her declaration of interest Councillor Hornsey left the meeting at this point.

As this item was the subject of a presentation the Chair proposed, and it was agreed without a vote to take this supplementary item next.

The Chair welcomed Ben Lea to the meeting. Ben explained that Close House has been running for 19 years from the old St. Peter's vicarage and provides a service mainly to youth who are in and out of school, often subject to temporary exclusions and at risk of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour or worse. Lockdown had been extremely difficult with a lot of open air sessions and one to one outreach. Gap year volunteers were now hard to find and pre Covid there had been eight youth workers, now there were two and half FTE. The activities are aimed mainly at 14+ age group and include after school and holiday clubs, EPICs, life skills coaching with nine sessions a week reaching some 150 young people. Following the demise

of the No Wrong Door programme, there had been joint working with HVOSS and some extension of work beyond the premises at Close House.

There is a request for an uplift of £5,000 in the annual funding award to bring it to £20,000 to support a full time youth worker and also a grant request for £15,000 to fund the part-time EPICs coordinator.

As the Council's representative on the Close House Board of Trustees, Councillor Hey added that the last few years had been very hard on Ben and his team and they deserve congratulations for their sterling efforts. Life was coming back into the centre now as Covid restrictions ended. HVOSS volunteers task force cites the EPICs as an example of best practice in community volunteering.

In answer to questions the following additional points were noted. The 2.5 FTE youth workers is in fact spread over six people and is supplemented by Ben himself and a coordinator/administrator for 20 hours per week. The EPICs grant will pay for two people to cover 12 hours a week each for year. There are a couple of volunteers keen to get into this work. EPICs has run for eight years funded from the lottery, then the European Social Fund, then the Police and Crime Commissioner and finally from Close House reserves. These are dwindling fast. It was noted that the P&CC had put funding into No Wrong Door and might be persuaded to fund Close House now that programme had closed.

Several members noted the excellent work done by the EPICs at various events, most recently at Hereford AppleFest as litter pickers leaving the event area immaculate. Ben added that it is by helping at events like this, Remembrance Day, Tupsley fireworks etc that the young people feel valued and included.

Funding has been obtained for the Community Foundation and the Council's officer will assist with applications to other local trusts who may well help. It was noted that as No Wrong Door closes demand at Close House will inevitably increase, as there is no replacement provision.

Sadly with De Montfort University closing its degree course in youth work the possibility of taking on and training workers is reducing however there is some possibility of marketing training to the market towns as a source of revenue.

The Clerk advised that the renewal of the annual grant was a matter for this Committee. Arguably increasing that grant by £5,000 was within the Committee's powers but said this might be taken to be an ongoing commitment and so it would be better for the matter to go to Council. As the large grant would in any case have to go to Council it would enable the best informed debate to take place if both items went to the same meeting.

It was noted that due to pressure of work at Close House the annual report did not provide all the information necessary to make a final decision on the increased annual grant, and that this could be referred to Council without a recommendation to enable Ben to assemble more data.

After some further discussion of options it was

Proposed by Councillor Wilcox, seconded by Councillor Tyler and unanimously

RESOLVED

That the one off grant of £15,000 to support the EPICs be recommended to Council.

That the increased service level agreement sum of £20,000 be referred to Council with some additional information from Close House.

Councillor Hornsey re-entered the meeting at the conclusion of this item.

CD2022/23.44 ALLOTMENTS' GRANT AND RELATED MATTERS

Councillor Boulter declared a non pecuniary interest as a plot holder and asked Councillor Hornsey to take the Chair for this item.

The Clerk briefly rehearsed the development of the service level agreement and particularly the move towards the Allotments Society engaging their own contractors for items such as pest control and grounds maintenance. He also reported that the dispute with a former trustee had been ended and that the mower was now being moved by another trustee from site to site, and would be in full use next year, reducing the need for a contractor for grounds maintenance work other than the annual hedge pruning. As a result of this some useful savings had been made, but the extra costs of grass cutting this year, as a result of the abrupt departure of the trustee who had undertaken to do this work, had meant an unexpected call on a contractor. Therefore the Society were out of pocket to some extent and the Clerk suggested that in view of the savings that had been accrued it would be reasonable to adjust the annual grant this year assist the Society with the transition.

Proposed by Councillor Stevens, seconded by Councillor Hey, and, with two abstentions,

RESOLVED

That in line with the service level agreement commitment and current budget the Committee agrees to this year's grant of £7,053.

That, recognising the additional costs incurred this year for site maintenance, the Committee agrees to add a further £2,000 making a total grant of £9,053.

That officers note the savings in pest control and grounds maintenance achieved under the new SLA and consider these as part of the overall budget setting processes in line with the direction given by members of the Policy and Resources Committee.

CD2022/23.45 COMMUNITY GRANTS SCHEME CONSIDERATIONS AND OPTIONS 2023/24

The External Funding and Community Support Officer introduced his first draft report, which will be completed for final decisions in February, which will shape the grants policy for the new financial year and following. The new form is easier to use, and it was pleasing that 50% of applications now were from people who had not applied to the Council before. We might also consider building an inflator into service level agreements rather than holding the same amount over three or more years, especially if the inflation rate remained high.

Members noted the positive outcome from the Officer's efforts, notably in many new applications and the positive feedback from people using the new forms. There was some discussion as to the extent to which members could give themselves guidelines as to when to apply the special merit criterion to justify awarding between £3,000 and £5,000 and also whether to prioritise grants for new projects or activities rather than asset maintenance. After much discussion of the options the balance of opinion was that trying to determine these matters through guidelines was very difficult, and would in any case, not be binding on future meetings of the Committee, as one meeting cannot fetter the discretion of a future one. This

would only apply if Council imposed guidelines which would then become firm policy constraints. This would prevent every application from being considered on its merits. The fact that the City Council will support revenue application not just capital programmes is a very positive feature of our scheme.

Members also discussed the situation of organisations with very large resources applying for discreet grants for specific projects when they clearly had the option of flexing those resources to meet their own needs. Vennture was cited as an example of this, as was the Courtyard. It was noted that large balances are often connected to ring fenced grants so this area too needs to be explored with some care, and full information obtained about the flexibility or otherwise of balances held by organisations before final decisions can be made. Nonetheless, it was a legitimate area of enquiry for the Committee to consider whether an organisation did in fact have the means to meet its own needs, and to prioritise grants on the basis of need as well as the value of the project being undertaken. Some members felt that the grants policy should show a clear bias towards smaller local organisations rather than branches of national charities and trusts. It was also important to know if Herefordshire Council was funding an activity as an outsourced council service before assessing the strength of a grant application.

It was noted that the Committee had met twice over the last two weeks to consider fifteen grants. In future no more than eight grants would be put forward in any one meeting cycle and would be dealt with in a single meeting so as to keep the workload manageable. If necessary, applicants would be told their grants would be considered at a later meeting, especially if they were late getting their applications in.

The Committee noted the report and asked the External Funding and Community Support Officer to bear their comments in mind in his discussions with applicants about streamlining the system.

CD2022/23.46 UPDATE FROM EXTERNAL FUNDING AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICER

The Officer gave an oral report including the following points.

An up to date summary of spending against the grants budget had been circulated. There is some pressure with two meetings to come this financial year; options would be to cancel the last meeting, to seek a virement from reserves or to award grants at the last meeting only for payment in the following financial year when the budget is planned to be increased by £50,000.

Plaques for premises and fittings funded by grants would be a single generic design to save money. With assistance from the Communications Officer some case studies would be published on social media to draw attention to the Council's community impact. Following his attendance at the Herefordshire and Worcestershire "Meet the Funders" event he had become aware of two new local trusts and would be meeting them shortly to obtain further information.

Awards for All are planning a spring workshop in Hereford and might be joined by the Lottery. Outside the scope of the grant system, the Officer is getting requests for help with groups trying to find premises in Hereford, citing slow progress with Herefordshire Property Services as the reason they are approaching us. There is little we can do to help. However, with this in mind he is trying to locate a suitable site for pop ups for local charities to publicise their work for a couple of weeks at a time. There may be a vacant site in Maylord's that would be suitable.

He is trying to organise a first meeting of possible Town Hall trustees to progress that element of the possible asset transfer, and will be attending a meeting at the Methodist Church on 19 October about the warm places initiative. The City Funding Group would be meeting in January to identify ways of avoiding duplication of effort and spreading the benefits of projects and funding sources as widely as possible.

The Officer also reported that Vennture had offered Rainbow Nursery space at the old RVS building at a much reduced rent from their original suggestion and without asking them to contribute to renovations; this was to be welcomed.

Councillor Hey asked that the officer contact the new Alan and Dorothy Brailsford Trust as possible local benefactors. Councillor Tyler asked if she could help with the creation of the Community Chest initiative, which is a joint project from the Community Foundation and Talk Communities. Within the limits of working for the City rather than the County this was acceptable.

CD2022/23.47 ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Coronation activities.

C2022/23.48 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 28 November 2022 at 10 am (Grant items)

There being no further business the Chair closed the meeting.

Signed

Date