



HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 6 JUNE 2023

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillors Paul Stevens, Polly Andrews, Kevin Tillett, Diana Toynbee, Debbie Hobbs, Cat Hornsey, Sam Potts, Mark Dykes and Sue Boulter

Attending: Steve Kerry Town Clerk and RFO, Alyson Kinsey Finance Officer, John Marshall Mayor's Officer.

PR2023/24.1 ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

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

RESOLVED That Councillor Stevens be elected as Chair of the Committee for the municipal year 2023-2024.

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

RESOLVED That Councillor Potts be elected as Vice Chair of the Committee for the municipal year 2023-2024.

PR2023/24.2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None. The Chair thanked everyone for a full attendance at the first meeting of the year.

PR2023/24.3 SUBSTITUTIONS

None.

PR2023/24.4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

PR2023/24.5 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was proposed by Councillor Hornsey, seconded by Councillor Tillett and, with new members abstaining,

RESOLVED That the minutes of the meeting of 21 March and the minutes of the confidential business of 21 March 2023 be accepted as a true record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

PR2023/24.6 SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS

The Finance Officer presented a schedule of payments made since the last meeting and the Chair reminded everyone that questions should be put in advance so answers can be researched. There were no questions, and the schedule of payments was noted.

PR2023/24.7 BANK RECONCILIATIONS

The Finance Officer presented reconciliations on all accounts for items since the last meeting. There were no questions, and the reconciliations were accepted.

PR2023/24.8 2022/2023 FINAL INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

The Clerk explained that as part of the closing of accounts the internal auditor produced a final report on the Council's processes. The report identified no problems or issues and would be forwarded as part of the Annual Governance and Accountability Review.

The report was noted.

PR2023/24.9 REPORT ON VARIANCES, CLOSURE OF ACCOUNTS, ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW

The Clerk reported that this year over 80% of the work had been done internally by the Finance Officer with the external accountants simply topping and tailing the final figures and verifying the external returns. The largest variance had been in interest earned which reflected the greater use of the deposit account and the higher rates now available on the market. Some of the additional income is the result of sums for the Hereford Zipper coming through the accounts as income, then being expenditure afterwards. There would be some very large transactions coming through the system such as the £1m or so when the buses were paid for. The process for clearing payments in relation to the Hereford Zipper was clarified; the Clerk obtains an invoice, gets a subvention of funds from Herefordshire Council, who are the overall project controllers (income), and as soon as that is cleared the invoice is paid (expenditure). The imbalance will be that Herefordshire will not forward funds for VAT as this is recoverable, so it will stand as a cost to the Council between the payment of the invoice and the settlement of the VAT recovery which is done quarterly with HMRC.

In answer to a question, the Clerk said that there had been an issue with too much money being in the deposit account and a very quick transaction was required to bring the current account up to the required level to cover all items. It was now operated a little more conservatively but still with much higher levels of interest than previously.

The Chair noted the financial year had finished very close to budget with some planned drawing on reserves for exceptional items. He proposed a vote of thanks for the staff on this, which was acclaimed.

There was a discussion of green bags, which the City Council sells at cost price plus a very modest handling charge, with the income going back to Herefordshire. The other means by which citizens can purchase sacks and avoid a handling charge were noted.

It was proposed by Councillor Dykes, seconded by Councillor Hornsey and unanimously.

RESOLVED That the Committee endorses the statement on variances in the report and recommends acceptance of the accounts and AGAR as drafted to Council at its meeting of 20 June.

That subject to any further comments at Council the Committee recommends that the AGAR be signed and that the accounts be published for public scrutiny.

CD2023/24.10 TEMPORARY STAFFING ARRANGEMENTS

The Clerk reported that a decision on these arrangements had been scheduled for June or July. As set out in the report it had taken some time to get the new arrangements into place, the transition in responsibility for Planning Committee had been problematic as there had been a wave of 5G mast applications which had attracted unprecedented levels of correspondence with a number of people and the temporary Administrative Officer had not started in post until April. He therefore recommended that further consideration be deferred until the July meeting.

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

RESOLVED That the temporary arrangements including acting up allowance for the Information and Communications Officer and the Tourism and Information Officer and the employment of a temporary Administrative Officer continue until the meeting in July is able to review them in detail.

That a report is prepared for that committee setting out options and recommendations for the future deployment of staff to deliver the Council's priorities.

PR2023/24.11 CIVIC APPAREL

The Clerk introduced the report stating that civic ceremonial is expensive but is also highly visible. The Council is judged by many people on how it performs these historic duties and poor quality in the civic robes is an issue. Several members have also noted the different shades as some have faded, the impact of the archaic distinction between Councillors and Aldermen in the facings, etc. A reserve had been built up over the years to cover this as replacement was costly, but only took place about once every thirty years as the robes were extremely hard wearing.

The Mayor's Officer showed the Committee the two colours one a bright red, the other a maroon tone. Members preferred the darker maroon one to avoid any clash with the Mayor's distinctive red, and agreed that the facing should if possible be navy blue to reflect the crest and the Council tie. It was noted that gloves are not considered to be compulsory, some members may have skin allergies which would make wearing them unwise but they are an accessory not fundamental to the civic apparel. The question arose of members who might have issues with complying with the dress code. The Clerk confirmed that a member who was transitioning their gender or who was gender fluid would be allowed to wear the hat appropriate to whichever gender they identified as at the time. Likewise, a member who had other headwear, for example a Sikh wearing a turban, would not be expected to wear a hat on top of that, or to remove their religious headwear.

There is no fixed rule about footwear, that is a matter of personal choice. The fusion of part civic and part military uniform is not acceptable as it breaches both civic and military protocols. The only exception is that it is absolutely in order for a member who holds civic or military decorations to wear them on their civic robe. If a member is seen not to be wearing the appropriate civic dress it is likely to be noted first by the officers organising the event, including the Clerk. They will advise the Mayor if they think there is an issue and the member will be asked to dress appropriately, and if they decline the Mayor will ask them to withdraw from the civic event.

There will be individual boxes for the new hats. Some effort will be made to have some variation in size of robes to reflect the wide variance in the size of councillors.

It was proposed by Councillor Andrew, seconded by Councillor Boulter and with one abstention

RESOLVED That the Committee authorises the officers to order 18 new robes and two new livery team coats at a cost of £15,144.30.

The Mayor's Officer confirmed that the new robes should all be available for Remembrance Day, the next civic ceremonial event in the calendar.

PR2023/24.12 DEFIBRILLATORS

The Clerk introduced the report and rehearsed the history of why the Council leased a machine at the Whitehouse as well as a mobile one for the Council to use at events. He confirmed that the Whitehouse had been given notice of the ending of the lease and that he had answered a number of questions from them and the ward member for the area about the duration of the agreement and the implications of not renewing. They had been advised to approach Herefordshire Council for funding as a community hub or to apply for a City Council grant if they wanted to retain the machine but were struggling with the reduced payments now being offered. Members agreed the Whitehouse was a good location with a high footfall and hoped that any application for funding to either council would be well received. It was confirmed that the advantages of leasing are that the one cost covers insurance, online testing twice a day to ensure the machine is in good order, regular visits to check the pads are not wearing or have become affected by damp and that the charge is being retained. If we purchase outright, we would have to make these arrangements ourselves or risk the machine not being fit for use when it was needed. It was also confirmed that the mobile machine was available for events supported by local members, it had been at three events over the Platinum Jubilee for example.

Members recalled the former City Councillors Ange Tyler and Rob Williams being very keen to get a county-wide survey of where all the defibrillators are and where there might be gaps in provision. The Clerk had not heard of the outcome of this work. Although the Whitehouse had asked several questions, they had not indicated they would sign a new lease, although that is something they might do without any further discussion with the Council, or whether they intended to give up the machine. Members were concerned that they were given every assistance to resolve the situation, keeping the machine in place.

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

RESOLVED That the Committee authorises the Clerk to enter into a new lease to retain the provision of a mobile defibrillator for supporting council and community events at a cost of £100 per month.

That the Committee ask the Clerk to seek a definitive answer from the Whitehouse as to their intentions and to contact Herefordshire's Director of Public Health for news of the survey and any possibility of community hubs having defibrillators as part of their standard kit.

PR2023/24.13 ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Temporary staffing arrangements - July Meeting

Possible provision of business mobile phones for councillors

Review of structure. Size and role of committees. The Clerk explained this would go around the cycle of committees for each one to express their views and ideas, then come to Policy and Resources before a report went to Council as only Council could alter the terms of reference or membership of a committee. This would be scheduled for the September/October meetings of P&R and Council.

There being no further business the Chair closed the meeting.

Signed Date