



## HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL

### POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE 12 SEPTEMBER 2023

#### MINUTES OF MEETING

**Present:** Councillor Paul Stevens (Chair) and Councillors Polly Andrews, Rob Owens, Diana Toynbee, Kevin Tillett, Sam Potts, Debbie Hobbs, Cat Hornsey.

**Attending:** Steve Kerry Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer and Alyson Kinsey, Finance Officer.

At the start of the meeting the Chair asked for a time of silent reflection following the sad news of the recent death of the former Deputy Town Clerk Tracy Morriss.

#### **PR2023/24.28 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The Clerk reported apologies from Councillors Boulter and Dykes.

#### **PR2023/24.29 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTES**

Councillor Owens was appointed by Councillor Dykes as a substitute. The Chair thanked him for stepping in.

#### **PR2023/24.30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None were made at this stage.

#### **PR2023/24.31 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

It was proposed by Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Tillett and, with two abstentions,

**RESOLVED That the minutes and confidential minutes of the meeting of 4 July be accepted as a true record and signed accordingly by the Chair.**

#### **PR2023/24.32 SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS**

The Finance Officer presented the schedules of items paid since the last meeting. In answers to questions the following additional information was noted:

The payment for tree works in Eign Hill was not for street trees but for trees on the allotments for which the City Council is responsible.

The payment for "Trooping the Colour" refers to the closing event of Armed Forces week and the subsequent civic reception at which the updated Armed Forces Covenant was signed by the Mayor. The cost covered the hire of the Assembly Hall and the catering.

The payment for Neil Wain covers one of two jobs, either the periodic trimming of the road face of the long Holmer allotment hedge, which grows across the narrow footway and generates complaints if it is not kept clear, or the annual mowing of the permissive path in Bartonsham to retain the access across the area. There was a query about the implications of the transfer of this by the Church Commissioners to the Wildlife Trust and the Clerk undertook to investigate whether that altered the status of the permissive path. He had not received any notification that it had.

The payment for the Whitehouse defibrillator is the last one, that arrangement is now ended.

#### **PR2023/24.33 BANK RECONCILIATIONS**

The Finance Officer presented the bank reconciliations which were noted without comment.

#### **PR2023/24.34 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

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

**RESOLVED That in order to enable the discussion of a confidential item the press and public be excluded.**

#### **PR2023/24.35 PROPOSAL TO AWARD FREEDOM OF THE CITY**

In addition to discussing a possible recommendation to Council for an award of Freedom of the City, members also discussed proposals regarding the recognition of such an award.

It was noted that the only difference between vellum and parchment is the animal that provides the skin. Heavy, good quality paper provides an alternative which is cheaper, but not by a great amount, and might be more acceptable in the modern era when animal rights are to the fore. It was noted that the process of Freedom of the City is steeped in tradition and that there was merit in maintaining that tradition by using parchment. The high cost of the scrolls is mainly due to the specialist calligraphy. There are few practitioners and there is often a lengthy delay before the provider (whom the Council has used for many years) is able to complete an assignment.

The social occasion attending an award was also discussed. It was felt that the ceremonial side needed to be less grandiose and more concentrated around the recipient and their immediate family and friends. The formal dinner could be criticised as extravagant even though it was largely at the recipient's expense. This also created a division between more or less wealthy recipients and people might feel under pressure to live up to an expensive commitment.

Various options for using either the Council Chamber or the Parlour were discussed.

The further and more detailed discussion of the individual suggested for the honour is minuted in more detail as a confidential document (PR2023/24.35a). It was noted that the process is not to ask a possible recipient if they would accept the honour until after Council has resolved to offer it.

Councillor Potts also suggested a new Committee be formed to discuss who might be recommended for an honour in future. The Clerk suggested that he gave him the detail of that for consideration in the review of Committee remits which will be presented to Council.

It was proposed by Councillor Potts, seconded by Councillor Owens and, with six in favour and two abstentions,

**RESOLVED That the proposal for an award to a named individual has sufficient information to go forward to Council with the recommendation of the Committee.**

It was proposed by Councillor Potts, seconded by Councillor Hornsey and with two abstentions

**RESOLVED That a report goes to Council based on the details provided and that members, with more knowledge of the proposed recipients' contribution to the City, should pass that information to the Clerk to enable a fuller case to be made.**

It was proposed by Councillor Potts, seconded by Councillor Andrews that scrolls be made from parchment. It was proposed by Councillor Hornsey, seconded by Councillor Hobbs that the two scrolls already required, and a third one should this proposal be accepted at Council, be of parchment but thereafter heavy quality paper should be used. Councillors Potts and Andrews withdrew their proposal, and it was unanimously

**RESOLVED That the scrolls for the two recipients who have yet to receive them, and a third scroll should the current proposal be accepted by Council, be on parchment but that subsequent scrolls should be on high quality paper.**

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

**RESOLVED That the work of printing the scrolls (not calligraphy) be awarded to William Cowley in accordance with the quote provided.**

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

**RESOLVED That the awarding of Freedom and presentation of the scroll should take place in the Council Chamber with a gathering of close family and friends of the recipient and current councillors which would adjourn to the Parlour for suitable refreshments funded by the Council. Further celebrations can be arranged if the recipient is willing to fund them.**

#### **PR2023/24.36 READMISSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

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

**RESOLVED That, confidential business having been completed, the press and public be readmitted.**

#### **PR2023/24.37 ONGOING BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS AND BUDGET**

The Clerk explained that the first part of this report reflected the suggestions from Community Development Committee in response to a proposal that some matters be shifted from that Committee to this one in order to even out the workloads. It was noted that the supervision and oversight of the Hereford Zipper project should be added to the list for the remit of this Committee and that the Hereford Zipper Committee (which had been created to enable a small group to meet during the election purdah period if any member level decisions were needed

to be made that were not covered by existing mandates) would be discontinued. There was a discussion about whether allotments should be within the Community Development Committee, especially if a similar relationship with Belmont Country Park Supporters was with that Committee. However, it was also noted that the CPS are no longer in an ongoing service level agreement, but are applying for a one off grant to Community Development Committee. On balance therefore the allocation of the allotments as an ongoing business relationship for the scrutiny of Policy and Resources was justified.

One ongoing relationship that required an immediate decision was the funding by the City Council of an additional Community Enforcement Officer employed by Herefordshire Council. The Clerk reported that liaison with the management of this officer had been excellent, and it had been a pleasure to work with them. The CEO employed was leaving the Council and in order to offer some stability of employment, Herefordshire Council were asking for a five year agreement to continue this funding. There was some urgency because if the Council wanted to maintain the service, they would need to start recruitment immediately. This was why this item had been added to this report, as a business relationship which needed to be resolved. The issue was whether the number of calls on the CEO's time had justified paying the cost of a full time worker. The Clerk reported that it was roughly one or two a month. The officer had clearly been usefully employed on other enforcement duties by Herefordshire Council, but this was not what the spending was for. If the City Council did not generate enough work to keep this officer mainly employed on City requested duties it was harder to justify the use of parish funds to support a Herefordshire Council function and post.

Members noted the prompt responses to requests that had been made and that they appreciated the co-operative atmosphere which had been created. They were concerned that if we did not fund this post then enforcement issues occasionally reported must still be responded to by Herefordshire as the statutory powers are with that Council in all cases.

There was also discussion of a possible bespoke version of the lengthsman scheme to address concerns about overhanging branches and vegetation blocking footpaths and street and pavement weeds, including weeds clogging gutters. The Clerk was not able to give a detailed response but did recount the unsuccessful discussion when Balfour Beatty had suggested a full lengthsman scheme including highway repairs for potholes, etc. with a sum attached which was derisory. BBLP had been unwilling to divulge the actual costs of maintaining the City's C and U class roads, nor the list of known but outstanding defects that would fall to the City if we entered fully into the scheme. It was noted that more detailed work would need to be done and this would require a flexible response from both Herefordshire and BBLP if it was to continue as a proposal.

After discussion it was proposed by Councillor Stevens, seconded by Councillor Hornsey and unanimously

**RESOLVED That the proposals for Committee remits to go before Council shall include a recommendation that the remit of Policy and Resources Committee should include the oversight of the relationships with Hereford Business Improvement District, Herefordshire Council Closed Circuit Television Service, Close House, Hereford in Bloom, Hereford Allotments and Leisure Gardeners and Herefordshire Citizen's Advice Bureau, together with**

**the ongoing oversight of the Hereford Zipper, with the Hereford Zipper Committee being abolished.**

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

**RESOLVED That the funding of these organisations be considered annually as part of the budget setting process and decisions are made in November to give adequate notice time for partners if staffing or budgetary changes are necessary in the light of Council decisions.**

It was proposed by Councillor Stevens, seconded by Councillor Potts and with seven in favour and one abstention

**RESOLVED That the Clerk advises Herefordshire Council that we will not continue to fund the post of Community Enforcement Officer as demand from the City Council did not justify the cost of a full time post.**

### **PR2023/24.38 PROCESSING DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Clerk updated the Committee on a recent meeting with the new officer assigned by Herefordshire to lead on parish liaison, an Interim Director of Communities replacing Amy Pitt who had been assigned other duties by the Chief Executive. The meeting had begun with relatively non-contentious presentations by officers leading on economic regeneration and highways and then by the new officer herself as to her background in community relations and associated areas of work, mainly in local government in London.

There was a brief discussion of a draft parish charter to replace the current one after which the officer had tried to go straight to any other business, ignoring the item on Declarations of Interest which was stated on the agenda. The Governance Support Manager who has been in correspondence with the Clerk, and HALC, about the registration of Declarations of Interest since May joined the meeting, briefly, but made no contribution to the discussion. The Clerk outlined his concerns about the unilateral imposition of changes, on a questionable legal basis, regarding the registration of declarations of interest, the number of DOIs which had disappeared in the process, the unilateral imposition of a shift in responsibility for managing the dates of nominations and ballots following a casual vacancy from Electoral Services to parishes and the apparent (but unannounced) policy of the Monitoring Officer of outsourcing complaints against councillors in the county to Monitoring Officers in other counties. He doubted that the second two changes were legal as the Returning Officer and Monitoring Officer functions are statutory roles of the principal authority.

The only response had been for the Interim Director to ask if the other clerks present (Ross, Bromyard, Leominster, Kington) felt as strongly as the Clerk about these issues. They immediately and unanimously confirmed that they did. The Governance Support Manager had then left the meeting without commenting. The notes of the meeting had been published and despite copious coverage of the non-contentious matters there was no note of the issues raised which were referred to as "Steve Kerry's concerns". There was no recognition of the acceptance by all the Clerks present that they supported the views expressed. The Clerk had prepared an addendum to the notes to restore them to accuracy which he would send to the officer taking the notes if she did not respond.

Councillor Tillett added that at the meeting with the Mayors and Chair of Herefordshire the Clerk had asked for governance issues to be placed on the agenda for the next meeting and there was clear support from the Clerks present (Ross, Bromyard, Kington) for this to be done. These were clearly matters that needed to be resolved. Councillor Phillips the Chair of Herefordshire Council had agreed to add these to the agenda.

It was proposed by Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Tillett and with one abstention

**RESOLVED That the Committee endorses the Clerk’s efforts to support HALC and the urban parishes in demanding a constructive and collaborative relationship with officers at Herefordshire Council who must be required when considering any matter that affects the workload or roles of parish councils to give ample notice of proposals to be considered, engage in meaningful and open discussion with the affected parishes about those changes and to take their views into account before finalising the delivery of any changes.**

**PR2023/24.39 Items for Future Meetings**

Budget direction and overall strategy for 2024/25 (next meeting)

Half yearly financial position (next meeting)

Council tax bill inserts of parish information (response from Herefordshire required)

Bespoke lengthsman proposals (response from Herefordshire required)

**PR2023/24.40 Date of Next Meeting**

Tuesday 7 November 2023 at 6 pm

There being no further business the Chair closed the meeting.

Signed .....

Date .....