



HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING – 30 January 2024

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Kevin Tillett (Deputy Mayor Chairing the Meeting in the absence of the Mayor) and Councillors Polly Andrews, Sue Boulter, Mark Dykes, Elizabeth Foxton, Alex Griffiths, Debbie Hobbs, Cat Hornsey, Jim Kenyon, Jeremy Milln, Rob Owens, Sam Potts, Dan Powell, Ben Proctor, Adam Spencer, Paul Stevens and Diana Toynbee.

Attending: Steve Kerry Town Clerk, Becci O'Reilly Administration and Events Manager and two members of the public.

C2023/24.49 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Deputy Mayor reported the Mayor had been taken ill during the day and sent her apologies. Council sent their best wishes for a speedy recovery.

C2023/24.50 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

C2023/24.51 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None

C2023/24.52 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was proposed by Councillor Powell, seconded by Councillor Hobbs and, with two abstentions,

RESOLVED That the minutes of the meeting of 14 November be accepted as a true record and signed accordingly by the Deputy Mayor.

C2023/24.53 ANNUAL BUDGET, PRECEPT AND COUNCIL TAX

The Clerk presented the annual budget and reminded members that they had asked for a 0% tax increase at a time when inflation was running at well above 5% for much of the year. This had only been possible by making some reductions in spending, to add to the improved income from investments and a beneficial movement of the tax base. The two savings made reflected decisions made at the last council meeting. The demise of the Twinning Association allowed for a budget saving of £4,500 in that area; any community projects associated with international links could be funded from the community grants budget, although none had so far been forthcoming. The second saving was in the Council's contribution to revenue running costs for CCTV, a saving of £54,000 in terms of the anticipated cost in a full year next year. This would actually take effect from May as six months' notice had been given in November

following the last meeting. Since giving that notice the Clerk had been advised of a meeting to be called but had only just received notification. Even given the one week postponement of this meeting on account of the delay in getting final figures from the accountants this meant that the meeting would now take place after the Council had finally fixed its budget. He reminded members that Herefordshire Council ask parishes to fix their budgets by no later than the end of January to allow them time to process the invoices for the following tax year. He had received no communication whatsoever on this matter other than the invitation to a meeting on 1 February.

Councillor Stevens, Chair of Policy and Resources Committee, explained that the death of the wife of our accountant had led to an understandable delay in getting the final figures which was why this meeting has been moved back a week. He had sent the Council's condolences to Mr Kemp. He thanked the staff for preparing a detailed budget and confirmed that it was in line with the mandate given. He also sought to move an amendment, that the sum of £500,000 be reassigned from the general reserve, which stands at just under £1,000,000 to become an earmarked reserve for the town hall. This recognises that talks are proceeding towards an asset transfer to a trust and this was a clear statement of the Council's intentions to take an active part in that trust and to bring some serious funding forward.

The Clerk confirmed that an amendment to the budget can be taken at Council without prior reference to Policy and Resources Committee provided it does not alter the overall level of expenditure, the precept or the level of the reserves. A proposal to reallocate reserves did not do any of these things that it could therefore be considered at this meeting. It would apply from 1 April as this item was about the budget for the next financial year, it did not affect this year.

In further discussions some members were concerned that placing a large reserve might show the Council's hand too soon in terms of any negotiations with Herefordshire about funding an asset transfer. On the other hand, Herefordshire has made it clear there would be very limited funds to support the transfer, a possible phased payment in the event of boiler replacement being about the limit to that. Some members were concerned at the impact of cutting revenue funding for CCTV and wondered if it could be restored at a later date. The Clerk confirmed this could only be done by virement, i.e. moving funds from another budget, or the reserves, it could not be done by varying the precept which was fixed now for the following financial year.

Concern was also expressed about relying on continuing high interest rates on deposit funds as income. If inflation falls, as it is expected to do, and if as a result the bank rate is lowered, then the rates will fall too and there might be a shortfall of interest income. Some members felt on this basis that it was risky to agree a 0% increase and repeated their call made at the November meeting for an inflation-linked 5% increase.

Regarding CCTV it was noted that an annual report had come out. This normally goes to Committee but in view of the budget item the Clerk had circulated it to all members. Members were critical of some aspects of the report in particular the conflation of figures to give a claimed 83% performance rating which was statistically meaningless. It was confirmed that the CCTV will not be switched off, despite mis-reporting this was not the City Council opposing its use. We were merely saying that the responsibility for funding this lay with the Police and Crime Commissioner and Herefordshire Council as members of the Community Safety Partnership – it was not appropriate for these groups to be seeking ever more capital for ever more cameras without addressing the need to support any programme with a sufficient revenue budget. This was not a parish council function.

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

RESOLVED To vary the proposed budget for 2024/2025 by taking £500,000 from the general reserve and allocating it to an earmarked Town Hall reserve. It was noted that this still left a general reserve well above the recommend £237,000 minimum.

There was then further discussion of the limited impact of a 5% increase given the very low tax level charged by the City Council versus then desirability of making no increase at a time when many families were struggling with soaring living costs.

When the matter was put to the vote a named vote was requested.

It was proposed by Councillor Stevens, seconded by Councillor Hornsey and by majority vote was

RESOLVED

That Council confirms a total expenditure budget of £1,032,884 and a precept requirement of £942,800.

That Council agrees to maintain the Band D level at £56.86, delivering the previous mandate for a 0.00% tax increase.

That the sum of £500,000 be transferred from the general reserve to establish an earmarked Town Hall reserve.

The named vote was as follows:

In favour Councillors Andrews, Dykes, Griffiths, Hobbs, Hornsey, Kenyon, Owens, Potts, Powell, Proctor, Spencer, Stevens, Tillett (13)

Against Councillors Boulter, Foxton, Milln, Toynebee (4)

There were no abstentions; Councillor Carwardine was absent.

C2023/24.54 ANNUAL RISK ANALYSIS

The Clerk presented the report and reported that it had been approved by Policy and Resources Committee who recommended it for adoption by Council.

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

RESOLVED To adopt the annual risk analysis for 2024-2025.

C2023/24.55 AMENDMENT TO FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

The Clerk explained that the reason for bringing this forward was to agree to one change, namely, to increase the single transaction limit on the credit card to £300.00. This was to keep in touch with prices for many items.

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

RESOLVED To amend the financial regulations to increase the single transaction limit on the credit card to £300.00.

C2023/24.56 INTERVIEW PANEL

The Clerk introduced the report which summarised the advice received from the Herefordshire Association of Local Councils regarding the process for appointing the Town Clerk when he retires at the end of March. It had been pointed out that the appointment panel was not a committee and so could not take a decision under delegated powers. Therefore, constitutionally it would be necessary for Council to resolve that matter. In addition, even if the decision was made by Committee, the HALC Chief Officer was strongly of the view that Council as a whole appoints and employs the Clerk and therefore all members should be involved in the final ratification, although clearly it was not possible for all 18 members to be involved in an interview.

As this had been discussed at a previous meeting it would be necessary to suspend the standing orders to allow for a previous decision to be rescinded or amended within six months. This was perfectly legal as long as a vote took place to suspend the standing orders before the matter was resolved.

In answer to questions, it was confirmed that the panel remains Councillors Tillet, Stevens, Hornsey, Andrews and Owens. It was also confirmed that it is intended that the panel will have professional support from HALC and the current Clerk.

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

RESOLVED Under Standing Order 26a to suspend Standing Order 71 to allow for further consideration and partial reversal of a previous decision.

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

RESOLVED That Council amends the terms of reference for the Appointments Panel in respect of the post of Town Clerk to read as follows "the panel shall consider applications, shortlist appropriate candidates and conduct interviews and any other assessments it deems appropriate, after which, subject to references if required, it shall make a recommendation to Council regarding the appointments. The decision of Council on this matter shall be final."

C2023/24.57 CO-OPERATIVE COUNCIL'S INNOVATION NETWORK

The Clerk introduced the report and in answer to a question reminded members that new subscriptions or affiliations are normally brought to full Council although renewals are often devolved to Committee. Members added that this started just over a year ago and is growing fast. Only about 1% of councils are affiliated yet. Not all of the members are councils, it is bringing all sorts of people and groups together. It is a bit of an experiment but if it comes off it could be really worthwhile. It was noted that the Zipper is the sort of collaborative innovation the network seeks to promote and has now carried 6,000 passengers since it was introduced at the beginning of November. There is no measure of success in advance for the network it will be a matter of seeing if, after a year, we feel it is worth renewing.

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

RESOLVED That the Council joins the Co-operative Innovation Network at a cost of £500.

It was proposed by Councillor Proctor, seconded by Councillor Hornsey and with one vote against

RESOLVED That the matter of renewing and maintaining the membership should be delegated to Policy and Resources Committee.

C2023/24.58 HCCI ART + PEOPLE + PLACE DESIGN REVIEW

The Clerk advised members that due to the very short period for consultation on this review, and the urgent need to get the money spent before the Local Enterprise Partnership was formally wound up on 31 March 2024, Herefordshire Council had a set a very tight timetable. As the vast majority of the art would be in Central Ward, Councillor Milln had acted as the Council's representative and had sought the input of local artists and to maximise the identification of specific art with the place it was being put in. This is not supposed to be just decoration, it should say something about the place through art and design. There was no general Council response and he was now suggesting that in default of that the Council might wish to adopt Councillor Milln's comments.

There was a discussion about maintenance and graffiti resistance as it would be disastrous if public art is quickly defaced and there is no budget for cleaning it up. It was confirmed that the varnish finishes are highly resistant to graffiti and that maintenance was covered in the project plan. The Hunderton Gardens mural has been added, giving some south of the river input and this is spectacular. Members who haven't seen it were warmly encouraged by the Deputy Mayor to visit the site. This had started with the objection to the dull concrete slab sides to the new student accommodation near the station which had been transformed by bright colours and interesting design. Councillor Milln was thanked for this work on this matter especially as the other two nominated members to represent Policy and Resources Committee (Councillors Stevens and Proctor) had been forced to miss some of the meetings so he had been soldering on our behalf largely alone.

It was also noted that the beautiful view of the City from Churchill Gardens was spoilt by flashing signs and adverts and that this sort of planned art was a far better way to bring colour and interest to the streetscape.

It was proposed by Councillor Owens, seconded by Councillor Proctor and, with one abstention

RESOLVED That Council thanks Councillor Milln for his work on this matter and formally adopts his comments as the views of Council.

C2023/24.59 CCTV ANNUAL REPORT

As this had been referred to in the budget debate there was no further comment and the report was formally noted.

C2023/24.60 ELECTION OF JUNIOR MAYOR

The Deputy Mayor described the ceremony installing the Junior Mayor, Emma Hurds, with her family and friends in attendance as well as several councillors. It had been a very pleasant occasion and although Emma was small for her age, and very young, she will not be overwhelmed by the role and is very keen and confident. Subject to his election as Mayor Councillor Tillett is looking forward to working with her in the role.

C2023/24.61 MAYOR'S CORRESPONDENCE

In the absence of the Mayor the Deputy had no items to report.

C2023/24.62 MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF COMMITTEES

a) Climate and Biodiversity Committee

21 November 2023 and 5 December 2023 no questions.

b) Planning and Highways Committee

9 November 2023, 7 December 2023, 11 January 2024 no questions. It was reported that a significant appeal had been won supporting the rejection of the Ledbury Road 5g mast application which would be useful is setting a standard for future applications.

c) Policy and Resources Committee 7 November 2023 – all relevant matters had been referred.

Regarding a possible lengthsman scheme for the City, it had been confirmed in discussions with Herefordshire Council that there was nowhere near enough money being attached to this to enable the City to make a worthwhile impact on highway problems so it was not being proceeded with.

d) Youth Council

20 November 2023 and 18 December 2023 no questions.

C2023/24.63 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE BODIES

a) Municipal Charities It was noted that all the City representatives we have nominated have now become trustees in their own right, including the Chair of the Trustees Councillor Andrews. The new Trust Clerk had written to confirm that he did not feel we needed to have additional representatives elected as well. Councillor Owens queried whether this was a correct interpretation of the Trust's rules and the Deputy Mayor ruled that this was a matter for the trustees, we would not elect representatives if they were not being invited.

b) Hereford in Bloom Councillor Boulter reported that there had not been any meetings, the work to restore the first large bed by St Peter's had been completed and HiB we very grateful for the Council's support.

c) Close House Councillor Potts reported that the management are working on ways to retain staff as good youth workers are in very high demand and therefore difficult to retain.

d) Hereford Business Improvement District After some discussion as to why Councillor Powell was listed as the correspondent, it was agreed that Councillor Stevens as Chair of the BID was best placed to report in future. He will continue to keep members informed of activities via email. The ballot for the third term is due in October 2024 and a proposed service level agreement will be brought to the next meeting of Policy and Resources Committee.

e) Stronger Towns Board Councillor Hornsey reported that this meets monthly. The big news is the opening of the new skatepark which is stunning. There is a lot of concern about the museum and library project which is the on one with a red risk rating, which means there is no certainty it can be completed. Councillor Kenyon asked for it to be noted that the STB do too much self-praise for other people's achievements and a bit more humility would be welcome.

- f) **Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School Charity** Councillor Hobbs reported that the Head had resigned and that a fresh tranche of funding had been released for the improvement of the sports hall.
- g) **Community Land Trust** Councillor Milln reported that the CLT had finally agreed heads of terms with Herefordshire Council for the transfer of a small plot of land near Barton Bridge.
- h) **Hereford Allotment and Leisure Gardeners** Councillor Kenyon reported that all is quiet which is good news. They were happy with the work to the Holmer gates.
- i) **Herefordshire Association of Local Councillors** Councillor Potts reported that he had been in touch with Lynda Wilcox but had not attended a meeting as yet.
- j) **Three Choirs** Councillor Hornsey reported that the first comms meeting would be very soon and the first fundraiser would be on Saturday at Holy Trinity Church. In answer to a question it was confirmed that any member involved in the project was welcome to add their comments when this item came up.

C2023/24.64 TOWN CLERK'S COMMUNICATION

The Clerk introduced two written items. The first related to the Monitoring Officer's work - adding a formal apology from Councillor Toynbee in respect of the Monitoring Officer's finding regarding her email about other members of Council. The second item was to start work on a reappraisal of the Council's business plan which would follow on to the term of the new Clerk.

In addition, the Clerk reported that the Department of Culture, Media and Sport would shortly be sending an official picture of His Majesty the King which would be placed in the chamber and the picture of the Late Queen would be found a suitable place.

Before the business plan was regressed there would be a short task and finish group to review progress and development options for the website.

C2023/24.65 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 19 March 2024 at 6 pm

There being no further business the Deputy Mayor closed the meeting.

Signed

Date