



HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE 23 JANUARY 2024

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Paul Stevens (Chair), and Councillors Polly Andrews, Sue Boulter, Debbie Hobbs, Cat Hornsey, Sam Potts, Kevin Tillett and Diana Toynbee

Attending: Steve Kerry Town Clerk, Becci O'Reilly Administration and Events Manager, Alyson Kinsey Finance Officer

PR2023/24.59 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were noted from Councillor Mark Dykes.

PR2023/24.60 SUBSTITUTIONS

None

PR2023/24.61 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

PR2023/24.62 RETIREMENT GIFT FOR THE TOWN CLERK

At this point the Clerk left the meeting.

The Administration and Events Manager Becci O'Reilly presented the report asking for permission for a budget for the Town Clerk's retirement at the end of March as no precedent had been set and no policy existed for guidance.

Councillor Potts challenged the details in the report and the budget, however it was explained that exact costs weren't yet available until the organisation of the activities began. Members felt it was better to be overgenerous in the budget and not spend it if it's not required (e.g. if the hire of the Assembly Hall can be achieved within our annual free uses) rather than underbudget and have to wait until the last minute to come back to the next committee for approval of extra funds. Members felt the budget was acceptable based on the estimated costs and the length of service (15 years) but have asked that a policy be drafted that sets out guidelines on how to thank retiring members of staff.

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

RESOLVED That Members approve a budget of £800-£900 to include a gift and get together to be transferred from the General Reserve into the Mayoral Expenses budget.

PR2023/24.63 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Clerk returned at this point and Becci O'Reilly left the meeting.

The minutes of the meeting of 7 November were presented. Councillor Potts challenged Minute 49 regarding the medium-term financial strategy suggesting the whole proposal had been rejected, not, as shown in the minutes that it was agreed to have an assumed 5% increase subject to review of circumstances annually as the starting point in future years but 0% this year. There was no seconder for any amendment.

Councillor Potts challenged Minute 52 regarding the reported comments of the Youth Council and suggested they should be reported as referring to all ages. However, it was affirmed that the focus of the Youth Council was on young people and their potential contribution to international events and there was no support for changing the minutes.

After some corrections of typing errors it was proposed by Councillor Tillett, seconded by Councillor Hornsey and with six votes in favour, two abstentions and one against

RESOLVED That the minutes of the meeting of 7 November be accepted as an accurate record and be signed accordingly by the Chair.

PR2023/24.64 SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS

There had been no questions submitted for the meeting. Councillor Tillett confirmed the query he had raised had been satisfactorily answered. Councillor Potts asked regarding the repairs to the mayoral car, and it was confirmed it was proving complex and a replacement vehicle had been offered. It was also confirmed that although the local dealer, Steels, has opened under new management and is not now a Honda dealer, a new dealership will be opening soon near Callow. The Council's vehicle lease is with Honda not Steels so this does not affect our position. He also asked regarding mobile phones and the Finance Officer will confirm the number leased for officers as soon as she has checked the figures.

The Chair reminded members it is helpful to have questions in advance so answers can be given at the meeting.

There being no further questions the schedules were noted.

PR2023/24.65 BANK RECONCILIATIONS

The reconciliations for October, November and December were presented. There were no questions. The reconciliations were noted.

PR2023/24.66 DETAILED INCOME AND EXPENDITURE REPORT

The Clerk presented the report which indicates no major divergence from budget. The apparent large divergence in one area is due to large capital items going through the accounts in respect of the Zipper and being recovered as shown elsewhere. There were a number of smaller items totalling about £35,000 which had accumulated and had not yet been recovered. An exercise in reconciling invoices from Yeomans and other suppliers, payments made and payment recoveries was in hand now and would be completed well before the year end. This was easier than going through the rather laborious system for every small item.

Councillor Andrews asked about the financial position on green bags. At the moment Herefordshire have changed the price, we are not sure what this will do to demand and whether the modest

surplus we are making will continue, and whether this will be sufficient to cover the staff time it takes to deal with these. A further report will be made to a future meeting of the Committee.

There being no other comments the report was noted.

PR2023/24.67 RISK ANALYSIS

The Clerk presented the report and noted that there had been no major change in the Council's risk position which remains low. This was to be expected for a parish council as we do not engage in any particularly risky activities. He asked members to note there was a new section on reputational risk which had risen with the introduction of the high profile Zipper service which was going well, albeit with a disruption when one bus was damaged in a minor collision. The extremely unlikely risk of insurance not covering the full cost of a total write off of all three vehicles could be covered for one year from the general reserve. After a year it was likely the insurance industry would catch up with current bus values, and the value of the buses would in any case depreciate. This was therefore a temporary phenomenon.

A question was raised about the possibility of the national grid wanting to dig a trench through an allotment – the Clerk will seek more information about this.

A question was also raised about mis-information coming from bus drivers, for example a highly exaggerated account of the aftermath of the minor collision referred to above. It was noted that a lot of negative social media comment, from the usual sources, is being refuted by other users which is much more effective than "official" denials which are taken by some to be confirmation. The issue of driver communication of news will be taken up with Yeomans. It was also noted that Beacon College could supply some useful input in making information easier to understand for people with learning difficulties.

The report was noted and approved for onward presentation to Council without going to a vote.

PR2023/24.68 ANNUAL BUDGET, PRECEPT AND COUNCIL TAX

The Clerk presented the report and reminded members that they had asked for a 0% tax increase this year despite very significant inflation which had affected the cost of many activities and a backdated pay award to staff. This had been achieved by taking up the suggestion of two significant cuts to spending. These were to serve notice on Herefordshire Council that we would no longer fund CCTV to the sum of £52,000, and to delete the budget for Twinning of £4,500 following the cessation of the Twinning Association. He stressed that the latter item did not mean we were withdrawing from activities with our twin and partnership towns, but that these would be funded from the community grants budget should members of the community in Hereford come up with worthwhile projects to be supported. Finally, a positive movement of the tax base had generated some additional income. Taking all these factors into account it was now possible to deliver a viable budget with a 0% increase, without any detriment to our services.

The Chair thanked the officers involved notably Alyson Kinsey for bringing the budget together and Becci O'Reilly for her assistance. It was noted that the sad death of Derek Kemp's wife had delayed input from DCK and the Committee thanked him for getting back to us in time to present a completed report. He reported that there had been no response at all from Herefordshire Council to the notice given in November of the cessation of our CCTV funding, although there had been some kick back from the night time economy. A stakeholder meeting referred to by County Councillor Gandy (the cabinet member for community safety) had not yet resulted in a venue or date being identified. The Clerk had forwarded the annual report from the CCTV Manager. It was

also noted that more and more cameras had been added but the revenue implications of servicing those cameras had not been addressed. A misapprehension at the BBC that we were opposed in principle to CCTV had been corrected when their reporter spoke to Councillor Potts.

The question was raised about a possible risk to the reserves if we do not put up the council tax. Our general reserve stands just below £1m, with substantial earmarked reserves for specific needs. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants recommend about three months revenue as a rough guide to a minimum reserve level, this was shown in our budget report as a figure of £237,000. Long term the reserves should not be used to support revenue spending, but the proposed budget had a very small surplus so it was not envisaged that we would be making a call on the reserves for other than exceptional items.

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

RESOLVED

That the Committee recommends to Council a total expenditure budget of £1,032,884 and a precept requirement of £942,800.

That the Committee recommends that Council agrees to maintain the Band D level at £56.86, delivering the previous mandate for a 0% increase.

PR2023/24.69 FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

The Clerk explained that the proposed change to the financial regulations was to raise the amount of a single transaction on the credit card to cover the cost of a printed Mayor's souvenir book. £300 was not an excessive amount and retaining a lower amount either meant we couldn't use the card and had to arrange payment in advance or make split payments, sometimes on consecutive days which was time consuming.

There being no questions or comments this was agreed to referred to Council without a vote.

PR2023/24.70 ACCESS TO OFFICES

The Clerk presented the report which covered both the re-introduction of the Paxton lock and fob system to improve security and a request for members to respect working areas and allow a quiet room to be set up when it was not being used for meetings. Members would also be able to use the quiet room for council business if they found their homes were subject to interruptions. To avoid disruption of meetings or quiet working the cost of a second water machine had been researched and another one could be fitted for less than £300. It was also noted that it would be sensible for councillors to check if people they want to see are actually going to be in as many staff now working partly from home.

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

RESOLVED

That members note the fob and Paxton lock arrangement and if they do not already have a town hall fob, they make this known to staff who will sort it out for them.

That members note and respect the arrangements regarding the use of the meeting room as a quiet room.

That the cost of a second drinking water outlet having been established as less than £300 this installation is approved.

PR2023/24.71 HEREFORD ZIPPER UPDATE

The Clerk introduced the report and reminded members that under the review of committee roles agreed by Council the specific Zipper Committee had been closed down and the service was now under the remit of Policy and Resources. The project had been overseen by an informal working group consisting of the Clerk, Councillors Stevens and Hornsey, with some input from Councillor Kenyon, together with the manager from Yeomans who deliver the service, an independent voluntary supporter from Herefordshire Rail and Bus (Will Frecknall), a PR and media consultant Sophie Armstrong and a transport management specialist Alan Lewis. The recommendations set out below were the result of the deliberations of this group and would resolve all outstanding matters for the progression of the project.

There is some confusion about disability passes. The buses are fare free but it is alleged that we can still recover a “refund” from the government of £2 per ride for people with passes. Drivers should be asking people for the time being if they have these.

The decision not to register the service yet means we have the flexibility to try out route changes, such as the diversion to Friars Street to serve the temporary library which has proved very popular with the residents of the old people’s village in Great Western Court who have been denied a bus service for some time.

There was general support for the idea of using some surplus capital for the installation of solar panels, which has been agreed in principle by the Stronger Towns Board as a worthwhile extension to the original business plan.

Some old fashioned poster adverts as well as the social media news output might also be useful.

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

RESOLVED

That the contract end date is revised to 31 October 2026 to match the later starting date.

That the services of Mr Lewis and Ms Armstrong in their respective roles are retained as needed to support the project.

That wider consideration is given to a comprehensive marketing strategy and the resources necessary to deliver that as part of a wider business plan revision.

That further work is done on the possibility of a new website platform dedicated to the Zipper and a further report on the benefits and costs of this is brought to the Committee.

That authorisation is given to install solar panels at Yeomans’ depot for the delivery of power to charge the buses within a cost ceiling of £50,000 (excluding VAT) including installation and ancillary costs to be funded from the capital surplus in the project funds.

That the Council’s officers and supporters continue to try and resolve a location for a bus stop adjacent to the main entrance to Hereford Medical Group facility and away from the junction with the service road.

That the Council retains as a policy position that the Zipper must have access to the station forecourt in any future transport hub development at the railway station.

That the Council purchases via Yeomans a fully comprehensive insource package and funds a notional shortfall in the event of a complete write off of the fleet through the general reserve as set out in Section 7 above.

PR2023/24.72 ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

To receive a report from a task and finish group to review certain aspects of the website, its operation and technical support and the resources needed to make full use of its potential. (It was agreed that Councillors Hobbs and Potts would be appointed to the group and Councillor Proctor invited to join them. The group would be supported by Connor Powell as the responsible officer.)

There being no further business the Chair closed the meeting.

Signed

Date