



HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 5 March 2024

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Paul Stevens (Chair), and Councillors Mark Dykes (part), Polly Andrews, Rob Owens, Kevin Tillett, Diana Toynbee and Cat Hornsey (part).

Attending: Steve Kerry Town Clerk and RFO, Becci O'Reilly Administration and Events Manager, Connor Powell Tourism and Communications Manager, Mike Truelove Hereford Business Improvement District Chief Executive (part).

PR2023/24.73 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were noted from Councillors Boulter, Hobbs and Potts.

PR2023/24.74 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Hobbs had appointed Councillor Owens as her substitute. The Chair thanked Councillor Owens for standing in.

PR2023/24.75 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Stevens declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 11 'BID Relationship and Gift Card Machine' as the non-salaried Chair of the BID.

PR2023/24.76 BID RELATIONSHIP AND GIFT CARD MACHINE

To enable Mr Truelove to leave promptly it was agreed to take this item up the agenda.

Mr Truelove presented the latest BID newsletter and explained that instead of seeking a series of grants for various activities through the year he had been advised to seek a single Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Council for the year. This would include support for Christmas, Halloween, street cleaning, a contribution to a bi-annual festival building on the success of Ferrous and the cost of operating a gift card sales service at the Tourist Information Centre (TIC). He explained that Ferrous is now a well-established event and could be free standing, giving the BID the opportunity to develop a wider artisan and crafts fair themed around mediaeval crafts. This would fit well with the historic nature of the City core. This would still include some blacksmithing displays and forging as these had proved to be such popular attractions.

The gift card had been very successful, as set out in the accompanying report by the Clerk and was effective in driving up footfall to the TIC. Connor Powell confirmed that many visitors who come in for gift cards browse the TIC and either take away free tourist and visitor guides or make additional purchases to the card. There is therefore a return from the Council's expenditure on this item.

In answer to questions from Members, Mr Truelove confirmed that there are plans now in Herefordshire Council to get the planters out of High Town and onto better permanent sites. They had not been a success and were far less mobile than they were thought to be when they were initially suggested. They have been a significant obstruction in a number of events.

The Ferrous or historical pageant event will be bi-annual, but to smooth out budget variations it was proposed to make a contribution to this every year within the SLA, providing up front funds for advance bookings in one year and funds for more immediate costs in the second year.

It was confirmed that the total cost of the SLA, including the revised gift card figure based on information from the TIC was £20,600 pa. This would require confirmation at full Council.

Finally, and for the avoidance of doubt, it was stated that this refers to the City BID and not the wider Herefordshire BID which is concerned with the promotion of tourism across the whole county.

It was proposed by Councillor Dykes, seconded by Councillor Hornsey and, with Councillor Stevens recording an abstention in view of his declaration of interest

RESOLVED That the Committee recommends that Council establishes an SLA with the Hereford City Business Improvement District for three years at a sum of £20,600 pa.

That the BID will be asked to inform the Council, via Policy and Resources Committee, in detail of its Halloween, Christmas and historic pageant proposals when they are ready to do so, and this will be reported for information to all members.

That the Committee considers in future whether to propose an increase to this sum annually to allow for inflation and what inflator to apply.

That a discreet budget line is set up for the SLA drawing funds from the budget headings which have been used for ad hoc support in the past or from the General Reserve as necessary in the first year.

That an annual report on performance against the SLA is made to Council and that if it is satisfactory, it becomes the basis for agreeing to release funds for the following year.

PR2023/24.77 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

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

RESOLVED That the minutes of the meeting of 23 January be accepted as a true record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

PR2023/24.78 SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS

The schedule of payments made since the last meeting as presented. Councillor Stevens had asked, before the meeting, for clarity regarding the payment for the Stronger Towns Board event. It was confirmed that £500 of this would be recovered from the Stronger Towns Board by invoice.

There being no other questions the schedule was accepted.

PR2023/24.79 BANK RECONCILIATIONS

The reconciliations on all accounts were presented. There being no questions these were noted.

PR2023/24.80 READOPTION OF INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Clerk reminded the meeting that the Council is required to review its strategy periodically and readopt or amend it. In fact, there were few options as the Council must invest in institutions covered by UK banking law and protections and must be prudent in its choices. CCLA are proven performers in this field and meet all the statutory obligations required. Councillor Andrews confirmed that in comparison CCLA continue to perform well, with competent fund management and ethical investment policies.

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

RESOLVED To recommend to full Council that it re-adopts the current strategy, with the amendments to the specified investment and amount invested long term as set out in the report.

PR2023/24.81 INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS FOLLOWING THE RETIREMENT OF THE TOWN CLERK

Councillor Stevens reported that he had met with Karen Davis, the Clerk-designate together with the Clerk and the Administration and Events Manager. Karen would be joining City Council from 1 May, and the current Clerk is leaving on 31 March, so there was a period of one month where the Council must have a Proper Officer and Responsible Financial Officer. Both of these functions are carried out by the Clerk. In answer to a question, Becci O'Reilly stated she was happy to take the role on for a month, especially since there would be no ceremonial duties during that time. She had never taken a front seat role in these in the past, always being behind the scenes supervising the arrangements. It was agreed that the current Clerk will be available to the Acting Clerk for advice and support as necessary in April and for a month or so after that whilst Karen Davis settles into the role, and to this end would still have access to minutes and other records but would not use the clerk@ email address after 31 March to avoid any confusion.

It was also noted that before applying for the post, Karen Davis had committed to a family holiday which would mean she would be away from the Council from 17 to 30 June, during which time the Council would be meeting to close the accounts and agree the Annual Governance and Accountability Report. This was a statutory deadline and required an RFO to sign the documents. Accordingly, the temporary arrangement for April could be extended to cover that period too.

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

RESOLVED That the Council appoints Becci O'Reilly as the Acting Town Clerk and Chief Officer from 1 April until 30 April and from 17 June to 30 June 2024.

That in this role the Acting Town Clerk is authorised to negotiate a suitable arrangement for mentoring and ad hoc support from the current Clerk during this period, as per HALC's recommendation regarding remuneration.

That the need to maintain professional boundaries and respect for work life balance, as set out in the report, is communicated to all members of Council and respected.

PR2023/24.82 FAMILY LEAVE POLICY

The Administration and Events Manager introduced this item, explaining that for some time she had been waiting for a composite policy to cover all the family/work balance policies, such as adoption leave, paternity and maternity leave, dependent care, etc. into a single, up to date policy that fully complied with developing employment law. This had now arrived from Hoople and had been adapted to refer to the processes of the City Council, for example with the correct descriptions of officers and committees where they had a role. As this policy applied at Herefordshire Council, Hoople had conducted comprehensive consultation with Unison. In addition to the policy itself there are some 40 pages of templates and standard letters to ensure that any correspondence sent under the policy is legally compliant. The policy will be kept under continuous review by Hoople and if developing employment law requires any changes these will be communicated to the Council.

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

RESOLVED That the Family Leave Policy presented be adopted as the Council's policy and that these be reviewed with Hoople should changes to law make it necessary.

PR2023/24.83 HEREFORD APPLEFEST 2023/24 AND 2024/25 BUDGET

The Administration and Events Manager reported that last year's AppleFest had been successful in gaining external funding above the budget. The budget had been drawn up to be adequate to enable the programme to continue even if some of the external funding had not been agreed. This year Herefordshire Council would be unlikely to come through, Shared Prosperity Fund money had been applied for but not yet agreed and while the BID would still try to contribute the reduction in NNDR has meant a shortfall in their income reducing their capacity to support the event. Last year the event had generated a surplus of £4,000 which would normally be returned to the general reserve as part of the closing of accounts. With the anticipated pressure on the budget for 2024's event it was now suggested that instead this money should be rolled over into next year's budget and ring fenced for AppleFest.

Members commented that this seems a sensible idea given the known pressure on the budget and in particular the likelihood of reduced external funding. Prices were also likely to rise as industry recovered from the post-COVID malaise. A decision on the Shared Prosperity Fund money should be received by the end of March, although the funds themselves take considerably longer than that to appear. It is hard to achieve sponsorship of the event as there is nothing of any commercial value to offer in return. It is aimed at smaller local artisan suppliers who have very limited, if any, resources for sponsorship deals.

It was noted that the banquet has a completely separate budget and covered its costs through the sale of tickets. It is not a drain on the wider AppleFest budget.

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

RESOLVED That at year end, any 2023/24 City Events/AppleFest budget balance be carried over to the 2024/2025 financial year rather than being transferred to the General Reserve, to ensure increasing AppleFest event costs can be met.

PR2023/24.84 ATTENDANCE AND RECORDING OF MEETINGS

The Clerk reminded members of the very limited success of the attempt to record meetings before COVID, with uncertain sound quality making the recording less than useful for minute

taking and certainly of little use to someone wanting to listen to a meeting they had missed. The primary purpose of recording a meeting was to assist with accurate minute taking, and potentially to resolve disputes about what had been finally agreed at a meeting. Once they had served that purpose there was little point in keeping them as the minutes themselves, agreed and signed at the subsequent meeting, were the formal record of business and were admissible in litigation as such. Having a preserved set of recordings would place the Council under ongoing legal obligations which could prove onerous. The Council now had a spare laptop which should be capable of providing a decent quality of recording to assist with minutes and it was being used tonight to record the meeting simply to see if the sound quality was good enough.

The rest of the paper was about having an officer to present items and one person to do the minutes. It was extremely difficult to present items, engage in discussion with members and keep notes for minutes. Also, having more officers attending on particular pieces of business would improve the range of expertise offered to support members in their decisions, and introduce more officers to the decision making processes and more councillors to individual officers so there would be greater awareness of what people did.

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

RESOLVED That the standard practice for Committees and Council meetings will in future be that an officer will attend to take notes and produce the minutes, but that other officers will attend to present reports they have written and to answer questions on the business they bring to the meeting.

That the available laptop will be used for recording the meeting solely for the purpose of supporting the generation of accurate minutes.

That once the minutes have been approved at the next meeting the recording will be erased and the minutes will stand as the legally admissible record of the meeting.

PR2023/24.85 MAYORAL COMMENDATIONS AND AWARDS

This item was not ready and would be held over for consideration at the next meeting.

PR2023/24.86 CITY COUNCIL WEBSITE

Councillor Dykes left the meeting at the start of this item, and Councillor Hornsey did so during the consideration of this item.

The Tourism and Communications Manager presented the notes of the Working Group which had reviewed this, together with subsequent comments on those from one member of the Group, Councillor Proctor, and some notes from the Clerk on some of the proposals that had been made. He reported that a number of the recommendations for improvements to the utility and accessibility of the site had been achieved by DM Labs, the platform provider, already, and that statistics about use were now available for examination. The font can be enlarged by a user and colour taken out if that would assist someone with a visual impairment. They can do Alt-Text but City Council would need to input that facility. The change from Google Analytics 3 to 4 had been worked through which had released the stats which were pretty good for a council website.

The officer recommend City Council continue with the current website and any further improvements required are communicated to him and to see if these can be achieved by DM

Labs. Referring to the proposal for re-tendering it was noted that this was borne out of a feeling that DM Labs should have been suggesting the improvements the working group had asked for and had thus under-performed. However, it was confirmed that when the site was acquired, members had the option of buying a very basic package which simply provides the site and makes changes only upon request, or a more pro-active one whereby DM Labs would make improvements or suggest them. Members had voted for the lowest cost, most basic contract which DM Labs had performed. It was reported that there is no specification for a new website for companies to tender against, so any re-tendering now would be on the existing service requirement, but would, of course, be affected by inflation over the last five years.

There is a specific justification for some elements like the Zipper and AppleFest having their own pages; it is not an error as suggested, it is a presentational choice which can be reviewed but at the moment evidence of the number of hits justifies the current arrangement.

Members discussed the proposal that all pictures of former Mayors be deleted. This will inhibit coverage of historic events such as signing a twinning or partnership agreement which happens occasionally, or the tri annual Three Choirs event. It was clearly important that the "Mayor of Today" be a discreet section and be as up to date as possible but there was actually no reason to go through the website removing old pictures, which would be immensely time-consuming, as long as it was clear they were historic and not contemporary.

Some members have criticised the appearance of the site without recognising that an android phone does not always display it to its best advantage, for example placing items in portrait rather than the landscape layout they were designed in. We can check to see how far this can be prevented, but there will always be an issue with a website designed to be read on a laptop being read though other devices, this is not unique to the City Council website. This is why communication with social media, which is often viewed through phones, is laid out differently, with a different viewing medium in mind.

Consideration was given to whether the group should continue, it was originally configured as a one-off task and finish, and its initial task has been finished. As part of the wider development of a business plan it would in due course be possible to develop a marketing and information strategy and it was possible that a new task and finish group could be useful in testing how the website and other social media would support the delivery of that strategy. At the moment there was no further work for the group to do.

It was noted that officers had asked for Councillors to submit biographical information for the website, some have not done so, therefore the display is patchy. The request would be repeated. There was a wider discussion of the news function of the website, which is limited. Most people rely on other social media for electronic news and an out of date news page looks bad. After consideration of other options members felt that the best option was not to have a news page, but to publicise important events as and when they happen as one-off items. Conversation, which was always ongoing, was best dealt with through the more interactive social media. Websites are not designed for this.

The conclusions of members regarding the recommendations of the working group were to accept the technical and visual improvements sought, noting that many had been delivered, not to re-tender the service until a new marketing and information strategy defined a need for a new specification and not to make fundamental changes to the archived material on past

Mayors whilst ensuring the Mayor of today always had the prominent position. Separate pages for AppleFest and Zipper would be retained, and the news function deleted, although a quarterly electronic newsletter could be developed as a new feature of the site.

PR2023/24.87 HEREFORD ALLOTMENT AND LEISURE GARDENERS ANNUAL FUNDING

The Clerk presented the proposal from HALG and affirmed that in his view the arrangement of having the allotments run by a voluntary society was advantageous to the Council as although it meant City Council did not receive any income, the grant provided to HALG was commensurate with the cost of employing an Allotment Officer to do for a salary what they did as volunteers.

Members raised queries as to high legal costs as a proportion of the overall budget and also how income was derived from administration. In communicating the result of the meeting, the Clerk was asked to circulate the answers on those points.

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

RESOLVED That the annual grant to HALG be agreed as £8,000 for 2024-25 and that it be released to them subject to clarification of the questions on legal fees and administrative income.

PR2023/24.88 ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Programme for Freedom Ceremonies for those agreed to be honoured (3)

Mayoral Commendations and Awards

Closure of accounts (noted that Derek Kemp from DCK would be attending the next meeting of the Committee)

PR2023/24.89 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 4 June 2024 at 6pm

Signed

Date