HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING 28 JANUARY 2025

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: The Right Worshipful the Mayor Councillor Kevin Tillett (in the Chair) and Councillors Polly Andrews, Susan Boulter, Jacqui Carwardine, Mark Dykes, Elizabeth Foxton, Cat Hornsey, Jim Kenyon (part meeting), Jeremy Milln, Rob Owens, Daniel Powell, Ben Proctor, Sam Potts, Paul Stevens and Diana Toynbee.

Attending: Alison Tolley (Acting Clerk), Alyson Kinsey (Finance Officer), Sarah Jones (Committee Clerk) Lynda Wilcox (HALC Clerk Cover for the meeting) and Derek Kemp (DCK Accounting).

1 CLERK COVER FROM HALC (Herefordshire Association of Local Councils)

It was resolved to access HALC's clerk cover service for the meeting @ £250 and appoint Lynda Wilcox as clerk for the meeting.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from: Cllrs Hobbs, Griffiths and Spencer.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS

Cllr Kenyon declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 11 because he used to play rugby at Hereford Rugby Club but had no financial interest

4 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No members of the public were present.

5 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was resolved to approve the minutes of the following meetings as accurate records, subject to amendments stated below:

<u>26 November</u>

5.1 Amendment to 25.44 Minute to read 'St John Ambulance', not St John's Ambulance.

5.2 Amendment to 25.53 Change 'reverse' to 'revise' in the first bullet point and in 53.1 of the resolution. **AT/SJ to amend. Completed 28.01.25**

5.3 Amendment to 25.53 (resolution 53.3) first sentence to read: 'That the City Council considers strategies and projects to support initiatives leading to a reduction in the removal of trees and, where possible, an increase of tree numbers in the city,

<u>28 November</u> – Extraordinary.

<u>23 December</u> – Extraordinary.

6 ZIPPER BUS

6.1 Zipper Bus Funding (Appendix two (A & B)

Members considered a report from Derek Kemp of DCK Accounting on Zipper funding and its impact on the 2025/26 budget as recommended by Policy and Resources Committee held on 14 January 2025, with an additional note from the Acting Clerk.

The Chair explained that full and detailed discussion on the Zippers was required prior to a decision being made on the precept for 2025/2026 at agenda item 7. The following points were raised:

6.1.1 If the City Council ceased funding the Zippers after 2026, a precept of £1,087,991 would be required for the financial year 2025/2026 (£65.78 per Band D property per year – an increase of £8.92 per property per year).

6.1.2 If the Zippers were continued after the conclusion of the current contract, with no funding from the General Reserve, the 2025/26 precept would need to be increased to £1,172,734 (£70.90 per Band D property – an increase of £14.04 per property per year).

6.1.3 Some members felt that they had been misled about the costings of the project when it was first discussed.

6.1.4 It was noted there hadn't been an increase in the precept for a few years and the service had proved popular with users, although it didn't serve all Wards within the City.

6.1.5 Each bus had two batteries, and new batteries were in the region of £70k each.

6.1.6 It was questioned whether the City Council should be involved in the licensing of buses which was a specialist field. Whilst support could be made available for younger and older members of the community to use a bus service it was suggested that the City Council shouldn't actually be running a bus service.

6.1.7 The cost of £330k per year for the service was excessive and meant that the City Council was paying around £1.80 per individual journey. There was also doubt that those who had been using the free service would actually pay for the same journey.

6.1.8 There was a suggestion that the Zipper Bus should be allowed to bed in during 2025 and at the conclusion of the contract in 2026, the City Council should start charging and operating new routes. However, there was concern about the City Council competing with other commercial services which were already being subsidised, raising the likelihood that the City Council would need to subsidise any fee-paying service they provided, via the precept.

6.1.9 Whilst several members felt that the City Council could be proud of the Zipper Bus project, they acknowledged that it had probably run its course and should not be continued after the contract ended.

6.1.10 If funding for the Zipper Bus was to continue, there wouldn't be enough money to support the current level of grants offered to other community projects.

Following the in-depth discussion captured above, the Chair called for a vote.

RESOLVED To cease operating the Zipper bus at the conclusion of the current contract.

6.2 Zipper Consultant (Appendix 3)

Members considered a request from the Zipper Working Group to continue to utilise the services of Alan Lewis as a bus consultant, and raised the following points:

6.2.1 Some members felt it was important to retain the current consultant who understood the project and could liaise effectively with Herefordshire Council and

the service provider on behalf of the City during the current shortage of officer capacity.

6.2.2 Others questioned why the City Council should continue to pay a consultant, as a decision had just been made not to continue the project and the City Council should be funding new projects, not spending more on projects that were finishing.

6.2.3 It was noted that the cost of the consultant continuing from the beginning of February to the end of April 2025, was between £1k and £1,500. Any commitment beyond that would be based on a recommendation from the new Clerk.

RESOLVED To continue funding the current consultant between the beginning of February to the end of April 2025.

7 ANNUAL BUDGET, PRECEPT & COUNCIL TAX (Appendix 4 A & B)

Members considered a recommended budget from the Policy and Resources Committee (Appendix 4B) which met on 14th January 2025, together with an additional note from the Acting Clerk (Appendix 4A).

The Chair explained that it was customary for Council to simply adopt the recommendation of the Policy and Resources Committee when setting the annual precept. However, a major factor for the forthcoming financial year had been whether or not to include funding for the continuation of the Zipper Bus project. The Policy and Resources Committee had therefore considered two options for the 2025/26 budget and were recommending Option 1:

7.1 <u>Option 1 (Appendix 4B)</u> – NO allocation to continue Zipper Bus funding.
Precept of £1,087,991.
Precept per Band D equivalent - £65.78 per property per year.
Increase of £8.92 per property per year – 17.1p per week.
Funding from General Reserve - £84,743.

7.2 <u>Option 2 (Appendix 4B)</u> – INCLUDING allocation to continue Zipper Bus funding.
Precept of £1,172,734.
Precept per Band D equivalent - £70.90 per property per year.
Increase of £14.04 per property per year – 26.9p per week.
Funding from General Reserve - £0.

Derek Kemp answered queries on the budget and confirmed that the overall grant allocation for 2025/26 was the same as the previous year (£150k) but the split was different: £120k for Community Support Grants and £30k for Climate & Bio-Diversity Grants.

RESOLVED To support the recommendation of the Policy and Resources Committee and adopt a precept of £1,087.991 in line with Option 1 above.

8 ANNUAL RISK ANALYSIS (Appendix 5)

Members re-received the 2024/25 annual risk analysis created by the previous Clerk alongside an addendum from the Acting Clerk (Becci O'Reilly) regarding a process for updating for the new financial year as recommended by a meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee on 14th January 2025.

It was noted that some areas of the current risk analysis need updating (e.g. 3.4.2) and the current format was not in accordance with the current guidance and templates in The Practitioners' Guide from the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG). The matter would normally have been considered by the Policy and Resources Committee in January with a recommendation taken to the January Council meeting.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED To follow the advice of the Internal Auditor and re-adopt the current Risk Analysis, with a view to ensuring that the new Town Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer would compile a new Risk Analysis for consideration by members, as soon as possible.

TC/RFO to compile a new RA for consideration

9 UPDATED FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

Members were informed that NALC had created new model Financial Regulations in April 2024.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED To support the recommendation of the Policy and Resources Committee which met on 14 January, to let the new Town Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer undertake the update of Financial Regulations.

10 LARGE GRANT – THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL 2025 - £20,000 (Appendix 6)

Members considered a large grant to Three Choirs for singing opportunities as recommended by the Community Development and Grants Committee held on 3 December 2024. The grant would be taken from the Earmarked Reserve.

RESOLVED To support the recommendation from the Community Development and Grants Committee to grant £20,000 to Three Choirs Festival 2025 for singing opportunities.

11 LARGE GRANT – HEREFORD RUGBY CLUB - £20,000 (Appendix 7)

Members considered a large grant to Hereford Rugby Club for changing rooms and catering upgrades as recommended by the Community Development and Grants Committee which met on 3rd December 2024. The following points were raised:

11.1 In response to concern that there could be a repeat of a few years' ago when flood water caused major damage to the Club, it was noted that there hadn't been any flood incidents since then and the new structure would be raised higher.

11.2 It was noted that the Club had originally requested a £70k grant.

11.3 There was a suggestion that funding should be sought from Herefordshire Council rather than the City Council.

11.4 There was also a query as to whether the Club was going to borrow any money or rely solely on grants. It was mentioned that the RFU had contributed £70k but that sum was thought to be ring-fenced for girls/ladies' rugby.

11.5 The Club was the only one within the City and the catering facility was to feed hungry, muddy teenagers and children

11.6 It was pointed out that the Community Development and Grants Committee was simply asking Council to spend some of the money that had been allocated to it and there was still money left in their budget for the financial year.

RESOLVED To give a grant of £20,000 to Hereford Rugby Club for changing rooms and catering upgrades, as recommended by the Community Development and Grants Committee meeting held on 3 December 2024.

Cllr Kenyon left the meeting

12 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS included:

12.1 Becci O'Reilly is on Maternity Leave.
12.2 Sarah Jones was welcomed as the new Committee Clerk.
12.3 Interviews for new Town Clerk/RFO had taken place on 17 December and an Extraordinary Council Meeting on 23 December had unanimously agreed to employ Kim Carpenter from 31 March 2025.
12.4 A new Junior Mayor, Stefan Dragomir had been appointed, and his first outing was with 40 plus young people who had helped to raised funds for the Poppy Appeal. Members were pleased to hear that year after year, Herefordshire raised more money for the Poppy Appeal than any other area of the country with the exception of Greater London.
12.5 The outgoing Junior Mayor, Emma Hurds had been invited to speak at a conference in Hereford supporting International Women's Day.
12.6 Hereford City, Herefordshire Council and BID were discussing government funding of £25k which was available to appoint a consultant to look at improving the market and City Centre. The funding was part of a £1.2m available to the county. Members hoped that the latest venture would not repeat the work of previous consultants and the City Masterplan. It was noted that Cllr Stevens was representing BID. The consultant's brief would be to look at High Town – the market, properties, signage and events. A meeting the following day would clarify matters a little more.

13 REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Members received brief very reports from representatives on the following bodies:

13.1 Hereford in Bloom – Cllrs Boulter and Foxton (Cllr Owens sub).
Cllr Boulter reported that Hereford in Bloom was going strong and would be competing in next year's event.

13.2 Close House (Cllr Potts (Cllr Proctor sub).
Christmas had been very successful. No meetings had been held recently.

13.3 Hereford Business Improvement District – Cllr Stevens
In line with the Constitution of BID, Cllr Stevens reported that he would be stepping down after 5 years' service and BID would seek a new representative. NOTED as an agenda item for the next relevant Council meeting as Cllr Stevens Chair until the end of March.

Add to next Council Agenda in May

13.4 Stronger Towns Board – Cllr Proctor
The Wyeside Project had delivered everything it said it would and hadn't spent all the money. There was potential for projects to come forward and be awarded money. There was £60k revenue funding and the rest for Castle Green.

13.5 Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School Charity – Cllr Foxton
Cllr Foxton reported that she had been unable to attend meetings and felt it would be appropriate for a new representative to be appointed at the next Council meeting.

New rep to be appointed at next Council meeting in March

13.6 Community Land Trust – Cllr Milln
The Mayor had attended the CLT Empty Shops project which runs until March and is looking at alternative uses for shops. There were opportunities for young people to occupy networking spaces (e.g. artists) and work alongside other professionals.

13.6 **Hereford Allotment & Leisure Gardeners** – Cllr Kenyon
No report available.

13.7 **Herefordshire Association of Local Councils** – Cllr Potts
HALC met last week. There was discussion on the changing relationship between County Associations and NALC, particularly in the light of local government reorganisation. It had also been noted that Herefordshire Council was endeavouring to pass on its responsibilities to parish and town councils.

13.8 **Three Choirs 2025** – Cllrs Dykes and Hornsey.
Cllr Dykes reported that there was a meeting on Thursday 20 March at the Bishops Palace.

14 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**
The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 18 March 2025

15 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**
It was resolved to exclude the press and public under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 s1(2) as the remaining business of the meeting was confidential and personal to named individuals.

16 **CONFIDENTIAL STAFFING MATTER (Appendix 8)**
Members considered a brief report on the arrangements during the interim period until the newly appointed Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) commenced work on 31 March 2025.

[REMOVED. Minutes of this item are contained in the Confidential Minute Book**]**

There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.15 pm

Signed …….

Date …….