

HEREFORDSHIRE MARKET TOWNS FORUM

Minutes of the Market Towns Forum meeting held on Wednesday 23rd September 2015 commencing at 7:00pm at the HALC Offices, Berrows Building, Bath Street, Hereford.

PRESENT:

Bromyard & Winslow Town Council: Cllrs Ray Whittaker and Tony Burt.

Ledbury Town Council: Cllrs Robert Barnes and Keith Francis. Karen Mitchell (Clerk)

Hereford City Council: Cllrs Len Tawn (Chair), Brian Wilcox and Charles Nicholls

Kington Town Council: Cllrs Celia Kibblewhite and Martin Fritton

Ross on Wye Town Council: Cllr David Ravenscroft

Leominster Town Council: Cllrs Jenny Bartlett, Valerie Mifflin and Angela Pendleton.
Paul Russell (Clerk)

Herefordshire Council: Cllr Patricia Morgan

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received and accepted from Naazlin Samani, Roger Page and Maria Mackness.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3rd June 2015 were as an accurate record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

The following matters arising were discussed:

CIL Charges – No further explanation had been received regarding the variation in Cil charges across the County. The matter would be pursued.

Relationships between the Planning Department and Bromsgrove & Winslow Town Council had significantly improved.

The New Homes Bonus funding would be discussed with the Deputy Leader of Herefordshire Council. It was acknowledged that it had been indicated previously that it was very unlikely that the additional income would be shared with the Market Towns. However if some additional funding was available then it might encourage the Market Towns to take on more devolved services.

4. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION GRANT

The Following proposal was put forward by Cllr Kibblewhite, Kington Town Council for consideration and adoption:

At a time when many Town Councils are taking on assets and related responsibilities, Herefordshire Councils proposal to cease paying the Council Tax

Reduction Grant to Town and Parish Councils will make this task more difficult and is also likely to antagonise residents. In view of the relatively small saving this represents, it is recommended that the Market Towns jointly and strongly lobby the County on this issue.

It was unanimously agreed to support the proposal. It was confirmed that there was no legal requirement for Herefordshire Council to hand the funding over despite receiving it from Central Government but there was a mutual benefit to all if the funding was handed over.

Cllr Fritton agreed to develop a letter and send it to the Secretary for distribution and comment.

Cllr Wilcox agreed to find out what the latest position was from HALC and Herefordshire Council regarding the discontinuation of the Transitional Grant.

It was noted that the Herefordshire Council consultation closed on 9th October 2015.

5. HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION WITH THE LEADER

The following matters were discussed with the Deputy Leader of Herefordshire Council, Cllr Patricia Morgan:

It was confirmed that the first tranche of asset transfers was with Legal. Cllr Morgan agreed to forward the relevant details to the Forum.

Concern was expressed that Councils were paying for the grass cutting even though the assets had yet to be transferred.

There was an area of “no mans land which Ross on Wye wished to have transferred so they could continue to manage it. A request was made to include this land in the overall transfers when being registered with the Land Registry.

Cllr Morgan reiterated that there was no additional funding available to help pay for devolved services being transferred from Herefordshire Council. A request was made that consideration be given to providing some funding from the New Homes Bonus.

Concern was expressed that the austerity cuts were not being equally distributed throughout the Council and there was less impact on Hereford itself.

It was confirmed that the Hereford Business Improvement District (BID) was carrying out additional street cleaning in Hereford.

The background to the Hereford BID was outlined. An additional charge of 1.2% had been added to business rates to help fund additional retail/town centre orientated services.

Cllr Morgan was asked to find out how Herefordshire Council assessed cost savings following the devolvement of services and where those savings were being directed. The main costs to Herefordshire Council was adult and children’s social care. Clarification on statutory and discretionary requirements was also requested.

Ross on Wye confirmed that it did carry out a public consultation exercise when it increased its precept by £130,000 to cover the cost of additional services. Over 90% supported the precept increase.

It was expected that Herefordshire Council would suffer a 12% government grant funding reduction from central government until 2020.

Ledbury requested clarification as to whether it would be asked to take over the toilets again having declined the offer. Cllr Morgan agreed to find out.

Concern was expressed regarding the Herefordshire Council Constitution in which it stated that all consultation with town and parish councils must be carried out through the Ward Councillors.

This clause had caused some issues in the past and Cllr Morgan agreed to look into it. The MTF requested that this clause be reviewed and changed to help improve democratic consultation but also enhance the improving relationships between the County Council and the Market Towns.

A further request was made to HC to ensure that when services were devolved to town and parish councils that the ability to deliver those services was facilitated. This was particularly pertinent to services such as waste collection and bin emptying as the Towns needed to be able to dispose of the waste collected.

Kington confirmed that the relationship with the Planners was very good but there was a difficulty getting an answer via the Switchboard. This issue had been previously identified and it was hoped that it had improved.

Reference was made to the proposal to request that the Support Grant is continued for another year. Although Herefordshire Council had indicated that this would be reduced over a four year period it appeared that this position had now changed and the entire Support Grant was being discontinued. It was agreed to clarify this.

It was suggested that funding could be requested from parishes surrounding the Market Towns although it was felt that this was unlikely. The Forum wondered whether Herefordshire Council had undertaken any work in this area. It was suggested that Herefordshire Council should assess possible funding solutions based on the localities.

Clarification was also requested regarding the relationship between Herefordshire Council and BBLP especially with regard to the potentially diminishing contract with various elements of grass cutting being removed from the contract which had originally been negotiated on a flexible basis. Had Herefordshire Council considered the possibility of BBLP withdrawing from the contract.

It was felt this was highly unlikely as the main element of the contract was based on highways work and filling potholes which required a significant investment from Herefordshire Council.

With regard to Youth Services it was confirmed that Herefordshire Council no longer delivered such services but that organisations such as HVOSS did so on the Council's behalf. Instead Herefordshire Council focused on troubled families and provided specialist help that tried to address all the issues through a multi-agency approach. It was unlikely that in future there would be generic youth funding available.

It was also confirmed that Herefordshire Council did not now support Tourism directly. Instead tourist information was provided by different organisations in different ways.

The Forum formally thanked Cllr Morgan for her attendance and thanked her for all her efforts helping to improve communication.

6. MARKET FORUM PRIORITIES

The main focus at present would be to obtain clarification on future Transitional Grant funding from Herefordshire Council and developing more proactive communications between each Market Town and Herefordshire Council.

An up to date contact list of all representatives and Clerks would be drawn up.

It was agreed to ask the Leader and Deputy Leader whether one of them would like to attend on a regular basis to develop a level of continuity. An additional slot would also be included for any guests that may be invited.

It was also agreed to develop the partnership between Herefordshire Council and the MTF, identify joint ways of working and joint partnership working.

It was agreed to develop a mechanism to share best practice and experiences between the Market Towns by developing more proactive communications.

It was important to ensure that Neighbourhood Plans being developed across the County were taken into consideration during the planning process and made to work.

7. ATCM

It was agreed to support the proposal to request Herefordshire Council to join the Association of Town Centre Managers to enable each Market Town to subscribe for the reduced rate of £100 per annum.

8. CONFIDENTIAL SESSION

There was no confidential items discussed.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

MTF meetings would be held on the 4th Wednesday of every second month. The following meeting dates were agreed:

- 25th November 2015
- 27th January 2016
- 23rd March 2016
- 25th May 2016
- 27th July 2016
- 28th September 2016
- 23rd November 2016

Venue: Berrows Building

Start Time: 7:00pm.

There being no other business the Chair thanked members for their attendance and closed the meeting at 9:07pm

CHAIR:

DATE: