

# HEREFORDSHIRE MARKET TOWNS FORUM

Minutes of the Market Towns Forum meeting held on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2016 commencing at 7:00pm at the HALC Offices, Berrows Building, Bath Street, Hereford.

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## **PRESENT:**

**Bromyard & Winslow Town Council:** Cllr Tony Burt (Chair) and Gary Swinford (Locum Clerk).

**Ledbury Town Council:** Cllr Eager.

**Hereford City Council:** Cllrs Brian Wilcox, Charles Nicholls and Steve Kerry (Clerk)

**Kington Town Council:** Cllr Bob Widdowson

**Ross on Wye Town Council:** Cllr David Ravenscroft and Sarah Robson (Clerk)

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

**Herefordshire Council:** Peter Robinson

## **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received and accepted from Len Tawn (HCC), Pete Andrews (B&WTC), Martin Fitton (Kington), Hannah Lerego (Ross), Daniel Lister (Ross), Keith Francis (Ledbury), Bob Barnes (Ledbury) and Karen Mitchell (Ledbury).

## **2. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2015 were agreed and signed as an accurate record.

## **3. MATTERS ARISING**

The new contact list was noted.

## **4. HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**

Mr Peter Robinson was welcomed to the meeting. He then gave a presentation which covered the following matters:

Herefordshire Council Financial Planning for 2016/17 to 2019/20.

- Government were aiming to achieve a budget surplus by 2019/20;
- In 2010 Principal Authorities were 80% grant funded by Central Government;
- By 2020 Principal Authorities were expected to be 100% locally funded. This did include retention of Business Rates;
- Details of the four year settlement had now been received.

The Rural Support Grant (RSG) cuts have been deeper and steeper than expected. The reduction for Herefordshire in 2016/17 will be 34% which amounts to £9 million plus the additional Rural Grant of £1.2 million which reduces the percentage to 30%. A further 2% (£1.7 million) will be raised from a 2% precept

increase. Therefore a further £28 million worth of cuts will be required on top of the £59 million achieved to date. Current savings proposals are as follows:

<b>Directorate</b>	<b>2016-17 £m</b>	<b>2017-18 £m</b>	<b>2018-19 £m</b>	<b>2019-20 £m</b>	<b>Total 16-20 £m</b>
Adults and wellbeing	4.1	2.3	1.8	1.7	9.9
Children's wellbeing	1.6	1.3	1.4	1.0	5.3
Economy, communities and corporate (ECC)	5.2	3.4	2.3	2.3	13.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>28.4</b>

***Library Services:***

A new way of operating libraries and customer services are currently being explored. The Council wishes to retain services that are important to residents and it acknowledges the health, well being and economic value of libraries which includes support for students. Funding options are also being investigated which may include fundraising, joint funding with town and parish councils and income generation as well as cost savings. Funding reduction in 2017/18 will be £380,000 with a further £380,000 funding reduction in 2018/19

***Lengthsman & P3 Services:***

Similar funding for these two schemes will be available in 2016/17 with phased reductions of £100,000 per annum in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20.

***The Future of Business Rates:***

The Government has proposed that Local Authorities will be able to retain 100% of business rates by the end of 2019/20. Currently Herefordshire retains £23 million which relates to 50%. It is expected that the change will be fiscally neutral across the country. However, areas such as Westminster generate £1.5 billion in business rates so there may need to be some additional work on the way this policy will be delivered.

It is expected that further additional responsibilities and services will be devolved to local government including the Public Health grant (currently £7 million) and attendance allowance which is paid to older people with care needs (currently £20 million).

***Proposed Increases:***

The following increases have been agreed in Council Tax:

- Fire Service proposing a 1.96% increase;
- Police are deciding 2/2/16 but expected to be around 1.99%;
- 2% Herefordshire Council Tax increase for Social Care;
- 1.9% increase as planned on basic precept totaling 3.9% overall;
- Over 90% of Counties are planning the same increase.

**Public Consultation:**

The results of the public consultation were presented and discussed. Libraries received the most positive responses while sale of the small holdings estate of 4,500 acres including 45 farms to reduce the Council's debt repayments was the most popular cut.

With regard to the cessation of the Council Tax reduction grant this was the fifth most popular cut although the Cabinet report had indicated that this was the third. However, this was the result of a smaller consultation carried out in June 2015 and it was suggested that the reference to this was misleading.

Mr Robinson explained that a calculation had been carried out to assess the impact of the loss of the Council Tax Support Grant provided to parish and town councils on the overall total precept. A decision had been taken that those that those Councils that suffered more than a 0.3% impact would receive some reduced funding. 5 parish and town councils had been identified.

There was some difficulty understanding the impact the withdrawal of the Support Grant was having on individual parish and town Councils precepts. The fundamental misunderstanding was around the fact that in order to stay still parish and town councils needed to either save the amount of the support grant or increase its precept by the relevant percentage.

Concern was expressed that Herefordshire Council had not carried out an equality impact assessment on the proposed cuts and that many of the cuts would have an adverse impact on other services

Concern was also expressed that Herefordshire Council should be promoting economic development. However, planning applications enabling this were not being supported and greater focus needed to be given to identifying suitable industrial sites and ensuring economic development.

Assurances were given that asset transfers of income generators such as car parks and markets town and parish councils to help them fund devolved services were supported. It was stressed that the potential of the development of Service Level Agreements between town and parish councils and Herefordshire Council to deliver services locally could potentially reduce service delivery costs and improve actual service delivery. The Forum requested that this be seriously considered by Herefordshire Council.

The meeting thanked Mr Robinson for his attendance.

**5. CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAUX**

The Forum noted that the CAB in Herefordshire was expected to close down on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

There had been a great deal of confusion over the future of CAB and the WISH hub. Further information is available by following the link below:

<http://newsroom.herefordshire.gov.uk/2015/december/statement-confusion-about-information-and-advice-services.aspx>

The new Wellbeing Information Signposting for Herefordshire service (WISH) has been developed in response to Herefordshire Council's duty to provide information and signposting to support people's independence and wellbeing under the Care Act 2014.

Concern was expressed that there would be no general advice available in Herefordshire. With the introduction of the Universal Credit and the effect this would have especially on the self employed, the lack of good benefit advice was of concern. It was confirmed that benefits advice was the most popular type of advice sought. It was also indicated that there was a 6 to 7 week delay prior to receiving the first Universal Credit payment. Universal credit payments came into effect for all new applications, change of circumstances and self employment.

Ross on Wye had considered providing local provision and had been quoted £10,000 per annum but with the demise of the Herefordshire CAB this was not an option.

Discussion took place regarding the possibility of the Market Towns pooling resources and commissioning a CAB service to be shared between the Market Towns. It was agreed that Bob Widdowson would champion this item and contact the Worcester CAB to establish whether they would be willing to provide a reduced service. Options such as video link services would be investigated. It was understood that CAB services could only be delivered by a CAB branded and affiliated organisation.

It was acknowledged that the Market Towns should be working together to help develop these and other services now and in the future.

CAB would be considered again at the next MTF meeting in March.

#### **6. ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (23<sup>rd</sup> MARCH 2016)**

It was agreed to invite Mr Clasby, S106 Officer, to the next meeting to provide the following update:

- CIL update including the process, timescale and consultation with particular focus on the way town and parish councils would be consulted;
- CIL draft proposals and the role of town and parish councils;
- Outstanding S106 agreements and funding available;
- S106 funding enforcement (examples to be fed to the Secretary)

#### **7. CONFIDENTIAL SESSION**

There were no confidential matters raised.

#### **8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was **NOTED** that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016 at Berrows Building at 7pm.

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting at 21:16.