

FULL COUNCIL	30 JULY 2020	AGENDA ITEM: 18
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Report prepared by Angie Price – Town Clerk

TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with details of meetings and work streams that the Clerk has undertaken since the last meeting of Council.

Detailed Information

The last report from the Clerk was to a meeting of Council held on 5 March 2020 and members will appreciate that following the lockdown at the end of March the way in which staff have been working was changed dramatically. The offices have been closed since 24 March, however the Clerk made arrangements for all calls to be diverted to her mobile phone and a service to the residents of Ledbury has continued via emails and telephone wherever possible throughout the lockdown.

There were occasions where the Clerk and admin staff have attended the office for various reasons through the lockdown and the Clerk is now back in the office full time and admin staff have also been attending the office regularly. Arrangements are currently being put in place for staff to return to work on a more permanent basis, but with the facility to continue to work from home 1/2 days a week if they wish. A risk assessment has been carried out in respect of the offices and Perspex screen has been ordered for the reception area, and once this has been delivered arrangements will be made to re-open the offices on a part-time basis initially. It is proposed to reopen the office three days a week Tuesday-Thursday 10.00 am – 2.00 pm.

During the lockdown office staff have been working from home and much of the Council's business has continued. The Clerk has participated in a number of Zoom meetings, and once legislation was changed to allow councils to hold meetings via on-line methods the Clerk provided procedures and instructions to allow the council to hold on-line meetings, which restarted with the Economic Development & Planning Committee on 21 May 2020.

Staff have ensured that the residents of Ledbury have been kept informed via social media platforms during the lockdown, with many residents stopping the Clerk in the street to congratulate the council on how much information has been shared with them.

At the extraordinary meeting of Council held on 19 March 2020 the Council gave delegated powers to the Clerk, in consultation with the relevant chairs, Mayor and Deputy Mayor to ensure Council business could continue. Attached are reports providing details of three decisions taken in consultation with the appropriate chairs.

Other projects and workstreams that have continued during the lockdown are:

- War memorial – the work to the War Memorial started towards the end of May and it is hoped that the new spire will be fitted on 24 July and the project completed soon after. It is anticipated that this will be completed in time to hold a small service of remembrance for VJ Day on 15 August.
- Annual Audit – following the lockdown an extension for the deliver of the 2019/20 audit has been provided. Following the completion of the year end accounts by the Deputy Clerk, the Clerk provided documentation to the Internal Auditor and these have now been returned and an item placed on the meeting of the Finance, Policy & General Purposes Committee for completion of the process in order for the documentation to be forwarded to the External Auditors by the revised deadline date.
- Viaduct Development Inquiry – As a Rule 6 participant the work involved in this inquiry for the Town Council was extensive, with many Zoom meetings being held between the Working Party and the expert witnesses, with many deadlines being taken to the wire for the provision of the various documents. The Inquiry started on 13 July 2020 and the Council provided a venue for residents to view the proceedings if they were unable to do this from their home. Unfortunately, the Inquiry was not completed in the anticipated time of one week and it will now reconvene on 22 September, when it is hoped it will be completed
- The organisational/staff review has commenced, and it is anticipated that a draft report will be ready towards the end of July, with a visit from the company to view the offices scheduled for 28 July. It is anticipated that the final report will be ready for consideration by the Resources Committee at its meeting on 3 September.
- The Shelter at the recreation ground has now been painted and a press release has been sent out asking for suggestions for the outside of the shelter and the skate park ramps.
- The Corporate Plan has been approved in its current form and the Standing Committees are hoping to arrange meetings to agree elements of the plan that they should look to work on in the 2020/21 financial year.
- Unfortunately, due to the pressures of working from home it was not possible to prepare an annual report as had been hoped, however, it is hoped that this will be available for the annual meeting in 2021.

Recommendation

That the above report be received and noted.

RECORD OF OFFICER DECISION

Decision Title	Cemetery Fees
Date of Decision	30 March 2020
Decision Maker	Town Clerk
Authority for delegated decision	Minute no. 251 Extraordinary meeting held on 19.03.2020
Consultation	Chair of Finance and Vice-Chair of Finance, Policy & General Purposes committee
Decision made	Not to increase cemetery fees and charges on 01.04.2020 and to review this in three months
Reason for decision	<p>The decision was taken due to the likely increase in burials posed by the outbreak of COVID-19.</p> <p>Whilst the increase was a planned increase as part of the 2020/21 budget, to increase the fees at such a time might be seen as profiting from others misfortune.</p> <p>Therefore, a decision was taken to suspend the increase in cemetery fees and charges for a period of three months at which time it will be reviewed.</p>
Associated risks	We may not be able to provide a full service if the death toll increases due to Coronavirus.
Alternative options considered and rejected	<p>To close the burial ground completely. To increase fees as agreed via 2020/21 budget.</p> <p>Both these options were rejected due to the need for the burial service to be available throughout this crisis.</p>
How long will this be in place	Three months with a review of the situation at the end of that period.

RECORD OF OFFICER DECISION

Decision Title	Closure to play area and skate park at recreation ground
Date of Decision	23 March 2020
Decision Maker	Town Clerk
Authority for delegated decision	Minute no. 251 Extraordinary meeting held on 19.03.2020
Consultation	Chair of Finance and Vice-Chair of Environment & Leisure Committees
Decision made	To close Play Park and Skate Park at the Recreation Ground Ledbury until further notice
Reason for decision	<p>The decision was taken due to the unprecedented threat to Public Health posed by the outbreak of COVID-19.</p> <p>Closing Play Areas will support the recommendations of national government for people to avoid places where people, as a result of natural use of play areas, particularly by children and parents, congregate in a way that is contrary to the recommendations of national government in regard to social distancing. Also to support Hereford Council in their decision to close all play areas etc.</p> <p>The decision was therefore taken to protect the public from the threat of COVID-19</p>
Associated risks	That people choose to congregate at other locations. However, the ability for all reasonable persons to abide by the recommendations of national government in regard to social distancing, will typically be greater in other public spaces, such as parks and sports pitches.
Alternative options considered and rejected	To close the recreation ground completely. This option has been rejected as, with the exception of play areas, public open spaces provide facility for all who can leave their house, in accordance with the prevailing Government guidance to exercise and travel by sustainable means. Such exercise and travel can be undertaken in accordance with the recommendations of national government in regard to social distancing and as a result can support the mental wellbeing of residents. If access to all parks and sports pitches was prevented, then those residents who can legitimately leave their homes will be obliged to exercise or travel via other public places, such as public highways or on private land, this risks concentrating people into less public space and reducing the ability for all reasonable persons to abide by the recommendations of national government in regard to social distancing.
How long will this be in place	Until such time national government guidelines allow for social distancing to be amended

RECORD OF OFFICER DECISION

Decision Title	Food Bank Grant
Date of Decision	5 May 2020
Decision Maker	Town Clerk
Authority for delegated decision	Minute no. 251 Extraordinary meeting held on 19.03.2020
Consultation	All Councillors
Decision made	To give a grant of £5,000 to Ledbury Food Bank to help with the current crisis and to consider offering a further £5,000 later on.
Reason for decision	The decision was taken due to the increased burden being placed on the Ledbury Food Bank in the current climate and the need for more people to be provided with food.
Associated risks	Council only has a limited budget for grants and therefore will need consider carefully how much the council can offer going forward without leaving residents in need
Alternative options considered and rejected	No alternative options considered at this stage. Clerk will investigate other avenues of grant funding
How long will this be in place	Consideration will need to be given to funding for the duration of the Covid-19 Pandemic

