

MINUTES OF THE POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 17TH. OCTOBER 2016

Present : Councillor J Criddle (Chair)
Councillors A Farina- Childs & J Weeks
Councillor Z Hammond as an observer

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence had been received from Councillors W Baber & D Davies

2. Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were made at this point

3. To Sign Interest Free Loan Agreement & hand over of cheque to Blackwood Little Theatre

In the absence of the Mayor, it was *unanimously agreed* the Deputy Mayor Councillor Jan Weeks sign the Agreement on behalf of the Town Council, witnessed by the Clerk

The Chair welcomed Janine O'Callaghan and Josh Griffiths from Blackwood Little Theatre who signed and witnessed the Agreement respectively on behalf of Blackwood Little Theatre. The Deputy Mayor then handed over the loan cheque for £10,000. Janine responded by thanking Town Council for their kind gesture, and gave a brief update of the works undertaken to date. They had this week returned to the Theatre, making enough space for them to start rehearsals for their forthcoming Christmas Pantomime Robin Hood. The roof and guttering had been repaired and central heating installed

4. To Receive the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting held on 18th July 2016

It was *resolved* the Minutes be received

5. Matters Arising

The Clerk reported that he had been contacted by the Football Club, asking if their cheque could be replaced with one made payable to Blackwood Griffins, their adopted team name. This was *unanimously agreed*.

6. To Consider Report of Council Highway Owned Car Parking Task & Finish Group

The Clerk informed members that this item was on the agenda as a response was required for a meeting arranged by Caerphilly C.B.C. to hear representations from Town & Community Councils on the attached Report. However, he had been informed late last week that the meeting had been postponed and a new date was to be arranged.

The Clerk had e-mailed a copy of the report presented to the Regeneration & Environment Scrutiny Committee to all members, but also circulated additional copies to members present.

Members highlighted the fact that 64% of all annual income collected from ticket sales for Council Highway owned off street car parks for 2014/2015 was generated in Blackwood (£438,764 of £685,730), with the High Street Car Park(£201,490) generating more than all car parks in Caerphilly and the Cliff Road Car Park generating more than all car park in Bargoed & Ystrad Mynach combined.

They queried what benefits the town had seen from the significant revenue generated, especially as Town Council had recently stepped in to ensure the continuation of floral displays in town throughout the summer after a Caerphilly C.B.C. decision to cease providing same.

It was asked whether budgets delegated to the Town Centre Management Committees could better reflect the income generated in each centre, at least then some sense of fairness might be seen, rather than the perceived vitality in town disadvantaging residents and visitors.

Members were disgusted to learn that whilst 98% of all spaces were pay and display in Blackwood, many of the other town centres were significantly better treated – Bargoed 22%, Risca 0%, Nelson 0% & Newbridge 0%. If all other town centres were brought more into line, then potentially an additional 500 spaces might be charge for, generating additional significant income which might be used to reduce existing charges across the borough.

Furthermore, two specific issues were raised –

Regarding the possibility of some short term free parking in the Bus Station Car Park to assist people visiting the Library, now that the cash office is situated there.

Regarding the possibility of 2 hours free parking in town in the run up to Christmas.

It was agreed to recommend to Council that the Clerk forward the comments raised in advance of the newly arranged meeting.

7. To Consider Initial Proposals Report by Boundary Commission for Wales

The Clerk circulated copies of the relevant proposals relating to the loss of the current Islwyn Constituency, and plans to incorporate the electoral wards of Argoed, Blackwood, Cefn Fforest, Crumlin, Newbridge, Pengam & Penmaen into Blaenau Gwent. The electoral ward of Aberbargoed into Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney and those of Abercarn, Cross Keys, Maesycwmmmer, Pontllanfraith, Risca East, Risca West and Ysddu into Caerphilly.

Whilst members were dismayed that the Islwyn Constituency would be lost, and that Pontllanfraith especially would not be joining Blackwood in the new Constituency, they felt they were unable to put forward any viable alternatives at this stage and thought other larger bodies might be in a better position to do so, and reluctantly, therefore, decided to recommend to Council not to make any representations on the Initial Proposals

8. To Consider Requests for Financial Assistance

The Clerk reported that 4 applications had been received for financial assistance –

Ist Cefn Fforest Scout Group are looking to install internet to their meeting hut on Waunborfa Road. The Clerk had established approximately 45 girls and boys attend, the majority from Blackwood/ Cefn Fforest . He had asked for details of likely costs but had had no response. It was ***recommended*** the application be deferred until costs are notified.

Caerphilly Access Group are seeking funding. The Clerk has asked the Group to identify a specific item of equipment they are looking to purchase, as general revenue funding is not usually considered.

It was **recommended** the application be deferred until a response is received.

Peter Karrie Productions, who performed at this years carnival and during the Children's Literature Festival are seeking funds to assist in the purchase of costumes/ equipment for a forthcoming Pantomime. There are 36 children in the group all of which reside in the Blackwood area, and 16 adults, 9 of whom reside in the Blackwood area.

After some discussion it was **agreed to recommend** to Town Council that £250 be awarded.

Blackwood Rugby Club are seeking assistance towards the cost of staging their Annual Fireworks Display, which attracts a good number of people to the town. Additional increases in costs together with having to deal with more and more regulations (Health & Safety) means the event is becoming non viable.

Councillor Farina-Childs voiced an opinion that maybe we could look to get more involved in this event in years to come, as many families benefit from attending an organised event.

After further discussion, it was **agreed to recommend** to Town Council that £250 be awarded, and that further discussions be held with officers of the club to consider potential involvement in future years.

9. To Consider additional Financial Support to future Velvet Coalmine Children's Literature Festival

The Clerk presented his report, a copy of which forms part of the minutes.

All members present were eager to secure the future of the Children's Literature Festival, and being mindful of the fact that Velvet Coalmine were looking to find a Title Sponsor, were adamant Town Council should do all in its power to ensure we became that Sponsor, rather than any other organisation/company coming in to steal the headlines for what promises to be a successful event for the town over coming years, and benefitting our youngsters enormously.

After further discussion, it was **unanimously agreed the following recommended to Town Council**

- (1) Of the ongoing potential savings associated with the Carnival, £500 be earmarked towards the Literature Festival, the remainder (£1,500) invested back into other Events
- (2) £1,500 be earmarked from balances each year for the next 5 years towards the Literature Festival, possibly £750 each from Projects Reserves and General Reserves
- (3) The Precept for 2017/2018 be increased by £1, thus raising an approximate additional £3,000 per annum that be earmarked specifically for the Literature Festival

The resultant effect being to **recommend that Town Council becomes the Title Sponsors for the Children's Literature Festival (with the acceptance of Velvet Coalmine) in the sum of £7,500 for the next 5 years**