

**MINUTES OF THE POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 27<sup>TH</sup>. JANUARY 2020**

**Present** : Councillors G James ( Mayor ), J Edwards, D Davies, T Evans, Z Hammond & R Mills

It was **agreed** by all present that Councillor G James ( Mayor ) Chair the meeting until a Chair/ Vice Chair of the Committee is appointed.

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors J Griffiths, P Cook & A Short

**2. Declarations of Interest**

Councillor G James Declared an Interest in Item 6 ( Applications for Financial Assistance ) as he is a regular volunteer with the Blackwood Action on Litter Community Group

**3. To appoint a Chair & Vice Chair of the Committee**

In the absence of Councillor A Short, who was to be nominated as Chair, and no other nominations being made it was **unanimously agreed** the Mayor continue to Chair the meeting and that nominations be sought at Town Council

**4. To Receive the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting held on 18th. March 2019 and extract of Minutes of Town Council Meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup>. November 2019**

It was **unanimously agreed** the minutes be received

**5. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising

**6. To Consider Applications for Financial Assistance**

Having declared an interest, Councillor G James took no part in the discussion or decision taken in respect of the application from Blackwood Action on Litter Community Group.

The Clerk presented his report on Applications received and each was discussed in some detail, and after some deliberation it was agreed to recommend to Town Council that the following grants be awarded –

Blackwood Action on Litter Community Group	£410
Wales Air Ambulance	£200

The Clerk had identified that as previous award agreed to Keep Wales Tidy in the sum of £350 had for some reason never been cashed, the actual charge against the current years budget for the above awards would realistically only amount to £260

#### **7. Budget Monitoring Report - Period 9 to 31<sup>st</sup>. December 2019**

The Clerk presented his budget monitoring report for the current year which indicated a number of variances to the original budget with a net effect being an under spend of £5,316 ,but once planned contributions in respect of Xmas Lights and Bi Centenary Celebrations are accounted for, this realistically equates to an overspend of £4,184 albeit some £11,600( Contribution to toilets & Loan to Studio 54 ( less anticipated £300 repayments) are specific unbudgeted calls on Reserves.

Given approx £4,250 of the under spends had been identified against Events, this potentially gives Town Council the opportunity to invest further amount towards our Bi Centenary Celebrations and it was **unanimously agreed to recommend** to Town Council the monitoring report as presented be accepted and that £4,250 is further earmarked to reserves towards planned Bi Centenary Celebrations.

#### **8. Budget Requirements 2020/2021 & Precept Setting**

The Clerk presented a budget for 2020/2021 which reflects current spending patterns, plus inflationary increases on some expenditure heads, but also reflects the Council's decision to continue the provision of hanging baskets, continued sponsorship of the Blackwood RFC Firework Display and the ongoing Events Programme and our Grants to Local Organisations/ Groups. A contribution of £2,000 is also included towards Replacement fund for Christmas Lighting, and an additional £7,500 towards our Bi- Centenary Celebrations.

For the current year, 2019/20 ,Caerphilly C.B.C. ( due to budgetary constraints ) no longer financed the Summer Event Carnival/ Beach Party, and the event whilst still organised by the Caerphilly Events Team, with all stage entertainment organised by Town Council Events Committee was fully funded by Town Council. It is proposed, whilst there were some under spends, the same budget of £9,500 be earmarked for 2020/2021.

Similarly, with the Borough now fully funding the Xmas Fayre/Market as a One Day Event, we had fairly considerable savings, but given the obvious emphasis on our Bi-Centenary Year Celebrations it is proposed the £2,750 budget remains, so that we might look to enhance the hopefully Victorian themed Xmas Fayre/Market to properly round off the year.

The Clerk emphasised that it must be noted that one issue that needs to be addressed by Town Council is the potential financial effect of the Independent Remuneration Panel Draft Annual Report, namely -

Payments of £150 each to members as a contribution towards costs /expenses.(potentially£2,400)

This is an amount that members are entitled to, unless the Clerk is notified in writing that they do not wish to claim. For the current financial year, to date, all but 3 members have indicated they wish to forego the payments and 8 have indicated they wish to forego the payment for the coming year( Hence £450 & £1,200 included in figures\*\* )

Decisions will, however, be needed at Town Council as to whether -

Up to 5 members should receive a payment of up to £500 each in respect of specific responsibilities.

Travel costs are paid for attending approved duties

Overnight subsistence expenses are paid for approved duties

Financial loss allowance is paid where an actual loss has occurred

Payment of up to £1,500 can be made to Mayor ( Currently £400 allowance made)

Payment of up to £500 can be made to Deputy Mayor ( Currently no payment made)

As stated previously, the £5,300 is the likely worse case scenario and would require an increase equivalent to £1.80p on the current precept of £20 at Band D equivalent ( 9% increase )

After much discussion members of this Committee ***unanimously agreed to recommend*** to Town Council that we retain the status quo and reject the option of making £500 payments in respect of specific responsibilities, keep Mayor's Allowance at £400 and reject payment of any Allowance to the Deputy Mayor

After further discussion it was ***unanimously agreed to recommend*** to Town Council the budget as presented and that the Precept for 2020/2021 remain at £20 per Band D Property.

***9. Boundary Commission Changes – Draft Proposals for Caerphilly Electoral Boundaries – Consultation period ends 15<sup>th</sup>. April 2020***

The Clerk presented his report which included the relevant details of the proposed Electoral Boundaries which affected the Blackwood & Cefn Fforest Wards of the Borough Council.

He also included the following statement which refers to Community & Town Council arrangements, namely -

The Commission wishes to highlight that this review of electoral arrangements is seeking to make improvements to electoral representation within Caerphilly County Borough Council. This process except for those specifically mentioned in Chapter 6, is independent from any changes to arrangements concerning community or town councils. Where combinations of communities or their wards are used to create electoral wards, the individual communities in question will retain their existing community council arrangements. These councils will remain independent following the outcome of this review, any precepts generated or assets contained with a community or town council will remain part of that community council.

Members expressed their concerns that community perceptions of the proposed ward changes might cause some issues with some apparently already voicing their opinion that if they are no longer within the Blackwood Ward why should they continue paying the Town Council precept.

The Clerk reported that he intended placing this item on the agenda for Town Council and this was supported by members present, who also expressed support for a meeting with both C.C.B.C. Blackwood & Cefn Fforest Ward members to prepare a joint response to these proposals prior to the consultation closing date of 15<sup>th</sup>. April 2020.