

**MINUTES OF THE POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL  
HELD REMOTELY ON 30<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2020**

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

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor P Cook

**2. Declarations of Interest**

No Declarations of Interest were made at this point

**3. To appoint a Chair for the Meeting**

It was *unanimously agreed* Councillor J Edwards act as Chair for this meeting

**4. To Receive the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup>. January 2020**

It was *unanimously agreed* the Minutes be received

**5. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising

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

The Clerk reported that he had received a letter from Friends of Cefn Fforest Eco Park enquiring if any assistance might be considered towards planned initiatives next Spring, in conjunction with Blackwood Comprehensive Youth Centre.

Councillor G James declared an Interest in this matter and took no part in the discussion or decision making

They are planning a Butterfly Garden, awarded by Keep Wales Tidy, and a huge mural with the help of a professional graffiti artist at the entrance to the Park.

The Clerk stated he had contacted the Group seeking the cost of the scheme, and had earlier that afternoon received an invitation to meet with representatives on site to discuss their plans.

After some discussion, when members expressed their support for the initiative, it was *agreed* the Clerk and Cllr. Rhys Mills arrange to meet on site, and report back.

Councillor Z Hammond reminded members any support could be considered from our Environmental Reserve Fund, and not necessarily from Grants to Voluntary Organisations budget.

## 7. *Independent Review Panel for Wales Draft Report*

The Clerk presented his report on the relevant section of the Draft Report that referred to Town & Community Councils, explaining that Town Council would fall into Group B, and that no decision was required regarding the £150 payment to members as a contribution to costs and expenses, as this was mandatory. However, if members decided not to take up the payment they would have to advise the Clerk/ Responsible Officer in writing to that effect.

After some discussion, it was ***agreed to recommend to Town Council*** that as the Report stands, the position remains as per the current year, and that –

***No Payments be made in respect of specific responsibilities for the coming year***

***Payments of Travel costs be made for attending approved duties***

***Payment of Overnight Subsistence costs be made for attending approved duties***

***Payment of Financial loss compensation, where actual loss has occurred be made for attending approved duties***

***Payment of £400 ( uplifted by inflation ) be made to the Mayor***

***No Payment be made to the Deputy Mayor***

## 8. *Medium Term Budget Strategy/ Budget Requirements 2021/2022 & Precept Setting*

The Clerk presented his Report on a planned Medium Term Budget Strategy.

He identified that his last Budget Monitoring Report to 31<sup>st</sup>. October 2020 indicated that our estimated Reserves Position at 31<sup>st</sup>. March 2021 would be as follows –

	£
General Reserves	37,347 *
Coed Duon	10,000
Other Environmental	2,190
Xmas Lights	18,610
Bi-Centenary	20,160
CIL	303
	<hr/>
	£ 88,610
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- With the currently accepted General Reserves set at £15,000 ( approx 25% of Precept ) per Town Council Minute of 19<sup>th</sup>. March 2020, this potentially makes approximately £22,000 available for use

However, given the unwarranted attention on the Town Council precept during the Caerphilly County Borough Council Boundary Changes Consultation, the enforced cancellation of our planned events programme and the cessation of required funding of the Bi-Centenary celebrations, perhaps members might like to consider utilising some of the available funds to reduce the current precept ( £20 per Band D property ).

Options within the tables indicate the position, that –  
with a £1 reduction to £19 would increase our reserves by £2,915 over the 3 years of this proposal  
**with a £2 reduction to £18 would require £5,950 contribution from reserves over the 3 years \***  
with £2.50 reduction to £17.50 would require £10,390 contribution from reserves over the 3 years

An unknown at this moment in time is the potential effect of the Independent Review Panel for Wales Draft Report.

If all things remain as last year, then there will be no effect on the figures.  
However, if members were to consider introducing specific responsibility allowances and /or now wish to receive the £150, which is their entitlement, then this will have a marked difference on the figures provided. Hence, an early indication of members intentions would greatly assist the budget setting process.

After much discussion, members **agreed to recommend to Town Council** that the Medium Term Budget Strategy be **agreed**, and that members consider reducing the precept by £2 per annum at Band D to £18 for 2021/22.

Furthermore, given the ongoing uncertainty around Covid 19 and our events programme the **Committee would recommend** budget provision as identified be agreed, and any under spends are revisited throughout the coming year with possible additional support/services for the benefit of the town considered as an alternative

## 9. **To discuss Potential Schemes to utilise Reserves**

The Clerk reported that given the previous decision to recommend a reduction in the Precept, approximately £16,000 was now available for potential schemes/initiatives to benefit the well being of the town.

After much discussion, two initiatives were identified, and it was agreed -

That in order to improve the profile of Town Council consideration be given to us having a base in town, manned by members, where the public could drop in for advice and support on a range of subjects. It was **agreed** Councillors R Mills & A Short lead on this initiative and report back to the Policy & Finance Committee early in the new year.

That in recognition of the consequences of Covid 19, namely loneliness and mental health issues, ( and bearing in mind the recent death of a Blackwood RFC youth team member under very distressing circumstances ) that consideration be given to working with the Rugby Club, Mental Health Charities and professionals to secure support services for the Town and surrounding communities. It was **agreed** the Clerk make contact with the Club, and that Councillor Z Hammond liaise with them on this initiative, which is apparently already underway, and report back to Policy & Finance Committee early in the new year.

