

**MINUTES OF THE POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD REMOTELY  
ON 25<sup>TH</sup>. JANUARY 2021**

**Present:** Councillor J Edwards ( Chair )  
Councillors G James, R Mills, P Cook, T Evans, D Davies & D Jones

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors A Short & Z Hammond

**2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest

**3. To Receive the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup>. November 2020**

It was *agreed* the Minutes be received

**4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising

**5. Presentation by Councillor Darren Jones on Proposals for Town Council Strategy & Vision**

Cllr. Darren Jones presented his idea of a potential Strategic Plan for Town Council ( Copy included as part of the Minutes ).

He emphasised that this realistically identified the mission, vision and values of Town Council brought together in a single document that we could proudly share with other public service organisations – Borough Council, Police, Health Authority, Businesses and residents alike.

Members had highlighted in the past that they felt many people did not know what Town Council did, and that we weren't proactive enough in advertising ourselves, having such a document could certainly assist there – informing them how we are working to serve their needs, with our limited resources, to provide community based services and activities that fills the gap or adds value to those of other local organisations.

He felt there was little members would disagree with, but would certainly welcome their views and comments.

Members were grateful for the work Cllr. Jones had put into the presentation, and were most supportive of the document, which they thought would go a long way in identifying exactly how Town Council benefit the community, both directly ( events, Christmas lighting, hanging baskets, grants to local organisations ) and indirectly ( challenging decisions made by public bodies – county council closure of leisure centre, other defunding of local services etc )

Cllr. P Cook referred to a document previously circulated which identified the services town and community councils could provide, and felt this might be worth including to help better inform residents as to our responsibilities and the County's responsibilities. The Clerk stated that he would try and produce said document.

After much interesting debate, the Clerk suggested that he call a Special Meeting of Town Council with this Strategic Plan as the only item for discussion, and that the Plan be forwarded to all members for them to digest prior to same. This was **unanimously agreed** by all present, and Cllr. Jones indicated he would be willing to present to Full Council.

#### **6. Budget Monitoring Report – Period 9 to 31<sup>st</sup>. December 2020**

The Clerk presented his budget monitoring report which indicated a number of variances to the original budget, resulting in an anticipated net effect of an under spend of £26,452, and whilst no further expenditure is anticipated during the year in respect of Additional Christmas Lighting and Bi Centenary Celebrations, in line with our agreed budget strategy, an additional £1,187 & £7,500 respectively have been earmarked to reserves for these purposes, meaning as at March 2021, £18,557 will be available for new/replacement Christmas Lighting and £20,160 for our now delayed Bi Centenary Celebrations.

This effectively means an additional £17,765 reflecting the non spend on the Carnival, Xmas Parade & Market, Sponsorship of Firework Display, Civic Awards Evening and other minor variations, has been added to the General Reserves.

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

The Clerk presented a budget which reflected 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 an ongoing albeit, likely revised Events Programme and our Grants to Voluntary Organisations. A contribution of £2,000 is also included towards Replacement fund for Christmas Lighting, and a further £5,000 is also included for our postponed Bi-Centenary Celebrations.

With the information that Caerphilly C.B.C., due to COVID, are unlikely to be holding/ supporting any summer events, it is proposed a £5,000 be allocated to potential summer/ autumn events, whilst £5,000 is also allocated to any proposed additional Winter/Christmas Events the Borough are hoping to arrange.

The Clerk also highlighted additional issues that could affect our budget requirements for 2021/2022 and the Medium Term Budget Strategy previously presented, namely -

***Potential for a by-election to fill the current vacancy, and potential Town Council elections in each ward during May 2022*** - Discussions with CCBC Electoral Services Manager indicates costs for a one off by election could cost possibly £3,000 - £5,000 ( depending on number of postal votes and timing of same – whether included with other elections )

With regard the upcoming elections in May 2022, these could be combined with C.C.B.C. elections, and the costs might equate to approx £12,000 but financed over a four year period

**Members - Contributions towards Expenses** - As has been discussed previously all Community and Town Councils must make available a payment to each of their members of £150 per year as contribution to costs and expenses and a community or town council member wishing to decline payments must themselves write to the Clerk/ Proper Officer. This is obviously not an ideal scenario when preparing a budget strategy

The effects on the proposed budget/ medium term strategy are as follows -

**£3,000 included for potential election costs each year – will be in a better position once outcome of current Notice of Casual Vacancy and May 2022 Council elections are known**  
**£2,400 included for potential Members contributions each year but also assuming £1,200 income in respect of potential unclaimed allowances by members – will become clearer once May 2022 Council elections are known**

After some discussion it was **unanimously agreed to recommend** to Town Council the budget as presented and that the Precept for 2021/2022 remain at £20 per Band D Property.

Furthermore, that the Medium Term Budget Strategy be accepted in principle, and obviously updated as and when more certain issues become clearer.

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

Cllr. R Mills apologised that no real progress had been made regarding potential use of premises in town due to the current lockdown.

The Clerk reported that he was aware Cllr. Z Hammond had been in contact with Blackwood RFC regarding provision of mental health support services to the town and surrounding communities.

Cllr.G Evans suggested members might consider supporting the Breast Cancer (Turn the Town Pink) Campaign by agreeing to provide pink bows or similar to lamp posts in town, similar to the lamp post poppies in support of Remembrance Day. This was considered a very worthy suggestion and was fully supported by those present