

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL HELD
REMOTELY ON 8th.FEBRUARY 2021**

Present: Councillor G James (Mayor)
Councillor R Mills (Deputy Mayor)
Councillors D Davies, J Edwards, T Evans, A Davies, A Farina-Childs, D Jones, A Short, P Cook
& M Gwynne

1. To Receive Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Z Hammond & C Erasmus

2. Declarations of Interest

Declarations of Interest were made by Councillors G James & A Farina-Childs in respect of Agenda Item 10, both being volunteers for the Blackwood Action on Litter Community Group

3. Mayoral Announcements

The Mayor had nothing to report

4. County Borough Report

Councillor A Farina-Childs reported that aware that there was a significant increase in anti social behaviour incidents around Apollo Way, ASDA & Cefn Fforest Park. The police and safety wardens were aware of the problems and were assisting when and where possible.

Councillor G Evans queried that given the issues raised perhaps we should seek a meeting of the multi agency After Hours Group to try and address the problems. It was **agreed** the Clerk try and arrange same.

Councillor A Farina-Childs also informed members that the planning application by Libanus Lifestyle Centre to provide 3 residential units of accommodation had been refused.

5. *Correspondence*

The Clerk reported on items of correspondence received since the last meeting, and all were *noted* -

Caerphilly C.B.C.

Coronavirus Support for Business – Several notifications – forwarded to members

Community Cleansing - requesting areas of concern be identified – forwarded to members

Licensing – Notification that licence or sale of alcohol (to be consumed of premises) has been granted in respect of 88 High Street Blackwood – Monday to Sunday 07.00 -22.00 hours

Traffic Management – notification of Traffic Orders in respect of the lane from the junction of Gordon Road to the north east corner of plot of land adjacent to 3 Fairfield Close (one way traffic),Maesruddud Lane (Emergency Closure) & Temporary Closure of Hall Street (overhanging branches) - forwarded to members

Statutory Consultation on the expansion of Trinity Fields and the relocation & expansion of Ysgol Cwm Gwyddon – forwarded to members

Consultation on Local Development Plan Draft Delivery Agreement – ends 29th March 2021

Aneurin Bevan UHB

Coronavirus & other updates – several notifications – forwarded to members

Mental Health & Learning Disabilities Public Engagement – forwarded to members

Breast Services Newsletter – update on fund raising campaign – forwarded to members

One Voice Wales

Notification of Larger Council's Meeting to be held remotely on Thursday 11th. February – forwarded to Council representative

Minutes of Area Committee Meetings – will arrange circulation to members for their information

Notification of February on-line Training sessions – forwarded to members

Blackwood R.F.C.

Notification that they have arranged via the Flourish Project - to equip young people to cope with a wide range on concerns including anxiety and depression - online Awareness Training sessions for Team Managers, Coaches & Volunteers

PDSA & Wales Air Ambulance - Letters of thanks for Financial Assistance

Green Top Events

Looking to establish a market – homemade/handmade traders – in the area. No conflict of interest with local shops as traders products are unique to their brand - have forwarded enquiry to Market Manager & Steve Wilcox (C.C.B.C. Town Centres & Business Support) for their views/comments

6. *Schedule of Payments*

The Clerk presented his report on payments to be made, and the following were *agreed* -

		£. p
John Hold	January Salary plus reimbursements	957.44
Playworks	Fee January	20.00
HMRC	January Tax/N.I. Contributions	291.65
Elsbury	Install, take down & store Christmas Figurines (incl. £703.68 VAT)	4,222.08

7. *To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 12th. January 2021*

It was resolved the minutes be *agreed* as a true record

8. *Matters Arising*

There were no matters arising

9. *To Receive the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting held on 25th. January 2021*

It was *agreed* the minutes be received.

The Clerk and Mayor placed on record their thanks to Councillor D Jones for all the hard work he had put into his presentation on Proposals for a Town Council Strategic Plan.

Policy and Finance Committee recommended that a Special Meeting of Town Council be held so that Councillor D Jones could present this to all members. This was *unanimously agreed*.

The Committee also recommended that Town Council continue to support the local Breast Cancer Charity by taking part in the Turn the Town Pink Campaign in October by erecting pink ribbons or similar on lamp posts in the High Street, similar to the Remembrance poppies. Again this was *unanimously agreed*.

The Mayor informed the meeting that this worthwhile Charity would become his chosen Charity for this his second term.

10. *Vacancy on Town Council - Update*

The Clerk reported that having posted the Notice of Vacancy on Town Council on our Notice board and web page, he had been informed by Dave Beecham (Electoral Services Manager) that the requisite number of signatures had been received by the Returning officer to trigger an election.

It now becomes the decision of the Retuning Officer as to when the Notice of Election is posted, and when any election is to be held.

If the election is held on its own Town Council must decide if poll cards should be issued, Dave's advice would be to issue same.

He had also been advised the likely costs could be £3,000 - £5,000 dependent on timing of election, and that he had made provision within next years budget of £3,000, whilst also identifying within the Medium Term Budget Strategy the need for £3,000 each year to cover potential costs of Town Council Elections in May 2022

The Clerk was thanked for his report, and after some discussion it was **agreed** that poll cards be issued per advice given.

11. Independent Review Panel for Wales Draft Report - Decisions required

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 accept the recommendations from Policy & Finance Committee** in 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 be made to the Mayor

No Payment be made to the Deputy Mayor

12. Application for Financial Assistance – Blackwood Action on Litter Community Group

Councillors G James & A Farina-Childs having declared an interest in this item took no part in the discussion or decision

The Clerk presented the application received from the above Group for funding to assist their litter picking work, whilst also undertaking some small environmental projects – bird boxes, possibly within local schools. Their litter pickers carry very heavy bags together with fly tipped materials, and feel a 4 wheeled heavy duty trolley wheelbarrow would be very useful (they have since setting up in November 2018 removed in excess of 1,000 bags of rubbish/fly tipping from Blackwood and surrounding communities)

The costed requirements – 8 bird boxes, brush cutting scythe, pick mattock, pruning saw, arrowhead shovel, wheelbarrow & gloves for their volunteers amounted to £260.

Members voiced their thanks and support to this Group who had made a major difference to the locality, and **unanimously agreed** a grant of £260 be awarded to assist their efforts

13. Proposed Skate Park - Show Field Blackwood – Letter from CCBC

The Clerk presented his report which consisted of correspondence from Lynne John (C.C.B.C. Welsh Housing Quality Standards Environmental Officer) giving an update on the proposal for a skate park on Blackwood Showfield which is currently with the WHQS Project Board awaiting a decision.

The consultation with the community had indicated that there is significant interest in it going ahead, although no decision has been made as yet.

They also enquired if the Blackwood Town Council would be interested in making a contribution toward the cost of the skate park.

They reported that as the skate park could serve quite a few of the communities in the vicinity as well as Blackwood, e.g Cefn Fforest, Argoed, Markham, Britannia, Fleur de Lys and Pengam, they would be looking to construct a larger skate park than in their other smaller communities – somewhere in the region of £90k, and attached a few design examples and photos of the Ty Sign skate park which was around £90k and is the largest skatepark constructed in the county borough (These had been forwarded to members or their information/reference).

They clarified, there were sufficient funds indicatively allocated in the environmental programme budget but that in other areas, where a skate park has been supported by the majority of tenants and residents, the town or community council had been willing to add value to the investment through a contribution towards the costs involved. The Project Board have asked for clarification as to whether the Town Council are willing / able to financially contribute towards the cost in this instance. There is no expectation or pressure upon the Town Council to agree to contribute.

All decisions made by the Project Board had been made via the same process that had been in place for over 3 years. The process was been approved by Cabinet and the Caerphilly Homes Task Group. Since the start of the programme, there have been 3 Environmental Officers who have been working throughout the county borough (one for each housing area) to engage and consult with tenants and residents throughout 82 communities in order to identify projects that will deliver against the WHQS Part 6 objective of creating attractive and safe communities. The Environmental Officers collate evidence of their consultation and engagement with the communities and then produce a proforma for each project that is considered by the Board (Cllr Lisa Phipps, Shaun Couzens - Chief Housing Officer, Paul Smythe – Housing Technical Manager & Jane Roberts-Waite, Strategic Coordination Manager). Projects are considered on the basis as to whether they meet the WHQS Part 6 aspirations and are supported primarily by tenants and will be of benefit to tenants. The HRA (Housing Revenue Account) has funded the programme hence the need to ensure that tenants directly benefit from proposals that are brought forward for consideration. The Board also make decisions in respect of the WHQS programme as a whole.

The WHQS environmental programme is now drawing to a close and this is one of the last projects to be considered. The deadline for consideration by the Board has passed however, this project and one other is still awaiting final consideration. There is no requirement for a skate park to be funded but there is a one time opportunity for this project to be funded if there is appropriate support, and want to ensure that Blackwood does not miss out as funding for such amenities are unlikely to be available in the future.

In reference to a 'full size or larger' skate park this term was used in comparison to the initial 'mini wheels' proposal that was initially considered. The size of the proposal has not changed. Skate parks can be square or rectangular and contain a number of different features. The more features, the greater the cost. The WHQS programme cannot fund the installation of lighting or CCTV as there is an ongoing maintenance cost and there is no provision within the budget to pay for ongoing costs. If a skate park is supported by the local community then it would be good to understand whether other budgets may be available to fund CCTV, lighting, fencing etc. and add value to the proposal.

They further clarified that they have not 'actively encouraged' residents from other areas'. The focus is the Blackwood ward but recognised that the Showfield is utilised by tenants and residents from neighbouring wards.

The Clerk reported that he had made contact with his colleagues at Maesycwmmmer and Penyrheol Trecenydd and Energlyn Community Councils which had contributed £26k & £15k respectively to similar schemes in their area

The Clerk was thanked for his report, and members had an in depth discussion regarding same.

Councillor A Farina-Childs queried the actual support in the area for the proposals, stating a reported survey of 34 properties that had resulted in 34% objections. He was also aware that the Comprehensive School and local community officers had raised grave concerns regarding potential safeguarding and anti social behaviour issues. Other members also reported that residents in the area had raised similar concerns that such a facility might add to the existing problems in the area.

Councillor D Jones queried whether the community had been properly consulted and had been asked for their views on other potential beneficial schemes, or was the skatepark the only one offered. Furthermore he queried the implied potential loss of the funding due to overdue deadlines.

After much further discussion, it was eventually *agreed* that before Town Council could consider making any financial contribution to the proposed scheme, the Clerk write to C.C.B.C. stating that whilst being supportive in principle of the Project requesting details/ results of the consultation exercise undertaken to date whilst also requesting a much wider consultation with stakeholders, possibly uploading plans online so that the wider community might have the opportunity to properly express their views

14. Budget Monitoring Report - Period 9 to 31st. December 2020

The Clerk presented his budget monitoring report for the current year which indicated a number of variances to the original budget, the net effect being a likely under spend of £26,452 ,but once planned contributions in respect of Xmas Lights and Bi Centenary Celebrations are accounted for, this realistically equates to an under spend of 17,765, reflecting the non spend on the Carnival, Xmas Parade & Market, Sponsorship of Firework Display, Civic Awards Evening and other minor variations, and adds to the General Reserves, which would now amount to £ 38,677

Also, as at March 2021 £18,557 will be available for new/replacement Christmas Lighting and £20,160 for our now delayed Bi Centenary Celebrations, £10,000 re. Coed Duon, £2,190 Environmental Improvements and £303 Community Infrastructure Levy

After some discussion, it was *agreed* that the Budget monitoring report as presented be accepted

15. Budget Requirements 2021/2022 & Precept Setting plus Medium Term Budget Strategy

EXPENDITURE	Orig. Budget	Estimated	*			
	2020/2021	Out-turn	BUDGET	BUDGET	BUDGET	
	£	£	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	
	£	£	£	£	£	
Audit Fee	450	450	450	450	460	
Insurance	1,350	1,318	1,320	1,370	1,370	
Postage/ Telephone	350	300	350	350	350	
Printing/ Room Hire/ Misc	1,500	900	1,600	1,680	1,760	
Clerk/Typist Salary	15,430	14,980	16,060	16,380	16,700	
Mayor's Allowance	400	400	400	400	400	
Subs/ Courses	2,000	1,300	2,000	2,100	2,100	
Office Furniture / Other	400	100	500	500	500	
Grants to Local Orgs.	4,500	4,500	4,500	4,500	4,500	
Sponsorship - Fireworks	1,000	-	1,000	1,000	1,000	
Town Impts – Xmas Lights	2,000	813	2,000	2,000	2,000	
Hanging Baskets	4,300	4,827	4,300	4,500	4,700	
Rememb.Garden	500	500	500	500	500	
Xmas Celebrations – Elsbury's	4,000	3,720	4,000	4,200	4,400	
Parade/Concert	750	-	750	750	750	
Market/Fair	2,750	-	5,000	500	500	
Newsletter	1,500	-	1,500	1,500	1,500	
Civic Awards Evening	1,750	300	2,000	2,000	2,000	
Carnival/ Summer/ Autumn Event	9,500	-	5,000	10,000	10,000	
Bi- Centenary Celebrations	7,500	-	5,000	-	-	
Members Contribution - Expenses			2,400	2,400	2,400.	
By Election / Election Costs			3,000	3,000	3,000	
	61,930	34,408	63,630	60,080	60,890	
INCOME						
Interest	10	140	140	140	140	
Loan Repayment – BLT	1,600	1,600	-	-	-	
Studio 54	1,200	-	1,200	1,500	-	
Non Claimed Members Conts.			1,200	1,200	1,200	
Precept - £20	59,120	59,120	59,040	59,040	59,040	
	61,930	60,860	61,580	61,880	60,380	
Deficit/ (Surplus)		(26,452)	2,050	(1,800)	510	£760

The Clerk presented a budget for 2021/2022 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 £5,000 towards our delayed Bi- Centenary Celebrations.

The Clerk informed members that since the last Town Council meeting, a few issues had come to light that could affect next years and subsequent years budgets, 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 between £3,000 - £5,000 (depending on number of postal votes and timing ie. if held with other elections).

With regard the Town/Community Council elections due in May2022 (which had not been factored into the original Medium Term Strategy), these could be combined with the 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 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 them selves write to the Clerk/ Proper Officer. This is obviously not an ideal scenario when preparing a budget strategy

Ongoing Uncertainty regarding Events Programme given Covid 19 restrictions – Having been in discussion with the C.C.B.C. Events Team over the past week, it seems almost inevitable that the Summer Events Programme across the Borough will be cancelled again this year, and will be hoping to host different events to the usual Christmas Markets.

The effects on the proposed budget 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

£4,500 transferred from Carnival to support potential Winter Events programme, whilst retaining £5,000 to support potential late summer/ autumn events for 2021/2022 and reverting back in future years

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

Councillor D Jones remarked that by building up to the current reserves position would assist when devising our Annual Action Plans once the proposed Strategic Plan had been agreed and properly consulted upon.

Councillors G James & D Davies supported the provision of funding to support potential late summer/ autumn events quoting the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee & Royal British Legion potential Freedom of the Borough respectively as possible events in the forthcoming financial year.

The Clerk was thanked by members for his financial stewardship throughout the year and his hard work in producing the 2021/2022 Budget papers.

16. Planning Applications

The Clerk presented his report on planning applications received since the last meeting -

Case Ref. 20/1086/FULL

Location: 1 Lewis Lewis Avenue Blackwood NP12 1JG

Proposal: Erect part two storey, part single storey side extension and single storey front extension

Case Officer: Elizabeth Rowley (01443 864776 : rowlee@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Case Ref. 20/1089/FULL

Location: 8 Rhos Y Dderwen Blackwood NP12 1HB

Proposal: Erect first floor extension over existing ground floor study area to create additional bedroom and internal alterations

Case Officer: Elizabeth Rowley (01443 864776 : rowlee@caerphilly.gov.uk)

And an additional received earlier in the day –

Case Ref. 21/0071/ RET

Location: 31 Bevan Crescent, Blackwood NP12 1EW

Proposal: Retain and complete single storey kitchen extension to rear and front porch

Case Officer : Jacob Cooke (01443 864347 cookej1@caerphilly.gov.uk)

After a brief discussion it was ***agreed*** there appeared to be no issues to warrant any objections

17. Reports

Councillor D Davies reported that he had received communication from County Councillor K Etheridge querying why he had not received notice of Town Council meetings.

The Clerk apologised for not including County Councillors to our remote meetings, but ensured members they would be included on the list for our March meeting.