

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL HELD  
REMOTELY ON 8<sup>TH</sup>.MARCH 2021**

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

Also present County Councillor N Dix & Ms Donna Box

**1. To Receive Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors A Farina-Childs & Z Hammond  
Apologies were also received from County Councillor K Etheridge ( connection problems )

**2. Request for Leave of Absence**

The Clerk reported Councillor R Weeks had requested an extension to his leave of absence. He explained, however, that the initial leave of absence had been agreed on 6<sup>th</sup>. January 2020, albeit Councillor Weeks had struggled and attended the meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup>. February 2020, thereby in effect making that leave of absence null and void. This application should now be treated as a new application.

Councillor Weeks states that he is still attending hospital, having suffered a bad fall, and is main carer for his wife Jan, former Mayor

Members were fully sympathetic to the request and it was **unanimously agreed** six month leave of absence be granted

**3. Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this point

**4. County Borough Report**

County Councillor N Dix had nothing to report

**5. Mayoral Announcements**

Due to the ongoing restrictions, the Mayor had no announcements of visits

## 6. Correspondence

The Clerk presented his report on correspondence received since the last meeting, and all were *noted*

***Aneurin Bevan UHB*** - Various COVID information

( all forwarded to members ) NHS Care during COVID Emergency Survey

S.E. Wales Vascular Network Public Engagement – online events

***One Voice Wales***

Online Training opportunities ( forwarded to members )

Awareness Campaign – harvesting of user details ( forwarded to members )

***Caerphilly C.B.C.***

Leader updates/ News Online ( forwarded to members )

Household Waste Recycling Centre Booking System – Consultation ends 10<sup>th</sup>. March ( forwarded to members )

Notification that Returning Officer has decided to hold Town Council by election with Senedd and P.C.C. Elections on 6<sup>th</sup>. May

Caerphilly Well Being & Place Shaping Framework (forwarded to members)

Following receipt of same, the Clerk forwarded the following -

Thanks for recent copy of reports to Scrutiny.

I am obviously particularly interested in the outlined proposals regarding –

The Centre for Vulnerable Learners at the old Pontllanfraith Grammar school site which includes indoor and outdoor sporting provision, which will enable community use of these facilities outside of school hours.

Active Travel in Greater Blackwood

Respite Care facility in Pontllanfraith ( is this also planned for the old Grammar school site ?

and wonder would it be possible for you to try and get the relevant officers to forward me more information/ details on these proposals

<b><i>Keep Wales Safe Campaign</i></b>	COVID 19 Scams on Vaccination payments
<b><i>Town &amp; Community Councils</i></b> ( Cllr. J Pritchard elected rep. Town & Comm. Councils )	Public Services Board Meeting 3 <sup>rd</sup> . November 2020 – Report Public Services Board – Purpose & Aims
<b><i>Libanus Lifestyle Centre</i></b>	Request for Financial Assistance - lighting up Chapel for St. David's Day COVID Remembrance Day ( 23 <sup>rd</sup> . March ) Application forwarded to members
<b><i>Studio 54</i></b>	Seeking Financial Assistance/ Sponsorship towards provision of Local Radio Station & Pod casting channels – equipment and software estimated at £5,000 - Application forwarded
<b><i>George Edwards</i></b>	Following press article regarding possible closure of Toilets at the Bus Station, the Clerk contacted George asking that Town Council,( as a major stakeholder ) be informed /approached prior to any firm decision being taken on closure by the Caerphilly Taxi Drivers Association. In an immediate response he gave me his assurance he would keep Town Council fully informed
<b><i>Zurich Municipal</i></b>	Renewal Documents for 2021/2022 in the sum of £1,329.13 Members may recall we entered a 3 year Long Term Agreement at this time last year to benefit from lower premium

In respect of the applications for Financial Assistance it was ***agreed*** these be considered by the Policy & Finance Committee at its next meeting

In respect of the Zurich Municipal Insurance Renewal Terms for next year, members ***agreed*** to renew in the sum of £1,329.13

## 7. ***Schedule of Payments***

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

HMRC	Tax/ N.I. February	£. p 291.45
John Hold	Feb Salary plus reimbursements	965.63
Playworks	Feb Fee	20.00

## **8. To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup>. February 2021**

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

## **9. Matters Arising**

The Clerk reported that he had requested a meeting of the After Dark Group, and had received an email earlier in the day from P.C. Adam Lang stating he was arranging a Blackwood Sectional Meeting on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup>. March 11.00am via Microsoft Teams, and had requested topics or discussion.

After some discussion, it was agreed the following be forwarded ASB at Apollo Way, ASDA, Cefn Fforest Park, Blackwood Bus Station & the Showfield, together with the proposed Skatepark and Removal of the Bus Shelter.

The Clerk indicated all members were invited to attend

## **10. Presentation by Councillor D Jones - Proposals for Town Council Strategic Plan also Notice of Motion – That the Draft Strategy be accepted and the next steps regarding public consultation be moved and enacted**

Cllr. Darren Jones presented his proposals for 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 expressed their thanks 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 )

The Notice of Motion – ***That the Draft Strategy be accepted and the next steps regarding public consultation be moved and enacted*** – was moved by Cllr. D Jones was seconded by Cllr. R Mills and ***unanimously agreed*** by all members present.

The Clerk suggested a Working Group be selected and meet in the near future to discuss our plans for public consultation on the now agreed Town Council Strategic Plan. This was ***agreed***, and representatives names would be confirmed to the Clerk as soon as possible

## ***11. Proposed Skate park – Showfield Blackwood - response from C.C.B.C.***

The Clerk presented his report, which consisted of Town Councils email following discussion at the last meeting, and response.

### ***Per the minutes of the last meeting I forwarded the following -***

Blackwood Town Council, whilst appreciating the unquestionable importance of leisure facilities in Our area for the benefit of our residents, as evidenced by our strong protests against the planned closure of Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre, have some concerns regarding the proposed Skate Park at the Showfield in Blackwood.

Town Council whilst supportive in principle of the Project would request that Caerphilly County Borough Council undertake a much wider consultation with stakeholders, possibly uploading plans online so that the wider community might have the opportunity to properly express their views Borough Councillors and several Town Councillors have been approached by residents in the area Querying the proposals, the majority of which had not been consulted, and my members would appreciate an indication of the level of consultation with residents and stakeholders and the results of same.

My members also queried whether the consultation had asked for views on what facilities residents Would like to see in the area, or was it purely the skateboard park project, and had any other alternative facilities been considered.

Once these results are known and Town Council is confident a full and proper consultation exercise has been undertaken, the request for a contribution towards the Project can be better considered, ensuring worthwhile and beneficial spending of public monies

### ***Response received as follows***

Consultations under the WHQS Environmental Programme were carried out in the Blackwood and Cefn Fforest wards in late 2018 – this was to gauge what improvements Council residents and tenants and residents felt would improve their community from the perspective of compliance with the Welsh Housing Quality Standard Part 6 which seeks to ensure that tenants live within ‘attractive and safe environments’ would like to see in their communities.

The WHQS Environmental Programme is funded from the Housing Revenue Account and as such must be directed to support improvements that will benefit tenants.

Initially, as with other areas where we have carried out consultations, we get a range wide raft of ideas that we are unable to take forward due to the criteria of the programme so, as a result I have identified the projects that do meet the criteria and put them forward for consideration by the WHQS Project Board which has been responsible for overseeing the delivery of the Council’s £260m investment in its housing stock. we put forward the projects that we can.

The general response to the consultation I have undertaken has related to young people. Respondents have advised that is that they would like “something for the children to do” or “something for the older ones” - sometimes the suggestions are beyond our remit such as outdoor swimming pools, zip wires, motorbike tracks and youth clubs – but the majority of suggestions that came forward were for a mini wheels / skate park.

The initial proposal was to install a “mini wheels” in the Attlee Road play park but this did not conform to regulations (too close to properties) and was rejected.

The only other location in Blackwood with existing play facilities is the showfield so this was investigated as a potential site. I have ,firstly checked with the Parks department and, then with Legal whether there were regarding any potential covenants on the land.

The intention was to start carrying out a more comprehensive consultation using our usual methods - i.e door knocks, letters, social media surveys, pop-ups etc., I was scheduled to attend an event at Blackwood Comprehensive School organised by the Police and Caerphilly Safety Partnership - Unfortunately all of this could not take place due to the Covid lockdown.

As our funding was due to come to an end in March 2020, I felt I did not want Blackwood to miss out on the opportunity so I contacted the local councillors to gauge their views.

Unfortunately, before I had chance to carry out a comprehensive and constructive consultation the information was unofficially released on Facebook which, caused a significant amount of confusion and mistrust especially amongst residents within the vicinity of the Showfield.

Further consultation was carried out via social media, emails and letters to residents in the immediate vicinity of the Showfield. ~The feedback obtained from the consultation undertaken throughout September 2020 suggested:

Snap survey

186 responses

124 agree – 67%

62 disagree – 33%

Emails

60 responses

48 agree – 80%

10 disagree – 17%

2 not sure – 3%

34 letters posted in the vicinity – of the 12 that contacted me 1 agreed & 11 disagreed

The responses via email, letters, social media and the Snap Survey were forwarded to members for their information/reference

The proposal for a skate park at the Showfield is currently with the WHQS Project Board awaiting a decision. The Board are concerned that there is no overwhelming evidence to suggest that a skate park is wanted or not wanted by the local community – however, the concerns regarding potential anti-social behaviour within the Blackwood ward are also currently being taken into consideration.

As you are aware, the Board also wished to know whether the Town Council were willing to financially contribute towards the scheme. In other areas where skate parks have been installed as a result of the WHQS environmental programme, community councils have contributed a small amount, and this is viewed as a positive by the Board.

Unfortunately, the deadline for the WHQS Environmental Programme funding has technically passed and until ongoing restrictions are lifted the only methods we have to carry out any further consultation is via social media and we are aware that this has limitations and it might be the same people who respond.

After further discussion by members, and an invited input by Ms Donna Box, who stated she felt there was significant support for the proposal within the community, especially the young people, it was **agreed** that further clarification be sought regarding the methodology of the consultation exercise together with the time line and whether the funding is time sensitive. Members felt that given the pandemic restrictions and enforced less rigorous than normal consultation consideration be given to delaying any decision until after restrictions are lifted and a proper more meaningful consultation can be undertaken to ensure proper use of public funds which can withstand scrutiny. Members also wished to reiterate they are not against this project in principal or for that matter any other recreational project planned in our area, but would want to ensure a full and meaningful consultation with all stakeholders has taken place before they can reach a properly informed decision regarding any potential financial contribution

## ***12. Review of Internal Controls***

Members are required to Review the adequacy of Internal Controls

Current practice -

Schedule of Payments to each meeting highlighting the Payee/ Reason for Payment/ Amount.

Payments are currently made via Bank Transfer albeit cheques require the signature of the Clerk together with two other signatories ( currently Councillors A Farina-Childs, A Short & P Cook )

To further strengthen controls, it was agreed last year that any payment in excess of £1,000 must receive written confirmation by two of the three signatories referred to earlier

Meetings of Policy & Finance Committee

Budget Monitoring Reports to Town Council three times a year – comparing spend to budget, bank reconciliation etc.

To further strengthen controls, it was agreed last year that budget monitoring reports should be accompanied by bank statements for members perusal - Due to remote meetings this has not been possible to implement

Internal Auditor audits Accounts during May/Early June in readiness for Annual Return to be completed and forwarded to BDO LLP ( current external auditors ) by 30<sup>th</sup>. June

After some discussion it was ***agreed*** the Internal Controls in place are considered adequate and proportional

## ***13. Review of Risk Management***

Members are required to review the adequacy of Risk Management

The misappropriation of funds by the Clerk (as the only employee) is an obvious risk, but hopefully the Internal Controls highlighted above would greatly negate that risk.

Little of the rest of the work of the Town Council, other than the Organisation of Events is considered to carry much of a risk.

Regular meetings of the Events Committee highlight any risk areas.

We are required to submit a Risk Assessment in respect of the Carnival Parade and the Site Activities each year to Caerphilly County Borough, and attend the ESAG Events Organisers Forum to discuss same with members of C.C.B.C. and the Emergency Services prior to event.

After some discussion it was ***agreed*** Risk Management was considered adequate and proportional given the risks identified

## ***14. Review of Insurance Provision***

Currently Mandatory Cover in respect of Public Liability stands at £15 million & Employer's Liability stands at £10million, whilst Fidelity Guarantee, Official's Indemnity, & Libel & Slander are £250,000 each.

Christmas Lighting, Chains of Office are also insured, at reported costs, whilst any equipment hired for a specific event is insured separately if required.

After some discussion it was ***agreed*** the current insurance cover is considered adequate

## ***15. Review of Reserves Position/Policy***

It is a requirement that the Town Council determine and review the level of reserves and how they are to be used. Local Government Legislation requires Town/Community Councils to have regard to the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure, when calculating their budget. However, there is no specified minimum or maximum level of reserves that an authority should hold, and it is the responsibility of the Responsible Financial Officer to advise the Council about the level of reserves, and to ensure that there are key protocols for their establishment and use.

Reserves can be categorised as General ( held to cushion the impact of uneven cash flows or unexpected events ) and Earmarked ( held for specific purpose )

General reserves is a sum of money not earmarked for a specific purpose, but rather set aside to deal with unexpected events or emergencies, and to provide a working capital cushion to deal with cash flow problems.

Whilst there is no amount specified, it is considered an amount equivalent to approx 25% of the Precept to be acceptable ie. approx £15,000.

Due to the ongoing Pandemic 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 resulting in £38,677 being the current total. It is ***proposed*** that £23,677 be transferred to the existing Other Environmental giving a total of £25,867 to fund potential improvements/projects as part of our Strategic Planning

Earmarked reserves are those held for specific purposes, or to meet known or projected liabilities.

In the past Town Council has identified a sum of £10,000 in respect of Coed Duon , together with £2,190 to support other Environmental projects.

Furthermore, Town Council have also over the past few years identified and invested approx £25,000 in respect of Renewal of Christmas lighting. It is thought prudent to budget an amount of £2,000 per annum to ensure a reasonable sum is available to replace/renew in the future, and this currently amounts to £18,547

With the now postponed Bi-Centenary of the town ( unfortunately delayed due to the ongoing Pandemic ) and the significant celebrations being planned it was thought prudent to set aside reserves to assist the funding of same - with £20,160 currently being available.

Additional Reserves will be accrued via the Community Infrastructure Levy, with £303 being received last financial year. There are restrictions on the use of these funds, and further discussions with C.C.B.C. officers will be required to ensure plans meet the required criteria.

After some discussion it was ***agreed*** that the Reserves position as outlined above and in the Budget setting report are considered adequate.



## **16. Planning Applications**

The Clerk reported on the following planning applications received since the last meeting -

### ***Case Ref. 21/0134/FULL***

Location: 67 Sunnybank Road Blackwood NP12 1HZ

Proposal: Erect garage extension to side of dwelling and new roof over existing front porch

Case Officer: Carwyn Powell ( 01443 864424 : [powelc2@caerphilly.gov.uk](mailto:powelc2@caerphilly.gov.uk))

### ***Case Ref. 21/0148/RET***

Location: Flat A 206 High Street Blackwood NP12 1AJ

Proposal: Retain the change of use of existing first floor flat into office accommodation

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

### ***Case Ref. 21/0163/FULL***

Location: 14 Pembroke Close Cefn Fforest Blackwood NP12 1JL

Proposal: Convert garage and re-roof existing attached garage

Case Officer: Mike Jones ( 01443 864528 : [jonesm5@caerphilly.gov.uk](mailto:jonesm5@caerphilly.gov.uk))

After some discussion it was ***agreed*** none of the applications warranted any objections

## **17. Reports**

Councillor Trefor Evans informed the Clerk that he wished to claim the £150 members allowance and donate it to Charity, and asked the Clerk if he could arrange same.