

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL HELD
REMOTELY ON 7TH.JUNE 2021**

Present: Councillor R Mills (Mayor)

Councillors G James, A Farina-Childs, D Davies, J Edwards, A Davies, P Cook , Z Hammond,
C Erasmus, D Jones, T Evans, G Edwards & M Gwynne (late)

Prior to the start of the meeting the Mayor reported that we had received the distressing news that former Mayor, Cllr. Jan Weeks had sadly passed away earlier today, and requested Members to observe a minutes silence to remember our former Mayor, colleague and friend Jan.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors R Weeks & A Short, together with those from County Cllr. K Etheridge & Ms Donna Box

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this point

3. County Borough Report

Cllr.A Farina-Childs gave a brief update regarding ongoing issues –

Dealing with numerous queries in respect of additional COVID Grants

Continued anti social behaviour problems around the area, but has had multi agency meetings and the situation is being monitored

Requested surveys on a number of roads in the area specifically relating to speed of traffic on Sunnybank Road, Bloomfield Road & Pwllglas.

Cllr. G James also highlighted the ongoing issues near the Stonehouse, and the case for traffic lights at the junctions.

The Mayor thanked members for the update, and queried whether a supporting letter from Town Council might add weight to the arguments, and it was **agreed** to discuss same at the next meeting

4. Mayoral Announcements

The Mayor thanked Cllr. Gerwyn James for arranging to meet to hand over the chain of office, and Cllr. Andrew Farina- Childs for assistance on the website for his chosen charity.

He reported that his Charity would be the Ty Hafan Trust, a leading paediatric and palliative care charity that offers care to children and support for their families throughout Wales. This was personal as a close friend's son had accessed their services and he had realised how much of a difference they had made to the family. Many charities had suffered disproportionately throughout Covid, and he hoped to raise money for this worthy cause by holding events when restrictions are lifted.

Cllr. Farina-Childs took the opportunity to congratulate the Mayor on his appointment, and wished him a successful term of office and Charity fund raising year

5. Correspondence

The Clerk presented his report on items of correspondence , and all were *noted* -

Caerphilly C.B.C. Off Street Parking Places (Consolidation – Amendment No. 1 Order 2021)
Relating in the main to Electric Vehicles – forwarded to members

Community Infrastructure Levy – No CIL Receipts for 2020/21 – Balance
£303.31 – Must be spent by June 2023

Changes to bus services from June 1st.
56 Tredegar- Blackwood- Ynysddu- Risca- Newport
151 Blackwood- Newbridge- Risca- Newport - forwarded to members

Aneurin Bevan UHB Covid Updates – forwarded to members

Keep Wales Safe Various Covid information – forwarded to members

6. Schedule of Payments

The Clerk presented his report on payments made/ due for payment, and all were *agreed* -

John Hold	Salary + Reimbursements - May	£. p 965.63
Playworks	Fee - May	20.00
HMRC	Tax/N.I.- May	290.76

The Clerk reported that he had recently received the Internal Auditor's Report from Mr Andrew Jervis together with request for agreed fee of £120, and requested this be included on the list.
This was *agreed* by members

7. To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Annual General Meeting held on 19th.May 2021

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

8. Matters Arising

There were no Matters Arising

9. To Receive Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of Town Council held on 27th. May 2021

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

10. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

11. Election of Deputy Mayor

The two original members, Cllrs. G Edwards & M Gwynne were again nominated and seconded by Cllrs. G James & D Davies and P Cook & R Mills respectively.

Just prior to the vote being taken the Clerk received a telephone call from Cllr. M Gwynne apologising that he was having problems in joining the meeting, and would continue trying.

Whilst sympathetic with his problem it was agreed by members that the vote be taken.

It was proposed by Cllr. D Davies and seconded by Cllr. G James that a recorded vote be taken, and this was agreed.

The following cast their votes for Cllr. G Edwards - Cllrs. G James, A Farina-Childs, J Edwards, D Davies, T Evans & G Edwards

The following cast their votes for Cllr. M Gwynne - Cllrs. R Mills, Z Hammond, C Erasmus, D Jones, A Davies & P Cook

The vote was tied at 6 votes apiece, but with the Chair's casting vote Cllr. Mark Gwynne was duly elected Deputy Mayor.

Cllr. M Gwynne successfully joined the meeting at this point and was congratulated by the Mayor and members on his appointment as Deputy Mayor. He in turn apologised for the problems and thanked members who had supported him

12. Financial Accounts 2020/2021, together with Internal Auditor's Report & Annual Return for the Year Ended 31st. March 2021

The Clerk explained that the figures shown in the Accounting Statements were based on the figures in the Annual Accounts, previously reported to and agreed by members, and having compared same, members satisfied themselves all was in order, and it was ***resolved*** the Accounting Statement be ***approved and accepted***.

Members then turned their attention to the Annual Governance Statements Part 1 & 2, and considered each in turn.

After some discussion, members were confident that Part 1 – Statements 1-7 could be answered positively, and that Statement 9 was not applicable.

With regard Statement 8, the Clerk proposed it be answered in the Negative, with an explanation that Town Council will over the coming months consider and adopt an updated model set of Standing Orders & Financial Regulations (he had hoped to present to an actual meeting but COVID had meant postponement, and presentation may have to proceed via remote setting). The Annual Governance Statement was ***approved and accepted***

The additional Statement on Page 4 regarding expenditure under Sect.137 Local Government Act 1972 and Sect.2 Local Government Act 2000 was also discussed and ***agreed*** by members.

Members then received and reviewed the Annual Internal Audit Report, and after brief discussion ***resolved*** it be ***approved and accepted***.

13. To discuss other possible alternative platforms for remote meetings

Given the recent problems experienced by some members, it was proposed we consider moving to an alternative platform for our meetings.

Alternatives suggested were Google Meetings and Microsoft Teams. Several members related their positive experiences of Microsoft Teams which is the platform used by C.C.B.C. for their School Governor meetings. Cllr. G Edwards reported that the likely costs were £64.60 per month for a minimum 12 month contract - £775.20. The Clerk suggested that the anticipated costs could be covered by the savings on the Web Maintenance agreement with C.C.B.C. , savings on room hire and printing.

After some discussion it was ***agreed*** we enter into an agreement or Microsoft Teams

14. Publication of Members Remuneration 2019/20

The Clerk presented a letter from John Bader, Chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales informing us that according to their records, Blackwood Town Council is non-compliant with Section 151 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 for 2019-2020 which sets the requirements for the publication of remuneration of community and town council members.

In the interests of transparency, the Panel, in its Annual Reports, has made it clear that community and town councils must publish their statement of payments by the 30 September following the previous financial year.

The Panel had considered a detailed report on all 2019-2020 statement of payment returns received. and noted the following noncompliance issues for Blackwood Town Council:

1. No statement of payments return received by 30 September 2020
2. No late return of statement of payments received; reminders were sent on 5 May 2020 and 11 November 2020.
3. Statement of payments not published by 30 September 2020 or thereafter.

The Clerk reported that he had written apologising for the oversight, believing he had submitted the return online, and explaining that this correspondence and previous reminders from IRP Mailbox had been received in his Promotions mailbox and not his Primary and had been deleted in error.

The Return had now been completed and forwarded, and a copy will be posted on our webpage and Notice board over the coming week

Members accepted the Clerks explanation and was pleased the issue had been resolved satisfactorily.

Cllr. G James proposed that to ensure Town Council complies for 2020/21 and subsequent years and to assist the Clerk procedures are put in place as requested.

It was ***agreed*** by members that the matter be placed on the Agenda at the July meeting of Town Council each year.

15. Planning Applications

Cllr. Z Hammond reported that the following Planning Applications had been received since the last meeting, and saw no issues that required attention. This was ***agreed*** by members –

Case Ref. 21/0496/FULL

Location: Candour Talent 120-122 High Street Blackwood NP12 1AF

Proposal: Carry out alteration to shop front including new shop signboard with concealed shutter box

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

16. Reports

Cllr. G James reported that whilst handing over the Chains of Office to the new Mayor, they had taken the opportunity to check the Defibrillators in town, and was pleased to report both were up to date, with June Thomas having arranged the change of pads at the Maxime.

Cllr T Evans queried when the last meeting of the After Hours/ Night Time Economy Group had been held, as ongoing issues still needed resolution.

Cllrs. Z Hammond & R Mills responded that a meeting had been arranged during March, but had unfortunately been cancelled on the morning of the meeting. The Clerk promised to make contact and request a meeting be called as soon as possible.

Cllr. A Farina-Childs informed members that Blackwood Town Football Club were holding Walking Football sessions for ladies and gents on Wednesday evenings 7.00pm at the Showfield

The Mayor asked Cllr. G Edwards for an update on the toilets at the bus-station. He responded by saying that things were o.k. at present, but did say the Clerk had witnessed the kind of abuse he has to deal with regarding the imposed charge.

Members were mindful of this, and agreed we consider putting out a statement reminding people that the charge only covers the costs of ensuring the facilities remain open and available to all.

Cllr. G James raised the issue of the Love Locks Sculpture commissioned by Blackwood Miners' Institute situated opposite the Dragon Circle at Blackwood Retail Park, and the fact that Town Council had not been consulted about same. Cllr. A Farina-Childs added that County members had not been consulted either.

After some discussion it was agreed we take a diplomatic route, and the Clerk write to the Manager at the Institute asking why we hadn't been consulted, but emphasising we were not against the project in principle.

Cllr. Z. Hammond queried the position of our events programme for this year, and whilst agreeing the Summer event seemed very unlikely to go ahead, thought some consideration should be given to the Christmas events, and whether there was any likelihood of any of these going ahead.

The Clerk said he would make contact with C.C.B.C. officers to seek their thoughts, whilst also looking to organise an Events Committee meeting over the next few weeks.

Cllr. D Davies raised the matter of One Voice Wales membership, and queried given the CCBC Monitoring Officer was available for advice and assistance whether we were receiving value for Money. He also asked the Clerk on how many occasions during the past years has he contacted them for advice and assistance.

The Clerk responded by stating the Monitoring Officer should not be seen as an alternative for advice, and that OVW was an independent National Umbrella Organisation or Town & Community Councils throughout Wales offering independent advice and guidance as and when requested.

Furthermore with the likelihood in the future that more and more non statutory functions may be offloaded by principal authorities, he would argue their support and advice would be invaluable. He also queried the timing of the query, given that Town Council had at the meeting held in April unanimously agreed to renew our membership.

Cllr. C Erasmus, our representative at OVW meetings supported the Clerks views, and reported the majority if not all town and community councillors in Caerphilly were members.

Cllr. D Jones pointed out that much of the advice and assistance sought could well be in respect of decisions taken by the Borough, the toilets closure and Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre being prime examples. He felt it unfair to question the Clerk without prior notice, and whilst agreeing is reasonable to question value for money, this should have been done at the April meeting, not just 2 months after unanimously agreeing to renew membership.

After some further discussion it was *agreed* the matter be left until membership comes up for renewal in March/ April 2022

Cllr. M Gwynne requested we make a request for free parking in town during the run up to Christmas accepting the current policy of free parking until 30th September. It was agreed we await further notification from Caerphilly C.B.C.