

DRAFT

**MINUTES OF A REMOTE MEETING OF BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL
HELD ON 7TH. FEBRUARY 2022**

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

Also Present : County Councillor K Etheridge, P.C. Adam Lang, Comm. Support Officer A Blackledge

1. Minutes Silence

The Mayor having stated this was the first meeting of Town Council since the sad death of our friend and colleague Jim Edwards, asked all present to observe a Minutes Silence in his memory

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors A Davies, Z Hammond, A Short & Ms. D. Box
Late apologies were also received from Cllr. C Erasmus who had had technical issues in trying to join the meeting

3. Declarations of Interest

Declarations of Interest were made in respect of Financial Assistance to Voluntary Organisations by -
Cllr. G James as Mayor (Mayors Charity) & member (Blackwood Walking Football Club)
Cllr. A Farina-Childs as member (Blackwood Waking Football Club) & Committee Member
(Blackwood ATC)
Cllr. D Davies as Vice Chair of Blackwood Branch British Legion

4. Police Report

P.C. Adam Lang was welcomed to the meeting, and he reported as follows.

He took members through the ASB process step by step via the ASB Process Ladder (attached as part of minutes for reference), identifying how difficult and time consuming the process can be.

He emphasised how important it was for all services to work together – Police, Health, Education, Youth & Social Services to ensure the best outcomes for all concerned.

He also identified there had been some improvement in the situation in town over recent weeks, but added no one should get complacent.

He also reported on details of the recent Injunctions obtained at court:

Prohibitions

1. Not to act or incite others to act in an anti-social manner, that is to say a manner that causes or is likely to cause harassment alarm or distress to any person
2. Not to enter the area of Blackwood Town Centre from the hours of 6pm to 6am, after 6am and before 6pm you may only enter the area if accompanied by a parent or guardian

3. Not to be in a group of four or more people (including yourself) in a public place within Caerphilly County Borough except for as part of an activity organised by an educational establishment, sports club or youth service. For the avoidance of doubt this prohibition does not apply to members of your own household or immediate family (parents, siblings, grandparents)

Power of Arrest

A power of arrest has been granted to enforce if, without reasonable excuse, the respondent does anything which they are prohibited from doing by this Order. They shall be liable on breach to a 3 month Detention and Training Order – Section 12 and Schedule 2 Part 3 Paragraph 14 of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2015.

This order was granted on 25 January 2022 and will remain in place until a further order is made

P.C. Lang also updated members on the drive to reintroduce Store net radios for some of the more affected stores in town to assist in tackling shop lifting and general anti social behaviour. Officers were currently visiting stores/ businesses to encourage participation, some already being in possession of radios, but not having used them for some time. Once the exercise is complete, Town Council will be informed of anticipated take up.

Members thanked P.C. Lang for his report, with several remarking that things certainly seemed to have improved recently, whilst also adding that residents were reporting that phoning 101 was still problematical with long waiting times.

P.C. Lang agreed that people must be frustrated by the system, but urged that they continue to report crimes, as feedback is vital.

The Mayor thanked the Officer for his attendance and he left the meeting.

5. County Borough Report

County Councillors A Farina-Childs & K Etheridge gave an update on various issues of ongoing concern, namely -

Cwmgelli Development drainage issues – major problems of flooding of some of the nearby cottages, which have they have not experienced prior to the development starting. New drainage proposals are now to be presented back to Planning by 9th. March 2022

Persimmon Development - nothing much further to report, still with the Minister. Members will recall the High Court overturned the Minister's approval

Cabinet are proposing a 2.5% increase in Council Tax – one positive appears to be additional provision of badly needed Community Safety wardens to assist in combating ASB

Cllr. Etheridge informed members that he had received several queries from local residents regarding any potential plans for Coed Duon woods. Members remarked that the scheme/project was being organised by the Blackwood & District Heritage Association, and after receiving a presentation back in September 2018 we have heard nothing since.

After some further discussion it was *agreed* the issue of the potentially earmarked £10,000 for the Project be taken back to Policy & Finance Committee for resolution

School Crossing Patrol at Blackwood Primary School - over 200 people have signed a petition to reinstate the patrol, and Cllr. Etheridge is due to present a Notice of Motion to the Environment & Sustainability Scrutiny Committee requesting a review of the Council's school crossing patrol criteria, adopted back in 2014. Several members commented on the timing of the review of the service at Blackwood, given several other gates were being used due to the pandemic, and a significant number of children were not in school due to same.

6. *Mayoral Announcements*

The Mayor reported that he had attended the scaled back County Borough organised Christmas Market in town, together with an event at the Methodist Church with various indoor stalls.

He had also attended other smaller events in and around the area over the festive period.

7. *Correspondence*

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

C.C.B.C. Footfall figures for town (forwarded to members)

Details of Caerphilly / Community Councils Liaison Sub Committee Meetings for 2022- 30th March /20th July / 23rd. November @6.00pm

- Request for suggestions of Street Names for new residential development at Cwrt Sirhowy, Tredegar Road, Cwmgelli

Council Tax Base Notification for Precept 2022/2023 - £2,972.91 or Band D equivalent dwellings (this compares with £2,952.00 for 2021/2022)

Request for precept to be submitted by 31st. January

Briefing notes for upcoming May Elections – (forwarded to members)

Consultation on Draft Budget Proposals 2022/23 responses by 13th. February – (forwarded to members)

Notification of Chartist Bridge Multi Agency Group Meeting on 7th. February

Public survey of visitors to Caerphilly County Borough town centres – (forwarded to members)

Proposed provision and amendment to Traffic Orders at various locations within Blackwood Ward (forwarded to members)

Notification that Blackwood Xmas Market will be held on Saturday 26th.November 2022, and a request that Town Council provide and manage on stage entertainment, with an allowance of £1,500 as in previous years

Christmas lighting problems –

I have advised my management team of the importance of effective liaison with the Town Council which worked well when we installed the covid / outside seating measures. I will ensure that there are early discussions in advance on next year's xmas lighting period to ensure that we can agree / achieve a mutually acceptable and attractive xmas lighting display in the town.

Regards Mark S. Williams Corporate Director For Economy And Environment
Caerphilly County Borough Council

One Voice Wales Notification that next Area Committee is to be held on 27th. April 2022

Warning regarding Phishing e mails – Gift cards (forwarded to members)

Welsh Govt. Eligible Community Councils (General Power of Competence) (Qualifications of Clerks) (Wales) Regulations 2021 – forwarded to members

Consultation on Local Govt. & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 – Community & Town Councils Statutory Guidance – Responses if any by 17th. March 2022 - forwarded to members

We are consulting on the draft guidance to support community and town councils to put in place provisions which include:

- eligibility to exercise the general power of competence
- access meetings from multiple locations
- provide opportunity for public participation at public council meetings
- publish an annual report
- publish a training plan to support training for councillors and council staff.

Gwent Public Services Board Consultation on Draft Gwent Well Being Assessment – Responses if any by 31st January - forwarded to members

**Blackwood Primary School /
Libanus Primary School** Thanks for Christmas Selection boxes

Gwent Police Notification of Dispersal Orders for Blackwood 14th – 16th. January
(forwarded to members)

Jenny Lee Estimate for provision of 4 tiered planters – purchase £630 each + VAT
£395 each positioned / planted/ removed & stored

Calon Hearts Notification that grants are available to Town /Community Councils of
£300 towards purchase of defibrillators

The Clerk also reported on an additional item of correspondence received from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales giving notification of a complaint against Cllr. T Evans

In respect of the request for street names at the Cwmgelli development it was agreed we respond stating that we do not make any suggestions as a matter of principle as we opposed the development.

In respect of the request from Caerphilly Events team, it was agreed we do assist in the organisation of entertainment at the Christmas Market, with an agreed allowance of £1,500 to assist same.

After some discussion, members **agreed** that we arrange purchase of 2 x 4 tiered planters for positioning opposite the Blackwood Miners Institute from our reserves and also **agreed** the quoted £790 for planting etc.

With regard the notification from Calon Hearts, Cllr. M Gwynne asked if this grant was only available to town/community councils or to voluntary organisations also. The Clerk stated he was of the opinion it was only town/ community councils but would double check and report back.

On an associated matter Cllr. G James asked if we had had any further information regarding Calon Hearts offer to manage the defibrillators in town, ensuring they were Rescue Ready at all times. The Clerk promised to follow up on this.

8. *Schedule of Payments*

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

| | | £. p |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|
| Treowen Girls Football | Financial Assistance | 250.00 |
| Wales Air Ambulance | Financial Assistance | 250.00 |
| John Hold | December Salary + reimbursements | 1,050.19 |
| Playworks | December Fee | 20.00 |
| HMRC | December Tax/N.I. | 290.76 |
| John Hold | January Salary + reimbursements | 969.23 |
| Playworks | January Fee | 20.00 |
| HMRC | January Tax/N.I. | 290.96 |
| Elsburys | Xmas lights (Incl. £600.68 VAT) | 3,604.08 |

9. *To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 6th .December 2021*

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

10. *Matters Arising*

There were no matters arising

11. To Receive the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting held on 24th. January 2022

It was ***resolved*** the minutes be received.

Members ***agreed*** the following Financial Assistance grants be made -

| | |
|--|------|
| Blackwood Town Walking Football Club | £250 |
| Mayors Charity (Breast Cancer Unit Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr) | £250 |
| Blackwood A.T.C. | £220 |

12. Matters Arising

All matters were either for discussion on the Agenda or specifically agreed by members as above

13. Vacancy on Town Council

The Clerk reported that following the untimely death of our friend and colleague Jim Edwards, a vacancy now exists for the Blackwood Central Ward.

Having sought confirmation he informed members that whilst the Vacancy will need to be publicised, an election cannot be held, due to closeness of upcoming elections, albeit Council had the option to co-opt if they so wished or leave the seat empty.

It was ***unanimously agreed*** the seat remained unfilled, and the necessary Notice be publicised

14. Budget Monitoring Report - Period 9 to 31st. December 2021

The Clerk presented his report, but informed members this had now been updated via the Budget report about to be discussed.

It was ***agreed*** the report be received

15. Completion of Audit for Years Ended 31st. March 2020 & 31st. March 2021 - Annual Returns/ Issues Arising Reports

The Clerk reported that Notice had been received from our External Auditors (Auditor General for Wales) that the Audits for Years ended 31st. March 2020 (BDO) & 31st. March 2021 had now been completed.

The Annual Returns (previously presented to members) were presented again, and it was ***agreed*** to approve and accept same.

The issues arising report was also presented, which highlighted some issues of concern, many of which the Clerk had queried and was, from correspondence received and reported, expecting deletion and/or amendment.

The Notice of Conclusion of Audit will be displayed on our website and Notice Board in the Precinct and will remain there for 14 days.

For both years, the Auditor states in the Audit opinion that -

Except for the matters reported in my Basis of qualification, on the basis of my review, in my opinion ***no matters have come to my attention giving cause for concern that in any material respect, the information reported in this Annual Return:***

- has not been prepared in accordance with proper practices;
- that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met;
- is not consistent with the Council's/Committee's governance arrangements; and
- that the Council/Committee does not have proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

The Clerk presented the Annual Returns and the Issues Arising Reports, but reported that he had queried some of the issues that had been highlighted and from correspondence received and reported was anticipating a revised Report very soon.

Cllr. G Edwards stated that he was disappointed with some of the issues highlighted in the Report, and was still awaiting clarification on some points raised with the Clerk. The Clerk responded that hopefully the anticipated revised Report would alleviate at least some of these concerns. Cllr. G Edwards expressed his disappointment that no Contract of Employment had been issued to the Clerk and proposed this be organised to safeguard both the Clerk and Town Council. This was ***agreed*** by members, and the Clerk stated he would seek a model contract from One Voice Wales and present to members over the coming weeks.

The Notice of Conclusion of Audit will be displayed on our website and Notice Board in the Precinct and will remain there for 14 days, once the amended/ revised Report is received. The Clerk reported he would of course forward this to members once received for their attention.

The Clerk was thanked for his continued sound stewardship of the Council's finances.

16. Budget Requirements 2022/2023/ Reserves Position/ Precept Setting / Medium Term Budget Strategy

The Clerk presented his report which reflected an updated likely out turn position for the current year, having now received the invoice from Elsbury's for Christmas lighting and given we are now some 10 month through the year, a revised position on the likely level of financial assistance and office furniture/other equipment.

It also included a proposed budget for 2022/2023 based on current spending patterns, plus inflationary increases on some expenditure heads, but which also reflected the Council's decision to continue the provision of hanging baskets, continued sponsorship of the Blackwood RFC Firework Display, an ongoing Events Programme and Grants to Voluntary Organisations. A contribution of £2,000 was also included towards Replacement fund for Christmas Lighting.

Also based on recent discussions, a budget for Turn the Town Pink, in support of the planned Breast Cancer Unit at Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr (£250)was also included, together with a budget of £1,350 to support the maintenance of the Remembrance Garden and provide assistance at the Remembrance Day Service which received such criticism last November.

Furthermore, given the above, and based on past experiences the Grants to Voluntary Organisations budget had been reduced by £500 to £4,000. This could of course be revisited if significant worthy applications were received during the year.

The Newsletter budget had been increased to £3,000 for the coming year, recognising the decision to consult with each resident regarding the Strategic Plan and their thoughts on priorities.

The report also took the opportunity to highlight additional issues that could affect our budget requirements for 2022/23 (and the Medium Term Budget Strategy previously presented) namely -

Cost of Upcoming Election -With regard the upcoming elections, which will be run in tandem with the C.C.B.C. elections, the costs, based on the By Election earlier this year, could equate to approx £8,000 if all are contested, but could presumably, with the agreement of C.C.B.C. financed over a five 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 a 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, especially given a new Council in May 2022.

Training Programme - Town Council will next year be expected to produce a training plan for members, and it is therefore incumbent for us to provide a sufficient budget to finance this plan.

Furthermore, it will be for the new Council to determine whether or not Special Allowances will be paid in respect of Chairs of Committees, Level of Payments to Mayor/ Deputy Mayor and whether Attendance Allowances are introduced.

The effects on the proposed budget strategy are as follows -

£1,600 has been included for potential election costs each next and future years – we will be in a better position once the outcome of the upcoming Council elections are known

£1,200 has been included for potential Members contributions each year, assuming only 50% of members claim– again will become clearer once outcome of May Council elections are known

£1,600 has been included to support the Training Plan, based on each member attending 3 (as yet to be identified courses) based on current £30 cost quoted by One Voice Wales, as members uplifted by possible inflationary increases.

N.B. If membership were relinquished , additional costs of approx. £1,000 could be expected

Assumed no change in respect of Special Allowance payments/ level of payment to Mayor and no Attendance Allowances

After some discussion, the budget as presented was ***agreed*** and it was also ***agreed*** the Precept for 2022/2023 remain at £20 per Band D Property.

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

As per the recent Audit recommendation, members formally approve the Clerk's Salary on Pay Scale LC2 – Point 28 (based on 16 hours per week) currently £13,936 per annum

The Clerk was thanked by members for his hard work in producing the 2022/2023 Budget papers.

Reserves Position

The Report also reminded members that it is a requirement that 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 and Earmarked (held for specific purpose)

General reserves as mentioned 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, and this has been previously accepted by Town Council

Due to the ongoing Pandemic an additional £17,994 (this excludes the agreed £5,000 contribution to Bi Centenary Celebrations & £2000 agreed contribution to Christmas Lighting) is added to our reserves 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 Reserves resulting in an estimated total reserves position of £117,350 at 31st. March 2022.

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

As at 31st. March 2021, Town Council had identified a sum of £10,000 in respect of Coed Duon and £28,346 in respect of improvements/projects to support our Strategic Plan.

Furthermore, Town Council have also over the past few years identified and invested approx £25,000 in respect of Renewal of Christmas lighting. Members thought it 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 (after this years planned contribution) amounts to £20,547

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 £25,160 currently being available (after this years planned contribution). A meeting of the Bi Centenary Committee will be arranged to ascertain their views on how to proceed.

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

Members were aware it was intended to forward a copy of our Strategic Plan to all residents and stakeholders for consultation/ information, whilst also looking to ascertain their views on how our reserves should be utilised to best benefit the town and its residents.

Unfortunately, as time has passed, and the upcoming elections get closer it would seem more beneficial and equitable to leave any major decisions on priorities for spending/investing these reserves until the newly elected Council is in place, and the results of this consultation are quantified .

After some lengthy discussions, it was **agreed** that based on the updated figures provided by the Clerk, and the agreement to set the Precept at £20 per Band D property, the Reserves position is considered reasonable, and would greatly assist when devising our plans based on the upcoming Consultation with our residents to identify their priorities for the potential use of these reserves –

| | £ |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| General Reserves | 15,000 |
| Coed Duon | 10,000 * |
| Other Projects – Strategic Plan | 46,340 |
| Xmas Lights | 20,547 |
| Bi- Centenary | 25,160 |
| CIL | 303 |
| | <hr/> |
| | £117,350 |
| | <hr/> |

*It was, however, noted that the decision reached earlier regarding the Coed Duon reserve being revisited by Policy & Finance Committee may well alter this position.

Policy & Finance Committee had recommended to Town Council that we take the opportunity of the increased reserves position to undertake possible further improvements to the Remembrance Garden to ensure it is a lasting and fitting tribute to those that gave the ultimate sacrifice, and this was **agreed**.

The Committee had also recommended that no further major decisions on allocation of reserves be made until the results of the consultation exercise was quantified, and the new Council had chance to consider same. After some discussion, this was **agreed**.

17. Petition – Children’s Play Park at Plas Mawr Fields

The Clerk presented his report, which included the Petition from 280 residents, presented by Cllr. G.James and organised by Ms Donna Jones , namely

We the undersigned residents request a children’s park be established at the Plas Mawr Field Blackwood near the Community Centre, to help with play and children’s well being as a Leisure Facility. - We ask that funding is considered from the Town & County Council with a proportion considered from the fund established for our Councillors in the Ward

The play area will consist of swings, roundabout, slide and other equipment for young nursery and primary school children but to include older children too.

WE WOULD ALSO LIKE THERE TO BE EQUIPMENT FOR DISABLED CHILDREN, FOR THEM TO HAVE ENJOYMENT AT THE PARK.

Also a suitable football field for the children.

All amenities for children aged 0-16 years.

We do not envisage any play area will take up the whole of the field and the area would be fenced off so dogs can be walked.

The Clerk reported that correspondence he had been copied into seemed to indicate that CCBC were under the misapprehension that Town Council had agreed to finance the scheme. He had written informing them that whilst supportive of the petition, no discussion and certainly no commitment to funding same had been made, whilst pointing out that if any proposal was likely to cost anywhere near the replacement costs of the Civic Centre play park, there was very little likelihood without significant funding from other sources that this could ever proceed. A recent e-mail from Mike Headington CCBC to Cllr. Etheridge (there has been no direct contact with Town Council) estimated the costs at £70k plus planning fees

Cllr. K. Etheridge reiterated that there had been an implicit understanding by residents of the area, from Caerphilly B.C., that some form of playground had been intended for the area in question, but they had now appeared to have reneged on that, stating that a review in 2015 had indicated there were several playgrounds in the vicinity, and that the Borough had no capital budget available to provide same, or revenue budget for ongoing inspection/ maintenance.

Cllr G James queried some of the stated locations of these playgrounds, several of which could hardly be classed as within the local vicinity, and queried if there was in fact provision at Upper Trelyn as identified, and asked if Cllr. Etheridge could check this out.

The Clerk asked whether Cllr. Etheridge had received any breakdown of the estimated £70k costs, querying whether this included fencing/ other security features and also reported that he had not had any response to a request for estimated ongoing inspection/maintenance costs.

Cllr. Etheridge responded that he had only received the £70k estimate with no breakdown of costs.

Members were generally in support of the provision of playground facilities, but felt the County Borough should be contributing to same.

After further discussion, it was **agreed** that whilst a proper consultation exercise would need to be undertaken before any decision is made, that Town Council consider future potential Community Infrastructure Levy monies be a possible source of partially funding same.

At this point in the meeting, several members queried whether the Clerk was well enough to continue with the meeting, as he looked unwell.

The Mayor took the decision to bring the meeting to a close.