

DRAFT

**MINUTES OF A REMOTE MEETING OF BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL
HELD ON 22ND. MARCH 2022**

Present : Cllr. R Mills (Mayor)
Cllr. M Gwynne (Deputy Mayor)
Cllrs. A Farina-Childs, G James, D Davies, A Davies, A Short C Erasmus & P Cook

Also Present were County Cllr. K Etheridge & Ms. Donna Box

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Cllr. T Jones, who was having technical issues

2. Declarations of Interest

Declarations of Interest were received from –

Cllr D Davies as a member of the Royal British Legion & Old Comrades

Cllr. A Farina – Childs having been fund raising in respect of Men In Sheds Project

3. Police Report

The Clerk reported that in the absence of the police, Inspector Andrew Boucher had provided a brief update for the meeting.

ASB on the town is beginning to look more positive. We ran a number of operations over the last few weeks on the weekend to ensure visibility was high and that offenders were deterred and dealt with where necessary.

We've made a number of arrests over the last few weeks too of 14-17 year olds for public order offences, sending the message home that disorderly behaviour wont be tolerated and have x3 ASB Injunctions in place at present.

Over 30 stores and business so far have signed up for Town safe and the first meeting will be towards the end of this month, bringing businesses and agencies together in the same (virtual) room. Safeguarding and CT Prevent training is to be offered to all of these stores and out CADRO is leading the rollout of the Storenets radios. Many stores are keen to have these and the digital update is coming to Blackwood Police station Monday, putting stores and business directly in touch with the local team via radio.

Last week saw a break in at one of our phone shops on gravel lane. The value of the theft was significant and happened in the daylight hrs on a weekday. Our design out crime team have recently attended the back of the High Street near the car park and put forward a series of recommendations around physical security.

4. County Borough Report

County Cllr. K Etheridge reported the following –

The planned Skateboard Park was now out to tender and anticipated completion date is end of November 2022.

With regard the Persimmon Development at Grove Park, notification that a new Planning Inspector is to be appointed, and any new representations must be received by 11th. April

Problems at Gibbs Close / Palmer Place where tiles are being stripped of the roves has necessitated the Police and Community Safety wardens becoming involved, with the elderly residents becoming fearful for their safety.

Whilst his Notice of Motion that the Schools Crossing Review Policy of 2014 be revisited was unsuccessful, there is to be a review of the recent decision with regard Blackwood Primary School

Cllr. Etheridge confirmed that ASB issues had improved over the past weeks, but that we shouldn't become complacent.

Cllr M Gwynne queried the apparent reduced opening of the toilets at the bus station.

Cllr. G Edwards confirmed that due to continued vandalism and criminal damage, opening was currently restricted to 10.00am – 2.00pm Tuesday – Saturday for the foreseeable future.

Cllr. Etheridge was thanked for his report

5. Mayoral Announcements

The Mayor reported that due to unforeseen family commitments he had not undertaken any visits recently, but did report that he had received an invitation to the opening of the new Remploy Office on 26th. April, but would need to seek advice given the upcoming elections and Purdah regulations.

6. Correspondence

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

Caerphilly C.B.C.	Notification of T.B. case in Blackwood Comprehensive School Footfall figures New Online Nomination Packs for upcoming elections Place Shaping Information Libanus Primary School Pedestrian & Cycle Zone – confirmation of continuation of restrictions which prohibit vehicles entering or proceeding along Libanus Road which passes the school during term time (Monday to Friday 8.30am – 9.40am & 3.00pm – 4.00pm) Surveillance Camera Commissioner is seeking views on the proposed continued use of CCTV cameras in Cefn Fforest
One Voice Wales	Membership Renewal Notification for 2022/23 at £1,315 (compared with £1,264 for 2021/2022) - details forwarded to members
Zurich Municipal	Renewal Documents for 2022/2023 in the sum of £1,340.54 compared with £1,329.13 for 2021/2022 (includes tax)
NALC	Notification of National Salary Award – agreed new rates from 1 April 2021 An agreed increase of 1.75% to £17.05 per hour results in a new equivalent salary of £14,183 – 16 hours per week
Ombudsman	Notification that with regard the Code of Conduct complaint against Cllr. Trefor Evans, the Ombudsman has decided not to investigate due to lack of sufficient evidence
Caerphilly C.B.C.	Copy of Notice of Election, which needs to be displayed on Notice board and web site from 28 th . March

In respect of the Surveillance Cameras, it was *agreed* the Clerk write in support of continuation of the use of the use of the cameras in Cefn Fforest

In respect of One Voice Wales Membership renewal, this was discussed and *agreed* by members in the sum of £1,315

In respect of Zurich Insurance renewal, this was discussed and *agreed* in the sum of 1,340.54

In respect of the NALC salary award, this was *agreed* from 1st April 2021, with the Clerk's salary increasing to £14,183 from that date based on 16 hours per week

7. *Schedule of Payments*

The Clerk presented his report on payments made/ due for payment and the following were **agreed** –

		£. p
HMRC	Tax/ N.I. February	290.76
John Hold	Feb Salary plus reimbursements	970.19
Playworks	Feb fee	20.00
Blackwood Town Walking Football Club	Grant	250.00
Mayors Charity (Breast Cancer Unit Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr)	Grant	250.00
Blackwood A.T.C.	Grant	220.00
HMRC	Tax/ N.I. March	374.45
John Hold	March Salary plus reimbursements	1,126.61
Playworks	March fee	20.00
S.S.E.	Xmas Lighting Charges (incl. £10.87 VAT)	228.46

8. *To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 7th. February 2022*

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

9. *Matters Arising*

The Clerk reported at the last meeting, that after querying some of the assertions in the Audit Reports revised Copies had been promised. The Revised Basis of Qualification were as follows

Year Ended 31 March 2020 Basis of qualification

The Council has failed to make proper arrangements for the exercise of electors' rights to inspect the accounts as set out in section 30 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004.

Other matters arising and recommendations

There are no further matters I wish to draw to the Council's attention.

Year Ended 31 March 2021 Basis of qualification

The Council's Annual Governance Statement assertions that it has maintained an adequate system of internal control and has taken all reasonable steps to comply with laws, are not supported by audit evidence

- The Council has not provided its Clerk with a written contract or a written statement of the specified terms of employment under S.1 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA) within two months of starting employment.

Other matters arising and recommendations

I draw the Council's attention to the following matters and recommendations identified during the audit:

- There is no clear evidence that the Council explicitly approves the Clerk's salary. Instead, the costs are included in the annual budget but this includes other employment related costs. In the context of the absence of a written contract, this is a significant omission. If the salary scale is not specified in a written contract, we recommend that the Council formally approves the Clerk's annual salary at least annually and whenever the salary is increased.
- The Council has carried forward reserves of £92,356, compared to its annual precept of £59,119. Although there has been a significant increase in 2020-21 due to COVID19, the closing balances have been steadily increasing for a number of years. The Local Government Finance Act 1992 only allows the Council to set a precept to fund planned expenditure and requires it to take its reserves into account when setting the precept. To ensure that it sets a lawful precept, we recommend that the Council reviews its reserves and its plans to apply these reserves when setting its 2022-23 budget and precept.

The necessary Notices will now be placed on the website and Notice Board over the coming days.

10. Minutes of the Town Council Meeting (ultimately postponed) held on 7th. March 2022

The Minutes were *agreed* as a true record

11. Applications for Financial Assistance

Councillors D Davies & A Farina- Childs having declared interests in this item, took no part in the discussion or decision making regarding the respective applications.

The Clerk presented his report on Applications received for financial assistance, and each was considered in turn –

Blackwood British Legion – members agreed a grant of £350 be awarded towards the purchase of coffin drapes, which would ensure a respectful/ ceremonial funeral.

Libanus Lifestyle (Wales) CIC Libanus Christian Centre – The Clerk explained that Cllr A Farina-Childs had requested this item be discussed at the last meeting, which unfortunately had to be postponed. Given it was still on the Agenda (but an application has been received in the meantime), he asked that perhaps the member could give a brief resume of the project.

This was agreed and Cllr. Farina-Childs informed the meeting this initiative was an opportunity for men to attend the group in an attempt to combat loneliness and assist with mental well being. It was hoped that when fully operational the group would produce bird tables/ planters etc. for possible sale to the public.

After some further discussion, members agreed a grant of £550 be awarded to fund the cost of tools, equipment and timber

Islwyn Comrades Association – members agreed a grant of £250 be awarded towards the costs of visiting the National Memorial Arboretum

Karaokekids – this group was set up in 2017 and cater for 6 to 16 year olds with social learning and mental health issues. They use karaoke, arts and craft and games to help cope with these conditions and operate on Thursdays 6 pm - 8pm (during term time) in the staff room Blackwood Comprehensive School.

Whilst members were unaware of this group, they fully supported their aims and aspirations. After further discussion, members agreed a grant of £250 be awarded towards the costs of replacement of equipment etc. if the Clerk made some enquiries, and was satisfied with the responses. Members also thought it advisable for the Group to better advertise their services within the Community, and wondered if we might assist by posting on our webpage/ face book page

12. Review of Internal Controls

The Clerk presented his report which highlighted that 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 30th. June

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

13. Review of Risk Management

The Clerk presented his report which highlighted that 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

The Clerk presented his report which highlighted that Members are required to review the adequacy of our 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. Independent Remuneration for Wales – Annual Report 2022/2023

The Clerk presented his report, and reminded members that they had discussed the proposals previously, which now form part of the Annual report and is purely for information.

Decisions will be required by the new Council regarding those optional elements of Remuneration

16. Welsh Government Consultation Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 Community and Town Councils statutory guidance

The Clerk presented his report, and highlighted the new guidance in respect of -

- * 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.

He stated these issues would need further consideration/input by members over coming months

Agreed the Report be received

16. Draft Contract of Employment for Clerk

The Clerk reported that as requested he had sourced a Draft Model Contract, provided by One Voice Wales and when forwarding same had proposed members consider same – query anything and perhaps agenda again for another meeting, without him being present.

The Mayor asked if Cllr. G Edwards wished to update members on the advice he had sought regarding the draft contract.

Cllr. Edwards stated that he was disappointed that we were in this position, but stressed he only wanted to ensure that both the Town Council and the Clerk were properly covered. He had been advised that the proposed Contract cannot be backdated, as to all intents there had been and was a verbal contract in place. Furthermore as already identified by the Clerk he should not be part of any meeting discussing same

Some members queried whether this should be left for the new Council to consider, but after some further discussion it was *agreed* a meeting be called for Monday 28th. March 6.30pm. to discuss just this one item, and since the Clerk would not be present, Cllr Edwards was asked by the Mayor if he could set up a Teams meeting and this was agreed.

17. Men's Shed Project (Cllr. A Farina-Childs)

This item had been covered under Applications for Financial Assistance

18. Planning Applications

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

Case Ref. 21/1172/FULL

Location: 9 Cwrt Y Coed Blackwood NP12 1GL

Proposal: Erect single storey side extension

Case Officer: Joshua Burrows (07874 641749 : burroj1@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Case Ref. 21/1167/FULL

Location: 19 Greenwood Road Cefn Fforest Blackwood NP12 1EZ

Proposal: Erect two storey rear extension, 3 No. hardstanding's with dropped kerb to front

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

Case Ref. 21/1095/FULL

Location: Newbold Solicitors 233 High Street Blackwood NP12 1AL

Proposal: Erect rear two storey extension and install shop front roller shutter

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

Case Ref. 22/0061/FULL

Location: Beeches Sunnybank Road Blackwood NP12 1HT

Proposal: Erect two story side extension

Case Officer: Joshua Burrows ☐ 07874 641749 ☐ burroj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 22/0008/FULL

Location: 34 Coronation Road Blackwood NP12 1EA

Proposal: Reconstruct side outhouse

Case Officer: Joshua Burrows (07874 641749 : burroj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 22/0106/FULL

Location: 1 Mayhill Bungalows Blackwood NP12 1EB

Proposal: Raise roof height and carry out loft conversion with rear dormers, new boundary treatment and develop additional car parking

Case Officer: Mike Jones (01443 864528 : jonesm5@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 22/0123/FULL

Location: 43 Lewis Lewis Avenue Blackwood NP12 1JQ

Proposal: Erect single storey rear extension

Case Officer: Joshua Burrows (07874 641749 : burroj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 22/0151/FULL

Location: 171 Beaumaris Way Cefn Fforest Blackwood NP12 1DF

Proposal: Erect two storey side extension

Case Officer: Joshua Burrows (07874 641749 : burroj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 22/0160/ADV

Location: Tesco Express Unit C Highfields Way Blackwood NP12 1SL

Proposal: Install 8 fascia signs, 2 projecting signs and 8 graphic signs

Case Officer: Bridget Jones-Crabtree (07850 916850 : jonesbas@caerphilly.gov.uk

After a brief discussion, members ***agreed*** there was nothing contentious among the applications and that no objections be raised

19. Reports

The Clerk gave a brief update on the planned Turn the Town Blue & Yellow in Support of the Ukraine.

A Street Collection permit had been granted by Caerphilly C.B.C. for a collection on the High Street on Friday & Saturday 25th/26th. March between 10.00am.- 5.00pm., and Mrs. Beverley Edwards had also had confirmation that ASDA were allowing a collection in their foyer on Saturday 26th.

The Clerk asked those members who might assist in the collection to email him ASAP and he would then draw up a rota (probably based on 2 hour sessions)

Beverley had also contacted businesses in town to sponsor the costs of ribbons/flags etc to decorate the lamp posts and shop windows to show the towns support for this most worthwhile of causes. She was then making up the decorations, and requested assistance to erect same on Thursday evening. Councillors A Farina-Childs & G James volunteered to assist, but the Mayor apologised that he was unavailable that evening. Cllr. A Davies volunteered in his stead.

The Clerk reported that as far as he was aware Blackwood was the first town in the Borough to undertake this show of solidarity, and requested members might like to consider making a financial contribution to the Disasters Emergency Committee Ukraine Appeal. It was ***unanimously agreed*** a donation of £500 be made to the appeal.

Given the previous discussion regarding opportunities for public participation during meetings, the Mayor asked Ms. Donna Box if she wished to address the meeting.

Donna thanked the Mayor, and gave a brief update on CHADS – the fact they were still awaiting the promised feasibility study on the barrier height on the Chartist Bridge, but also that the support group continues to flourish with Coffee mornings every 3rd. Saturday of the month at Elim Chapel and craft evening next Monday at 6.00pm

Cllr. A Farina-Childs took the opportunity to inform members that he was standing down from Town Council after 14 years, and thanked members and the Clerk for their help and support over that period.

He also informed members that Cllr. Rob Weeks had asked him to inform members he was standing down from Town Council and asked him to pass on his thanks for the support shown to him over his term of office, and especially since the death of Jan.

21. Dates of April Meeting & Annual General Meeting

The Clerk reported that given the date of this current meeting perhaps members might consider the April meeting being held on 11th. or 18th. especially since the AGM has to be held within 14 days of the Election, therefore either 16th./17th./18th. May as potential dates.

However having received notification that due to the restrictions around the pre-election period, Christina Harray as Returning Officer for Caerphilly County Borough Council has advised that only meetings that consider critical business should go forward at this time.

After some discussion it was ***agreed*** the Clerk seek further advice from the Monitoring Officer regarding planned meeting in April.

The Mayor proposed members pencil in April 18th. as the potential date which would be confirmed once advice had been received.