

DRAFT

MINUTES OF THE BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 5TH SEPTEMBER 2022

Present : Cllrs. G James, D Davies, S Wareham, P Cook, C Erasmus, K Williams, K Jones, A Bradfield & D Box

Also present in the absence of Inspector Petty was PC 2174 Leah Powell

In the absence of the Mayor & Deputy Mayor it was ***moved seconded and unanimously agreed*** that Cllr. D Box Chair the meeting

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Cllrs. G Edwards (Mayor), L.Phillips (Deputy Mayor), R Mills, K Etheridge & Cty. Cllr. A Farina-Childs

Apologies were also received from Inspector Oliver Petty

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this point

3. Police Report

PC Leah Powell was welcomed to the meeting, and thanked for her attendance. She passed on Inspector Petty's apologies, and gave a brief update of issues affecting the town

She acknowledged that Anti Social Behaviour in and around town had been a major issue earlier in the year, but that thankfully there now seemed to be a reduction in such incidents. Increased joint patrols and better joint working with the CSW's and better and more timely sharing of information had assisted the reduction.

She also reported that the Store Net system was now working in town, and this had led to a quicker response times.

Cllr. S Wareham asked the officer if she was aware of the problems with a rough sleeper at the rear of Santander/ Flavourvape and an incident earlier that day with a flaming canister coming over the rooftops and landing in Gravel Lane. 101 had been called but with little or no response, but the he Fire Brigade did attend the incident. Cllr. Wareham also reported that the area was in a disgusting state and was fearful of vermin infestation.

The officer apologised that she was unaware of the incident earlier, but would check out on her return to duty. She also apologised for the 101 service but that unfortunately that was out of their control but had reported the various concerns passed through to officers.

PC Powell reported that new PCSO's were proactive in town and that a number of arrests had been made. A new Ward Manager was also to be appointed, as additional CSW's were also to be appointed by Caerphilly C.B.C.

Safer Street Funding had been applied for to assist victims of burglary and the most vulnerable in our society. It was also planned to hand out Smart Water kits at the Blackwood Beach Party

The next meeting of the Town Safe Meeting was being planned and it was hoped this would be an in person meeting as opposed to a remote meeting, and plans for Halloween and 5th. November were well advanced.

Finally, the officer mentioned that there was funding available for additional CCTV, but that there were specific criteria to be met in order to be successful.

The Chair thanked PC Leah Powell for her attendance, and she left the meeting

4. County Borough Report

In the absence of all Blackwood Ward members Cllr. P Cook gave a brief report on an issue whilst not directly affecting Blackwood, could impact on some residents, namely meetings with officers and members of Islwyn Indoor Bowls Club and its future viability

5. Mayoral Announcements

With the absence of the Mayor there were no Announcements

6. Correspondence

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

Caerphilly C.B.C.

Notification of Town Centre Networking Event
13th. July 5.30pm at Blackwood Miners Institute

News Online – forwarded to members

Foot Fall Figures - forwarded to members

Temporary Prohibition of Driving Order
Hall Street, Blackwood – Gas main replacement – forwarded to members
Cefn Road, Blackwood – Gas main replacement

Notification of Temporary Road Closures for Beach Party

Prohibition Restriction of Waiting & Loading & On Street Parking
Various locations in Blackwood - forwarded to members

Notification of Appointment new Town Centres Manager – Joanne Hillier
Reikes

Notification of 2nd. Instalment of Precept payment - £29,729.10

Annual Review – justified need of deployment of CCTV cameras in town

Various correspondence regarding requirements for Beach Party

Request via TCC for Community/Town Cllr. Representative nominations on the Standards Committee

Notification of Comm. Councils Liaison Sub Committee meeting 27th.July

Notification of additional Councillor Code of Conduct Training Event to be held on Tuesday 13th. September 4.30pm – in person or remote attendance – forwarded to members requesting they contact me to organise same

Elsburys

Notification of Xmas Lights costs - Install /Remove/Store £65 per figurine
Tamtorques £4 per figurine
PAT Testing £1.60 per item
£250 per Official turn On

One Voice Wales

Training Opportunities – forwarded to members

Notification of OVW Area Committee Meeting being held remotely on 20th.July

GAVO

Request to sponsor award at Awards Evening to be held at Blackwood Miners Institute (Sponsored same in 2019 - £250)

Members ***agreed*** sponsorship in the sum of £250

Libanus Lifestyle

Notification of increase in venue hire rates from September to £30 per hour

Members were in ***agreement*** that the move to the Blackwood Methodist Church in the interim had been warranted, given the proposed increase in venue hire rates

Wales Audit

The Clerk reported that on 5th. June queried why we hadn't been contacted for the additional information required under Full Audit or whether the letter had not reached us, but received no response.

As a result he forwarded what had been requested by the due date of 15th. July. A request for some additional information(2nd. August) was supplied and notified nothing else was required.

On 12th. August we were notified that as we were under a Full Audit for 2021/22 (New Arrangements) significant additional info. was required – Copy of Cash Book, All Invoices, Bank Statements, PAYE monthly returns, 2021/2022 & 2022/2023 Budgets and Precept Requirements, Clerks Contract of Employment & Fixed Asset Register.

This additional information will now be delivered by 16th. September to their Offices in Cardiff

Cllr. Gerwyn James

Letter requesting leave of absence until January

Cllr. James declared an Interest in this item but took no part in the discussion or decision taken

Members were ***unanimous in supporting*** this request

Cllr. Steve Brookman Letter of resignation from Town Council

Members *accepted* the letter of resignation

Prompted by a Press article, relating to the likely re-introduction of car parking charges, after consulting with the Mayor, the following letter was sent to the Chief Executive & Leader and all Cabinet Members of Caerphilly C.B.C.

Good morning Leader & Cabinet members, it is with some amazement and dismay that we read in the local press that the long awaited cross party Car Parks Task & Finish Group have agreed to support the re-introduction of charges in our town centres from 2023, and that the meeting of the Joint Scrutiny

Committee held on 28th July approved same.

This at a time when the rate of Inflation is currently running at 9.4% and likely to increase to 11%, making it much more difficult for families and businesses to survive.

When the decision to extend free parking was last considered, the then Leader of the Council, Cllr. Philippa Marsden said it was important we continue to make every effort to encourage people to shop local and support the economic recovery of our towns and I feel extending free parking is a key factor in that.

Even more recently when supporting the Trade Unions demand for an increase in funding for local authorities from the U.K. Government, Cllr Morgan said, “The cost of living crisis is putting a huge pressure on the community and, as elected members, we have an obligation to do all we can to improve the lives of our residents. Many people are already facing impossible decisions, such as choosing between buying food or paying spiralling bills – it is clear that we cannot sustain this position for much longer.

“I want to assure everyone that we are taking swift and positive action to deliver change and I will continue to represent the best interest of the community and our public services.”

Blackwood Town Centre will be affected more by this decision than any other, given that well in excess of 60% of all anticipated car park income for the whole Borough is generated here, with historically the High Street Car Park generating more than all car parks in Caerphilly and the Cliff Road Car Park generating more than all car parks in Bargoed & Ystrad Mynach combined.

Members and residents have long queried what benefits the town had seen from the significant revenue generated, especially as Town Council have over recent years stepped in to ensure the continuation of floral displays in town throughout the summer, and assisted the Caerphilly Taxi Drivers Association to re-open the Bus Station Toilets after Caerphilly C.B.C. decisions to cease providing same.

Members were also disgusted to learn that whilst 98% of all spaces were pay and display in Blackwood, many of the other town centres were significantly better treated – Bargoed 22%, Risca 0%, Nelson 0% & Newbridge 0%, and urged the Task & Finish Group to consider that if all other town centres were brought more into line, then potentially an additional 500 spaces might be charged for, generating additional significant income which might be used to reduce existing charges across the borough.

The decision to re-introduce car parking charges at this time does not seem to mirror the rhetoric of the Borough Council, and Blackwood Town Council would respectfully urge Cabinet members to think again.

Wouldn't it make much more sense to continue with the current position and then revisit again in 2024, thereby giving struggling families and businesses a better chance of survival ?

Thank you for the email John,

The Cabinet will be looking at this item in detail in September and will take on board the views of the Blackwood Town Council, the outcome of the Task and Finish Groups findings, the guidance from the Joint Scrutiny and the many other points of view.

One of the comments you make regarding the amount of revenue that car parks collect in Blackwood in comparison to other town centres. This is obviously due to the fact that Blackwood enjoys a large amount of car park spaces which leads to a vibrant town centre, whilst other towns are constrained by the lack of car parking spaces. I can assure you that other towns would welcome the amount of parking provision that Blackwood enjoys.

Regards, Sean

7. *Schedule of Payments*

The Clerk presented the following payments made / due for payment, and all were **agreed** -

		£. p
George Edwards	Licence Fee Reimbursement	40.00
Boverton Nurseries	Hanging Baskets	1,515.36
J. Hold	July Sals / Reimbursements	1,038.52
HMRC	July Tax/N.I.	300.20
Katherine Watkins	July Fee	20.00
Libanus Lifestyle	Room Hire	40.00
J.P. Fulton	Photography Fee	200.00
The Branded Company	Printed Balloons	138.00
Audit Wales	Audit Fees 2019/20 & 2020/21	596.00
Jan Woodward	Deposit Entertainers Fee	105.00
Caerphilly C.B.C.	Returning Officers Fees	314.52
Libanus Lifestyle	Room Hire	20.00
J. Hold	August Sals	1,038.52
HMRC	August Tax/N.I.	300.20
Katherine Watkins	August Fee	20.00
J. Hold	Hawaiian Garlands	258.95
Cherry Ripe Management	Entertainers Fee – Steel Band	990.00
J S Lee	Watering of Hanging Baskets (inc. £ 763.30 VAT)	4,579.80

The Clerk reported on 2 further potential payments

Following the sad death of our former friend & Colleague Leon Gardiner the Clerk queried that a Donation in Lieu of Flowers be made to Ty Hafan . It was **unanimously agreed** a Donation of £50 be forwarded

An Invoice had just been received from One Voice Wales for £105 in respect of 5 Training sessions to Members. It was **agreed** payment be made

8. To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 4th. July 2022

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

9. Matters Arising

The following matters were raised at the previous meeting

Tennis Courts - Information received now indicates Refurbishment begins September. There will be an online booking system and key pad entry system on gates, with the code given when booking is confirmed

Chartist Bridge – As members are aware, the following was forwarded to Chief Executive Officer And Leader of Caerphilly C.B.C.

Dear Christina & Sean,

Chartist Bridge, Blackwood

At a recent meeting of Blackwood Town Council, one of our members Cllr. Donna Box reported on yet another incident on the Chartist Bridge involving a 13 year old girl threatening to take her own life. Thankfully, on this occasion she was talked out of doing so by a young lady until the police and her father arrived and stopped her doing anything she would later regret.

Cllr. Box also highlighted that latest figures show 15 such reported incidents to the Police up to May this year, but emphasised many other incidents go unreported.

She has spoken to and received the whole hearted backing of our Blackwood Ward Members – Councillors K Etheridge, A Farina-Childs and N Dix – together now with the unanimous support of Town Council, and indeed no doubt the majority of our residents, to make this joint plea for Caerphilly County Borough Council to revisit the raising of the height of the barriers on both sides of the bridge, as the parapets are far too easily accessible to would be suicide attempts.

There is a sign at the northern entrance to the town which reads :

BLACKWOOD – DEFINING THE FUTURE

How many more people must be denied a future before something is done and before Blackwood's future is unfairly defined and maligned as the suicide capital of South Wales.

Please revisit this issue as a matter of urgency, before anymore families are grieving lost relatives due to continued inaction.

Yours sincerely

John

Clerk to Blackwood Town Council

A Meeting of Chartist Bridge Multi Agency Group Meeting is now called for 10.30 am. Friday 30th. September

10. To Receive the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting held on 18th. July 2022

The Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee were *received and agreed*

It was noted a Grant of £500 to Blackwood Cricket Club had been *agreed*

11. To Agree New Application Form for Financial Assistance

Having had prior opportunity to peruse the New Application Form it was *agreed* it be accepted and implemented

12. To Agree levels of payment for Travel Costs/ Overnight Subsistence/ Financial Loss Compensation

Arising from discussion and deliberation at the Policy & Finance Committee it was *agreed* to recommend the following to Town Council -

Travelling expenses – To apply the HMRC mileage allowance of 45p per mile on approved duties outside the Caerphilly County Borough boundary or actual costs of public transport (2nd. Class rail fare).

Subsistence - For approved duties that requires an overnight stay an allowance of up £28 per 24 hour period allowance for meals incl. breakfast where not provided, with receipts required as proof

Financial Loss - For approved duties financial loss compensation of £10 per hour can be claimed where such loss can be proved to have occurred

The recommendations were *agreed*

13. To Agree and implement the following Policies -

Members of the Public Speaking Protocol for Council Meetings

Data Protection Notice

Freedom of Information Publication Scheme

Social Media Policy

Bio-Diversity Statement

Town Council Complaints Procedure

Having had prior opportunity to peruse these Policies it was *agreed* they be accepted and implemented

13a. To Receive the Minutes of the Events Committee Meetings held on 8th August & 24th August 2022

The Minutes of both Events Committees were *received and agreed*

14. Co-option to fill Vacancy – Cefn Fforest East Ward

The Clerk reported that No Election was called for and we are now able to co-opt

However with the recent resignation of Cllr. Steve Brookman, members considered whether to advertise this vacancy giving residents the opportunity to call for an election, and if no election is called to then advertise both co-options and interview together.

After some discussion this was *agreed*

15. Energy Crisis – Possible Warm/Heat Banks in Public Buildings

Prompted by Cllr D Box, the following was forwarded to the Leader & Chief Executive of CCBC

Good morning both, I trust all is well with you ?

Given the current situation regarding the rocketing energy costs and with things predicted to get even worse, some of my members have asked me to enquire whether Caerphilly County Borough Council are considering the possible provision of Warm/ Heat banks in public owned buildings throughout the Borough. The Library/ Blackwood Miners Institute/ Pontllanfraith & Bedwellty Leisure Centres are probably relevant in our area, but there might also be opportunities to work with local churches/ community centres /rugby clubs and other organisations with facilities to provide residents the opportunity to attend during the day to keep warm rather than heating their own individual homes.

The Borough Council rallied around to help the community during the coronavirus pandemic and this is surely another instance when we will be looking to the Borough to assist, however it can, during another crisis for our residents.

Look forward to hearing from you

Regards

John Clerk to Blackwood Town Council

Having received information that Team Caerphilly were to hold a number of Cost of Living Roadshows across the Borough I followed up with the following -

Good morning all,

As welcome as the proposed Cost of Living Roadshows are, is/has any consideration been given to Town Councils suggestion of Warm/ Heat banks throughout the Borough, as per email dated 29th. August. Surely this would be a relatively easy, cost effective and practical way of assisting our residents during the winter months ahead of us.

We have received the following response

Hi John

Hope you are keeping well. Thanks for your e mail and Christina has asked me to respond as I'm currently the officer lead around the cost of living crisis.

The authority is looking at a whole range of options in terms how we can assist people within the borough through what is going to be a very difficult winter period. Through engagement with staff and members we now have a whole range of options being considered and these will need to be prioritised. Warm banks have figured significantly in the responses we've received to date and while we will initially be looking at council owned buildings we'll also be reaching out to voluntary orgs, community groups and the community

to identify other suitable venues. We are also considering what other services we could co-locate in the warm banks to further support to people in need.

Our initial proposals will be put before Cabinet Members on the 13/9 and we'll then be moving quickly to implementation.

If you or your Town Council colleagues have any further suggestions on how we can assist people I'll be delighted to receive them.

Many Thanks

Dave Street Corporate Director Social Services & Housing

After much discussion it was **agreed** to revisit this issue once the Governments Announcement on Fuel Assistance and the Cabinet have decided on their response. Members were supportive in principle of the proposals put forward to the Borough but did question whether churches were the most energy efficient buildings and were asked to contact the Clerk with any suggestions

16. Civic Awards - Potential Awards Evening & Nominations

The Clerk reported that it was usual this time of year to seek nominations in respect of our Civic Awards Scheme, and to also organise an Awards Evening at the Blackwood Miners Institute to present same.

Whilst he suggested Nominations could still be sought, he wondered given the fact that the Events Committee will likely be involved in the organisation of the Remembrance Day Services and the Christmas Activities might best be postponed until the new year.

Given that some of the newer members had little knowledge of the Civic Awards Scheme, after some discussion it was agreed to accept the Clerks suggestion to delay the Civic Awards Evening

17. Planning Applications

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

Case Ref. 22/0588/TPO

Location: Land At Grid Ref 317148 197924 The Fairways Blackwood

Proposal: Carry out various tree works (Tree Preservation Order 2/82/IBC)

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

Case Ref. 22/0608/TPO

Location: Green Acres 11 Lon Pennant Cwmgelli Blackwood NP12 1EL

Proposal: Thin crown of beech tree by 15%, including removing dead wood (Tree Preservation Order 2/82/IBC)

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

Case Ref. 22/0628/COU

Location: Land At Pencoed Fawr Farm Pencoed Fawr Farm Lane Bedwellty Blackwood NP12 0BQ

Proposal: Change the use of barn to residential dwelling

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

Case Ref. 22/0646/FULL

Location: 107 Beaumaris Way Cefn Fforest Blackwood NP12 1DQ

Proposal: Erect double storey side and single storey rear extensions

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

Given none of the applications seemed contentious , it was *agreed* no objections be raised

17. Reports

Cllr. D Box informed members that unknown to the CHAMPS Group, to celebrate Samaritans Awareness Day, a walk had been organised, which co-incided with GCE results day across the Chartist Bridge , and that during the walk, someone was again talked down .

She stated she and the Group were disappointed not to have been consulted or invited, but she would be reporting this additional incident, together with a letter she had received (and circulated for members to read) at the next MAG reported earlier.

Cllr. K Williams who could update the Councils Web page/ Face book page.

After some discussion, it was agreed that Cllrs. George Edwards, Gerwyn James and Kirsty Williams be the persons nominated to update/ post on same.

Cllr. A Bradfield queried if any Ukrainian Refugees had been placed in Blackwood. The Clerk stated that he would ask the question of Caerphilly C.B.C.