

MINUTES OF THE BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 6TH. MARCH 2023

Present : Cllr. G Edwards (Mayor)

Cllrs. A Farina-Childs, D Davies, R Mills, D Box, K Williams, A Bradfield, K Jones & J Pearce
Cllr. K Etheridge attended remotely

Police Sgt. Gareth Wilkins

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Cllrs. C Erasmus, P Cook, C Clark, L Phillips & A Short

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations made at this point

3. Police Report

The Mayor welcomed Sgt. Gareth Wilkins to the meeting who passed on Chief Insp. Oliver Petty's apologies.

Sgt. G. Wilkins gave a brief update on matters affecting the town. He was pleased to report that ASB and crime generally was down on last years figures, but did acknowledge various issues in and around Blackwood & Cefn Fforest over the last 3/4 weeks had been worrying with several dispersal orders issued and arrests made.

Cllr. A Farina-Childs reported that the Blackwood Comprehensive School facility had been closed due to a number of incidents and queried whether it was the same crowd responsible. Sgt. Wilkins thought that was a fair assumption, and understood the facility was to re-open on Wednesday, with several interviews planned for tomorrow regarding associated offences. Cllr. Farina-Childs stated residents were continually ringing 101 to report the issues and had queried if private patrols could be considered, if police didn't have adequate resources. Sgt. Wilkins responded by stating he appreciated the frustration with the 101 system and that it was apparently under review. Furthermore he informed members 4 new CSO's would be in post from end of March and hoped that might assist policing to become more proactive rather than reactive.

The Sgt. briefly identified the problems regarding vandalism of the car parking machines and the playground area at Woodfieldside.

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

4. County Borough Report

Cllr. A Farina- Childs reported briefly on the following -

Proposed 7.9% Council Tax increase by CCBC

Warm Hubs operational at Libanus/ HCT/ Blackwood Cricket Club/ Cefn Glas & Moose Hall

Litter Bins Facility set alight

Delay at Taylor Wimpey Site

Still nothing regarding the proposed Persimmon Development

5. Mayoral Announcements

The Mayor reported briefly on the Spring Fair held in the High Street on Saturday 4th. March.

It had proved very successful with more than 8,000 people in town on the day some 3,000 more than the previous Saturday and with a peak attendance of approx 1,200.

The Mayor stated he had been on site the whole day and had taken the opportunity to walk the High Street and gauge the views of stallholders and the public, and feedback had been very positive, with many stalls sold out part way through the afternoon, having exceeded their expectations.

He had personally thanked Stacy, Sarah –Kate and the rest of the team for their hard work and proposed the Clerk formally thank them on behalf of Town Council. This was ***unanimously agreed.***

6. Correspondence

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

Caerphilly C.B.C.

Football figures (forwarded to members)

News Online (forwarded to members)

Notification from Events Team that they will not be involved in organisation of any Coronation events

Minutes of Chartist Bridge M.A.G. Meeting held 27th. Jan. 2023

Request for interest in proposed Training Session on Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence – 5 members responded showing an interest. Now awaiting date of session

Information regarding ticket machines in car parks

<i>One Voice Wales</i>	Request completion of Section 6 – Biodiversity& Resilience of Eco Systems Duty
	Request for Nominations for King’s New Year Honours List
	Request to undertake Training Needs Survey
	Membership Renewal £1,426
<i>Zurich Insurance</i>	Renewal Quote 3 Year Agreement @ £1,351.61 1 Year Standard @ £1,486.91
<i>Police – Oliver Petty</i>	Details of Revised Caerphilly Central Police Catch Up Feb. 26th
<i>Welsh Blood Service</i>	Request to advertise information on blood clinic sessions
<i>Ogi</i>	Information promised at last meeting (forwarded to members)
<i>Rhiannon Thomas</i>	Request on behalf of Cefn Fforest PTA for grant funding planned Coronation Celebrations - Application form forwarded
<i>Thanks for 20</i>	Notification that 20mph has been set as the default speed limit in cities, towns & villages in Wales from 17 th . September 2023 with exceptions at 30mph being set by the local Highways Authority
<i>Cllr. Louise Phillips</i>	Apologies for meeting plus resignation from Town Council
<i>Cllr. D Davies</i>	Notification of Resignation as Governor at Cefn Fforest Primary School

In respect of One Voice Wales Membership renewal in the sum of £1,426 this was ***agreed*** by members

In respect of Zurich Insurance Renewal, the Clerk reported that he had requested a revised quote to include the new Mayoral Chain of Office (£5,000) but given the originally quoted £1,351.61 for 3 Year Agreement was less than a 1% increase on the current years premium, members ***agreed*** to renewing with Zurich.

It was, however, considered appropriate to obtain quotes from other Insurance Companies over the next twelve months.

7. Schedule of Payments

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

		£. p.
John Hold	Feb. Sals & Reimbursements	1,045.30
Katherine Watkins	Feb. Fee	20.00
HMRC	Feb. Tax/N.I.	318.27
HCT Blackwood	Financial Assistance	550.00
Thomas Fattorini	Mayoral Chain – final payment (includes £952.75 VAT)	2,866.49

8. To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 6th. February 2023

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

9. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

10. Applications for Financial Assistance

The Clerk presented the following two applications –

Cllrs. A Farina-Childs & K Williams declared their interest as Governors at Blackwood Comprehensive and took no part in the discussion or decision making in respect of same

Blackwood Comprehensive School Eco Club

The School has an Eco Club and request funding for litter picking equipment. The school's Engagement Officer has arranged to work with the Trussell Trust, Keep Wales Tidy & Neighbourly to help benefit students and their families in the local community.

Would improve the environment and local area and helps the students have a purpose, learn further about the Environment and how we can help improve our Planet. This is seen as a mindfulness activity, improving physical and mental health.

	£. p
8 litter pickers	- £24.99
3 High Vis Kits	£93.57
3 bin picking kits	£95.85
Total	£214.41

H.O.P.E. (Helping Open Peoples Eyes)

Community Interest Company – Not for Profit which help the homeless and vulnerable families in Caerphilly.

Currently operating a food bank from home address (20 Davies Street, Cefn Fforest) and contactable 24/7. They have support from Morrison's in Caerphilly with fruit and vegetables, but can't cope with the demand and therefore looking to buy more food.

Total Project cost £700 – Amount sought from Town council £500

After some deliberation and discussion, it was *agreed* that a Grant of £214.41 be made to Blackwood Comprehensive School Eco Club

In respect of H.O.P.E., it was agreed Mr. Ian Smith be invited to make a presentation in support of the application to a meeting of the Policy & Finance Committee to be called over the next two weeks. Cllr. K Williams suggested Mr. Vik Yadh (Comic Con) be invited to the same meeting to make a presentation in support of the application in respect of proposed Blackwood Library Project. This was agreed.

11. 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 Wales Audit Office by 30th . June

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

12. 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

13. 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

14. *Independent Remuneration for Wales – Annual Report 2023/2024*

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

15. *Notice of Vacancy - Cefn Fforest East Ward following Cllr. Gerwyn James resignation*

The Clerk reported that following Cllr. Gerwyn James resignation, A Notice of Vacancy must now be posted, and if notice in writing is given to the Returning Officer by ten Local Govt. Electors from the Ward an Election will be held to fill said vacancy. If no such notice is received within 14 days of the posting then this can then be filled by Co-option.

Given the subsequent resignation of Cllr. Louise Phillips from the same Ward the Clerk proposed both vacancies be advertised together and that the required Notice will now be posted immediately onto our Web Page and Notice Board, and that we now wait until Friday 24th. March 2023 to see if an Election to fill the final vacancies on Town Council is called or whether we can fill by Co-option.

This was unanimously *agreed*

16. *To Consider Possible Options for Coronation Celebrations - Sat/Sun/Mon 6/7/8th May 2023*

The Clerk reported that he had received notification from the Caerphilly C.B.C. Events Team stating they would not be involved in organising/ assisting any Coronation Celebrations throughout the Borough, and that if anything were planned for the High Street, we would have total responsibility for applying, managing and manning any road closures required etc. (Anticipated costs given previous quotations given in respect of Beach Party £3,500 - £4,000)

After much deliberation and discussion, members considered any large scale event in town would be difficult and costly to organise, whilst also appreciating that various Clubs & Organisations, and not forgetting individual streets/estates were also likely to be organising their own celebrations over the weekend. It was, however, *agreed* to organise the erection of bunting on the High Street as per the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Celebrations last year. Furthermore if approaches were received from Schools and Organisations for financial assistance towards any planned organised event each would be considered on their merits.

17. *Planning Applications*

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

Case Ref. 23/0040/RET

Location: Blackwood Service Station 275 High Street Blackwood NP12 1AW

Proposal: Retain installation of modular self-service laundrette facility and associated works

Case Officer: Joe Simmons (07874 641751 : simmoj1@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Case Ref. 23/0108/HH

Location: 62 Beaumaris Way Cefn Fforest Blackwood NP12 1DE

Proposal: Erect single storey rear extension and convert garage

Case Officer: Joe Simmons (07874 641751 : simmoj1@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Case Ref. 23/0062/COU

Location: 195 - 197 High Street Blackwood NP12 1AA

Proposal: Change the use from A1 to Sui Generis for restaurant and takeaway

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

Case Ref. 23/0088/TPO

Location: Land At Vision House High Street Blackwood NP12 1BE

Proposal: Carry out various tree works

Case Officer: Joe Simmons (07874 641751 : simmoj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 23/0139/CLPU

Location: 8 Pentwyn Avenue Blackwood NP12 1HS

Proposal: To obtain a Lawful Development Certificate for proposed removal of existing conservatory and erection of single storey rear extension

Case Officer: Abbie-Jane Stokes (07907 574195 : stokea@caerphilly.gov.uk

After some discussion members ***agreed*** the applications did not seem contentious and no objections be raised

18. Reports

Cllr. A Farina-Childs informed the meeting he was now raising funds for Blackwood Air Cadets – 277 Squadron, and that a Quiz Night was being organised at Blackwood Bowls Club on 17th. March, 7.30pm start all members invited.

The Mayor reported that he intended to contact Jo Hillier-Raikes, C.C.B.C. Principal Officer Town Centre & Business Support regarding the number of empty shops on the High Street and in the Precinct to try to ascertain what is being done to attract new businesses