

**MINUTES OF THE POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON
20TH. SEPTEMBER 2023**

Present : Cllr. G Edwards - Etheridge(Mayor)
Cllr.R Mills (Deputy Mayor)
Cllrs. K Etheridge, K Williams, C Erasmus & D Box

1. To Appoint a Chair of the Committee

It was proposed, seconded and unanimously agreed Cllr. K Williams continue as Chair of the Committee

2. Apologies for Absence

The Clerk reported that he had received a resignation e mail from Cllr. N Nyle, and so obviously would not be in attendance

3. Declarations of Interest

Cllr. G Edwards Etheridge & Cllr. K Etheridge declared an interest in the item relating to Toilets in Town

4. To Receive the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting held on 20th. March 2023

The Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 20th. March 2023 was received and agreed as a true record

5. Matters arising

There were no matters arising

6. To Receive Applications for Financial Assistance & Consider same

The Clerk reported that after reporting back to Blackwood Bowls Club regarding their initial application in respect of funding towards recycling bins and issues that members had raised, he queried whether there might be any other one off project/ scheme that might be more appropriate for consideration.

It was identified that 2024 marks the 120th. Anniversary of the Club and that the Club were looking to raise funds via sponsorship for new Commemorative kit to mark this milestone. Details had been recently received which identified that the following sponsorship packages are available -

£100 Basic - Corporate logo added to all social media updates, advert included in annual membership handbook and awards night programme, invite to annual corporate day at club.

£200 Advanced - As above (basic) plus corporate logo display on advertising board (2ft X 4ft) around bowling green for full season.

£400 Premium - As above (basic and advanced) plus corporate logo displayed on new commemorative kit for our 120th season.

After some discussion, when members voiced their support for this organisation, and recognising had not requested funding over many, many years **agreed to recommend** to Town Council to support a £400 Premium Sponsorship Package

7. Proposed Programme of Work deferred from Town Council -

(a) Model Standing Orders

(b) Model Financial Regulations

(c) Draft Annual Report *

(d) Possible Town Council Office in Blackwood *

(e) Tablets/ Laptops for Members *

(f) Toilet Provision in town*

The Clerk presented extracts from minutes of various minutes which identified various issues that had been deferred to this Committee for discussion, prior to recommending outcomes/ possible solutions to Town Council.

He had attempted to prioritise the ones that should perhaps be given more immediate priority and ones that whilst arguably equally as important could potentially take more Committee time (Model Standing Orders / Financial Regulations) and we did at least have a form of these already in existence.

Cllr. K Williams, Chair, thanked the Clerk for his report, and acknowledged this year had been difficult for a number of reasons, but recommended that this Committee should convene on a regular monthly basis perhaps either a week or two before or after scheduled Town Council meetings. This was fully supported by members.

The Chair then offered to devise a more detailed proposed work programme for the remainder of the year.

Cllr. K Etheridge raised the issue of the very high level of balances held by Town Council and the fact these would be scrutinised by Audit.

Cllr. R Mills reminded members these balances have realistically existed since COVID with the decimation of our planned Events Programmes.

The Clerk confirmed that of the approx £193k current balances, approx £70k was CIL monies, approx £23k earmarked for new Christmas Lights with £15k agreed as a reasonable working balance, leaving some approx £75k for projects or support of precept (With the planned purchase of laptops etc / flag poles this is nearer £65k)

It was, however, **agreed** by members that our balances should be examined by this Committee with a view to recommending to Town Council how these be best allocated for the benefit of our residents including the CIL monies (which is time sensitive)

After some further general discussion it was also agreed this Committee take responsibility to review the Training Plan and ensure all members attend accepted core training sessions.

Turning to each of the above identified priorities in turn, it was formally agreed to defer items (a) & (b) until the remainder had been given due consideration by this Committee.

(c) Draft Annual Report

The Clerk reminded members the Report had been presented to members at the AGM on 31st. May 2023 stating that members needed to identify their priorities for 2023/2024.

Following various discussions culminating in this meetings agenda, he proposed members might wish to consider the following -

Priorities identified for 2023/24

Town Council will look to organise/deliver first class events that can be enjoyed by our residents and the wider community, whilst also looking to benefit the local businesses by increasing footfall in town.

To continue working with the Borough Council, police and other agencies to improve the anti social behaviour in and around town that is causing distress to many and significantly affecting the well being of residents, businesses and visitors alike.

To continue working with the Blackwood Branch of the Royal British Legion to ensure the Remembrance Day Services at the War Memorial at Blackwood maintains the 2022 standard and improves further where possible in the future as we remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Erection of flag poles on the site as an additional improvement.

Town Council will look to provide tablets/ laptops to members to ensure we are not likely to be in breach of data protection rules with members using personal email addresses and devices for receiving and sending Town Council business documents.

Town Council will look to explore the possibility of Town Council Offices in Blackwood, as a way of highlighting the presence and work of Town Council to our residents

Town Council will look to explore all options available in an effort to ensure public toilet facilities are available in Town for residents and visitors alike

After some discussion, it was ***agreed to recommend*** these priorities to Town Council for the current year 2023/24

(d) Possible Town Council Offices in Blackwood

Members were still eager to progress this, but could only do so when suitable premises become available at a realistic rental. Previous Café premises had become available on the High Street, but were discounted as not being suitable to meet our requirements.

It was agreed the situation be kept under constant review, and the Mayor offered to keep watch on potentially suitable properties becoming available on the market, and liaise with the Clerk to report these to members ASAP for their deliberation.

Members **agreed** this course of action accepting speed would be of the essence in viewing and reporting same

(e) Tablets/ Laptops for members

The Chair asked the Mayor for an update as he had assumed responsibility for this item at Town Council meeting held on 12th. June 2023.

The Mayor reported that he and the Clerk had made enquiries with the Clerk at Bargoed Town Council who had gone through much the same process and for the same reasons, and had ultimately purchased via Currys. Having spoken to Currys they have quoted £6,021.93 incl.VAT for 17 devices in total (4 laptops & 13 Tablets)

After some discussion, and taking into consideration the urgency of the issue and following work undertaken by a neighbouring Town Council, it was **agreed to recommend suspension of Standing Orders** and place an order with Currys for the required equipment as outlined above. Given the next Town Council meeting is not scheduled until October 16th. it was **further agreed** the Clerk contact other members immediately following this meeting seeking their support for the recommendation and once a majority has responded, the order be placed.

Members also **agreed and acknowledged** the tablets/ laptops remained the property of Blackwood Town Council and would need to be handed back when a member loses or resigns their position on Council.

(g) Toilet Provision in Town

Having declared an Interest in this item, Cllr K Etheridge left the meeting at this point. Cllr. G Edwards Etheridge having received Special Dispensation remained to answer any questions from members, but took no part in discussion or decision making.

The Clerk queried whether the existing lease issue had been resolved between Caerphilly Taxi Drivers Association and C.C.B.C. but was informed it was still ongoing.

Members referred to the discussion at last Town Council regarding the closure of the waiting room due in the main to the ongoing anti social behaviour issues at the site, and discussed possible solutions. After some interesting discussion it was **agreed** that perhaps Town Council should try and take the lead and explore the potential costs of Shutting the Bus Station at night with Shutters, a solution apparently employed elsewhere in South Wales.

Cllr. R Mills **agree** to try and source three quotes for the works whilst also trying to ascertain whether any funding might be available via Policing Funds to tackle ASB.

The Clerk suggested that perhaps this initiative might fall under the criteria of Community Infrastructure Levy Funds and **agreed** to make initial contact with Lisa James, Principal Planner at Caerphilly C.B.C. to seek clarification.