

DRAFT

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

**Present :** Cllr. G Edwards Etheridge ( Mayor )  
Cllr. R Mills ( Deputy Mayor )  
Cllrs. K Williams, D Box, K Jones, A Farina-Childs, N Dix, K Etheridge & C Clark

Albeit Cllr.D Davies had tendered his apologies to the Clerk he did attend the meeting late, arriving whilst discussing Item 5 on the Agenda

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for Absence were received from Cllrs. D Davies , C Erasmus, M Gwynne & A Short

**2. Declarations of Interest**

No Declarations were made at this point

**3. Members Conduct**

The Mayor reminded members of the following protocol to ensure smooth running of meetings, namely -

Standing to Speak - When a member speaks at Full Council they must stand and address the meeting through the Chairman. If more than one member stands the Chairman will ask one to speak, and the others must sit. Other members must remain seated whilst a member is speaking unless they wish to make a Point of Order or a point of personal explanation

Chairman Standing – Where the Chairman stands during a debate, any member speaking at the time must stop and sit down. The meeting must be silent.

Member not to be heard further – If in the opinion of the Chairman a member persistently disregards the ruling of the Chairman by behaving improperly or offensively or deliberately obstructs business the Chairman may move that the member be not heard further. If seconded, the motion will be voted on without discussion.

Member to leave the Meeting – In the event of behaviour by a member of whatever nature which the Chairman considers prevents the meeting being properly conducted the Chairman may require that member to leave the meeting.

General Disturbance – If there is a general disturbance making orderly business impossible the Chairman may adjourn the meeting for as long as he/she thinks necessary or the meeting may be cancelled.

**4. Police Report**

There were no police in attendance

## 5. *County Borough Report*

Little to report, other than Anti social behaviour is still an ongoing problem.

Cllr. C Clark queried if there was likely to be any further discussion/amendment on currently designated 20 mph roads in the area. County Members responded that they were unaware of any such discussions.

## 6. *Mayoral Announcements*

The Mayor reminded members of his Charity Concert being held on 22<sup>nd</sup>. November at Blackwood Miners Institute and also reported that all arrangements for the Remembrance Services had been finalised, albeit given the weather forecast was looking to make some contingency plans for gazebo cover for Markham Band and Mynyddislwyn Choir organist. It was also hoped the Moose Hall would be open for the public to wait prior to Service.

## 7. *Correspondence*

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

### ***Caerphilly C.B.C.***

Football figures – forwarded to members

Closure of Albion Terrace between no's.6 - 14 ( approx 57 metres ) on 6<sup>th</sup>. November 9.00 -17.00 hours – forwarded to members

Notification of Chartist Bridge MAG Meeting Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup>. November 12 noon via Teams Meeting together with Agenda & Minutes of last meeting

Notification of Comm. Councils Liaison Sub C'ttee Meeting 6pm. Monday 20<sup>th</sup>. November

Blackwood Town Centre Audit as at October 2023 – forwarded to members for their information

### ***One Voice Wales***

Review of Democratic Health in the Community & Town Council Sector Views/ questionnaire requested by 27<sup>th</sup>. November – forwarded to members

Notification of Training opportunities – forwarded to members

### ***Ogi***

Notification of Community Engagement/ Information Event - Market Square Friday 3<sup>rd</sup>. November 12.00 – 3.00pm

**Remuneration Panel for Wales** Notification of guidance received from HMRC, regarding the treatment of tax on councillor allowances – both the £156 payment & £52 payment( working from home & consumables ) are now exempt from tax .  
Letters to individual members from Clerk to follow shortly

## 8. *Schedule of Payments*

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

		<b>£. p.</b>
J Hold	October Salary & Reimbursements	1,131.68
HMRC	October Tax/NI	318.27
Playworks	October Fee	20.00
K & R Print	Remembrance Service – Printing	368.00

## 9. *To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup>.October 2023*

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

## 10. *Matters Arising*

Cllr. C Clark reported that having visited the HSBC pop up Branch at the Blackwood Library she can confirm there is no provision for cash deposits or withdrawals, but would advise on any other banking queries including assistance in completion of any paperwork.

## 11. *To Receive the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup>. October 2023*

It was **resolved** the minutes be received

Cllr. K Williams, Chair of the Committee, proposed the following recommendations on behalf of the Committee, namely -

### ( a ) *Recommendation of £500 Grant to Wales Air Ambulance*

The Mayor declared an Interest in this matter ( this being his chosen Charity ) and took no part in the discussion or decision making.

It was **unanimously agreed** to accept the recommendation and donate £500 to Wales Air Ambulance

**( b) Recommendation that Town Council agrees in principle to the proposed Medium Term Budget Strategy which identifies an increase of approx. 10% year on year over the next 4/5 years to full finance current spending priorities and agreed Office Accommodation. Actual Precept decision for 2024/25 to be taken in January/ February 2024**

Much discussion took place on this recommendation, with Cllrs. N Dix & A Farina-Childs firmly against any such rise in the precept querying potential use of balances/ reserves to offset any increase next year. Other members stated they thought this to be a short sighted approach, given the existing precept is already supported by the use of balances/ reserves, and the provision of office accommodation could only proceed with a planned approach as outlined in the Medium Term Budget Strategy or a significantly higher charge on the precept next year.

Cllr. R Mills reminded members that the recommendation as it stands only takes into account the costs of the office accommodation, and not additional hours/ staffing to ensure it is available to the public for 4/5 days a week.

The Mayor highlighted the current precept levels in some of our neighbouring town/ community councils and the fact we hadn't increased our precept since 2017/2018 and stated that if we were serious about improving not only our visibility in the town, but also services to the public, then realistically there was no real alternative other than to plan responsibly.

The Clerk pointed out that the 10% increase amounted to £2 per annum on Band D tax payers, however, Cllrs.N Dix & D Davies felt the Clerk should not be offering his opinion on the matter whilst other members supported the view he was advising members of actual cost of the potential decision.

After some further discussion, it was agreed the vote be taken. Cllr. A Farina- Childs asked for a recorded vote and this was agreed. The vote was as follows –

Agreeing the recommendation as outlined above –

**FOR** Cllrs. C Clark, K Jones, R Mills, K Williams, K Etheridge, D Box & G Edwards Etheridge

**AGAINST** Cllrs. N Dix & A Farina-Childs

**ABSTAINED** Cllr. D Davies

**( c) Recommendation to earmark a sum of £30k from available CIL monies towards purchase of necessary furniture/ equipment / internal adaptations etc to make Office Accommodation fit for purpose.( CCBC will require sight of all invoices set against CIL )**

The Clerk/ Mayor confirmed that the CIL monies could be used for the purposes outlined, and that the amount of £30k was merely an estimate at this point, and a detailed breakdown would be identified and monitored by Policy & Finance Committee. Some members queried whether the furniture purchased by Town Council at the Miners' Institute would be used within the Offices and the Clerk confirmed he had made contact and requested same.

After some further discussion it was **unanimously agreed** to accept the recommendation and earmark £30k from CIL monies for necessary furniture/equipment/internal adaptations

- ( d) ***Recommendation to earmark a sum of £30k from available CIL monies towards purchase/ installation of roller shutters on each bay at Blackwood Bus Station to assist in deterring anti social behaviour ( CCBC will require sight of all invoices set against CIL )***

The Clerk/Mayor confirmed that the CIL monies could be used for the purpose outlined, and that Caerphilly C.B.C. had been formally approached for their agreement to the proposal. Initial responses queried our statement regarding ongoing anti social behaviour problems and responsibility for opening and closing of the shutters at 6.00am.& midnight to cover first service and last departure. We had in turn requested consideration be given to C.C.B.C. doing as Bridgend C.C. in closing the site early evening and installing an external bus stop for all services after say 7.00pm.

During the discussion that followed members expressed their concerns regarding safety of anyone closing the Bus Station late at night, but ***unanimously agreed*** to accept the recommendation and earmark £30k from CIL monies for the installation of roller shutters on each bay at the Bus Station n the proviso the Borough accede to our requests.

#### ***12. Budget Monitoring Report to 30<sup>th</sup>. September 2023***

The Clerk presented his Budget Monitoring report for period ended 30<sup>th</sup>. September which was accepted by members.

#### ***13. Notices of Vacancies – Blackwood North Ward/ Cefn Fforest East Ward/ Blackwood South Ward***

The Clerk reported that whilst the Notice had been placed on the Notice Board for the required duration, it appears that problems had been encountered with the website, which means it hadn't been available for the requisite period on line.

He had contacted Dave Beecham earlier today, the actual closing date, to see if there had been any Call for Election in either of the Wards but had been unsuccessful in making contact.

He suggested he seek further advice and if necessary a new Notice be posted both on the Noticeboard and online, to ensure we meet our legal responsibilities.

Members ***agreed*** with the proposed course of action.

#### ***14. Remembrance Services Arrangements***

The Mayor had already updated members in his Mayoral announcements

### ***15. Verbal Report on Planned Christmas Events***

The Clerk reported that the majority of performers had confirmed their attendance for Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> November and that he would forward details of the Timetable to all members as soon as it was finalised.

The Mayor apologised that he was unable to attend due to a prior important commitment, and had asked the Deputy to assist in the Switch On of the Christmas Lights.

Similarly, full details of the Lantern Parade/ Carol Concert would be forwarded to members and asking members to assist whenever possible at both events.

Cllr. R Mills requested we purchase new hi viz vests for these events, and members were in full agreement

### ***16. Verbal Update on Town Council Office Accommodation in Town***

The Mayor gave a brief update on the Town Council Office Accommodation. Following the last meeting the Owner/ Agent had been approached regarding Fire Risk Assessment/ Legionella certificate and review of Electrics together with possible Surveyors report, and these were being followed through. He also reported that in conjunction with the Clerk an independent electrical check was also being undertaken to safeguard Town Council.

A 2 year break clause was being negotiated in the lease, together with other breaks in line with Town Council election periods.

Members appreciated the update, and would now await the outcome of the various checks/ reports

### ***17. Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Annual Report – Comments by 8<sup>th</sup>. December***

The Clerk presented the report which outlined the Mandatory & Optional Payments for Town & Community Councils, reminding members that actual decisions regarding payment of same would be taken nearer budget setting.

The Panel continues to mandate payments for the extra costs of working from home and payments for office consumables.

There is no change to the Determination made last year.

#### ***Mandatory payments: Determination 6***

##### ***Payment for extra costs of working from home***

All councils must pay their members £156 a year (equivalent to £3 a week) towards the extra household expenses (including heating, lighting, power and broadband) of working from home.

##### ***Set payment for consumables***

Councils must either pay their members £52 a year for the cost of office consumables required to carry out their role, or alternatively councils must enable members to claim full reimbursement for the cost of their office consumables.

It is a matter for each council to make and record a policy decision in respect of when and how the payments are made and whether they are paid monthly, yearly or otherwise.

The policy should also state whether and how to recover any payments made to a member who leaves or changes their role during the financial year.

**Compensation for financial loss: Determination 7**  
**Compensation for financial loss is an optional payment.**

The amount for financial loss was not increased last year.

Previously, the Panel determined that an appropriate level of payment should be set at the daily rate of ASHE.

To maintain this link, the figures for 2024 are now proposed as £119.62 for a full day and £59.81 for a half day.

**Reporting requirements: Determination 8**

Community and Town Councils are required to submit an annual statement of payments to the Panel by the 30 September each year, and also publish this on their website. The Panel have provided a template return for clerks to use.

The Panel have discussed and considered changing the requirements for Community and Town Councils when submitting their statement of payment returns.

The Panel's aim is to simplify administration and encourage Councils to ensure all mandatory payments are made to individual members.

The Panel proposes that from September 2024, the returns need only show the total amounts paid in respect of the mandatory payments mentioned above. That is the £156 contribution to the costs of working from home and the £52 set rate consumables allowance and the travel and subsistence expenses paid.

This brings these in line with the reporting of the costs of care and personal assistance allowances.

**Reimbursement for time spent on CTC matters      £156 mandatory for all members.**

All councils must pay their members £156 a year (equivalent to £3 a week) towards the extra household expenses (including heating, lighting, power and broadband) of working from home

**Reimbursement for office consumables whilst working from home £52 mandatory for all members.**

All councils must pay their members £52 a year (equivalent to £1 a week) towards the cost of office consumables whilst working home

<b>Senior role payment</b>	Optional up to 3 members
<b>Mayor or Chair of Council</b>	Optional: up to a maximum of £1,500
<b>Deputy Mayor or Deputy Chair of Council</b>	Optional: up to a maximum of £500
<b>Attendance allowance</b>	Optional
<b>Financial loss</b>	Optional
<b>Travel and subsistence</b>	Optional
<b>Costs of care</b>	Mandatory

After some discussion, it was **agreed** that no comments be offered on the Annual Report, and that required decisions be taken at budget setting time in January/ February 2024

### ***18. Boundary Commission for Wales - Review of Community Arrangements of the County Borough of Caerphilly***

The Clerk presented his Report which identified that changes had been proposed for the boundaries of 13 of Caerphilly's communities, with 9 Town/ Community Councils also seeing proposed changes to the number of Community Councillors. The Commission have proposed no changes to Blackwood.

After some discussion it was ***agreed*** the only comment to be made was to reiterate Town Council's view that the Cefn Fforest East Ward be renamed Blackwood West Ward to help avoid confusion.

### ***19. Planning Applications***

The Clerk reported none had been received relating to Blackwood Town Council area.

### ***20. Reports***

The Mayor informed members that he had been invited to speak at the Local Government Association Conference 24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> November in St. Neots, on the relationship between Principal Councils and Town / Community Councils and asked Town Council to consider this an approved duty to enable claiming of travel and subsistence costs.

After some discussion this was ***agreed*** by members.

### ***21. Date of December meeting***

The Clerk reported that he had received a request from Aberbargoed Ladies Choir via the Methodist Church for Town Council to agree use of Church for their Christmas Concert. Having consulted with Mayor, it was agreed to re-arrange our December meeting.

After some discussion members ***agreed*** to cancel the December meeting, but with the proviso that if any important issues arise, the Clerk & Mayor give consideration to calling a Special Meeting.