

DRAFT

MINUTES OF THE BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD 8TH. APRIL 2024

Present : Cllr. G Edwards Etheridge (Mayor)

Cllr. R Mills (Deputy Mayor)

Cllrs. K Etheridge N Dix, A Farina-Childs, C Pearce, C Erasmus, P Cook, A Short, K Jones & P Cook

Cllrs. D Box & K Williams (until 6.50pm) attended remotely via Microsoft Teams

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Cllr. M Gwynne

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this point

3. Police Report

The Clerk read a Report that had been forwarded by the new PCSO for the area, Tariq Chaudrey , who unfortunately had a prior commitment and was unable to attend.

Shoplifting is a major issue, with several incidents reported at Aldi, B&M and ASDA. Several arrests have been made, and with the use of CCTV images others have been identified with a view to arrest.

Anti Social behaviour has again been a problem with patrols visiting fast food outlets in town, with arrests made for assault and police and public order offences.

The Bus Station & Market Square has seen several incidents with large numbers congregating and loitering with a few riding electric scooters and push bikes in between the buses. These have again been captured by CCTV and police are in the process of identifying same. More graffiti has appeared in the Bus Station which are offensive and have a racial context to them.

This increase in ASB is in part due to the half term holidays and has also coincided with the opening of the Talking Shop in the Market Place, which has attracted 50/60 young people who visit the project. In conjunction with the project lead Jordan Forse it is planned to hold a regular Police Surgery there in order to educate the young people about their behaviour.

In an attempt to help tackle the problem it is also planned to undertake an operation with partner agencies during the next half term holidays in May.

It was also noted that a meeting with concerned residents was to be held at Croeso Square on 16th. April with reports of ASB, criminal damage and racial abuse.

Tariq also reported that he had introduced the mobile police station van to the Market Place, and had held his first surgery there on 3rd. April, where 20 visitors had attended. The next planned surgery will be 10.00am – 1.00pm on Wednesday 24th. April

4. County Borough Report

Members reported briefly on current issues -

Ongoing meetings with residents at Cwmgelli

An apparent Planning breach at William Street causing major problems for residents

Reports of fly tipping around the area, most recently near Plas Mawr

The POBL development at Coronation Road highlighting shared access issues

Several complaints from businesses in town regarding the further demands on segregation of waste recycling resulting in significant additional costs at the same time that the Business Support has reduced and many fearing for the future viability of their businesses

5. Mayoral Announcements

The Mayor reported that the kitchen furniture had been delivered and arrangements were in hand regarding fitting of same.

Furthermore, it was anticipated the office furniture will be delivered within the next week.

The Mayor also reported on his ongoing correspondence with CCBC Town Centre & Business Support Team regarding the number of empty shops in town and what they are trying to do to encourage new businesses and why the Borough cannot be more proactive in entering into discussion with the owners of the Market Place to improve the number of stalls and bring it back to the busy market it used to be a few years ago.

Several members voiced their similar concerns, and after some discussion it was agreed we write to CCBC seeking a meeting to discuss both the empty shops and the Market Place, whilst also requesting that consideration be given to designating at least two bays for parking just along from the bus station, opposite the bakers/cake shop

6. Correspondence

The Clerk reported on the following items of correspondence received since the last meeting and all were *noted* -

Barclay's Bank Confirmation letter from Alan March that their local site will be situated at Libanus Lifestyle Centre .

The Clerk had responded accordingly on behalf of Town Council

Audit Wales Audit Notice for 2023/24
Annual Return must be returned by 30th. June 2024
The Audit Notice must be published and posted on Noticeboard & website by 16th June for minimum of 14 calendar days and then make appropriate arrangements for the public to inspect the accounts and supporting documents for a total of 20 working days from 1st July to 26th July

Caerphilly C.B.C. Footfall figures (forwarded to members)

News Online (forwarded to members)

Reminder Blackwood Town Centre Stakeholder Meeting scheduled for 6.00pm on 13th. March (forwarded to members)

Notification of Temporary Closure of Chartist Bridge for Inspection purposes

One Voice Wales

Details of Training Courses available

Notification of next RCT/Merthyr/Caerphilly Area Committee meeting to be held at 7.00pm on Wednesday 24th. April via Teams

Notification of Deputy Clerk Vacancy at Tonyefail & District Community Council – will raise at next Policy & Finance Committee for consideration along with provisionally agreed Advertisement/ Job Description prior to placing our advertisement

Notification of National Award to Town Council – Commended for Devolution of Service or Asset Transfer

Invitation to Renew Membership for 2024/25
- £1,513 (£1,426 for 2023/24) an increase of 6.1%

Rodrigo Sanchez

Invitation to Cllr. K Etheridge & Mayor to attend Local Govt. Assoc. AGM, at Harrogate, 2nd - 4th July 2024i

Cllr Teresa Heron

Invitation to 80th. Anniversary D Day Landings

In respect of the Renewal of Membership to One Voice Wales for 2024/25 in the sum of £1,513 this was unanimously ***agreed.***

In respect of the invitation to the Mayor to attend the Local Government Assoc. A.G.M. at Harrogate, it was proposed by Cllr. R Mills, seconded by Cllr.C Clark and unanimously agreed that this be an Approved Duty, and the Mayor be entitled to claim 2 nights subsistence allowance (travelling with Cllr. K Etheridge the nominated Borough representative)

7. Schedule of Payments

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

		£. p
G Edwards Etheridge	Members Allowance	220.15
K Etheridge	“ “	226.00
A Farina-Childs	“ “	208.00
C Erasmus	“ “	208.00
C Clark	“ “	226.00
M Gwynne	“ “	172.00
D Davies	“ “	208.00
Blackwood Cricket Club	Financial Assistance	100.00
Blackwood Methodist Church	Room Hire	630.00
Howdens	Kitchen Units (incl. £541.00 VAT)	3,246.00
K G Williams	Members Allowance	208.00
D Box	“ “	208.00
A Short	“ “	208.00
N Dix	“ “	172.00
Wales Air Ambulance	Financial Assistance	500.00
Playworks	March Sals - Fee	20.00
HMRC	March Tax/ N.I.	341.65
John Hold	March Sals/ Reimbursement	1,102.29
Note Top Office Solutions	New Office Furniture (incl. £2,053.60)	12,321.60
K G Williams	Reimbursement DBS	18.00
Glassfibre Flagpoles	Flagpoles & Flags (Incl £281.05)	1,686.30
Woolleys Florist	Flowers	46.00
2024/25 Accounts		
Zurich Insurance	Renewal Premium	1,494.78
Bebb, Tasker & Sucksmith	Office Lease (incl. £160 VAT)	960.00
Woolleys Florist	Flowers	40.00

8. To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 4th March 2024

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

9. Matters Arising

The Clerk reported that Cllr. D Box’s contact details had been forwarded to Governor Support Unit who had in turn invited her to the next Governors meeting later this week.

10. To Receive the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Working Group Meeting held on 18th March 2024

It was *resolved* the minutes be received

11. Provisional Out- turn for Year Ended 31st. March 2024

The Clerk presented his provisional out turn report which projected a deficit of for the year

He explained he would present the final out-turn together with the Annual Return and Internal Audit Report to Policy & Finance Committee later this month, and then to the Annual General Meeting

12. Verbal Update on Office Accommodation

This had already been covered under the Mayors Report

13. 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 G Edwards Etheridge , A Short & R Mills)

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 or agreement Policy & Finance Committee

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 that budget monitoring reports should be accompanied by bank statements for members perusal.

Furthermore, it has also now been agreed that Policy & Finance Committee will meet regularly between Town Council meetings

Internal Auditor audits Accounts during May/Early June in readiness for Annual Return to be completed and forwarded to Audit Wales (current external auditors) by 30th. July

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

14. 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 currently 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.

Meetings of the Events Committee highlight any risk areas.

We are required to submit a Risk Assessment in respect of the Parades 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 as and when requested.

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

15. 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, Civic Regalia & Defibrillators 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 Internal Controls in place are considered adequate and proportional

16. Planning Application

The Clerk presented his Report which identified the Planning Applications received since the last meeting -

Case Ref. 24/0149/COU

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

Proposal: Change the use and convert detached garage to self-contained residential family use

Case Officer: Joe Simmons ☐ 01443 864428 ☐ simmoj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 24/0164/FULL

Location: Home Bargains Unit 6-7 Blackwood Gate Retail Park Blackwood NP12 2FS

Proposal: Install additional storage canopy

Case Officer: Joe Simmons ☐ 01443 864428 ☐ simmoj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 24/0191/FULL

Location: Land At Woodbine Road Blackwood

Proposal: Erect two storey property, consisting of 2no. ground floor & 1no. first floor commercial units and 1no. first floor flat

Case Officer: Joshua Burrows ☐ 01443 864427 ☐ burroj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 24/0204/COU

Location: 5A - 5D Cordani Buildings Gravel Lane Blackwood NP12 1AG

Proposal: Change the use of 4no.first floor office units into self contained residential units (flats)

Case Officer: Joshua Burrows ☐ 01443 864427 ☐ burroj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

After some discussion it was *agreed* no objections be raised.

17. Reports

The Clerk reported briefly on the Stakeholder Meeting held on 13th. March at the Blackwood Miners Institute, which had been quite well attended by Town Councillors & Business's alike.

Business's voiced their concerns that the added responsibility for segregation of waste recycling and associated costs, coupled with the reduction in Business Rate support was going to cause even more of a financial burden.

Footfall had been

18. Date of Annual General Meeting

The Clerk reminded members that the scheduled date for our next meeting, the AGM, was in fact a Bank Holiday and so it would now be held on Monday 13th. May.

It was hoped that if things go to plan we would meet at the new Offices, but that members would obviously be kept informed.