

MINUTES OF THE BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 14TH OCTOBER 2024

Present : Cllr R Mills (Mayor)

Cllrs. A Farina-Childs, K Etheridge, A Short, K Jones, P Cook, J Griffiths, D Davies & L Phillips

Also in Attendance Police Inspector Andrew Gibbs
Cllr. G Etheridge (Deputy Mayor) attended remotely

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Cllrs. C Erasmus, C Clark, D Box, N Dix, K Williams & M Gwynne

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this point

It was unanimously agreed that Item 11 be discussed next

3. To Receive the Minutes of the Co- option Interview Committee held 7th. October

The Mayor presented the Minutes, and it was ***unanimously agreed*** they be accepted, and that Louise Phillips be Co-opted to Town Council to serve on the Blackwood North Ward.

Cllr. Phillips duly signed the Acceptance of Office ,witnessed by the Clerk, and was formally welcomed back onto Town Council

4. Police Report

The Mayor welcomed Inspector Andy Gibbs to the meeting, who apologised for being slightly late. He stated he had considerable experience in the force, much locally and felt he was forthright but approachable and whose aim was to make the area a safer environment.

He informed members of current crime statistics for the local areas, which had showed a slight reduction over the past weeks, highlighting some 3 cases of ABH, 2 Criminal Damage and 4 Public Order Offences for Blackwood itself.

Shoplifting with 8 reported offences in the town was an ongoing issue, with B&M and Aldi now being targeted. Some of the individuals were known to the force and arrests made.

The Inspector cited there being issues of timely CCTV transference of information through to the Police and had tasked the control room to try and remedy same as a matter of priority.

With Christmas on the horizon, Operation Tinsel would again target the worst affected shops in and around town.

Vehicle crime, especially of high end keyless cars was a problem, as was lead theft especially currently in the Pontllanfraith & Newbridge areas.

Anti Social Behaviour continues to be a problem with 20+ calls for the week in question, with some 6/8 calls in respect of Blackwood.

With Halloween approaching a Dispersal Order will be implemented for the Bus Station area, with officer rest days being cancelled, and hourly evening patrols of the area planned.

Another issue of concern around the area is that of Dogs on leads, with several enquiries relating to XL bullies and similar. After the enquiries were followed up on, and the necessary paperwork was found to be in order, 4 owners had been cautioned for lesser offences.

Several members raised individual concerns on this issue citing numerous instances of dogs not on leads in and around the Showfield and Penyfan Pond.

The Inspector concluded his report by saying he hoped with the CSO's and P.C.'s working alongside each other we will see an improvement in these crime statistics in future months.

Furthermore, if members had any particular concerns/issues to contact him via email
Andrew.Gibbs@gwent.pnn.police.uk

The Mayor thanked the Inspector for his attendance and the Officer left the meeting

5. County Borough Report

Cllr. K Etheridge gave a brief update on the Blackwood Miners Institute stating that members had been informed that the matter was not to be discussed at Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet along with Llancaiach Fawr and Meals on Wheels Service and had been deferred to a future meeting.

The Clerk reported at this point that he had received notification from the Charity Commissioners that his FOI request for a copy of the correspondence between themselves and Caerphilly C.B.C.

(following Town Councils letter querying the Trustees not acting in the best interest of the Charity by looking to mothball to save money) had been denied, stating that on consideration it was not deemed to be in the public interest.

Cllr. A Farina-Childs reported on the following –

The Pobl development at Coronation Road – response still awaited regarding various grievances

The Cwmgelli development – the sewage issues had still not been resolved, and it could be a while before the site is fully occupied

Issues regarding Scooters and bikes around town, with significant problems in the Bus Station area last Sunday

An apparent increase in joy riders at ASDA and on Chartist Bridge together with numerous complaints of noise from cars and bikes apparently speeding along the bypass during the late evening

6. *Mayoral Announcements*

The Mayor reported on the following visits/ events attended recently, namely –

Joined Cllr. AFarina-Childs and others in walk around Showfield raising funds for Blackwood Little Theatre

Attended the GAVO Awards Ceremony held at Blackwood Rugby Club

Attended performance at Blackwood Miners Institute of The Three Musketeers – (he and the Deputy Mayor had both taken the decision to pay for their complimentary tickets, given the ongoing issues)

Had been invited to BMI Advisory Committee Meeting, albeit subsequently postponed. In discussion with some other members of the Group it became obvious some efforts were being duplicated, and we weren't aware what the other was doing. It was proposed we share information in the hope that going forward we can show a united front in our opposition to the current proposals and this was unanimously agreed.

He also reported on the very successful March/ Rally in support of the BMI held in town on Saturday 9th. September which was attended by close to a thousand people and demonstrated once again the strong community disgust at the Borough's proposals.

7. *Correspondence*

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

One Voice Wales

Recruitment, Induction & Retention (Clerks Guide)

Code Of Conduct Members & Officers (forwarded to members)

Notification that 92% of Community & Town Councils in Wales now in membership

Reminder Annual Conference on 16th. October

Notification of Larger Councils Committee meeting on Wednesday 9th. October – via Zoom

Caerphilly C.B.C.

Footfall Figures

Newsline

Winter Fair Planning - Saturday 23rd. November (Agenda Item 17 b)

Notification of Consultation Exercise on the Future of Library provision

Independent Remuneration Panel Draft Annual Report 2025/26 - Agenda for next meeting

Citizens Advice Bureau Outreach Sessions at Town Council Offices - (Agenda Item 13)

Mrs Morgan Skenfrith Close Request that town Council consider erecting lights on tree in garden of via Cllr. A Farina – Childs Sunnybank House

Arts Council for Wales Copy of their submission in response to CCBC consultation exercise on BMI

In respect of the request for Christmas lights to be placed on tree in private garden on Sunnybank Road it was **agreed** this not be considered further.

This did, however, prompt discussion on possible other sites for Christmas trees in and around town. The Mayor stated that given the recent sale of the Market Square, he and the Deputy Mayor had considered placing the tree this year immediately outside the Office, and members agreed this be progresses if practical.

Cllr. Jan Griffiths queried if Council should consider the planting of living trees in future years and after further discussion it **was agreed** that this together with potential sites be considered by the Events Committee in readiness for Christmas'25

8. *Schedule of Payments*

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

| | | £. p |
|--------------------------|---|----------|
| Tramline | Travel Expenses | 213.99 |
| British Gas | Energy Charges | 197.41 |
| C.C.B.C. | NNDR Charges | 1,914.00 |
| GWR | Travel Expenses | 182.75 |
| Specrum Fibre | Wi Fi Charges + Hardware (incl. £79.72 VAT) | 478.33 |
| Dwr Cymru | Water Charges for Year | 658.60 |
| Playworks | September Fees | 20.00 |
| H.M.R.C. | Tax / N.I. September | 605.65 |
| John Hold | September Salary / Reimbursements | 838.29 |
| G Edwards | Reimbursement of framing costs | 180.00 |
| Bebb, Tasker & Sucksmith | Lease | 960.00 |
| Caerphilly C.B.C. | Planning Fee – Flagpoles | 120.00 |

9. *To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 2nd.September 2024*

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

10. Matters Arising

The Clerk reported that he had written to Caerphilly C.B.C. as requested regarding the potential charge for road closure in respect of the British Legion Poppy Appeal Launch, and had received confirmation that having considered the options, the Borough will be able to manage the road closure given the short distance from the church to the BMI and relatively short time involved and will do so without any charges being passed on.

11. To Receive the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting held on 30th.September 2024

The Clerk reported that as the Minutes referred in the main to the proposed Contract of Employment they would not be published. It was however **agreed** they be received.

Members also **supported** the Committees recommendation to earmark a sum of £250 in respect of providing a small Civic Reception to honour the visit of the Head of the Lesotho Rugby Federation to the town

12. Completion of Audit for Year Ended 31st. March 2024 - Annual Return/ Issues Arising Reports

The Clerk presented the **Auditor General's report and audit opinion**

I certify that I have completed the audit of the Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2024 of Blackwood Town Council.

My audit has been conducted on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales and in accordance with the requirements of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) and guidance issued by the Auditor General for Wales.

Audit opinion: Unqualified

Except for the matters reported below in my Basis for Qualification, on the basis of my audit, in my opinion no matters have come to my attention to give cause for concern that, in any material respect, the information reported in this Annual Return:

- has not been prepared in accordance with proper practices;
- that relevant legislative and regulatory requirements have not been met;
- is not consistent with the Council's governance arrangements; and
- that the Council does not have proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Other matters and recommendations

I draw the Council's attention to the following matters and recommendations which do not affect my audit opinion but should be addressed by the Council:

Model Standing Orders and Financial Regulations The Council's financial regulations and standing orders are not based on the One Voice Wales/NALC model. It is recommended that the Council updates their financial regulations and standing orders to ensure they cover the minimum legal requirements and reflect best practice.

There are no further matters I wish to draw to the Council's attention.

Deryck Evans, Audit Manager, Audit Wales For and on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales

Date: 03/10/2024

The Clerk also reported that the required notice together with Annual Return has been placed on the Notice Board & Council Website

He also reminded members that the Policy & Finance Committee had identified the Standing Orders & Financial Regulations as a major priority, but that progress had been delayed due to the Recruitment/ Interview process and the ongoing BMI issue, but was in hand.

Members received the Report and thanked the Clerk for his continued sound stewardship of the Councils finances

13. Update on Town Council Office Accommodation useage

The Clerk reported that he had met with Steve Tiley Chief Exec. GAVO who was greatly impressed with the facilities at the Office and would pass on details to local groups at their next meeting, whilst also mentioning an upcoming V Fest Event (formerly One Beat) at Blackwood Rugby Club on Wednesday 30th. October 10.00am – 3.00pm which could be a catalyst to meeting these Groups and possibly encouraging some to utilise some of our Office space.

He and Cllr. D Box had also had a follow up meeting with Papyrus & Jacob Abraham Foundation to discuss possible use of our Office for drop in sessions.

The major news, already reported to members, was that Citizens Advice Bureau are now in a position to offer a drop in advice service on Wednesday mornings 10.00am – 1.00pm starting Wednesday 6th. November.

So currently we have the following useage -

| | | | |
|-----------|------------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Monday | Sight Cymru | 10.30am – 12.30pm | fortnightly |
| Tuesday | HSBC Bank | 10.00am – 3.00pm | monthly |
| Wednesday | Citizens Advice Bureau | 10.00am- 1.00pm | weekly |
| Thursday | | | |
| Friday | Papyrus | 10.00am – 12.00 | monthly |

The Jacob Abraham Foundation are also very interested in using the Offices for their base in the area on an ad- hoc basis for client counselling sessions as and when required

Members thanked the Clerk for his report and for his continued efforts to make the Offices a Community Hub for local organisations

14. Verbal Update on B.M. I. Mothballing

Covered earlier in the Agenda – County Borough Report

15. Planning Applications

The Clerk presented his report on planning applications received since the last meeting, and after a short discussion it was agreed no objections be raised to any of the following -

Case Ref. 24/0574/ADV

Location: Unit 1 Blackwood Gate Retail Park Blackwood NP12 2FS

Proposal: Erect 1 internally illuminated flexi face box, various internally applied window graphics and A0 non illuminated poster cases

Case Officer: Ed Chappell (01443 866768 : chappel@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Case Ref. 24/0723/ADV

Location: Amenity Area Lewis Lewis Avenue Blackwood

Proposal: Erect 3 No. heavy duty flag poles

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

Also consulted on the following – not yet included on Planning Lists

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

Retain the widening of the existing 9 metre farm entrance to 20 metres

Pencod Fach Farm Heol Y Cefn Bedwellty Blackwood GRID REFERENCE - 316519(E) 198895(N)

16. Reports

The Clerk reported that he had received information that the Defibrillator at the Market Place had been activated over the weekend, but had unfortunately been unsuccessful in saving the individuals life, despite concerted efforts.

He had contacted June Thomas (Remembering Jack) asking her to order new pads and to check if the battery needed renewal.

Cllr. A Farina-Childs queried that now the Town Council Offices were so close to the Defibrillator that perhaps it was time to consider a further training session on how to use same. This was considered a good idea by members and the Clerk as tasked to organise same over the coming months.

17. Events Committee –

Remembrance Services Arrangements

Cllr D Davies declared an Interest as a member of the Royal British Legion and took no part in any discussion

The Mayor asked the Deputy Mayor to update members, but unfortunately the contact via Teams had been lost.

The Clerk reported that he knew arrangements were well in hand for both Remembrance Services – Friday at the Market Square & Sunday at the War Memorial ,and that he would arrange to email members with details of same over the next few days together with details of the Poppy Appeal Launch at St. Margaret’s Church.

Following on from this, it was agreed the lamp post poppies be erected on Thursday evening and that available members meet at 6.30pm

Cllr. A Short volunteered to try and tidy up the Remembrance Garden area prior to Remembrance Day Services

Planned Christmas Events

The Clerk reported that he had received a request from the CCBC Events team asking Town Council to book and manage the Stage Entertainment again this year at the Winter Fair, with an allocated budget of £1,500. They had asked if we could arrange Ruby Kay as the final artist leading into the light switch on to do sing along Christmas songs and 12 days of Christmas and that they will arrange hand out posters for audience participation.

We have all agreed more needs to be made of the light switch on so they have ordered a fibre optic tree for the stage to come on when the lights turn on so the audience in front of the stage see this, they have flames and snow machine ordered with stage company and a light switch on box on order so whoever is switching on lights presses this to make more of a spectacle and they also have some confetti cannons.

Hopefully it will be a bit more of an occasion and be more spectacular than in previous years.

They will also allocate £600 to book the Rotary Club to be in attendance all day and hand out small goodies for the children.

The Light switch on will be at 4.30pm

The Clerk reminded members they also earmarked £1,000 towards supporting this event, meaning budget of £2,500 was available in total, to cover cost of on stage entertainment, the Pipe & Drum Band to lead the parade and other associated costs.

He further reported that both Ruby Kay & Travis George (an X Factor finalist in 2023) had both been booked via Studio 54 whilst the Pipe & Drum Band had also been booked, and the local community dance groups/ Choirs etc. had also been contacted.

Jenna at Studio 54 had queried whether if time allowed we look to hold a Christmas Princess/ Prince competition to lead the parade. If this were to take place he would look to our lady councillors to sit on any interview panel, as they did in the past for our Miss Blackwood Carnival Event.

The Clerk concluded by stating that whilst there was little for members to do on the day, their presence at the event and more especially around the entertainment stage would be appreciated, and also availability from approx 4.00pm to ensure safe passage of Santa up the High Street to the Lights Switch on.

A further update will be given on all upcoming events at the next meeting scheduled for Monday 4th.
November