

# Blackwood Town Council



**Draft Minutes of the Special Meeting of Blackwood Town Council held on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> June at Blackwood Town Council Offices**

**Present Cllr G Etheridge, Cllr C Clark, Cllr M Gwynne, Cllr D Davies, Cllr L Perkins, Cllr C Erasmus, Cllr J Griffiths, Cllr R Mills, Cllr N Dix, Cllr P Cook**

## **1. Apologies for Absence.**

Cllr D Box, Cllr A Farina-Childs, Cllr Kevin Etheridge

## **2. Declaration of Interests**

Councillor Clark in respect of item 5 and information on the Inner Wheel and Councillor Griffiths in respect of item 5 and Ty Hafan

## **3. Out-turn 2025/26 - Accounting Statement 2025/26**

The Clerk presented the annual accounts. The budget for the year had been 114,700, the actual outturn for expenditure was 160,338.83. Variances between budgets and actuals were highlighted along with implications for reserves. The balance sheet and breakdown of reserves were also explained.

An overpayment of the Mayor's allowance was queried; this had been an error by the Clerk; the allowance had also been incorrectly recorded in the Policy and Finance Minutes of 18<sup>th</sup> May but had been corrected at the Policy and Finance meeting of 15<sup>th</sup> June.

While it was noted that some items of expenditure were one off items, concerns were raised that use of reserves needed to be prudent and review of expenditure was needed

It is difficult to generate income beyond the precept. Room rental was below the estimated budget; several groups use the facilities but at the moment do not pay for the facilities. It was suggested that Council look at a charging policy, according to the type of group using the rooms. It might at least be possible to levy a nominal charge to cover utilities. Further, and wider promotion of the facilities is needed such as via social media or the businesses in the Town. It was also suggested that hot desking could be a possibility and more use could be promoted in the evenings, although it was accepted that this would have implications for staff/volunteers to open and close the offices

Consideration of appropriate facilities for disabled users is also needed.

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## Budget Monitoring Statement

The Clerk explained that this was a work in progress. To date there had been a small underspend on insurance. Councillors requested that the budget monitoring statement be updated and reviewed and be re-presented later in the year with supporting information such as bank statements.

### **4. Annual Return**

The Clerk presented the various sections on the annual return including the accounting statement, the annual governance statement (including the explanations for negative answers to question 1 and question 7), the variances between this year and last year, the internal audit report and recommendations, the content of the audit engagement (with the addition of the fee) and the budget monitoring explanation.

#### **Governance Statement Question 1-Answer No**

While the Council had hoped to make consultation on the vision and purpose a priority for 2025/26; this has not yet been possible. Circumstances within the Council especially retirement of the long-standing Clerk and employment of new Clerks has impacted on what could be achieved.

Some work has been done on a community survey of residents' priorities and there will be opportunities to continue this at our forthcoming public events. However, Council feels that with elections in May 2027. It would be prudent to wait until the new Council is in place to consult on a long-term vision and purpose.

#### **Governance Statement Question 5 -Answer No (related to internal audit aspect)**

Whilst fully understanding and recognising that the Internal Audit function should be independent of the Council's management and administration, and that any prior involvement in such roles within the same financial year might be seen to compromise that independence, Town Council contend that given the exceptional and unavoidable circumstances ( outlined in more detail in the return) that have been faced over the past 18 months that as a "one off " Town Council is confident of the internal auditor's proven integrity over the past 17/18 years, independence will not be compromised on this occasion.

It was proposed by Councillor Delwyn Davies and seconded by Councillor Mark Gwynne that all of the above be approved for submission to Audit Wales. The proposal was unanimously agreed

The explanation for variances had been presented in some detail by the Clerk. As some variances were significant, it was suggested that each variance should have a

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narrative as well as numerical explanation and should link to minutes approving spends. The Clerk was asked to draft the narrative to accompany each variance.

## 5. Annual Report

The Mayor circulated the draft annual report that he and the Deputy Mayor had produced. He went through each page. Councillor Dix gave apologies as he had to leave the meeting at 7.50pm. Queries/comments were as follows:-

- Public Toilets: to be discussed at separate meeting
- Clarified that the cenotaph is a cenotaph and not a war memorial (categorised by size)
- Community Garden, clarification needed on land ownership and visit needed to assess current condition. Councillor Mills has made some enquiries with the local garden centre for assistance and has made enquiries re land registry. There are also biodiversity packages available via One Voice Wales
- There is some repetition in the document; the Mayor explained that Priorities had a statement and a section explaining what had been done.
- Community survey suggested that it is repeated at the Beach Party but possibly split the survey into one for Blackwood Residents and one for visitors to the Town. It may be possible to widen the questions to tie in with other issues such as footfall.

It was unanimously agreed to adopt the Annual Report.

### **Date of next meetings:**

6<sup>th</sup> July Full council 6.30pm

20<sup>th</sup> July Policy & Finance 6.30pm