

TREDEGAR TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Council held in the Council Chamber, Bedwellty House on Wednesday, 18th March, 2020 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: Councillors D. Jones (Chair)

T. Smith
A.E. Tippings
M. Cross
D.W.A. Howells
G. James
A. Jones
K. Phillips
S. Rees
M. Turner

In attendance: Clerk – Ms. C. Price
RFO – Ms. A. Jones

By invitation: Welsh Assembly Member, Alun Davies

409) Apologies. Councillors E. Jones, P. Prosser, D. Rowberry, J. Thomas, H. Trollope, S. Trollope, G. Walters and B. Willis

410) Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members to make their declarations as and when necessary.

411) Alun Davies, A.M. – to provide an update on the work he is undertaking and inviting any questions of Members

The Chair extended a welcome to Assembly Member, Alun Davies, who had been invited to attend a meeting of Council to provide an update on work being undertaken, and thereupon respond to any questions raised.

The Assembly Member was aware the date had been set some time ago and everything had changed with the situation during these recent difficult times. The potential impact on the town of Tredegar could be very serious and he said that an institution, such as Tredegar Town Council, would have an essential role to play. He believed the role of Council would be absolutely critical over the coming weeks, even months.

The decision had now been made to close schools, although this had been delayed as long as possible; the reason being that schools ensured children, particularly the vulnerable, were fed. It was considered this was a key factor in providing a structure for those children who would not have this at home.

The A.M. had spoken with the Managing Director of the Local Authority who would be putting in place various structures to support people and Elected Members would be aware of which 'doors to knock' – who was vulnerable, had the support of family and who would be cared for. Elected Members would be aware of these people in the community and have a role in identifying the vulnerable, which would be critical to achieve coherence.

He was sure, over forthcoming weeks, questions would be asked on social media, with people feeling the situation was not progressing, and suggesting what could be happening, but it was important not to create a chaotic situation. The Imperial College London had undertaken a 'model', the analysis of which suggested the virus could peak in June, with no recovery as a society until July. Therefore, appropriate structures had to be put in place to support those who were ill, and the vulnerable, to sustain people over the coming months.

The A.M. had spoken with the First Minister in respect of a testing regime, which he considered should be more aggressive. He had also spoken with the Economic and Finance Ministers to address any concerns of what work was being done within UK Government, as monies were not being apportioned adequately throughout Wales, Scotland and Ireland.

There was concerns in respect of retail and industry; the A.M. said it was not yet clear if all would receive appropriate support, e.g. taxi services, as to how to maintain the earnings of small businesses, and support those people who would not receive any income; one example could be relief from bills and mortgages.

Councillor S. Rees joined the meeting at this juncture (6.07 p.m.)

In respect of economic support, an emergency meeting was being sought for the following week, as there was a duty to resolve these issues. Local Government Ministers had been approached for additional support to ensure this support was provided. The Health Minister would be contacted to ascertain how to take this forward, to ensure necessary structures were in place and ensure resources were available to help monitor numbers across Wales, and what actions could be taken, e.g. appeal for volunteers – anaesthetist, expertise with critical care, how to utilise other community facilities as community hospitals, and what aspects were available to help provide support. The situation was changing daily, with business operations being curtailed and limiting access, and emergency laws were to be introduced next week. All had been agreed, in principal, within that Policy; a vote would be undertaken on Wednesday, with these laws being enforced the next day and anticipated use of powers immediately. These included serious powers, which allowed for arrest if individuals were found not to be obeying instructions, and muscular action planned. Heart-breaking decisions were being taken in other countries and the A.M. hoped that the nation could look back and see the UK was over-prepared in comparison with other parts of the world.

The A.M. thereupon responded to questions raised in respect of the following:

- *What plans were to be in place to ensure pupils received a good basic of nutrition:* there was a need to look at schools as a community resource, not just places of education, to lock-in structures to provide for vulnerable children, not only being fed but an appropriate structure throughout the day. Work was needed with Welsh Government to ensure funding was available and how this could be delivered. Schools already had facilities in place to help deliver such support, e.g. kitchens, with an opportunity to provide children food and sustenance free of charge.
- *Spain had nationalised private hospitals – there were facilities along the M4 Corridor and*

a Member enquired of legislation in place to use such facilities if there was a shortage of beds: the A.M. acknowledged this could prove an uncomfortable conversation, however there was a hope, and expectation, that care providers would be working together as a single unit. The associated spend in respect of use of private hospitals in the UK would be a matter for Local Government, as expenditure relating to staffing, nursing, etc. had to be met.

- *Care of all children, other than pupils, with parents now out of work – how to ensure parents were aware of support available, as holiday clubs would have provided a means of bringing people together and somewhere for isolated parents to take children:* currently, younger age groups were less effected by the Virus, with school age children showing less than 1% being effected in a profound way; however, children bringing the illness into the home should be avoided, for instance if a parent suffered with Asthma. He highlighted that schools had not been identified as a breeding ground anywhere in the world however. Schools provided facilities and structures in order to provide services that needed to be delivered. However, No Authority / Government would be in a position to know who would be in need, and those that would not require support; this is where local authorities / Government would use local Councillors.
- *Welsh Government influencing retail: a Member referred to the major increase in price for items of necessity – she had witnessed a substantial price increase in respect of Calpol and toilet rolls.* In respect of ‘profiteering’, Regulations were in the remit of Central Government, not the Welsh Government; however, talks were being undertaken with supermarkets in respect of distribution of food, how best to maximise access to food and essential items, etc. This had not been targeted in Wales, but he hoped that UK Ministers would take this forward, as this issue had been recognised.
- *Homelessness:* the Minister for Housing and Local Government, Julie James, A.M., had released a statement in respect of support for the Homeless and the A.M. would forward this for circulation to Members. A Member said that the Homelessness Team had spoken with two individuals identified in the town, who unfortunately would not engage with the Team. The Local Authority were then powerless, unless Social Services needed to intervene, and he was unsure how these individuals could access food supplies.
- *Beneficial community projects, e.g. Over 60s Club – if showing symptoms, how could individuals get tested, access correct guidance and information:* Public Health Wales and the Aneurin Bevan UHB provided advice for the community and Government was looking to put in place the appropriate structure; in his view, more data was needed and as many as possible needed to be tested. Public Health Wales advised that, if you had symptoms, you should consider yourself as having the Virus; and, if living alone, isolate for seven days, or in the case of a household, fourteen days isolation for every family member; also, no unnecessary travel or interaction with other people. Vulnerable people deemed ‘at risk’ included any person entitled to a free flu jab, pregnant, aged 65 and over, underlying health conditions or undergoing chemotherapy – all these individuals should avoid any undue risk.

On consideration of the numbers, most people would be alright; people in Tredegar / Blaenau Gwent would contract the Virus, but only a mild form; others would become extremely sick. It would be important to reach people who would not normally be deemed as vulnerable but as ‘at risk’ following health advice – everyone was susceptible; however, it was unknown how each individual would be effected.

- *Emergency Powers – how would these be implemented, if enforced:* this could be done through the Police and Armed Forces in accordance with the Coronavirus Bill, which allowed significant powers on how to apply this Act, e.g. closure of buildings – both public and private, ports, make arrests, etc. should people have the Virus and not follow instructions. He trusted the majority would recognise the seriousness of the situation and citizens would enforce the law themselves; however, the powers and resources were

available to enforce the Act.

- *Mental Health issues / interim loss of vital services due to closure of schools, e.g. children isolated and not allowed social contact with friends:* Schools would be utilised as centres, rather than adopting a 'closed doors' approach, to provide the right balance of support for those children with established mental health issues and monitor those effected, for instance recognising issues regarding depression, as it was recognised that parents would be anxious in respect of school closures, due to accessibility of support networks in place.
- *Redeployment of individuals to provide support in the community* – a Member said the Council had to be proactive, rather than reactive, to support the people of Tredegar in the proper manner. Meetings should only be convened, as and when required, at an appropriate venue. As long as Members remained fit and healthy, regular leaflet drops could be undertaken to highlight that volunteers would be 'at the end of a phone', collate information gathering, and link together community support – evidencing that the community had a 'caring' Council in Tredegar.

The A.M. agreed with the comments made and said there was a need to collate questions and answers as a community resource, and there was an onus to ensure information was disseminated, e.g. there was a Research Library in Cardiff, whereby the public could ask questions and receive a response at any time. Tredegar needed to work together as a town and had the capacity to take care of its own residents; a directory of support would centralise and provide an opportunity to collate information of help available in the community. Volunteers therefore needed to co-ordinate and act under one umbrella.

A Member said that the Little Theatre was based in the heart of the town and could be utilised as a base of operations and was there to be used as a venue with staff available.

- *A Member referred to concerns that the Virus had presented earlier in the year and enquired if there was now evidence to support such concerns:* the A.M. said that there would be individuals who believed they had contracted the Virus at the beginning of year, e.g. experiencing flu symptoms in February, however he very much doubted this to be the Coronavirus.
- *Any funding to be allocated via Local Government or centrally through Local Government to assist local organisations, community centres, etc.:* funding would be allocated to Local Government, as principal authorities, to provide an opportunity to support organisations in the area; however, those decisions had not been taken as yet. The Member therefore asked that the Minister ensure any funding allocated was earmarked, and any monies not allocated was returned to Welsh Government with a view to reallocating to those communities affected.

A Member referred to funding via companies / charities such as the Heritage Lottery and he was happy to contact funders to ascertain if monies could be diverted from current proposals to help other projects providing support.

- *Concerns raised for those with Autism / Dementia who were reliant on daily routine and could be at risk due to isolation:* those particular groups of people would be contacted by the Health Authority direct; although medical records were not widely accessible, records of those people receiving treatment for chronic illness would be known.

Members appreciated the update provided and welcomed the excellent work being undertaken. A Member offered condolences to the A.M. and his family, on their recent loss. The Chair extended the thanks of Council to the Assembly Member for attending and sharing this information, which was greatly appreciated. The Assembly Member thereupon left the meeting (6.57 p.m.)

412) To receive any verbal recommendations of all Sub-Committees / Working Party held prior to this meeting of Council

It was agreed that the following recommendations of the Sub-Committee meetings held prior to Council be approved:

- **Civic Sub-Committee – 18th March, 2020, 5.00 p.m.**
Tredegar Mining Heritage Group – Agreed that a ‘start-up’ grant of £100.00 be awarded: grant approved, *in principal*, subject to the actions to be pursued by the RFO, i.e. ascertain charity status and sight of a constitution.
Sporting and Cultural organisations – Friends of Bedwellty Park: *grant of £200.00 Approved accordingly.*
Churches & Chapels (s.137) – Saron Chapel,: *grant of 300.00 Approved accordingly.*
- **Policy Sub-Committee – 18th March, 2020, 5.20 p.m.**
That the Risk Management Policy and the Standing Orders documents, as amended, be approved accordingly.
- **Emergency Meeting of the Events Sub-Committee – 18th March, 2020, 5.34 p.m.**
All events to be postponed / cancelled, up to 31st August, 2020.
Annual General Meeting: at present time, to progress.
Press Release to be issued.
Any meetings – emergency basis only, called on an ad hoc basis, with the next anticipated meeting as the AGM.

*** The grants would be posted to recipients, as the Mayor would be unable to visit in the current climate.*

413) To consider a Schedule of Accounts for payment in March 2020

The RFO spoke to the reports and explained that the bank reconciliations were available for Members to view. The Officer highlighted this was the final month of the financial year and the accounts would be closed on 31st March, 2020.

No feedback had been received from the external auditors or the Wales Audit Office. Regulations stipulated that the Annual Return had to be completed by 30th June, 2020, and the RFO therefore aimed to close the accounts as soon as possible. Once all information had been received, Council would be informed of any changes accordingly.

- **Internal Auditor Recommendations –**

The RFO provided a brief update in respect of the five Recommendations, confirming that advice in respect of the Members’ Allowances was that Councils should continue to tax the payment of £150.00; the Mayor’s and Leader’s Allowances were also subject to tax requirements.

Unpresented and written off cheques would be up-to-date at the close of the accounts.

A Member referred to the signing of the accounts before April and would assume that Welsh Government would be looking to extend deadlines for local authorities and town / community councils. The RFO highlighted the deadline for the Annual Return was not until the end of June and, with annual expenditure being below £200,000 on a ‘receipts and payments’ basis, the accounts could be closed quite quickly – this would entail a longer process for councils functioning on an ‘Income and Expenditure’ basis.

With regard to changing restrictions in respect of Covid-19, the RFO sought permission to work from home, should circumstances dictate, and clarified that she had access to a

lockable workspace within her own home to securely store documentation and files; which was agreed accordingly.

In the event of staff being required to self-isolate, Members would then need to agree a process, e.g. cheque payments, etc. to continue to operate. A Member referred to logistics for Town Council in relation to an agreed mechanism, e.g. request a period of notice to access buildings, as it had been inferred that Aneurin Leisure staff were to be subsumed by the Local Authority during this crisis period.

▪ **Schedule of Accounts**

The RFO had updated the Schedule of payments to include the recommendations of the Civic Sub-Committee and sought approval of Council for the additional expenditure, which was agreed accordingly.

There being no further queries regarding the Schedule of Accounts, presented items were approved for payment. Transfer of funds, as approved by Council, would be undertaken in the presence of the appropriate Member and Town Clerk, which was noted accordingly.

The RFO left the meeting at this juncture (7.16 p.m.).

414) To receive and adopt the following Minutes of Council:

- a) **Events Sub-Committee - 5th February, 2020**
- b) **Civic Meeting of Council - 5th February, 2020**
- c) **Policy Sub-Committee – 19th February, 2020**
- d) **Ordinary Meeting of Council – 19th February, 2020**

It was agreed that all Minutes presented be moved en bloc as a true record with any matters arising to follow.

415) Action Sheet

The Action Sheet received for consideration was noted and agreed accordingly.

416) Chair to sign Minutes

Minutes approved were duly signed by the Chair in the presence of Council.

417) Correspondence

- 1) BGCBC
 - a) A. Vaughan: Pre-consultation letter for Central & West Ward Members regarding Community footpath 339/24 Public Path Diversion Order 2020 Wauntysswg Farm.
 - Noted; forward to Ward Members for Central and West.

Councillor T. Smith declared an interest in the following item and took no part in discussion or voting thereon.

- b) E. Hallett Re: PCi Pharma Services planning application C/2020/0033. Response to concerns raised.
 - Noted; Council expressed their thanks to the Officer for the response.
- c) K. Evans Re: Update on events in Blaenau Gwent. Following recommendations from Central Government, they will no longer be supporting any community events.
 - Noted.
- d) Deighton Primary: thank you letters for opening the Clock and Museum.
 - Noted.

Councillor T. Smith declared an interest in the following item and took no part in discussion or voting thereon.

- e) i) List of Licencing Applications, week ending 28.02.2020
 ii) List of Licencing Applications, week ending 06.03.2020
 1. Temporary event notice 08.03.2020 – The Olympia
 - Noted.
- 2) One Voice Wales a) National Awards Conference 26.03.2020 cancelled.
 - Noted.
- 3) V. Preece Re: Recreation Ground. Update on the current situation with regards to a lease and use of the grounds.
 - Noted; forward to Mark Howland. As the Town Council was not consulted during the process, Members considered it would be inappropriate to comment.
- 4) A. Cotton TredFest events postponed until August / September.
 - Noted.
- 5) J. Karn Blaenau Gwent Heritage Forum meeting 20.03.2020 will go ahead and be the last for the foreseeable future.
 - Noted.

- 6) K. Williams Re: French visit. Shame visit cancelled and thank you to Council for the offer of funding, hoping Council will still approve the funding for next year.
- Noted.
- 7) Caerphilly County Borough Council 2nd replacement CCBC Local Development Plan up to 2035. Six-week consultation period now open until 22.04.2020.
- Noted.
- 8) GAVO NHS poster of advice on Coronavirus – **added to website**
- Noted.
- 9) Keep Britain Tidy
- a) “Do it for your dog”, launch of campaign tackling dog fouling.
 - b) Great British September Clean 11th – 27th September, 2020.
- Noted.

10) PUBLICATIONS

BGCBC roadworks report week ending 13.03.2020; Brecon Beacons National Park Authority Community Update Spring 2020; One Voice Wales - Report: Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill. Debate on the report will be held in Plenary on 24.03.2020; Community Health Council - Asking for contact relating to any matters to be made via telephone / email / text / social media / website and not in person; Ace Essentials - Ultra AX antibacterial cleaning product; BGCBC, L. Sage - ‘Place for Sport’ Funding opportunity – **distributed to Members**: Received.

11) AGENDA

Blaenau Gwent Heritage Forum meeting Friday 20.03.2020 at 10.00 a.m. Tredegar Library – **available for Members**: received.

Councillor T. Smith declared an interest in the following item and took no part in discussion or voting thereon.

418) Planning:

a) i) To consider an Officer’s Report (if received) – None received.

- ii) a) List of planning applications received in week 08.
- b) List of planning applications received in week 09.

b) Verbal report of the Planning Committee, if any N/A

c) To consider Planning Applications submitted for Council’s observations – None received.

d) To consider other planning matters – None received.

419) Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Annual Report - February 2020 To receive report to take effect during the financial year 2020 / 2021

The Clerk spoke to the Final Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales, reading each individual Determination in order to highlight any changes and salient points for consideration, to be agreed by town and community councils.

Council noted all options in relation to allowances / payment for Members, approving only one Senior payment to the Leader at this time, emphasising that Senior roles and allowances were agendaed on an annual basis for ratification at the Annual General Meeting of Council.

Council noted and agreed the Determinations (No. 42, 44, 45-51 inclusive), subject to ratification at the Annual General Meeting for approval of requirements pertinent to Tredegar Town Council as an individual community / town council.

420) Matters of Local Interest or Concern (by prior notice)

- Community organisations – if needed, a Member suggested a financial grant could be awarded by Town Council, and proposed that a fixed sum be agreed, in principal, to support local organisations. It was noted that the funding allocated to provision of the summer Bandstand concerts was now available within the current budget.

The Leader said that there was a sum of money allocated within the Climate Change Policy, that Council currently had no intention of utilising, and could be used if needed. However, he suggested it would not be prudent to authorise funding to any organisation at this time, without careful consideration, as following the meeting with the Internal Auditor, the budget-setting process had been subject to discussion and Council advised accordingly on how to progress appropriately in respect of budget management. However, the Member reiterated that additional funding that had been allocated to the Climate Change could be utilised, being placed in this budget heading in the event of a Climate Change crisis, and this situation was exemplar of such a crisis.

The Deputy Leader supported the Leader's comments raised, emphasising that funding virements between budget headings should be given due consideration, and should be delegated to Senior Members 'Top 4', as Council had to be vigilant in respect of budget spend. Members supported this course of action, as an emergency meeting could be called at any time, and supported the need to wait before allocating monies.

It was therefore agreed that Senior Members would meet, if and when required, to discuss awarding of grant monies to any organisations that were deemed in need of financial support.

- Town Clock: scheduled works – in response to a question raised, the Clerk confirmed that the most recent correspondence received outlined that the company was still operating at the present time and intended continuing with scheduled projects.
- Grounds Maintenance: Deighton playing field and Sirhowy Community Garden – the Clerk had contacted the Head of Grounds Maintenance, BGCBC, to enquire of costings to undertake grass cutting; she outlined the contract sum and said this could be used to seek and compare further costings from other providers.

Following a brief discussion: in the interest to proceed during this difficult period, and with a view to the good value and quality of service provided by the Local Authority over recent years, Council thereupon agreed to waiver TTC Financial Regulations and approve the quotation received accordingly.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 7.57 p.m.

_____ Chair