

TREDEGAR TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Council held via Microsoft Teams / hybrid on Wednesday, 15th June, 2022 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: **Councillors G. Evans (Chair)**
 M. Turner
 G. Badham
 P. Cornlouer
 A. Jones
 E. Jones
 K. Phillips
 P. Prosser
 B. Rees
 D. Rowberry
 J. Thomas
 H. Trollope
 S. Trollope
 K. Waldron
 G. Walters

In attendance: **Clerk – Ms. C. Aherne**
 RFO – Ms. A. Edwards

By invitation: **Internal Auditor, Mr. S. Bees**

061) Apologies: **Councillors A.E. Tippings, A. Davies and C. Walters**

062) Declarations of Interest

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

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

It was agreed the following recommendations be approved.

- **Finance and Staffing Sub-Committee - Wednesday, 8th June, 2022**
 - Company A, Blachere Illumination UK Limited, be approved and invited to meet with Members to discuss any issues requiring clarification; and, subject to satisfactory negotiations, the contract be awarded to undertake Christmas lighting requirements on behalf of Tredegar Town Council.
 - The Kickstart Placement Scheme six-month contract period be noted and conclusion accepted accordingly; and, best wishes of Council be extended to the trainee and a thank you gift be approved.
 - A formal report be presented to the Finance and Staffing Sub-Committee, clarifying the grounds for the extension of hours of the RFO, with appropriate recommendations

to a meeting of Full Council for a formal decision to be made.

Councillor P. Cornlouer joined the meeting at this juncture (6.04 p.m.)

064) To consider the exclusion of the Press and public by virtue of the matters to be discussed under the provisions of the LGA 1972 Schedule 12A

Moved, the meeting was closed to the public.

Councillor H. Trollope joined the meeting at this juncture (6.06 p.m.)

065/a) To receive report of the Internal Auditor for year-end 31st March, 2022;

The Chair extended a welcome to the Internal Auditor, who was in attendance to present his report for the Internal Audit for the year.

The Internal Auditor thanked Council for the opportunity to present his report, particularly as the financial year had again proven challenging due to the pandemic. He thereupon spoke to the report, explaining the purpose of the audit was to review the financial propriety and governance arrangements of the Town Council in accordance with proper practices, as set out in the latest version of the OVW / SLCC publication 'Governance and accountability for Local Councils in Wales – A Practitioner's Guide 2019'.

The Internal Auditor highlighted that Audit Wales had yet to issue their opinion on the Annual Return for 2020 / 2021, so Council had no feedback on which to base informed decisions and would also now be subjected to the more detailed external audit arrangements, recently introduced for 2022 / 2023.

The internal audit had been deemed satisfactory in all significant respects; however a number of observations were included in the Appendix, the most significant being that Council had still not developed and approved a sustainable medium-term financial strategy, despite the recommendation of the Internal Auditor for a number of years. He thereupon highlighted the following, outlined in the report and the Appendix 'Control Objectives and audit findings', confirming he would be pleased to respond to questions at any stage.

- The annual accounts were prepared on a 'receipts and payments' basis, i.e. less than £200,000.00.
- Financial Regulations were subject to annual renewal, with certain amendments approved to clarify mandates for approved signatories and processing urgent payments.
- Council had approved one official waiver, accompanied by the appropriate detailed report, which was deemed lawful.
- There had been a slight weakness in the cost comparative information relating to the contract process for works to the Town Clock.
- S137 expenditure had been recorded separately and had remained well within statutory limits.
- Council had conducted the annual Risk Assessment, and revised the Risk Management Policy, which was recorded in the Minutes accordingly.
- The precept had again been agreed at a standstill, being last raised some thirteen years previously; therefore, Council had once again set a deficit budget, requiring savings to be achieved during the year or met through the General Reserves. Council had set a

deficit budget for a number of years in addition to accepting responsibility for management of local services.; however, this reflected a process of effective budget-monitoring in retaining services without a proportional increase in the budget.

The Internal Auditor reiterated the importance of developing a medium-term financial strategy to address the recurring shortfall, as it would be irresponsible to plan for a further depletion of General Reserves, which could result in a loss of existing services or an inevitable increase in precept over successive years.

- Current contracts of employment, with clear terms and conditions of service, were important, as on being audited, this could result in councils being issued with a 'qualified' audit, if these were deemed outdated.
- The full recommendations of the Internal Auditor were outlined within section 4 of the report.

The Internal Auditor thereupon outlined his conclusions in respect of the statutory Internal Audit Report and requirements thereof. He expressed his gratification to the RFO and Clerk for their full co-operation throughout the audit process, and assistance provided in respect of supplying documents required.

Members thanked the Internal Auditor for the report, which provided the opportunity for open and frank discussion in working together; Council noted the information provided and responded as follows:

- The Internal Auditor visited staff regularly during the year, with any issues being identified and addressed at officer-level, where feasible; however, Council had set a deficit budget for a number of years, which Members would need to address, and the annual report was therefore aimed at Member-level for Council to agree an approved course of action. The Internal Auditor placed those issues of greater significance in the end-of-year report with a view to Council accepting the recommendations to be addressed accordingly.

A Member confirmed that the budget had been discussed in detail and Council had approved a deficit budget against the advice of the RFO, again setting a standstill precept. Some Members had not been comfortable with this but a democratic vote had carried the decision and Council was now facing the consequences.

- Medium / Long-Term Financial Strategy – it was the intention of Council to develop a Strategy as soon as possible via the appropriate finance Working Group. The Internal Auditor said this would be most welcomed; this needed to be done as a priority as, when he first joined Council, there had been substantial reserves, which had been consistently depleted year-on-year for the past twelve years. Therefore, any further delay in developing a sustainable financial strategy could consequently have significant risk.
- Absence of Cost Comparators – a Member said the decision had been made to continue with the initial successful tender, following restrictions due to the pandemic, due to time limits and in view of public perception; he therefore maintained this had been the proper course of action.
- Contracts of Employment / Terms and Conditions – if the information retained on record was not up-to-date, this could result in the external auditor deciding the whole Annual Return as 'qualified'. A brief discussion ensued regarding the current staffing arrangements and any associated matters, whereupon it was agreed this would be agendaed for the consideration of the Finance and Staffing Sub-Committee, as the appropriate forum for exempt business.

The Chair of Finance extended his thanks to the Internal Auditor for all his hard work over very many years and for attending to present a most comprehensive report. He extended the good wishes of Council and all the best for the future.

The Deputy Leader also extended the thanks of Council to the Internal Auditor, in the absence of the Leader, for all the work done over the years; it was a shame to lose his service and for Council to start afresh.

The report of the Internal Auditor was unanimously approved, who thereupon left the meeting.

065/b) To confirm the Annual Accounts for year-end 31st March, 2022 and approve Mayor to sign;

The RFO asked that Members formally agree the accounts to 31st March, 2022; the Officer thereupon highlighted salient points in respect of confirming the accounts.

- The End of year accounts and Asset Register had been considered and agreed as the final / correct documents. Overall income for the year was £166,318.00, and overall expenditure £180,702.00; expenditure was under predicted spend of approximately £36,000.00, mainly due to the continued impact of Covid.

The Annual Accounts were approved for year-end 31st March, 2022, and signed by the Mayor, as the Chair of the meeting, in the presence of Council.

Council and the Officer expressed their sincere thanks to the Internal Auditor for his diligence in providing this service, and wished him all the best on his retirement; the Internal Auditor left the meeting at this juncture.

065/c) Internal Audit 2021/2022: to undertake a review of the Internal Audit Process for the year ended 31st March, 2022;

The RFO referred Members' attention to the report and appendix checklist: confirming that, following a meeting between the Internal Auditor and Senior Members, the Internal Auditor had undertaken his assessment. The Officer thereupon presented her report of the Internal Audit Service 2021 / 2022, which was a thematic approach to be reviewed every year.

Council had confirmed approval of the re-appointment of Mr. S. Bees, as Internal Auditor to Tredegar Town Council for the year 2021 / 2022, and the appropriate letter of confirmation sent following his review. On Council being notified that this would be the last year with the Internal Auditor, the RFO had undertaken an exercise to ascertain expressions of interest and updated Council accordingly.

In respect of the performance of the Internal Auditor, there being no queries or further comments; the statements outlined within the report were formally accepted and approved accordingly.

065/d) Agree the Annual Governance Statements on the Return for 2021/2022, prior to External Audit; and

The RFO explained the process in respect of the electors' rights notice, i.e. to be displayed for six-eight weeks, with a fourteen-day period in September to contact the external auditors, if having any questions. The Officer would erect the notice promptly, however the dates would remain the same within the public realm.

The RFO thereupon spoke to Parts 1 – 9 of the Annual Governance Statement; Parts 1 – 8 were thereupon agreed as 'Yes' and Statement No. 9 (Trust Funds) as 'not applicable'. Members of the Council therefore agreed, to approve by resolution, to submit the Annual Return to the External Auditor.

065/e) Council approval and certification of Annual Return 2022 to be signed by Mayor

The Annual Return was approved and certified, signed by the Mayor as Chair of the meeting in the presence of Council, and in accordance with the statutory deadline of 30th June, 2022. The RFO requested the Mayor attend the office to sign all the supplementary documents to support the Annual Return; agreed accordingly.

066) To re-open the Meeting to the Public

Moved, the meeting was re-opened to the public.

067) To consider a Schedule of Accounts for payment in June 2022

The RFO spoke to the report and explained that the bank reconciliations, valid to date, were available for Members to view upon request, which was noted accordingly.

- Council approved the ratification of the three payments in respect of the prizes awarded for the Platinum Jubilee window-dressing competition.
- The RFO sought approval of the Clerk as a second signatory for the replacement cheque needed to reflect a 'name change', which was agreed accordingly.

There being no queries regarding the Schedule of Accounts, presented items were approved for payment. The RFO asked that the designated signatories liaise in respect of signing of the cheques for payment and the transfer of funds, as approved by Council, to be undertaken in the presence of the appropriate Member (remotely) and Town Clerk, which was noted accordingly.

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

- a) Annual Meeting of Council – 11th May, 2022
- b) Ordinary Meeting of Council – 18th May, 2022

It was agreed that all Minutes presented be moved en bloc as a true record.

069) Chair to sign Minutes - at earliest opportunity in accordance with WG Legislation and Guidance

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

070) Correspondence

- 1) BGCBC 1) List of applications received, week ending 27.05.2022.
 2) List of applications received, week ending 03.06.2022.
 - Noted.
- 2) One Voice Wales Applications now open for Local Places for Nature.
 - Noted; forward to Members (PC / BR / MT).
- 3) Cenin Renewables Re: Community Engagement Opportunities. What would Council Members like to see in terms of community engagement for their constituents? Are there any events / town events that they should link with?
 - Noted.
- 4) K. Malnati Re: Deighton Fields. Asking if Council would consider fitting a gate that a pram can access.
 - Following a brief discussion, it was agreed that the request be referred to the appropriate Sub-Committee for an investigation to be undertaken and a recommendation to be presented to Council for subsequent consideration.
- 5) Bedwellty House Manager Re: Car Parking. Unable to offer a designated parking space for the Mayor, but he is welcome to park in the gap halfway down the drive should there be a space at the time of his visit.
 - Noted.
- 6) Diane Summerfield Re: Classic Car Show. Thanks for toilet opening times, they are fine. Understands that the Clock cannot be open due to safety concerns.
 - Noted; unfortunately Council would be unable to open the Town Clock to the public due to remedial work required to ensure the structure was made safe. It was agreed that this work should be undertaken as a matter of urgency.

7) Cllr K. Phillips Looking for stewards for the Classic Car Event in town on Saturday 18.06.2022.

- A Member said his team had joined forces with the Business Forum to organise more events to bring visitors into the town and improve footfall; Council was therefore asked to support the event by assisting with stewarding duties – from approx. 8.00 a.m. until 4.00 p.m. - and should liaise with the Councillor accordingly.

8) GAVO 2022 GAVO Volunteer Awards, closing date for nominations 01.07.2022.

- Noted.

9) K. Symonds Re: Cwm Salvation Army Band. Thanks for opportunity to play on Sunday and it was lovely to engage with attendees.

- Noted.

10) PUBLICATIONS

BGCBC Roadworks report, week ending 10.06.2022 and 17.06.2022.

– ***distributed to Members:*** Received.

11) AGENDA: None received.

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

071) Planning:

a) i) To consider an Officer's Report (if received) – N/A

- ii)** a) List of planning applications received in week 22.
b) List of planning applications received in week 23.

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

c) To consider Planning Applications submitted for Council's observations

App. No.	Applicant	Proposal
C/2022/0153	Mr. & Mrs. H. Davies No address supplied.	Approval of Reserved Matters for appearance, layout and scale pursuant to outline planning permission C/2014/0238 at plot 7, former Pochin Works site, Newport Road.
<i>No objections</i>		

C/2022/0158

Mr. J. Hunt
No address supplied.

Proposed garage in rear garden
of property, Holycroft 13 Beaufort
Road.

No objections

d) To consider other planning matters - Pennant Walters: Mynydd Carn-Y-Cefn Wind Farm Proposals Statutory Consultation open from 24.05.2022 until 08.07.2022: Noted.

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

- Stewarding required for the Bevan Festival music events – Saturday, 2nd and Sunday, 3rd July. Members' feedback from the concerts to date were as follows: although visitors were aware the House was run by Aneurin Leisure, concerns had been relayed that parking was an issue; the chairs were not best suited for outdoor use as the legs sunk into the ground; health and safety training was not provided for Members; a Member considered the trolley was unsuitable / inadequate for the moving of equipment.

It was agreed that the feedback be referred to the Events Sub-Committee for consideration.

- Mayor's Appeal – the designated charity for 2022 / 2023 was the Hospice of the Valleys. A charity show would be held on 18th November, 2022, at the Ashvale Social Club, featuring eight artists, 150 tickets were available at £5.00 per ticket; no complimentary tickets would be issued. Mastercard had made a donation to the Appeal, direct through Hospice of the Valleys as a registered charity, in accordance with their audit requirements.
- Mayoral Inauguration – this was agreed for Wednesday, 6th July 2022. Council needed to make a decision as to whether the role of Deputy Mayor would be filled for 2022 / 2023, as this would form part of the agenda for the inauguration.
- Thanks to the Mayor and Councillor K. Phillips for attending the Falklands service at St. George's Church.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 7.53 p.m.

Chair