

TREDEGAR TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Council held via Microsoft Teams / hybrid on Wednesday, 15th May, 2024 at 6.30 p.m.

Present: Councillors K. Phillips (Chair)
M. Turner
A.E. Tippings
A.E. Evans
E. Jones
S. Mavar
M. Moore
D. Rowberry
H. Trollope
S. Trollope
C. Walters
G. Walters

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

026) Apologies. Councillors E. Griffin, G. Badham, A. Jones, J. Thomas and K. Waldron

027) Declarations of Interest

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

028) To receive any verbal recommendations of all Sub-Committee / Working Party meetings held prior to this meeting of Council

No Sub-Committee meetings had been held prior to Council; however, a meeting of the Website Working Party took place on 7th May, 2024.

The Leader provided a brief update accordingly.

029) 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.

030)a) To receive final report of the Internal Auditor for year-end 31st March, 2024;

The RFO referred to the report of the Internal Auditor, a copy of which had been circulated prior to the meeting for Members' perusal; all points contained therein had been, or would be, actioned and reported throughout the year accordingly. The RFO confirmed that the same format of reporting had been carried out as the previous year with the new Internal

Auditor.

- An issue had been raised in respect of an 'out of date' cheque; the RFO had explained the reason and that the cheque would have been written back. This was due to the bank cashing a cheque awarded for a grant after the six-month period had elapsed. Council recognised that historically there had been instances where groups had not cashed a cheque during the six-month period and the cheque had been written back and re-issued. Therefore, Council would just have to accept such recommendations.
- Council had received an interim report, as the process consisted of two reports during the audit, and had accepted feedback accordingly. The Internal Auditor would be reviewing recommendations in the next financial year to see if Council had implemented these points.
- 2022 / 2023: three points remained outstanding, No's 6, 7 and 10 and would be actioned during this financial year.

The report of the Internal Auditor was unanimously approved.

030)b) To confirm the Annual Accounts for year-end 31st March, 2024 and approve Mayor to sign;

The RFO asked that Members formally agree the accounts to 31st March, 2024; the Officer thereupon highlighted salient points in respect of confirming the accounts.

- The Reserves and Asset Register had been previously considered and agreed as the final documents, with no amendments since that time. All financial accounts and bank reconciliations were available on request for Members to view in the office.
- Overall income for the year was £175,851.00, and overall expenditure £165,311.00; expenditure was below predicted spend of approximately £29,807.00, mainly due to a number of projects / activities not being completed.

The Annual Accounts were approved for year-end 31st March, 2024, and signed by the Mayor, as the Chair of the meeting, in the presence of Council.

030)c) Internal Audit 2023 / 2024: to undertake a review of the Internal Audit Process for the year ended 31st March, 2024;

The RFO referred Members' attention to the report and appendix checklist, circulated prior to the meeting for Members' perusal: the Officer thereupon presented her report of the Internal Audit Service 2023 / 2024, which was a thematic approach to be reviewed every year.

Council thereupon agreed to the following points, summarised below, as contained within the report of the RFO:

- Internal Auditor's Report 2022 / 2023 – points raised reviewed and reported throughout the year; Council was happy to continue with the same auditors for this current year
- Appointment – New Internal Auditor, recognition of CIPFA / ICAEW Membership and Professional Indemnity Insurance
- Internal Auditor's Report 2023 / 2024 – Members were satisfied with the report
- External Auditor – there were no reports regarding the internal audit work covered

- General – communication, compliance and achievement

A Member said having perused the document, he was pleased to note the process had progressed in a smooth, effective approach and was confident of the RFO competently organising Council's finances. This was a clear and accurate method and he commended the Officer.

In respect of the performance of the Internal Auditor, the RFO had engaged satisfactorily with the Internal Auditor and was happy to continue. In response to a question raised, the RFO confirmed that one other town council in Blaenau Gwent had engaged the services of the Internal Auditor but had opted to receive a single report approach. However, the format adopted by Council worked well for Tredegar and the portal used for submission was easy to use; the Internal Auditors were prompt in responding and had proven helpful throughout the process.

The checklist would be added to the audit portal and, although the audit appeared more governance-led, the Auditors also continue to check the financial position of Council. This appeared to be the way forward for town and community councils in line with the toolkit circulated by One Voice Wales.

The statements outlined within the report were thereupon formally accepted and approved accordingly. It was agreed to continue with the current Internal Auditor.

030)d) Agree the Annual Governance Statements on the Return for 2023 / 2024, prior to External Audit; and

The RFO spoke to Parts 1 – 9 of the Annual Governance Statement; Parts 1 – 8, which Members 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.

The RFO thereupon explained the process in respect of the electors' rights notice, i.e. to be displayed for four weeks, with a period from September to when the audit was completed, to contact the external auditors with any questions. The Officer would erect the notice promptly, however the dates would remain the same within the public domain.

030)e) Council approval and certification of Annual Return 2024 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, 2024.

The RFO requested the Mayor attend the office to sign all the supplementary documents to support the Annual Return; agreed accordingly.

The Chair extended his thanks to the RFO for her diligence in preparing the reports and for the hard work undertaken.

031) To re-open the Meeting to the Public

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

032) To consider a Schedule of Accounts for payment in May 2024

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

- Summer Bandstand Concerts – these were due to commence in June, the RFO would prepare all cheques for approval in the next schedule of payments, as there was a query in respect of to whom cheques would be made payable in relation to some performances. Members commended Ebbw Valley Brass on their performance the previous weekend and extended congratulations.
- Town Clock – the new fuseboard would be installed and thereupon the electrics would operate separately.

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

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

- a) Events Sub-Committee - 3rd April, 2024**
- b) Civic Meeting of Council - 3rd April, 2024**
- c) Finance and Staffing Sub-Committee - 9th April, 2024**
- d) Performance Review Sub-Committee - 17th April, 2024**
- e) Ordinary Meeting of Council - 17th April, 2024**

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

034) 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.

035) Correspondence

Councillor D. Rowberry declared an interest in the following item and took no part in discussion.

- 1) BGCBC
 - a) i) List of applications received, week ending 03.05.2024.
 1. Premise Licence for sale of alcohol – 90 Glyn Terrace
 - ii) List of applications received, week ending 10.05.2024.
 - Noted.

2) Vision ICT

Quote for new website and preview link for a new site.

- Consideration was given to the breakdown of services offered within the quotation, i.e.

Recommended package - £2,850.00 plus VAT, consisting of site programming and design; migration / adding content; features for news and events, including licensed Wordpress plugins; and telephone / online training.

Plus 'add ons': Annual fee (year two onwards) £325.00 plus VAT; re-branding (graphic design) £500.00 plus VAT; and, Photography / video of Tredegar £450.00 plus VAT.

Following a brief discussion:

It was agreed that the £2,850.00 plus VAT be approved, with further consideration of the design and content of the site to be further discussed by the Website Working Group.

3) Kidney Wales

Link to information their Annual Walk for Life event.

- Noted; it was agreed that Council reinstate this walk at Parc Bryn Bach for the next year, to be undertaken by the Deputy Mayor to welcome the Member to the role, prior to coming into office as Mayor.

4) Requests:

a) Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod: Asking for a donation towards this year's event – **previous donation 2023/24 April'23 CQ No. 706468 £100.00**

- Noted; a donation of £100.00 was unanimously approved.

b) Abertillery & Llanhilleth Community Council, Re: Letter of Support. Would Council consider sending a letter of support for all Blaenau Gwent School Headteachers, who are raising their concerns to parents regarding the ongoing budget cuts schools are receiving.

- The Chair said that he had spoken with the Head of the School he represented as Governor and stressed the importance of this letter; he was aware that the Head of Glanhwy Primary School had spoken on this matter on the news. If Headteachers felt it necessary to come together as a collective body, he suggested such correspondence should be taken seriously.

The Leader considered a different stance; as a School Governor he had been unaware of that letter being sent and felt it unclear what schools were asking for. While understanding why such a letter was written, he was aware of the position of the Local Authority; in respect of budgets, education was an area protected more than many other services. This letter was not prevalent only to Blaenau Gwent, but had been raised across Wales as a whole, and the Member felt this action was politically led. Welsh Government was not in a position to allocate additional monies to schools and he failed to understand what outcome was expected from sending this letter.

A Member agreed with these sentiments; Headteachers had not approached the Local Authority to liaise before circulating this letter and, as a Governor, he had not been aware this letter had been sent. Education received an uplift compared to every other department (Blaenau Gwent was actually top of the table in respect of funding per head per child) and local authorities all received a cut in funding; this was not a proper approach and he felt this would also undermine unions; he would therefore not support Council sending a letter.

Another Member said that, from the point of view as a primary school teacher for many years, and a Deputy Head involved in major decision-making policies, Council should have to appreciate this action by the Headteachers. A reduction in finances could possibly result in redundancies and ultimately would lead to a decline in standards that schools would be able to provide to children in the borough of Blaenau Gwent, e.g. loss of input of teaching assistants, with individuals not achieving their potential.

Therefore, the Member was not aware if this matter was politically driven but highlighted the lack of investment in education.

In response to a question raised, Members indicated that the vast majority of Headteachers in Blaenau Gwent had signed the letter circulated to parents / carers. However, serious concern was raised by a number of Members that there were no signatories actually listed on the letter, and therefore could be considered anonymous, and not deemed as official correspondence for consideration of Council.

A Member expressed concern that not all information contained within the letter was accurate. As a Governor representative, she was aware of discussion between the Governing Body and the Headteacher, but the letter in question, circulated to parents / carers, did not reflect the conversation undertaken at that meeting. The letter appeared to criticise the Local Authority directly and the Member was aware that historically the budget for both Social Services and Education had been protected for some fifteen to twenty years. She therefore proposed an amendment that Tredegar Town Council consider writing a letter to Blaenau Gwent recognising the difficult financial situation, rather than levying criticism, and not support the letter circulated 'on behalf of' Blaenau Gwent Headteachers.

Following due consideration of points raised, Members raised two amendments to the proposal by Abertillery and Llanhilleth Community Council:

- 1) Not to write a letter of support for Blaenau Gwent Headteachers, but to write to Blaenau Gwent recognising the difficult financial situation and supporting the Local Authority;
- 2) Not involving Town Council in any correspondence to the Local Authority nor Senedd.

Upon a vote being undertaken, the majority of Members (9:3) agreed option 2), i.e. to take no action in respect of writing a letter of support to the Local Authority or Senedd.

- c) Blaenau Gwent Mustangs Re: Taster Flag American Football Session. Non-contact version of American Football, want to offer a taster session on Saturday, 7th September, 2024 from 10.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon on the Deighton field.
- Noted; It was agreed that Council would be pleased to support the request and provide the facility free of charge on the date / times mentioned. Clerk to advise unfortunately there were no toilet or changing facilities on the site and Council would be unable to make arrangements for such provision; however, there were public conveniences located in the shopping precinct in

the town centre; also, Clerk to provide guidance criteria for use of the facility.

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

d) Margaret Thomas Re: Civic Award. Requesting Council consider a local a group for an award.

- Noted; a brief discussion ensued regarding Council precedent to only recognise a group or individual once within a chosen field. It was acknowledged that Council had presented an award throughout a profession, as individuals had progressed, and this had generally been in relation to a national achievement.

Members suggested that an agreed criteria should be devised in respect of the Council's presentation awards, which needed to be subject to appropriate discussion.

It was agreed that the two nominations presented be agreed accordingly.

Councillors G. Badham and A.E. Evans left the meeting at this juncture (8.06 p.m.)

5) Mr. West

Raising concerns on people still speeding up and down Beaufort Road and asking whether Sirhowy Councillors are able to question why nothing is being done.

- Noted. A Member undertaking a dual role as Town and County Borough Council, confirmed that Sirhowy Ward Members (BGCBC) had spoken with Police on numerous occasions to explain the situation in respect of Sirhowy Hill, as well as other areas of Tredegar. The Local Authority had taken on board this was a police matter but had put forward their opinions and were doing their best to address issues.

While agreeing this was a police matter, another Member said that there were speed restrictions in place, and the Highways Department also had a responsibility, and calming measures needed to be put in place.

A Member said that, for information, all Members of Blaenau Gwent had instructed the Leader (BGCBC) to ask the new Police and Crime Commissioner to meet in person as soon as possible to discuss all anti-social behaviour throughout Blaenau Gwent.

6) Ty Hafan Thank you for the £200.00 donation.

- Noted.

7) PUBLICATIONS

BGCBC Roadworks report, week ending 26.04.2024, 03.05.2024, 10.05.2024 and 17.05.2024; Communicorp Clerks & Councils Direct May 2024 Issue 153; ABUHB Neighbourhood Care Network issue 4, February to April 2024; OVW Wales Conference 23.05.2024, The Future of Inclusive Transport; Brecon Beacons National Park Authority Re: Community & Town Council Nature Recovery Grants. Programme now open to applicants. Grants will be on a first come first served basis with a total of £30,000 available – ***distributed to Members***: Received.

Councillors E. Jones and D. Rowberry declared an interest in the following item and took no part in discussion or voting thereon.

036) Planning:

- a) i) List of planning applications received in week 18
- ii) List of planning applications received in week 19

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

| App. No. | Applicant | Proposal |
|-----------------|--|--|
| C/2024/0097 | Mr. G. Howells 15 Beaufort Road Tredegar | Reinstate garden wall opening and install gate - 15 Beaufort Road. |

No objections

| | | |
|-------------|--|---|
| C/2024/0111 | Mr. G. Knapp 23 Lindsay Gardens Tredegar | Single storey rear extension and replacement Garage - 23 Lindsay Gardens. |
|-------------|--|---|

No objections

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|-------------|--|--|
| C/2024/0104 | Mr. G. James The Drop Zone Golf Ltd. 58 Lakeside Way Nantyglo | Change of use from existing use to indoor golf facility with ancillary bar and kitchen - Unit 4 Sirhowy Industrial Estate. |
|-------------|--|--|

No objections

c) To consider other planning matters – None received.

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

- Emergency Medical Cover – Council approved expenditure for emergency medical cover for Armed Forces Day and Aneurin Bevan Day respectively, instructing the Clerk to complete the necessary paperwork with St. John Ambulance.

- OAP building, Beaufort Road – a Member said that the parking area to the rear of the OAP building did not fall within the remit of the land given to the boxing organisation. The Clerk confirmed that she had contacted AB Boxing, explaining the Council’s grant application process and had forwarded an application form accordingly. This would be submitted to a meeting of the Civic Sub-Committee on receipt as a first-time applicant. In response to a question raised, the Leader clarified that the Clerk had been asked to pursue with the Local Authority if there was a list of ‘gifted’ buildings in the Tredegar area, as this would be informative for Council to be aware of properties gifted to the people of Tredegar.
- Nomination Form, for consideration – Agreed accordingly; as previously discussed (Correspondence Item 4b).

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.24 p.m.

_____ Chair