

TREDEGAR TOWN COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Council held via Microsoft Teams / hybrid on
Wednesday, 18th January, 2023 at 6.00 p.m.**

Present: Councillors **G. Evans (Chair)**
K. Phillips
A.E. Tippings
G. Badham
E. Jones
B. Rees
D. Rowberry
G. Walters

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

By invitation: **Gwent Police representatives – Tredegar Branch**
Sergeant N. Pigeon
PC 1895 C. Paxon

241) Apologies. Councillors **M. Turner, P. Cornlouer, A. Jones, P. Prosser, J. Thomas, H. Trollope, S. Trollope, K. Waldron and C. Walters**

242) Declarations of Interest

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

243) Gwent Police - Tredegar Branch: representatives in attendance to introduce the new Ward Manager

The Chair extended a welcome to the Local Police representatives, who had requested an invite to attend a meeting of Council to introduce the new Neighbourhood Ward Manager for Tredegar and update Members on work being undertaken.

Sergeant Pigeon said there had been a number of changes in Blaenau Gwent and had requested an invite to Council, considering this would be a good opportunity to introduce ourselves, and provided the following update:

- Chris Paxon was the new Neighbourhood Ward Manager for Tredegar, and was available on mobile and email.
- Inspector Shane Underwood had left to pursue another post and the new Inspector, Stevie Warden, was in place starting Monday; he had been on holidays but would be arranging meetings with Elected Members and would be willing to come along to town council meetings.
- The Sergeant had received a request from the Chief Constable, on being made aware

he was attending this meeting, asking him to share one point in response to Council's request for a front office facility at Tredegar police station and to explain the circumstances.

In 2018, a review had been carried out of the Estates Strategy; the PCC had been responsible for undertaking a review of all front office counters in the stations, carrying out a 'time and motion' exercise, assessing footfall across Blaenau Gwent - Ebbw Vale had been the busiest in Blaenau Gwent and most accessible. The Sergeant explained the function of the front office provision; for example, daily visits in relation to bail conditions, and logistically Ebbw Vale had proven central to meet those needs, bearing in mind accessibility of public transport.

The Force had been tasked with saving money and had therefore needed to look at their Estates Strategy. Through a scoping exercise, it was agreed to lose the front office facility at Tredegar, Brynmawr and Abertillery and all provision put into Ebbw Vale. Subject to further savings required, there had also been a need to reduce hours until 8.00 p.m.; this had now been further reduced Monday to Friday, 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. The Chief Constable had needed to make that decision.

Therefore, the Chief Constable was unable to agree to the request by Town Council to reinstate front office provision, as Gwent Police were under pressure to save further monies and had no intention of changing the Estates Strategy at the present time.

- A Member said that he had met with the new Ward Manager on a number of occasions, via the Business Forum, and felt that Chris and his Colleagues were visible on the streets. However, as a resident of premises within the town, he was concerned of the blatant crime taking place on a common basis, even opposite the police station - for example, drug dealing. This was so visible on the high street, he believed this would deter people visiting the town, affecting both businesses and shoppers. Shop owners / businesses were encouraged to use the 'App' but he did not know how the Police could tackle this problem.

The Sergeant briefly outlined ongoing work with the Crime Prosecution Service in respect of recent arrests, whereby he was confident the culprits would be charged. The new Ward Manager also had the support of a Neighbourhood Enforcement Team, looking at drug enforcement issues and, when applying to the Magistrates Court, evidence was of utmost importance and intelligence received from the community was invaluable. All information received – whether reported through the App, Crimestoppers or Officers, remained anonymous and personal details would never be disclosed if applying for a warrant or a case being pursued through the Courts.

In response to a particular case of drug dealing in the town centre, the Officers confirmed they were aware of the issue and this was being pursued accordingly. A Member suggested that the Police needed to be more proactive in feeding back the positive work being undertaken; the Sergeant recognised this could be the case – the Member asked if residents could re-contact in respect of past concerns, which had not been acted upon, now the Neighbourhood Enforcement Team was in place. The Sergeant strongly urged the community to report any intel, whether strange smells from residential / vacant properties, or the vehicle registrations of cars.

- Anti-social Behaviour – a Member expressed concern of anti-social behaviour in the town and shopping precinct and the futility of reporting such issues. She referred to an incident whereby the former Mayor, and members of the public, had been harassed on the footpath and in the precinct by youngsters on bikes and, although the names of the

offenders had been provided, nothing was done. The Member, therefore, said she could not see an improvement in respect of a police presence locally.

- Off-Road Police Team – also, concerns were raised of anti-social behaviour in respect of 4x4 owners in the town. The Sergeant acknowledged Members' concerns and highlighted there were a number of operations in respect of off-road vehicles, but this problem was difficult to resolve. It was demoralising for Officers to stand down, however it was Force policy not to pursue vehicles – some counteractive measures had been introduced, e.g. urge garages not to allow off-road bikers to fuel their vehicles. The South Wales Police had an Off-Road Police Team and had recognised this was an issue; tactics and the redirecting of resources were being considered to ascertain what could be done to resolve the problem.

A Member said she was proactive in reporting issues – and had found the FB Messenger facility invaluable – however, she had provided photographic evidence and vehicle registration number plates and, although reporting issues time and time again, had received no response. The Member had also offered to meet with Officers to point out appropriate 'pinch points' and been informed, on enquiring, that it was too dangerous to use a drone in the Trefil area. Every weekend there was an issue of quads driving through the Dukestown and Trefil area to access the quarry. This was a triple SI area and the Member felt that Officers did not have a level of understanding to recognise the damage being caused - with ruts now some 15m wide, through prime peat, and moorland being eradicated. Another Member supported the concerns raised, as this was not prevalent only to the Trefil area – significant work had been undertaken to Sirhowy Woodlands, which was being ruined by offroad vehicle activity.

The Officer acknowledged Members' concerns; he said it was so difficult to catch these vehicles even when suitable 'pinch points' were identified. Although the Force had access to their own quads, appropriate risk assessments would be undertaken to assess how to stop a motorcycle safely while in motion, also the Police were not able to use stingers. In respect of the use of drones, only specialised Officers within the Rural Crime Team could operate this equipment and would only be allowed upon request. However, the problem of illegal / offroad vehicles was an issue borough-wide and there were cross border operations throughout Powys, Dyfed and Blaenau Gwent.

In response to a question in respect of confiscating vehicles, the Sergeant confirmed that, if caught on common land, Officers had the powers to confiscate under S59; furthermore, in respect of uninsured offenders, far more protective powers allowed the Police to crush the seized vehicle to ensure its' removal and would not return to circulation.

Members were advised to liaise with PC Paxon and the Neighbourhood Enforcement Team to share any photographic and video evidence, details of the time / date of the offence, etc., for the Team to investigate.

- Communication – Members felt better communication was needed and the Police had to be more proactive in promoting good work undertaken, as feedback of residents indicated that intelligence was not acted upon and there was no improvements in respect of longstanding issues. The Sergeant ensured Council of the importance of intel and urged Members to encourage residents to report issues for the Ward Manager and the six PCSOs to pursue in order to apply to the Magistrates Court to obtain warrants and seek prosecution.

A Member commended the Officers on how the Police were actually communicating within

the community on official social media pages – there was a degree of light heartedness in the reporting, which he considered a positive way in going forward.

The Chair extended the thanks of Council to the Officers for a most comprehensive update, which had been greatly appreciated. The Sergeant said he would liaise with the Clerk, as Officers were more than happy to return and provide statistics in respect of crime locally.

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

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

Performance Review Sub-Committee – 18th January, 2023

- Budget against Actual: the report was approved and the recommended Virements unanimously agreed for consideration of full Council;
- Draft estimates and Reserves to be amended to reflect the afore-mentioned budget proposals presented by Members;
- The update in respect of the Internal Auditor Recommendations was noted and accepted accordingly.

245) To consider a Schedule of Accounts for payment in January 2023, with ratification of payments made in December 2022 (Schedule circulated to all Members)

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.

- British Gas – due to receipt of cheques being delayed to postal strikes, all cheques authorised had now been cashed, with a payment of £27.95 remaining to offset the balance.
- Barclays Bank – due to a clerical error on their part, the Bank had returned two cheques declining payment, both to Blaenau Gwent CBC for November and December; replacement cheques had been reissued.
- Dual Signatory – the RFO said that Council could now undertake the dual signatory process online. A dedicated Member would need to be nominated, as the authorised second designated signatory, together with the RFO, to visit the office to deal with payments via a Pin Sentry machine and card. This could be subject to further consideration as a way for Council to move forward with processing payments. Members enquired of the observations of the RFO: the Officer said that the Covid pandemic had opened up alternative ways of working and this could be beneficial as long as Council had a robust policy in place, bearing in mind, this method would also avoid a penalty on cheques written back. However, the designated signatory should be aware of the responsibility being taken on and ensure to proactively check the scheduled list against the payments to be made, bank account details, etc. The RFO said that other town councils were utilising that process and it was working successfully. It was therefore agreed that this process be agendaed for the next meeting of a Finance and Staffing Sub-Committee for consideration.
- Grass Cutting Service Level Agreement – this related to the current financial year, ending 31st March, 2023; the Team Leader for grounds maintenance had apologised for the delay in submitting the invoice. In view of inflation, he confirmed the Local Authority were reviewing 2023 / 2024 costs and were aiming to maintain the cost of the SLA to a minimal amount.

The December Schedule was ratified accordingly and the Schedule of Accounts for January was thereupon approved for payment. The RFO requested that the designated signatories contact the office in respect of signing cheques for payment.

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.

246) Town and Community Councils - Pooled Contribution Rate Proposal

The RFO referred to the Triennial Evaluation pensions employers contribution option for town / community councils to join a pooled resource. The response of OVW was that they were unable to advise on specialist matters; feedback from Torfaen CBC had been circulated to Members. The Officer was not in a position to provide any additional information; however, she highlighted Council was currently paying 15.2% and the pooled contribution would be significantly more, as some town councils were at a higher level.

It was unanimously agreed that Council would not participate in the approach in respect of the Pooled Rate Contribution Proposal at this time.

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

- a) Events Sub-Committee - 2nd November, 2022
- b) Civic Meeting of Council - 2nd November, 2022
- c) Ordinary Meeting of Council - 16th November, 2022
*** Previously circulated – Ordinary Council, 21st December, 2022 ‘Inquorate’ therefore, no ratification of Minutes*
- a) Events Sub-Committee - 7th December, 2022
- b) Civic Meeting of Council - 7th December, 2022
- c) Ordinary Meeting of Council - 21st December, 2022

It was agreed that, for points of accuracy only, all Minutes presented be moved en bloc as a true record.

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

To be duly signed by the Chair, adhering to safety regulations and relevant restrictions, at the earliest opportunity – Chair to liaise accordingly.

249) Correspondence

- 1) BGCBC Notice for 2023 / 2024 Precept requirement to be received by them no later than 03.02.2023.
- Noted.
- 2) One Voice Wales a) Public commemoration in Wales: guidance for public bodies. The guidance will help public bodies make decisions on existing and proposed commemorations including statues, plaques and

street names. It sets out what public bodies should do to contribute positively to the public commemoration of Welsh history and achievement of an anti-racist Wales. Consultation ends 21.02.2023.

- Noted; a Member said the guidance was an interesting document, providing case studies as to how matters arising could be dealt with, e.g. placing of explanatory information next to existing statues, rather than costly removal. The Member was unaware of any such problems in the Tredegar area however.

b) Press Release: Ombudsman new appointments to governance roles.

- Noted.

3) Wales
Air Ambulance

Thanks for the £200.00 donation.

- Noted.

4) PUBLICATIONS

BGCBC Roadworks report, week ending 13.01.2023 and 20.01.2023; ABCHC Patient's Voice News Bulletin December 2022 Issue 48; Blaenau Gwent Heritage Forum Agenda for meeting 16.01.2023 at 10.00 a.m. Tredegar Library; OVW Democratic Engagement Grant – ***distributed to Members***: Received.

5) AGENDA: None received.

250) Planning:

- a) i) List of planning applications received in week 01
- ii) List of planning applications received in week 02

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

App. No.	Applicant	Proposal
C/2023/0001	Ms. C. Bird, BGCBC Blaina Integrated Children's Centre High Street, Blaina	Change of use of existing residential properties(C3) into children's care homes(C2) – Madison House & Mon Calpe, Picton Road, Tredegar

No objections

Blaenau Gwent CBC were purchasing two large houses to convert into a home to be used for children in care; these were set in their own grounds and therefore provided an ideal location. This was a good development, if preventing children being sent out of county.

C/2023/0006

Mr. P. Parsons
Creative Design
Wales
88 Bailey Street
Brynmaur

Proposed construction of four detached dwellings with associated parking and external works, land adjoining Yr Hen Becws, Merthyr Road, Tredegar.

No objections

c) To consider other planning matters: None received

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

- Southend Allotments – a great amount of work had been undertaken, with significant investment, i.e. concrete paths laid and the erection of a new shed. This allotment was at the heart of the community and the Association was doing a really good job and all plots were allocated.
- Tredegar Business Forum – there were a lot of activities proposed for Easter, and had been undertaken at Christmas. Tredegar Town Council were urged to become actively involved in these events and join forces with the Business Forum.
- Holocaust Memorial Day – the Little Theatre would be holding an event on Friday, 27th January, 2023, which the Mayor would be attending; also, Town Council had agreed to illuminate the Clock 'purple' in recognition of this Day.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 7.21 p.m.

_____ Chair