

TREDEGAR TOWN COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Civic Meeting of Council held via Microsoft Teams / hybrid on
Wednesday, 1st February, 2023 at 6.30 p.m.**

Present: Councillors **G. Evans (Chair)**
A.E. Tippings
M. Turner
A. Jones
E. Jones
J. Thomas
C. Walters

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

261) Apologies Councillors **K. Phillips, G. Badham, P. Cornlouer,
P. Prosser, B. Rees, D. Rowberry, H. Trollope, S. Trollope,
K. Waldron and G. Walters**

262) Declarations of Interest

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

263) To receive Mayor's report, as appropriate

The Mayor had nothing to report; however, the following update was provided for Members' information.

Former Tredegar Town Councillor, Malcolm Cross, had been admitted to hospital but was expected to return home shortly: it was agreed that the best wishes of Council be extended.

It was nice to note Councillor J. Thomas returning to the Council Chamber, as she also had been admitted to hospital and Members hoped this now meant her return to good health.

264) To receive any verbal recommendations of all Sub-Committees / Working Party prior to this meeting:

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

- **Events Sub-Committee - 1st February, 2023**

All expenditure outlined in respect of refreshments and entertainment be unanimously agreed for approval of Council; and
Ongoing actions to be progressed accordingly

It was proposed that Councillor C. Walters be nominated to fill the vacancy on the Sub-Committee, which was agreed unanimously.

▪ **Civic Sub-Committee - 1st February, 2023**

FC Tredegar (Mini Section) – It was unanimously agreed to recommend that a start-up grant of £100.00 be awarded.

Tredegar HM Armed Forces Veterans' Group - no contact had been made; it was therefore agreed to make contact again to extend an invite to attend another meeting.

It was proposed that Councillor G. Walters be nominated to fill the vacancy on the Sub-Committee, which was agreed unanimously.

265) To consider and finalise the Budget for the financial year 2023/2024, setting the Precept to be collected by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

The RFO spoke to the report, which had been compiled following discussions relating to the 2023 / 2024 draft budget proposal, in order to agree a precept in line with the Local Authority requirement by 3rd February, 2023. The report was comprehensive, outlining what should be brought under consideration and also provided guidance as to the impact of precept levels on Reserves. The Officer thereupon highlighted the following:

- Medium-Term Strategy – Council should be planning year-on-year for projects, e.g. for the next three years
- Grant funding – was not a guaranteed source of income, and even when secured may only provide partial funding
- Precept level information was provided in respect of a Standstill demand at 10, 15 and 20% increase
- Earmarked Reserves had been prudently streamlined, with justifiable reasoning, and the RFO advised these should not be further depleted
- Council had recommended removal of the Earmarked Reserve in respect of 'one-year accommodation'; however, in the current financial climate, the Officer reiterated her recommendation to retain that Reserve for another year.

Prior to due consideration of the report, the Clerk asked that Council consider a written request at this juncture, received from four Members of Council undertaking a dual role with the Local Authority. The Clerk thereupon outlined the request and - at the behest of Members – her response, i.e. 'We would ask that this goes in correspondence, we formally ask that the Precept item be deferred for more consideration be given to it.'

The Clerk had confirmed that she would accommodate the Members' request, however, could not advise deferring the item as Council would miss the deadline imposed by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council of Friday, 3rd February, 2023.

Based on previous discussion of Members of Council, and the response of the Clerk, at the risk of not receiving a precept in adhering to the deadline imposed – the Leader suggested Council had no other option than to proceed with consideration of the report, particularly as no apologies had been received nor comments forwarded to her or the Deputy Leader for consideration.

The RFO clarified if town councils did not respond by the deadline, then the appropriate local authority would automatically levy a standstill precept for collection. Members said if this

happened, Council could be running a deficit budget and would be at risk of placing an even greater increase on citizens in the future.

A Member said one reason the request had been sent by the four Members was that, on reflection, they felt Council could do more to cut expenditure as they had a duty of care to the community, e.g. reduce the number of band concerts.

The Deputy Leader said that the budget-setting had been subject to lengthy and careful consideration; Council had attempted to keep the precept as close to a zero increase as possible: however, reiterated he considered that Council tried to take on too much without seeking external support, e.g. businesses sponsoring the Christmas lights display. He suggested Tredegar had to learn from other town councils to operate in a different way, particularly as the current position was of Council's own making, maintaining a standstill budget for the past fourteen years, irrespective of inflation / growth. The Member expressed disappointment at the County Borough Members voicing concerns at the last minute, this issue was not disappearing and Council would be in the same position next year; therefore, Members had to seriously consider spend. He thereupon enquired what the outcome would be should Council continue to set a standstill budget.

The RFO said that relying on Reserves was a failure to set a lawful budget and could give rise to personal liability to individual Members, action taken by the Council's external Auditor, Audit Wales, and could also lead to a Police investigation.

The RFO had clearly outlined in the report the draw on Reserves in respect of a 'standstill' budget and the budget being lower than anticipated over the previous few years due to a reduced draw on Reserves resulting from Covid restrictions. The advice of the Officer was to continue meeting as a Performance Review Sub-Committee on a regular basis in respect of budget-monitoring and recommence the meetings of the Budget Working Party. Council should be looking towards developing a Medium-Term Financial Strategy and continue to investigate sourcing funding from other sources.

The RFO also reiterated the risk should the Local Authority change its practice of paying the precept in one lump, as other local authorities paid in instalments, Council could find itself in a position of not having sufficient funds to carry on operating after the first three-six months.

The Leader pointed out the budget had been set at the previous meeting, and there had been numerous opportunities for consideration, and discussion should have taken place prior to this meeting. The Member had written to all Members in respect of considering the budget and no alternative options had been received by the Leader / Deputy Leader. Therefore, when setting the budget, Council needed to look at the medium/long-term future and may need to increase the precept again or consider cancelling services, being very careful in Council's financial management.

Upon a vote being undertaken, Councillor J. Thomas abstained from the voting process, whereupon

The report was accepted and recommendations contained therein approved:

- An increased Precept of 15%, resulting in a reduced draw on Reserves by £20,760 (N.B. This equated to a £0.06 weekly increase for Band B properties)
- Increase Earmarked Reserves 'Contractual maintenance services for Toilets (one year)' to £22,950

- Remove provision in Earmarked Reserves in respect of 'Accommodation (one year)'
The RFO would notify Blaenau Gwent CBC of the increased Precept to the budget accordingly.

The Deputy Leader wished to place on record the low number of Members in attendance to consider such an important agenda item; it was therefore agreed that a letter be sent to all Members, emphasising the importance of Councillors fulfilling their role and a reminder to make every effort to attend meetings.

266) Grants:

a) To receive and consider grants to Sporting and Cultural organisations (under the provision of the Local Govt. Miscellaneous Provision Act 1976 s.19 and Local Government Act 1972 s.137)

Councillor C. Walters declared an interest in the following application and took no part in discussion or voting thereon

Aneurin Leisure Trust, Bedwellty House - Any financial assistance received would be used towards moving their Heritage Learning programme to digital platforms and they are also looking to purchase the Town Clock model from The Little Role Play Town, which would be sited in the reception at Bedwellty House, to be used as the "start and finish" point for the Heritage Learning Trail.

2021/22 April'21 CQ No. 141 £1,000.00

In response to a question raised, a Member said this was a new trail looking in-depth at Bedwellty House and Park, featuring twenty-three QR stations; Members felt this was an excellent initiative to attract young people and highlighting there would be the opportunity to include the Town Council logo ; the Member had no hesitation in supporting this initiative.

A grant of £1,000.00 was: *Approved accordingly.*

Hospice of the Valleys - Any financial assistance received would be used for the Bronze Level sponsorship for the 6 Mile Race.

2021/22 Feb'22 CQ No. 269 £250.00 - *Approved accordingly*

Oak Football Club - Any financial assistance received would be used towards the increased costs of hiring the pitch and paying referee's costs.

2021/22 March'22 CQ No. 282 £200.00 - *Approved accordingly*

b) To receive and consider grants to Churches & Chapels (s.137) - *Grants as of 01.04.2017 now max £300.00 (before awarding a grant Council must be satisfied the grant is being given for non-religious purposes with the building being for community use):* None received

267) Correspondence

1) JDH Business Services Ltd.

Re: Internal Audit service quote £650 plus VAT. This will be a remote service, with no meeting attendance, will produce a report, answer any queries raised and complete their section of the Annual Return.

- The RFO had emphasised the audit related to a Welsh based council; references had been provided and the Officer outlined responses received, which would be retained on file.
A specific member of staff would be designated to deal with the Tredegar Town Council account – the process could slightly differ to that experienced previously but the RFO would not wish to receive a qualified audit due to the failure of acquiring the service of an Internal Auditor. The Officer was satisfied with the information presented and suggested Council could accept the quote accordingly.

In response to a question raised, the RFO confirmed comprehensive information had been provided on which to provide costings and the initial quote was actually cheaper; however, any additional work would be subject to a subsequent charge being levied.

Due to the extensive work of the Officer in seeking expressions of interest, and the reasonable cost, a Member proposed that Council proceed with this service for this year – and could always continue with the search in the meantime.

The quote in respect of the internal audit service was thereupon approved unanimously.

2) BGCBC

- i) List of applications received, week ending 06.01.2023.
 - ii) List of applications received, week ending 13.01.2023.
 - iii) List of applications received, week ending 27.01.2023.
- Noted.

3) One Voice Wales

- a) Technical Advice Note (TAN) 15: Development, flooding and coastal erosion further amendments. OVW will be preparing a response to this consultation and would appreciate your response or draft response by the end of the day, Friday 31st March 2023.
- b) Carbon Literacy training for asset managers and stakeholders.

c) Buckingham Palace Garden Parties, nominations for Councillors who have gone above and beyond for their communities are to be submitted by 13.02.2023.

- Agreed: Councillor Ellen Jones to be nominated for her outstanding work to the community of Sirhowy.

4) Members items:

a) Cllr Turner: Report of two floodlights not functioning properly on the Clock.

- Noted: Clerk to contact the Contractor to ascertain cost with subsequent expenditure delegated to Senior Members to progress.

b) Cllr H. Trollope: Request from Cllrs E. Jones, J. Thomas, D. Rowberry and H. Trollope for the precept item to be deferred for more consideration.

- Noted (Ref: Minute No. 265).

c) Cllr Tippings: Asking for the toilets operative hours to be changed to 12.00 noon til 5.00 p.m. on a Monday & Saturday and if so will need someone to open the toilets on those days.

- The Leader, as the operative's Line Manager, outlined the previous arrangements in respect of opening / closing of the toilets when the operative was appointed. The operative was asking to amend the hours of working but maintain the same number of hours. A Member highlighted that the operative was contractual and not an employee of Council.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the request be referred to a meeting of the Finance and Staffing Sub-Committee for due consideration.

5) Integrated Wellbeing Network

Blaenau Gwent Food Partnership Network has been launched and asking people to make a pledge to the Blaenau Gwent Food Charter.

- Noted.

6) PUBLICATIONS

BGCBC Roadworks report, week ending 27.01.2023 and 03.02.2023; Communicorp Local Councils Update Issue 269: January / February 2023; OVW Learning from the Great Tide BBC Radio 4 programme – ***distributed to Members***: Received.

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

268) Planning:

a) To consider List of Planning Applications received

- i) List of planning applications received in week 03
- ii) List of planning applications received in week 04

a) *To consider Planning Applications submitted for Council's observations* - None received.

b) *To consider other planning matters* – Re: Windfarm at Manmoel. Ebbw Vale resident raising concerns for this development which he has discussed these with Alun Davies MS. As Ebbw Vale, Victoria and Cwm do not have their own town Council he hopes Tredegar Town Council will be supporting those residents and others in Blaenau Gwent in its opposition to this development – Agreed: Deputy Leader to respond.

269) Updates regarding Bedwellty House and Park / Parc Bryn Bach - any issues to have been previously reported direct to Aneurin Leisure personally

- None received.

270) Delegates: to receive and consider reports from Delegates to Outside Bodies and the recommendations of Sub-Committees / Working Parties:

- a) Joint Committee of Local Councils** – budget setting; Quarterly meetings to be re-introduced and scheduled accordingly
- b) Gwent Valleys One Voice Wales** – No meeting
- c) One Voice Wales Larger Councils and AGM** – Meeting to be held next week
- d) Tredegar Twinning** – the visit to Orvault would be from 1st – 5th June; Members should let Kim know as soon as possible if wishing to attend
- e) Pen Bryn Oer Community Fund** – Deadline: closes 8th March, 2023
- f) School Governing Bodies** – Deighton Primary: meeting to be held next week
- g) Blaenau Gwent Heritage Forum** – No meeting
- h) Blaenau Gwent CAB** – No meeting
- i) Tredegar / Ebbw Vale Crime Prevention Panel** – No meeting
- j) Tredegar Business Forum** – No meeting
- k) VVP / Tredegar Heritage Initiative** – No meeting

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

- Dispensation for absence: The Clerk referred to a request received from Councillor Pierre Cornlouer, seeking dispensation for absence for the time-being. The Officer highlighted the appropriate Category of Legislation in respect of the six-month period of absence in attending meetings of Council.

The Clerk outlined the reasons for the Member's request, which Council fully acknowledged and were happy to support. It was recognised, this was a decision subject to approval of Council and, if the time period needed to be extended, this should

be brought back for consideration accordingly.

It was therefore agreed to allow a 'dispensation for absence' of six months for Councillor Pierre Cornlouer; the Member would be encouraged to attend, when next in a position to do so in the future.

Members wished to thank Councillor Cornlouer for informing Council of the situation, rather than just not attending meetings, which was greatly appreciated.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 7.50 p.m.

_____ Chair