



Draft Unapproved Minutes of the Full Council Meeting 16th October 2024.

Present: Councillors H Llewellyn; C Andrews; J Bissex (remotely); C Bissex-Foster; R Carrol; P Collins; J Davies; S Hamer-Thomas (remotely); D IngramJones; M IngramJones; Y Price; J McCarthy (remotely).

Youth Representatives: Miss E Jones; Miss E Harding.

Also Present: Mr A Thomas (Aberbargoed Fire Station Manager); Mrs H Williams (Town Clerk)

Meeting Chairperson: Councillor H Llewellyn (Mayor)

The mayor welcomed everyone and went on to thank members for attending in person on such a wet and windy evening. There were no police present to give a report.

1.To receive a report from Gwent Police.

Members reviewed the statistics on the monthly report and questioned the inclusion of an incident in Penybryn Terrace – this may relate to another geographical area. The youth representatives were asked to comment on their understanding of how young people feel about being in the community at night. They advised it feels very calm in the community, but not many people are out at night.

Due to the lack of Gwent Police presence the mayor sought Members approval to reorder the business of the agenda to move on to item three and revert to item two upon the arrival of the fire service.

3.To receive Apologies for Absence.

Councillor M IngramJones (university commitment); Councillor R Price (away).

4. To receive Declaration of Interests or dispensations on any item(s) on this Agenda, if appropriate.

Councillor R Carroll declared an interest in item 9 in respect of the recommendation under minute reference 12.1 Oakland Hall Allotment Association.

5. Press and Public Participation Session.

No enquiries received by the clerk.

6. To receive, approve and sign Minutes of the last Meeting of Full Council 18th September 2024.

Minutes unanimously approved.

The clerk noted an error on the numbering of agenda items with the omission of item 7.

8. Mayor's verbal report on Civic activities.

The mayor reported a quiet month for civic activities, however he did attend the new dog groomers on Cardiff Road in Bargoed and officially opened the premises, noting he was very impressed with the set up and the amount of work that has been put in to the business.

9. To receive draft unapproved minutes of the Policy & Resources Committee meeting 26th September 2024 and consider the committee's recommendation under minute reference 12.1 in respect of the grant application from Oakland Hall Allotment Association.

Councillor Carroll left the meeting room prior to this item being discussed.

Content of the draft unapproved minutes were noted.

Members reviewed the grant application and RESOLVED to make a grant of £250 to Oakland Hall Allotment Association. The clerk was asked about previous grants to allotments and advised most allotments apply for a small grant every year, with the exception of one in the Park ward.

10. To receive verbal feedback from the town council representative to the One Voice Wales Area Committee meeting 2nd October 2024

Councillor M IngramJones extended her apologies but for technical reasons she was unable to attend the meeting, and there will be no feedback at a subsequent meeting.

11. To receive draft unapproved minutes of the Events & Environment Committee meeting 3rd October 2024.

Content of the draft unapproved minutes noted.

12. To note the content of the Caerphilly People's First Autumn newsletter. Content noted, and members commented on the positive work being delivered in the community.

Mr A Thomas joined the meeting 18.20pm.

2.To receive a report from Aberbargoed Fire Station.

The manager advised the flooding is getting quite bad in places so he will keep his feedback brief on this occasion. The team is not aware of any local trends in arson or deliberate fire setting at the moment, they will continue with ongoing arson vulnerability assessments in empty premises particularly in town centres. All health and safety risk assessments are up to date with regard to buildings. The mayor asked if there were any concerns about buildings in the north of Bargoed town having received feedback from the public about buildings being unsafe. Mr Thomas advised that the team undertake regular assessments from a fire perspective and also to ensure the building is safe for firefighters to go in should a fire occur in the premises. If there are concerns then an 'at risk' form is submitted to the local authority. He advised that if the public have safety concerns these should be reported to the local authority directly.

Mr Thomas moved on to explain that his team are currently working on arrangements to take Santa's Sleigh out into the community during the festive period. This will be in addition to their attendance at the Bargoed Winter Fair Saturday 7th December, and will be over a two day period. Dates to be confirmed within the next three weeks.

Mr Thomas left the meeting.

Councillor McCarthy joined the meeting 18.30pm

The clerk advised the meeting that the Youth Representatives needed to leave shortly to attend a university masterclass.

The mayor sought members approval to immediately deal with item 16 to allow the youth representatives to leave on time. Members approved the reorder of the business on the agenda.

16. To receive a verbal report from the Youth Representatives.

The young ladies reported being involved in initiating the dissemination of information on new mental health support services throughout the school. They have been working closely with their year tutor to distribute this information and encourage take up within the school.

The main message they are receiving from young people is that they want age appropriate places to go in the community. Young people do not want to be attending a youth club with very young children, they want venues they can relax and socialise with peers.

The representatives asked if they could have access to survey questions that they can use within the school to collect opinions on what young people think and what they would like to see developed in the local community. Members of the community engagement committee advised the deputy clerk has a brief survey ready to be provided to the representatives.

The mayor thanked them for their input and they left the meeting at 18.44pm

13.To receive the draft report of the Independent Remuneration Panel, note the amendments to determination number 8 and provide instruction to the Policy & Resources Committee on discretionary member allowances for budget planning discussions.

Members reviewed the draft report noting the development of the Democracy and Boundary Commission (DBCC) which will take over remuneration responsibilities from April 2025, that there is no change to the mandatory payments under determination 7, (£156 a year towards extra household expenses, £52 a year for consumables), and the increase in the proposed rate of compensation for financial loss under determination 8 being £126.74 for a full day and £63.37 for a half day. Members instructed the clerk to edit the town council expenses policy to reflect these financial loss figures.

Members spoke about the basis upon which to commence the draft budget calculations for the optional allowances, resolving to instruct the policy and resources committee to include the following:

Three senior role salaries of £500 each; a mayor allowance of £1,500; deputy mayor allowance of £500; members attendance allowance per full council meeting of £20 per member; and budgets of £500 for financial compensation and travel and subsistence expenses respectively.

14.To consider the Welsh Parliament inquiry into the role, governance and accountability of the community and town council sector, discuss participation in the roundtable discussions 23rd October and compile a response to the terms of reference. (Consultation display (senedd.wales)

The following feedback to be provided to the inquiry on behalf of Bargoed Town Council:

1. The Role and Value of Community and Town Councils

Community and Town Councils have a multi-faceted role in the local community. Members of Bargoed Town Council feel the overarching role is to work to improve the quality of life for local residents. Councils do this through collaborative working, delivery of services, improving relationships, sharing information and resources, and encouraging the participation of local people. Community and Town Councils act as a representative voice for residents and advocate for them in dealing with county councils. The role of the community and town council is also to promote the democratic process, to encourage greater involvement and promote opportunities for participation. Community and Town Councils are better placed to foster partnership working and greater collaboration between sectors and being closer to the community they are better able to identify the most pressing needs of their local communities.

2. Whether the sector is fit for purpose in an evolving local government landscape

Some of the legislative framework within which the sector is working is no longer fit for purpose. It is, however, difficult to measure whether the sector is fit for purpose when the public perception of community and town councils has not yet been measured, Welsh Government has not given any indication of what it understands to be the purpose of the sector, and there is such a broad spectrum of size and shape of local council within the sector. Some communities across Wales do not have any community or town council at all, which leads to other questions about absence of services, particularly when county council budgets are reducing.

3. Governance and scrutiny arrangements and its impact on accountability and transparency

Some of the new requirements introduced within the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 such as Annual Reports, the publication of decisions/draft unapproved minutes within 7 days, public access to meetings, multi-location meetings are positive steps forward in improving accountability and transparency. The introduction of Training Plans, however, does not go far enough in terms of improving governance. Mandatory training for Members should not be limited to code of conduct as the sector is increasingly becoming more professionalised, and there are greater demands on Members. There is a possibility that more local people would come forward to fill vacancies if they knew they would receive comprehensive training to give them confidence in having the right skills to make informed decisions.

4. Scope of digital/new technology to improve decision-making, service provision and participation

The statutory requirement of offering remote access to meetings has been welcomed by Members, however the resource implications of increasing IT requirements; the lack of knowledge and varied skill sets amongst Members is a huge challenge and concern for the future. Participation and information dissemination has been improved using social media and website, but there are huge sections of the local community who still have no access to technology and are wholly dependent on noticeboards and hard copy documents/publications. Welsh Government funding for IT infrastructure, and parity across the sector, for example not all using different platforms, not using personal equipment etc. that would be a big step forward.

5. How new powers and responsibilities are utilised to support communities

Greater ability to collaborate across sectors and to use the General Power of Competence to generate income other than through the precept are positive steps which could lead to huge benefits for local communities. However local councils need to have resources to be able to commence new initiatives using GPoC, and this is where things become problematic. Powers given in isolation (ie without the resources to use them) are completely ineffective. Capacity issues and financial resources are the biggest restrictive issues to growth in the local council sector.

15. To receive items from the clerk:

15.1 Dates for the diary (library activities) – the clerk apologised to members that the dates would need to be shared electronically after the meeting, and will be included in the news section of the website for public awareness. An invitation has been received for Harvest Thanksgiving at St Peters Church Aberbargoed Sunday October 27 2024 at 16.00pm; and the Bargoed RBL Remembrance Festival at Heolddu School Friday 8th November at 6pm.

15.2 Update on noticeboards [instruction required by the clerk] – the clerk advised of the inability to site noticeboards on or adjacent to bus stops, and that the deputy clerk is still prompting Morrison's for a response on the request for a noticeboard on the outside of the building. Confirmation has been received on the ability to install a noticeboard near the shop on the Park estate and officers are requesting quotations to start the ball rolling.

Members considered Aberbargoed ward and instructed the clerk to seek information about the possibility of siting one on the entrance to the Hangar.

15.3 Update on photographs – the deputy clerk is still communicating with the local photographer in Bargoed having secured quotations from three other businesses in the county.

15.4 Information on minor authority representative to Park Primary School – instruction required by the clerk. Members RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Chris BissexFoster as the new minor authority representative for Park Primary School.

15.5 Opportunity for a working group with Heolddu School to look at potential for a youth forum. Members spoke about this opportunity and resolved to invite relevant teachers to attend a full council meeting to discuss the proposal, with the youth representatives to be involved.

17. To consider donations to the two local Foodbanks.

The clerk was instructed to defer a decision on funding but to liaise with both foodbanks to make enquiries about eligibility, where vouchers can be obtained, future delivery plans and human resources.

18. To discuss committees and working groups with a view to filling vacancies and boosting capacity of the annual report working group, the biodiversity working group and the finance & governance toolkit working group.

Members RESOLVED to appoint the following members:

Annual Report Working Group – Cllr H Llewellyn, Cllr Y Price.

Policy & Resources Committee – Cllr C BissexFoster.

Events & Environment Committee – Cllr J McCarthy.

Town & Community Council Liaison Committee – Cllr J McCarthy.

One Voice Wales Larger Councils Committee – Cllr J McCarthy.

Members will revisit the remaining vacancies in the new year when the Community Engagement Committee is re-examined.

This concluded the business of the meeting. The Mayor thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 19:36pm