MINUTES OF A MEETING OF ABERTILLERY AND LLANHILLETH COMMUNITY COUNCIL (ALCC) HELD ON 12 DECEMBER 2018 at 7.00pm in the Council Chamber, Mitre Street, Abertillery

PRESENT: Councillors:

Peter Adamson, Steve Bard, Keri Bidgood, Gill Clark (Vice Chair) (in the Chair), Roger Clark, Tracey Dyson, Mark Lewis, Perry Morgan, Gary Oakley, Rob Phillips, Allen Rees, Nick Simmons and Bernard Wall

Officers: Steve Edwards, Deputy Clerk and Richard Gwinnell, Town Clerk

Others: None

ABSENT: Councillors Ivor Beynon, Julie Holt (Chair), Glyn Smith, Graham White and Trudy Williams

154. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Beynon, Holt, White and Williams.

155. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bard declared a personal interest in agenda item 14 (grants) as he was involved in the Abertillery Orpheus Choirs, which were applying for grant funding.

156. POLICE UPDATE

The Clerk circulated an update received from the Police, since the agenda was issued. A copy is attached to the minute book. Members took a few minutes to read the update.

Comments were made about continuing problems with sheep wandering freely in Bourneville, parking on Roseheyworth Hill and Gladstone Street, a number of burglaries in Bourneville and people drinking late at night in a lane. Members were encouraged to report issues to the Police directly, when they occurred. The Clerk was asked to find out more information about the Ebbw Fach Crime Prevention Panel (e.g. what it was, its membership, when it met etc) and let members know by email.

Councillor Wall arrived at this point.

Council RESOLVED to note the update.

157. MINUTES – COUNCIL MEETINGS – 7 AND 21 NOVEMBER 2018

Council RESOLVED:

(1) that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 7 November 2018 (budget issues) be confirmed as a correct record, for signature by the Chair

(2) that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 7 November 2018 (non-budget issues) be confirmed as a correct record, for signature by the Chair

(3) that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 21 November 2018 be confirmed as a correct record, for signature by the Chair, subject to the following changes:

- page 4, minute 131, penultimate paragraph: add the words "The point of order was passed over." before the words "Following further brief discussion:"
- page 6, minute 135, last paragraph: add the words ", called a point of order" before the words "and left the meeting at this point".

158. MINUTES – HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 7 AND 21 NOVEMBER 2018

Council RESOLVED to note the minutes of the Human Resources Committee meetings held on 7 November and 21 November 2018 (which had already been confirmed as correct by the HR committee).

159. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no public questions for this meeting.

160. COUNCIL ACTION LIST

Questions were asked and replies given about progress on the cleaning of the Abertillery war memorial and liaison with Aberbeeg Community Centre about storage.

Council RESOLVED:

(1) to note the updates shown in the action sheet and the good progress being made
(2) to remove item 252(3) (28.3.18) from the action sheet, as discussions had taken place and Aberbeeg Community Centre would use their own storage space.

161. REPORT ARISING FROM THE HUMAN RESOURCES (HR) COMMITTEE HELD ON 21 NOVEMBER 2018

The Clerk circulated an amended page 30, which listed the members of the HR Committee and stated that the report was presented by the Chair, on their behalf.

In the absence of the Chair, the Vice-Chair presented and outlined the report in detail, highlighting the options identified by the HR Committee for Council to decide upon.

Discussion ensued, with the following main points arising:

- too much was being asked of the Council's two part time officers
- the Council needed an Admin Assistant to undertake admin tasks and also work experience students or short-term project staff for particular periods or projects
- councillors should be doing more basic research and "legwork", not staff
- the staff should be used only where their admin, skills or experience warranted it, and not for work which members should be doing themselves
- members should have a laptop, to use in the office for appropriate tasks

- staff should have proper hours, not be on zero hours contracts for example
- employing staff on an hourly basis was not a viable option
- members who worked full time could not come in and work on projects
- more detail was needed on how many staff / hours were required, before budget setting; could staff report back on how many staff / hours were needed
- this was not possible, without the Council knowing first what it wanted to deliver
- the Council should be able to extend staff hours or pay overtime if the Council wanted more done and existing staff were able to work extra hours
- the Council should pay the least amount possible for extra staff/hours
- putting limits on the timeframe in which staff could take time off in lieu was not a viable option; this would mean staff could be told to take time off by the end of a month, even if deadlines needed to be met; this could result in failure to deliver on time
- staff had worked over and above for ALCC and would not do so again if they lost the hours they had worked or were forced to take days off at an unsuitable time
- allowing time off in lieu (TOIL) to be carried forward until it could be used had worked to date but was not sustainable going forward, given the rising demands
- overtime only worked if staff were available to work it, and staff had to be paid; a combination of overtime payments and TOIL was therefore the only option
- who authorised overtime (currently none was paid, but it had been, up to two years ago) and why overtime was necessary
- the new appraisal form was better than the old one, but the old form was not "unfit for purpose".

Staff were asked for and gave their views about the options put forward in the report.

Council RESOLVED:

(1) to consider the cost-effective use of officer time as part of all future decision making, including decision making about the budget and potential future projects
(2) to consider further in due course the options highlighted by the HR Committee including overtime payments, employment of hourly paid project staff, the possibility of employing an Admin Assistant and the possibility of work experience placements
(3) (with two members abstaining from the vote and the rest in favour) to use a mixture of overtime payments and time off in lieu (TOIL) in future
(4) to adopt the proposed new appraisal form.

162. WELL-BEING WORKING GROUP (WBWG) REPORT

Councillor Simmons (Chair of the WBWG) referred to the additional papers he had circulated and explained (main points):

- Councillor Phillips was in fact the lead member for "regeneration of recreational facilities", with Councillor Williams as the Deputy (the paper issued was wrong)
- "Making getting to school safer" was not being taken forward at this stage
- it would be good to have more members actively involved in projects
- Blaenau Gwent had made clear that a long-term over-arching project would be a good idea
- the possibility of an out of town retail centre/railway station for Abertillery was the

most significant long-term project currently being considered by the WBWG
- he and others had met with Alun Davies AM (then a Welsh Government Minister) to discuss this
- there was no immediate prospect of getting a railway station at Abertillery
- it may be more likely if there were 4 trains per hour running on the Ebbw Vale line (instead of the current 2 trains per hour) and if Abertillery also had an out of town retail/leisure complex to attract visitors
- if well-being projects were to be progressed, more powers were needed, e.g. to enable members to meet with outside organisations/partners and speak to them with a degree of authority and to enable project leaders to get on with planning.

Councillor Oakley stated that a railway station at the Aberbeeg junction had been suggested by the Assembly Member, but there was no car parking at the Aberbeeg site and this would render a station at Abertillery even less likely in future. He proposed that a Well-being Committee be formed, with powers to get on with working up projects and meeting with partners. The committee could report back to Council periodically on progress. It could also appoint sub-committees as needed.

The Clerk reminded members that committees required agendas, published a week in advance, minutes, reports, staff attendance, meetings which were open to the press and public and proper terms of reference/powers.

Other members referred to the need to open the building specially for additional evening committee meetings and to budget for extra evening working (overtime or TOIL). It was suggested that meetings be held quarterly, on the same day as Council meetings, to avoid additional evening working, and that the Clerk work with members to develop terms of reference as soon as possible, ideally in January.

Council RESOLVED:

(1) to note the update
(2) that the Clerk work with members to develop draft terms of reference for a Well-being Committee and submit these to Council for further consideration, as soon as possible, ideally in January.

163. BUDGET 2019/20

Councillor Oakley presented the paper he had submitted. He explained (main points):

- the proposals in his paper were not all his ideas, but were those which various members had expressed previously
- there were approx. 7,000 properties in the ALCC area; over 70% of these were in Band A, paying less than £17 per house for ALCC, per year
- ALCC should raise and spend considerably more, to deliver better for the people of the ALCC area
- most other town or community councils (T&CCs) of a similar size spent much more than ALCC did
- £220,000 plus was not unreasonable for a council serving a population the size of ALCC's population
- the current precept (£112,000) was completely inadequate

- ALCC had kept its precept too low for too long
- charging £30 per house per year (at Band A) would be an increase of just over £13 per house per year, or just over £1 per month
- this would give ALCC a lot more money to put to good use for local communities
- council tax rises in England were capped; councils in Wales needed to make sure they were funded properly before capping came to Wales too
- some parish councils in England had increased their precept by 500%, with no negative feedback from the public they served.

Considerable discussion ensued. A brief summary of key points follows:

- the proposals from Councillor Oakley were “too much too soon”
- the budget and precept should be increased gradually, over a number of years
- a 20% increase in precept or a £33k budget increase would be reasonable
- £33k could pay for more events (£15k), young people’s activities (£5k), a TV monitor in the Council Chamber, asset transfer of the Division Street top car park, an Admin Assistant (£7k) etc
- other existing budget commitments could be reduced or consolidated (e.g. grants and ward donations, events spending etc)
- if members had firm proposals, they could have written them down and circulated them earlier, so others could consider them properly in advance of the meeting
- Blaenavon had a higher precept than ALCC, with only a third of the households
- some T&CCs in Wales had a precept of over £1 million
- many town councils charged a lot more than ALCC, let alone community councils
- over half the budget was fixed staffing costs
- taking inflation into account, ALCC’s budget had gone backwards, not forwards
- if ALCC did not increase its budget and precept, and do more for the people of the ALCC area, it was wasting its time
- people could vote at the ballot box on ALCC’s record
- people didn’t mind paying more if they could see the results
- solid, costed plans should be in place before the precept was increased
- people did not want to pay more council tax, when the street lights were going off in Blaenau Gwent
- people wanted value for money, and to see how much money was going where
- ALCC had to increase public awareness and public engagement
- the majority of members in the room today were in favour of a “considerable” (more than 30%) increase in the precept.

Councillor Oakley proposed that the officers ring round other town and community councils to find out some more reliable cost estimates and report back in January.

The Clerk explained that it was difficult to estimate costs, without the Council deciding what it wished to do in the year ahead. Costs could vary drastically. Clearly however, the Council was ambitious and needed to budget accordingly, as well as taking account of staff hours and costs. Taking over the top level of the Division Street car park, to ensure evening opening, was not simple, for example. A proper asset transfer was likely to cost in the region of £15k every year, not £5k. He reminded members that, in years gone by, ALCC had been criticised for considering its budget much too late and therefore not considering it properly. The meeting today was yet another opportunity for members to discuss the budget for the year ahead, prior to agreeing the budget in January.

The Chair stated that if other members had any other firm budget proposals, they should submit their proposals in advance of the papers going out for the 16 January meeting.

Council RESOLVED to consider the budget further on 16 January, and that officers find out more realistic cost estimates against the various budget options if possible.

164. VACANCY FOR A COUNCILLOR

The Clerk explained that ten signatures, calling for an election to the vacant seat, had not been received by the deadline. There had also been no applications to be co-opted into the vacant seat by the deadline advertised. The advert could stay on the website, but with the closing date removed.

Council RESOLVED to continue to advertise, but remove the closing date, and consider any future applications on a first come, first served basis.

165. SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 1(z)

Council **RESOLVED** to suspend standing order 1(z) to extend the meeting for longer, but only to deal with any urgent issues (as shown below), and to defer any other issues to a future meeting.

166. FINANCE ORDER

The Deputy Clerk explained:

- that the cheque for the next quarter payment for Christmas lights had not been sent yet, as installation of the Christmas lights had not yet been completed
- the Council's reserves now stood at only £16,500 approx
- £145.92 for the hire of refuse bins, for the WW1 Party in the Park, appeared twice in the "cheques presented" table
- this was a typing error; it only needed to be paid once.

Council RESOLVED:

(1) to note the above error in relation to the refuse bins payment
(2) to note the situation with reserves
(3) to approve the payments listed in the Finance Order, with the exception of the next 25% instalment of £4,989.60 for the Christmas lights
(4) to discuss payment of the next 25% instalment for the Christmas lights later in the meeting, after excluding the press and public.

167. SOLAR FARM GRANTS

The Clerk circulated copies of an application submitted (by email on 11 December) by Aberbeeg ward members, on behalf of the Ebbw Fach Community Group and Aberbeeg Community Centre Committee. A copy of this paper is attached to the minute book. All other proposals had been circulated with the agenda.

Councillor Phillips circulated and read out a letter (a copy of which is attached to the minute book), proposing that the 2018 solar farm grant be used for the Roseheyworth Community Woodland project, given its potential reach and links across the whole area.

The Chair reiterated that proposals must be submitted by members before (not at) meetings, to enable those proposals to be circulated in advance and allow everyone time to consider them properly.

It was pointed out that the Council had already decided to split the £35,000 available this year between the five wards (£7,000 each) and that people's expectations had been raised about many potential projects throughout the ALCC area.

Lengthy debate ensued, with arguments made for the merits of the Roseheyworth Woodlands scheme and its potential to attract more grants in future, as well as its potential to build links across the whole of the ALCC area (as part of the Ebbw Fach Trail) and to engage schools, children, local volunteers, partnerships, training and work opportunities etc. Comments were also made about the history of the Woodlands project, money spent previously, the work done on other projects, the decisions already made by the Council and the need for more time to consider the options.

The Clerk clarified the previous decisions made. He answered queries on the timeline and process.

A motion was moved by Councillor Morgan, seconded and:

Council RESOLVED (with 6 members voting in favour, 5 against and 2 abstaining) that the decision made on 21 November 2018 to split the £35,000 equally between the five wards of ALCC be rescinded.

A motion was moved by Councillor Bard, and seconded, that the Council look to take forward the proposal submitted by Councillor Phillips (to put the whole of the £35,000 into the Roseheyworth Community Woodlands scheme) but also look to include where possible links to the other projects submitted and any other potential partnership working opportunities.

Questions were asked about the timescale in which the money might be available from the solar farm company and about how the money would be spent. The Clerk reiterated again that the company wanted the Council to decide quickly on the priorities for the grant and that the Council had very limited resources with which to deliver projects. ALCC needed to give the money to community groups or trusts (for example) which were already established, for them to deliver desired outcomes and report back. ALCC did not have the resources for ongoing spending liabilities or workloads.

Following further debate, the Clerk suggested, in light of the lack of consensus, and:

Council RESOLVED:

(1) to defer further consideration to the 16 January meeting of the Council
(2) that the Clerk seek further clarity from the company on the deadline for decisions

and advise members as soon as possible
(3) that an urgent meeting be called if necessary, if an urgent decision is required to secure the funding, before the 16 January meeting.

Members agreed to deal with agenda item 20 next.

168. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Council RESOLVED to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the following items of business, by virtue of The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, on the grounds that disclosure of the matters to be discussed would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of those matters.

Members agreed to deal with agenda item 22 next.

169. CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

Discussion ensued on the late arrival of Christmas lights this year, the poor quality of the lights provided in some areas and the lack of any lights in other areas. The Clerk advised members of conversations held with the contractor in the last few weeks and months and of the terms of the contract.

Council RESOLVED:

(1) not to pay the 25% “on installation” instalment at present, as much of the installation had not yet taken place
(2) that the Christmas Lights Working Group meet with the contractor to discuss the situation urgently
(3) that the Clerk seek further legal advice from One Voice Wales
(4) that members take photos of lights provided (or not provided) locally and
(5) that the situation be revisited in January.

Members agreed to deal with agenda item 17 next.

170. DEFIBRILLATORS

The Deputy Clerk reported that, as requested previously, he had obtained further quotes for different models. Defibs with GPS trackers cost in the region of £700 to £800 more each, with an annual maintenance cost of approx. £6,000. If the Council went for non-GPS models, it could purchase 10 units from the £15k set aside previously.

Council RESOLVED to proceed to purchase non-GPS tracked defibrillators.

Members agreed to deal with agenda item 21 next.

171. WAR MEMORIAL MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

The Clerk explained that the current contract to maintain the war memorial site had come to an end and a new contract was needed for the new year. The current contractor wished to carry on providing the service to the Council in the year ahead and had quoted a price to do so, which was within the budget agreed by Council. Another bid had been received, at more than double the cost of the current contractor. The current contractor was also cheaper than two other bidders when quotes were sought in 2017. The current contractor's performance had been good.

Council RESOLVED to award the contract for maintenance of the war memorial site in 2019 to Green Fingers Tree Services.

Members agreed to deal with agenda item 23 next.

172. PAYROLL SERVICES PROVISION

The Clerk reminded members that the Council had for some years employed an external accountant to calculate staff pay, national insurance, tax and pension contributions. The accountant provided the calculations and payslips but was not able to make the required payments, so cheques had to be written by staff. The Council had previously signalled a wish that all payroll related payments should be made by bank transfer and by an external agency, in line with advice from the Clerk and the Council's Internal Auditor. Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council had been approached and were able to offer such a service, but at a cost of £50 per month, as opposed to the current £26 per month. This offer was subject to further detailed discussions with Blaenau Gwent and the current service provider.

Council RESOLVED:

(1) to delegate authority to officers to continue discussions with BGCBC about them providing an automated payroll service with effect from 1 April 2019 if possible
(2) to enter into an agreement with BGCBC to do so if possible and
(3) to give notice to the current service provider of the Council's intentions as soon as possible, to ensure an effective transition to the new arrangements.

173. DEFERRAL OF FURTHER BUSINESS

The Council **RESOLVED** to defer any further business remaining on the agenda to the next available Council meeting.

The Chair wished everyone a Merry Christmas. The meeting ended at 9.55pm.

Signed as a correct record by the Chair …………………………………..……..

NB these minutes are a summary of the proceedings and record of the decisions taken. They are not intended to be a verbatim record.

Minutes produced by Richard Gwinnell, Clerk