

**MEETING OF THE FULL COUNCIL OF ABERTILLERY AND LLANHILLETH
COMMUNITY COUNCIL (ALCC) HELD ON 19 July 2023 AT 7.00pm
in the Council Chamber at Council Offices, Mitre Street, Abertillery.**

PRESENT

Councillors: Tracey Dyson (Chair); Josh Rawcliffe (Vice Chair); Michaela Assiratti; Steve Bard; Mark Lewis; Barrie Page; Rob Phillips; Nick Simmons; Bernard Wall and Graham White

Via videolink: Chris Hill; Ben Owen-Jones.

Officers: David Cartwright (Clerk); Steve Edwards (Deputy Clerk)

Apologies: Peter Adamson; Deb Pitt

Absent: Glyn Smith

Other: Mr Paul Welch

32. APOLOGIES AND WELCOMES

Apologies were received from Deb Pitt. The Chair welcomed Mr Paul Welch of Cwmtilery, who attended the meeting as a member of the public.

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST OR DISPENSATIONS

None.

34. MINUTES – 28 JUNE 2023

Mark Lewis complained that he had asked a number of questions and made some statements during the meeting but that none of these interventions had been mentioned in the minutes. The Clerk reminded Members that the minutes were not a transcript of a meeting – they were the official record of decisions made. Comments made by Members were usually only included where they were indicative of the debate that led to a decision being made. The Chair added that Cllr Lewis needed to propose specific amendments to the minutes that Members could vote on. The Council agreed to the Clerk's suggestion that consideration of the minutes be deferred to the next meeting to give Cllr Lewis time to formulate appropriate amendments.

Chris Hill – who could neither hear nor be heard via his videolink – left the meeting at 7.14 pm.

35. EMERGENCY MOTIONS

The Chair informed the meeting that she wished to accept two motions from the Community Empowerment Committee that had not been included on the original agenda as both required decisions to be made before the Council's next scheduled meeting in September.

The Council **RESOLVED** to suspend Standing Order 9b to enable the two motions to be moved.

a) Youth diversion scheme

The Chair stated that The Blaenau Gwent Youth Team had been working with CSO Luke Davies of Gwent Police to formulate a scheme to divert some young people from the criminal justice system. The scheme proposed enabling identified individuals to attend classes with professional mixed martial artist Jack Shore in Aberbeeg.

Attendance would be compulsory and the classes would be dependent on the individuals staying free of drugs, alcohol and offending. In return, the costs of the classes (£43 per month) would be met by the scheme. A budget of £5,000 would give the Community Empowerment Committee the potential to fund up to eighteen individuals over a period of six months to enter the program as an alternative to the police bringing criminal charges.

The Council **RESOLVED** that a budget of £5,000 – to be managed by the Community Empowerment Committee – be allocated to fund a Blaenau Gwent Youth Team diversion scheme for young people who have been identified as being most at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

b) Lo-Cost store site

The Chair stated that the newly-formed Abertillery Aspiration Group had proposed an initiative regarding the abandoned Lo-Cost store site adjacent to Castle Street in Abertillery. The site was currently derelict pending development for the proposed Abertillery railway station. As the planned rail link to Abertillery had yet to receive UK Government funding, the site was likely to remain derelict for a number of years. The project envisaged cleaning up the site and creating a ‘safe area’ for the town’s young people. The project would require significant on-going funding to provide shelters, lighting and other infrastructure. The proposed scheme had been endorsed by the Blaenau Gwent Youth Team.

The Council **RESOLVED** to agree in principle to support an initiative to create a safe area for young people on the former Lo-Cost site in Abertillery and authorised the Community Empowerment Committee to enter into relevant discussions on its behalf with the Abertillery Aspiration Group, Blaenau Gwent Youth Team, the landowner and others.

36. INTERNAL AUDIT

The Clerk shared the internal auditor’s report on the Council’s Annual Return and accounts 2022-23, which had been received only a few hours before the meeting. The Clerk said that the internal auditor had noted a number of deficiencies in the Council’s financial oversight during 2022-23 of which the Council was fully aware. Action to address those issues had been taken at a meeting of the Finance Committee on 18 July 2023. There were a small number of other issues where the internal auditor required more information from the Responsible Financial Officer.

Most importantly, the internal auditor’s report had highlighted two issues of which the Council had been unaware. Firstly, it was not clear whether the payment of members’ allowances – which was made through the same Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council payroll as staff salaries – had been correctly removed from the figure for staff costs reported in the Council’s Annual Return. Secondly, there was a discrepancy of £136.38 between two figures generated by the Council’s online accounting system when they should be the same.

Although this was a small discrepancy, the Clerk stated that he could not ask the Council to approve the signing of the Annual Return until it had been rectified.

The Council **RESOLVED** that the Clerk could summon an extraordinary meeting of the Council in August to approve the signing of the Annual Return once the issues raised in the internal auditor’s report had been resolved.

37. BANK AUTHORISERS

The Deputy Clerk reminded the Council that it had resolved to transfer the Council's current and reserve accounts from Nat West to Unity Trust Bank. Unity Trust was an online-only bank and the necessary authorisations would need to be given online in order to complete the transfer. One of the Council's current bank authorisers did not have access to email and had no working laptop. The Deputy Clerk proposed that the Member be removed as a bank authoriser and that a motion to review the list of authorisers be brought to a meeting of the Council once the transfer had been completed.

The Council **RESOLVED** to authorise officers to remove Glyn Smith from the list of the Council's bank authorisers.

38. COMMITTEES

The Council **RESOLVED** not to appoint Graham White as a Member of the Finance Committee.

39. PARTY IN THE PARK

The Chair said that a firm commitment to ongoing funding of Abertillery's Party in the Park would enable Members and officers to begin the event's organisation months earlier each year.

The Council **RESOLVED** that the Council will fund a Party in the Park event to be held annually on the second Saturday in June at Abertillery BG RFC.

40. COUNCIL GRANT

Steve Bard questioned whether it would be right for the Council to pay a grant to Llanhilleth RFC when the People and Communities Committee had paid a grant of £5,000 to Off The Streets in respect of the same event. Ben Owen-Jones believed that the proposed grant would bring benefits to the rugby club and to Llanhilleth that went beyond the staging of a single event.

The Council **RESOLVED** to authorise (under Section 145 of the Local Government Act 1972) officers to pay a Council Grant of £500 to Llanhilleth RFC.

41. WARD GRANT

The Council **RESOLVED** to authorise (under Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976) officers to pay a Ward Grant of £200 to Abertillery Bluebirds Youth FC.

42. GRANT CRITERIA AND PROCESSES

The Council **RESOLVED** to appoint the chairs of the Council's three budget-holding committees to a working group to consider the Council's criteria and processes for the awarding of grants.

43. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS REPORT 2022-23

Ben Owen-Jones suggested that each citation of statistical information in the report should be accompanied by an appropriate reference. Steve Bard suggested that copies of the report should be filed in relevant places such as local libraries and that it should be circulated to appropriate public bodies.

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the Council's Well-being of Future Generations Report 2022-23.

44. NEXT MEETING

27 September 2023

The meeting ended at 7.51 pm.