

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF ABERTILLERY AND LLANHILLETH COMMUNITY COUNCIL
(ALCC) HELD ON 20 NOVEMBER 2019 at 7.00pm
in the Council Chamber, Mitre Street, Abertillery**

PRESENT: Councillors:

Gill Clark (Chair), Peter Adamson, Michaela Assiratti, Keri Bidgood, Roger Clark, Tracey Dyson, Julie Holt, Mark Lewis, Beverley Lucas, Perry Morgan, Gary Oakley, Rob Phillips, Tracy Postlethwaite, Allen Rees, Nick Simmons, Glyn Smith and Graham White

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

Others: None

ABSENT: Councillor Bernard Wall

119. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND WELCOMES

No apologies for absence were received.

120. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No members declared any personal interests verbally at the meeting. Councillor Phillips completed a personal interests form, that he had a personal but not prejudicial interest in agenda item 6 (minute 124 below) as he had awarded ward grants to Abertillery and District Museum in the past, he had been invited to their meetings and he had been a close supporter of the Museum (but he did not hold any position of authority on the Museum Trust).

121. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no public questions for this meeting.

122. COUNCILLOR VACANCIES

The Clerk reported that two applications for co-option into the vacant Abertillery seat had been received, from Vanessa Bartlett (on 8 November 2019) and from Rachael Baskerville (on 13 November 2019). He circulated both applications for members to read.

Council RESOLVED (with 12 votes in favour) to co-opt Vanessa Bartlett onto the Council as a Councillor for the Abertillery ward.

123. FINANCE ORDER

The Deputy Clerk outlined the finance order and answered questions about the gazebos damaged at Party in the Park 2019 (which the Council's insurance did not cover) and the bank transfers (between the Current and Reserve accounts) previously agreed by Council, which would be done as soon as staff had time to go to the bank.

Council RESOLVED:

(1) to note the payments listed in Table 1 and Table 2 of the finance order

- (2) to authorise the payments listed in Table 3 of the finance order
- (3) to note the current financial position on the current and reserve accounts.

124. QUARTER 2 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT AND END OF YEAR FORECAST

The Deputy Clerk outlined the report. He stated that the Finance and Grants Committee would in future receive and discuss quarterly budget monitoring reports, before they were submitted to the Council, as they had with this report. He responded to a question about a British Gas bill (the Council was in credit).

Councillor Oakley (Chair of the Finance and Grants Committee) commented that:

- the committee met on 14 November
- it agreed to ask the Council to delegate decisions on ward grants to the committee in future (the Clerk advised that this could be dealt with later in the meeting, under “committee terms of reference”)
- the committee was putting together the draft budget for 2020/21, for submission to Council in January
- all members were invited to submit ideas for the new budget to the Clerk before the committee’s next meeting (2 December 2019)
- discussion had ensued at the committee meeting about a budget for potentially seeking a Community Asset Transfer of the Division Street car park next year
- members of the committee considered that a public survey should be carried out, to ask the public for their views, before any budget was committed to this
- it had been suggested that the Shop Local Working Group could take the lead on such a survey, as they were already looking at car parking options
- he had prepared a survey (copies of which were circulated at the meeting)
- the survey could be conducted at Winterfest on 30 November 2019 and beyond
- all members could help with the survey.

Various other members commented (main points):

- officers were doing a very good job; budgetary control was “spot on”
- copies of the survey could be taken to shops
- shops could be asked to get customers to do the survey too
- copies could also be taken to The Met, hairdressers, Bethany Chapel etc
- members would need to take responsibility for distributing and returning surveys
- staff could not be asked to do any more than they were doing already
- surveys could be taken to all shops in Abertillery and conducted at Winterfest
- there should also be an online link to the survey so people could find it online, fill it in and return it directly.

Following clarification, the Clerk stated that the survey could be posted on the website and 400 paper copies could be given to the Chair of the Shop Local Working Group next week.

Council RESOLVED:

- (1) to note the current financial position
- (2) that the Shop Local Working Group and all other members undertake the proposed car parking survey at Winterfest and beyond, with copies placed in local shops and other outlets in and around Abertillery town centre
- (3) that the survey be posted on the Council’s website

(4) that paper copies be produced and given to members as necessary.

125. MOTION: COUNCIL GRANTS FUNDING

Councillor Gary Oakley explained and moved his motion, as attached to the agenda.

Comments were made by various members (main points) that:

- since the Council adopted a £500 limit in its new grants criteria, groups were now increasingly applying for £500 (not lesser amounts)
- £10,000 would not last long if Council approved £500 grants every time
- this was about increasing the grants budget, not deciding to give £500 every time
- Council did not have to give every applicant £500
- there was a projected £3k underspend on the Council's budget overall
- voluntary groups kept communities going and needed ALCC's support
- the grants budget and any underspend could be looked at again later in the year.

Council RESOLVED: that the Council increases the 2019/20 Council Grants budget from £5,600.00 to £10,000.00 and that the additional funds required are taken from the "new projects" budget.

126. GRANT APPLICATIONS

The Clerk reported on a conversation with Rev Viv Nicholls of the Zion Miner's Chapel Intergenerational Craft Group and the reason for their application (following this question being raised at the Finance and Grants Committee on 14 November 2019). The Deputy Clerk answered questions about the amount of grants given previously to this group.

Comments were made that the Zion Miner's Chapel's Equalities Policy did not make any reference to sexual orientation. Members reassured the questioner that the group was fully inclusive and that it had customers with a wide variety of characteristics. It was suggested that this gap in their policy should be drawn to their attention.

Council RESOLVED:

- (1) That Zion Miner's Chapel Intergenerational Craft Group be granted £500 towards the costs of food, art and craft materials
- (2) That the ward grant application from Councillor Gill Clark, for £50, for the Llanhilleth Tenants and Residents Association to spend on road signage, be approved
- (3) That the ward grant application from Councillor Bidgood, for £50, for the Llanhilleth Tenants and Residents Association to spend on road signage, be approved
- (4) That the ward grant application from Councillor Rees, for £50, for the Llanhilleth Tenants and Residents Association to spend on road signage, be approved
- (5) That the ward grant application from Councillor Lucas, for £50, for the Friends of Six Bells Park to pay for the rental of an indoor space to hold a fundraising event, be approved
- (6) That the Friends of St Illtyd be granted £500, for the first stage of a project to make a photographic record of all the gravestones in the churchyard and produce a website, 3D map and database, to enable people to find out about their ancestors, long after the gravestones themselves have deteriorated beyond eligibility.

127. SOLAR FARM GRANT 2019

The Clerk informed members that he had spoken to the Project Manager of the solar farm company on Monday. He read out an email received today, in which the Project Manager confirmed that, if the Council decided on 11 December (who to give the 2019 funds to) and informed the company, for their approval, and the funds were issued before 20 December 2019, this timescale would be acceptable. The company was likely to approve the Council's choice, if it was clear, exactly what the funds would be spent on.

The Clerk asked to speak to members of the Solar Farm Grant Working Group after this meeting, to agree the timeline for the working group meeting on 4 December 2019.

The Chair stated that all members were invited to attend the working group meeting on 4 December, as presentations made by applicants on that date would not be repeated at the Council meeting on 11 December 2019.

Council RESOLVED: to note the update.

128. CHRISTMAS 2019

Councillor Phillips updated the Council on the preparations for Winterfest and what the day would entail. It was reported by Councillor Holt that the Facebook post (advertising Winterfest) had been seen by 21,500 people, with 900+ interested in attending.

Councillor Phillips reminded members that volunteers were needed to help on the day.

Council RESOLVED: to note the update.

129. REPORTS BACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM WORKING GROUPS

Leisure and Tourism Working Group (L&TWG): Councillor Dyson (Chair of the L&TWG) reported that a meeting had been held recently and progress was being made on the Fun Run. Councillor Postlethwaite was also looking into a "Green Shoots" project, which could involve local volunteers in the "town in bloom" project (planting and watering flower beds). Further details were to follow on costs. This was for Council's information at this stage.

Shop Local Working Group (SLWG): Councillor Lewis (Chair of the SLWG) referred to the recommendations circulated with the agenda and sought Council's approval of £200 to purchase and paint a sleigh, to be sited in the town centre and moved around (by members of the SLWG) during the Christmas period. The idea was for children to sit on the sleigh and have their photo taken. He also referred to the proposed Best Dressed Window Competition, which would be free to the Council as trophies had been donated by New Ashes. He asked for three volunteers to judge the competition.

Wellbeing Working Group (WBWG): Councillor Simmons (Chair of the WBWG) reported that no costings had been received for projects, except the Town in Bloom project. He would submit Town in Bloom costings (based on a quotation he had received) for inclusion in the 2020/21 budget. The project mapping exercise undertaken by Councillor Holt was a good start to mapping what the Council was doing in terms of meeting the Wales wellbeing objectives.

Council RESOLVED:

(1) to note the updates

(2) to agree to the spending of £200 to purchase and paint the proposed sleigh

(3) that the members of the SLWG judge the Best Dressed Window Competition.

The Chair suggested and Council agreed to take agenda item 13 at this point.

130. PROJECT MAPPING EXERCISE

Councillor Holt outlined the project map template she had prepared, which was attached to the agenda. She commented that ALCC should not be focussing its efforts on looking for numerous new projects to meet the wellbeing objectives, but rather it should be mapping what it was already doing (e.g. on youth engagement) to meet the wellbeing objectives. When ALCC was asked what it was doing to improve wellbeing, it could use these maps to demonstrate that. The template could also be used to map other things ALCC was doing (e.g. the fun run or giving grants to community groups) to improve wellbeing.

The Chair of the WBWG reminded members that ALCC now had a budget of over £200k and would therefore have to report what it was doing to meet the wellbeing objectives in future years. He welcomed the template, agreed to call a meeting of the WBWG to develop it further and agreed to work with Councillor Holt on preparing more project maps.

Council RESOLVED:

- (1) to note and support the project mapping template
- (2) to note and support the further development of this by the WBWG.

Council returned to agenda item 11 at this point.

131. REPORTS BACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM WORKING GROUPS

Youth Engagement Working Group (YEWG): Councillor Oakley (Chair of the YEWG) circulated a recent email from PC Evans of Heddlu Gwent Police which referred to the reduction in calls about anti-social behaviour by youths in August, the increase in anti-social behaviour by youths in Abertillery since the detached youth workers stopped duties at the end of September, the positive impact of the detached youth workers (paid for by ALCC), the need for more permanent solutions and the need for a “safe space”. He stated that:

- the Blaenau Gwent Youth Service was currently interviewing for additional youth workers following ALCC’s decisions on 30 October 2019
- a further meeting to review the effectiveness of the additional youth workers paid for by ALCC would be held on 5 December and the results reported back to Council
- Councillor Rees had given a talk on fishing at Cwmtillery Lakes
- the Youth Service and Space Café had reported that some youths may be interested in taking up fishing
- a Christmas Fayre was being held at Abertillery Youth Centre on 28 November: this had been shared on the Council’s Facebook page and by email
- it may be a good idea to include more money in the budget in future to pay towards the costs of a new “safe space” for young people
- the YEWG would consider this in due course.

Council RESOLVED: to note the update.

132. COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS

Members proposed changes to committee and working group memberships. It was pointed

out that councillors should be asked if they wanted to serve on working groups, before being appointed to do so in their absence.

Councillor Oakley reminded members that the Finance and Grants Committee had agreed to ask the Council to delegate decision making on ward grants to the committee in future. Discussion ensued on whether to grant permission to approve and refuse ward grants to the committee and on potential members' personal interests. The Clerk read aloud the changes which would be needed to the committee's terms of reference.

Council RESOLVED:

- (1) to appoint Councillor Vanessa Bartlett to the Planning and Environment Committee
- (2) to appoint Councillor Michaela Assiratti to the Shop Local Working Group
- (3) to grant delegated authority to the Finance and Grants Committee to approve (but not to refuse) ward grants
- (4) if the committee is minded in future to refuse a ward grant application, the application be referred to the Council for decision
- (5) that the terms of reference of the Finance and Grants Committee be amended as follows:
 - Replace: "The Council itself takes all decisions relating to the approval of spending or grants."
 - With: "The Council itself takes all decisions relating to the approval of spending or grants (except ward grants, which the Committee may approve (but not refuse))."
 - Replace: "The Finance and Grants Committee's purpose is to prepare, monitor, review and assist in the effective financial management of the Council. Its role is to make recommendations to the Council in any of the matters listed below:"
 - With: "The Finance and Grants Committee's purpose is to consider and approve (but not refuse) ward grant applications and to prepare, monitor, review and assist in the effective financial management of the Council. Its role is to make recommendations to the Council in any of the matters listed below:"
 - Replace: "6. To consider and make recommendations to the Council in respect of all requests for financial assistance submitted to the Council, including Council Grants and Ward Grants."
 - With: "6. To consider and make recommendations to the Council in respect of all requests for financial assistance submitted to the Council, excluding solar farm grants and ward grants (which the Committee may approve but may not refuse)."

133. REPORTS BACK ON RELEVANT TRAINING OR MEETINGS ATTENDED

Councillor Adamson reported on a recent meeting of the Blaenau Gwent Heritage Forum (BGHF), the successful heritage day held recently in Brynmawr and the BGHF website if anyone wanted to seek further information.

The Chair referred to the recent One Voice Wales (OVW) training on Local Government Finance, which ten members had attended and which had been very interesting. Two other members were due to attend the next session, on 26 November.

Councillor Postlethwaite referred to the recent OVW training session she had attended on the Member Code of Conduct, which had been very useful.

Councillor Lucas referred to the recent OVW training session she and two other members had attended on “The Councillor” which had been very good.

Council RESOLVED: to note the reports back.

134. CHAIR’S ANNOUNCEMENTS, RELEVANT CORRESPONDENCE AND CELEBRATING SUCCESS

The Chair and other members commented:

- thanking members for their efforts with poppies and the Remembrance Day parades
- the tributes had been very fitting
- thanking the Abertillery Knit and Natter Group for their hard work over many weeks, organising and making the poppy cascade which was placed near the Silent Soldier
- the poppy cascade had attracted a great deal of positive publicity for Abertillery
- it had been said that it was the best of all the Remembrance displays seen locally
- Abertillery Youth Drama and Music Society (AYDMS) should be thanked for stepping in at the last minute to provide music for the Abertillery Remembrance service
- a local young man had been selected recently for the Wales Under 13s football team
- further details would be supplied to the Clerk in due course.

Council RESOLVED:

- (1) to write with the Council’s thanks and/or congratulations to the Abertillery Knit and Natter Group, AYDMS and the local young man who had been selected for the Wales Under 13s football team
- (2) to publicise these successes on the Council’s website and Facebook page.

A councillor asked why he was no longer receiving agenda packs for meetings at his home, three clear days before meetings. Another councillor reminded members of the Council’s previous decisions to issue agendas by email only (not by post) and cut down on paper.

The Clerk explained that summons and agendas were being sent to councillors’ homes at least three clear days before meetings, in line with the legislation (which he outlined), except where members did not want these posted to their homes, as agreed by the Council. Whole agenda packs were emailed to all members, posted on the website and available in paper form, before or at meetings. Posting whole packs involved extra resources and costs. When post was received at councillors’ homes was not within ALCC’s control.

The Chair stated that this matter should be dealt with outside the meeting.

The meeting ended at 8.35pm.

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, Town Clerk