

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF ABERTILLERY AND LLANHILLETH COMMUNITY
COUNCIL (A&LCC) HELD ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2018 at 7.00pm
in the Council Chamber, Mitre Street, Abertillery**

PRESENT: Councillors:

Peter Adamson, Steve Bard, Keri Bidgood, Gill Clark (Vice Chair), Roger Clark, Tracey Dyson, Julie Holt (Chair) (in the Chair), Mark Lewis, Rob Phillips, Allen Rees, Nick Simmons, Bernard Wall and Graham White

Officers: Stephen Edwards, Deputy Clerk and Richard Gwinnell, Clerk

Others: Claire Smith, Play Service, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
2 members of the public (Gary and Sally Oakley)

ABSENT: Councillors Ivor Beynon, Ross Leadbeater, Perry Morgan, Glyn Smith and Trudy Williams

54. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND WELCOMES

Apologies were received from Councillors Ivor Beynon, Ross Leadbeater, Perry Morgan, Glyn Smith and Trudy Williams. People attending for the first time were welcomed to the Council.

55. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following personal interests were declared later in the meeting, when the relevant items arose:

Councillor	Agenda Item	Minute no.	Type of interest	Reason for interest
Roger Clark	15: Community Asset Transfers	68	Personal only	He was the Chairman of Abertillery BG Rugby Football Club, which was in the process of a Community Asset Transfer
Allen Rees	15: Community Asset Transfers	68	Personal only	His wife was the Treasurer of Friends of Six Bells Park, which was in the process of a Community Asset Transfer

Members agreed to take agenda item 5 next, to enable external speakers to leave the meeting as early as possible.

56. BLAENAU GWENT PLAY SERVICE: PLAY SUFFICIENCY

Claire Smith, Early Years, Childcare and Play Manager, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (BGCBC) gave a presentation, commenting briefly on:

- the importance of play and providing play opportunities for children and young people
- the need for and recent history of play sufficiency audits in Blaenau Gwent

- the improving performance of BGCBC, as evidenced in recent audits
- the lack of funding for play and the need for a no/low cost approach
- the significant progress being made, working in partnership with other agencies including Tai Calon, Torfaen Play Service, Aneurin Leisure Trust, Groundwork Play Project, Space Saviours, GAVO (Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations) and town and community councils
- Open Access Play Schemes, which were running during school holidays e.g. in Six Bells Park
- the number of people receiving training and becoming play volunteers
- the Play Friendly Schools Programme, which five schools were signed up to already in Blaenau Gwent, with more to follow
- various initiatives including the Play All Day booklet, the Wild Tots club in Roseheyworth and the School Life Play Conference held in 2017
- the quality assurance scheme being developed by BGCBC for after school and holiday clubs
- the Play Friendly Communities Awards, also under development to promote play
- the barriers to children and young people playing, including that children rarely went out of the house because of safety concerns and home technology
- the dangers of not letting children out to play, in terms of their consequent lack of social, physical and mental development, challenge and confidence
- the lack of playworker career opportunities and hence recruits
- how A&LCC could help:
 - by sharing information, promoting and sign-posting people to BGCBC events
 - by telling BGCBC about any volunteers or events in the A&LCC area
 - by taking part in the Big Play Survey
 - by helping with funding, towards play schemes for example
 - by consulting children, young people and parents about what they want and passing this information on to BGCBC
- the views of children and young people about why they didn't play, including their age, transportation problems, traffic concerns and the amount of homework or housework they were required to do
- decreasing resources for play and the potential in future years of further reductions in play/playground maintenance or investment
- there were no current proposals for community asset transfers of playgrounds.

Claire Smith was thanked for her presentation and left the meeting at this point.

57. MINUTES – COUNCIL – 25 JULY 2018

Council RESOLVED that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 25 July 2018 be confirmed as a correct record, for signature by the Chair.

58. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no public questions for this meeting.

59. COUNCIL ACTION LIST

Members welcomed the significant progress being made on a large number of issues.

Councillor Simmons proposed that officers investigate and report back on the costs of installing a big screen TV in the Council Chamber, to assist with presentations.

Council RESOLVED:

- (1) to note the progress reported and
- (2) to receive a report back on the costs of installing a big screen TV in the Council Chamber, to assist with presentations.

60. POLICE UPDATE

The Clerk circulated an update received from the Police on 25 September.

The Chair updated members on the severe anti-social behaviour issues currently being experienced in the evenings in Abertillery and what the Police were doing about it. They were issuing dispersal orders, issuing anti-social behaviour orders, speaking to parents and the young people concerned and increasing their presence in the area. The Chair was now holding monthly meetings with the local Police in her role as a BGCBC ward councillor and welcomed the efforts of the local Police to deal with the situation.

Debate ensued on why some young people behaved in this way. Comments were made that there was a lack of other activities for young people, particularly in Six Bells, that youth engagement services were lacking and that austerity was to blame. Other members commented that there were many clubs, sports, groups, organisations and other things young people could be doing, but a small number of young people simply chose to rebel and destroy, despite everyone's best efforts.

Members looked forward to better news and the report from the Police was **NOTED**.

61. CENTENARY EVENTS 2018 WORKING GROUP (CEWG) REPORT

Councillor Dyson (Chair of the CEWG) reported (main points):

- the WW1 Party in the Park held on 8 September 2018 had been very successful
- the working group hoped similar events could be held in future years
- there would be no need for the working group after Remembrance Sunday, as the work it was set up to do was done.

Comments were made (main points):

- about the hard work of everyone involved, particularly Councillor Tracey Dyson (the Chair of the Working Group), the Deputy Clerk (Project Manager), Councillor Rob Phillips and the team of Ffrindiau Tyleri volunteers
- the event was very good
- local people wanted more of the same
- the rain on the day dampened attendance
- perhaps future similar events could be held earlier in the summer
- a raffle held on the day had raised £471 for the Chair's charity appeal
- over £400 had also been raised on the day for the Royal British Legion, through

stallholder, vendor and public donations.

Council **RESOLVED:**

- (1) to congratulate everyone involved in making it a successful event and
- (2) to note the outcomes report.

62. SHOP LOCAL WORKING GROUP (SLWG) REPORT

Councillor Lewis, Chairman of the SLWG reported (main points):

- that he and Councillor Bard had walked around the shops, surveying traders
- 63 surveys had been returned; a further 20 were still awaited
- the feedback was very good
- traders were very keen on the idea of a shop local campaign.

Councillor Bard reported (main points):

- that he and Councillor Lewis had spent over 30 hours surveying traders
- all except one business owner thought the shop local working group plans were a good idea; everyone else thought this was the right direction
- many positive suggestions had been received
- there was already a Town Shops Facebook page, which A&LCC could work with, so there was no need for a new Facebook page
- a more discreet method of online communication between traders and the Community Council was also needed
- traders were very positive about the proposals of the SLWG and the proposed banners as a first step
- 24 said they would be happy to contribute to the costs, 5 were undecided and 34 said they wouldn't be able to contribute at the present time due to poor trading conditions or because such decisions were taken nationally (e.g. charity shops)
- this was a very good start; more may come on board if initial efforts were shown to be successful in boosting footfall
- 47 said they would display shop local posters, with 8 not and 8 undecided
- a local business boardroom had been offered for meeting/event purposes
- traders were not keen on having regular meetings, as they had businesses to run, but were keen on online forums and on informal business networking or problem-solving sessions, perhaps every 3 months or so
- it may help if the Community Council could facilitate such events
- businesses identified two main problems which made Abertillery a difficult place to trade; lack of parking and high business rents
- these were not within the control of A&LCC, but it may have an influencing role
- more events in town, e.g. to showcase local bands, choirs etc were supported by the vast majority of traders
- a few concerns had been expressed about Aberfest and Winterfest; that more activity was needed at the top end of Church Street and on Somerset Street, and that activities on Market Street were not helpful to some of the businesses there as they took up valuable customer car parking spaces.

Councillor Bard moved the proposals (1) to (5) below. The motion was seconded.

Councillor Phillips commented that planning was already well underway for Winterfest. None of the issues raised about Aberfest or Winterfest were unresolvable and he would take these back to Ffrindiau Tyleri (FT) for discussion, with a view to FT working closely with traders over the coming months to iron out any difficulties if possible. Moving some activities would be difficult however as they required infrastructure/power supplies. It may also be time to re-visit A&LCC's previous requests to BGCBC for longer opening hours for the main car park off High Street/Division Street.

The Chair stated that a 500-signature petition, calling for longer car park opening hours, had recently been considered and turned down by BGCBC, due to concerns about anti-social behaviour. Following further comments,

Council **RESOLVED**:

- (1) that Council encourages all Council members to follow/like Abertillery Town Shops Facebook page and sign up as many local friends as possible, as the larger the audience the page gets, the more likely it is to help support businesses in the town
- (2) that the proposed banners be produced and erected and that the money ringfenced be released for this purpose only at this point in time
- (3) that the members of the SLWG remain in contact with the business owners to agree what can be achieved and how best this can happen
- (4) that the SLWG investigate the idea of facilitating a quarterly problem-solving session which includes time for informal business networking; any costs to be brought back to Council for approval
- (5) that Council members who are members of Ffrindiau Tyleri take business owners' concerns on board and bring them to FT's attention as soon as possible
- (6) to discuss again the need for more evening and overnight car parking in Abertillery at a future meeting.

Agenda item 10 was delayed until later in the meeting.

63. ZEBRA CROSSING AT ALEXANDRA ROAD

The Clerk referred to the correspondence he had undertaken on this subject with Blaenau Gwent Borough Council since the last Council meeting, as requested. Copies were attached to the agenda.

Councillor Bard expressed continuing concerns about the proposal to locate a zebra crossing outside the shops on Alexandra Road. He expressed the view that a new zebra crossing so close to the shops, the adjacent junction with Bridge Street and the entrance to the car park opposite would be even more dangerous for pedestrians, as well as damaging to passing trade for the shops.

Members debated the issue and suggestions were made that a School Crossing Patrol be used morning and afternoon (instead of a zebra crossing 24 hours a day) to ensure safety for children and other people crossing the road to use the new school or for whatever other purpose. Automatic crossing patrol lights were also suggested at the

location, to warn drivers to slow down.

Following a motion from Councillor Bard, Council **RESOLVED**:

- (1) that the Council does not withdraw its objections to the zebra crossing proposed
- (2) that the Clerk write to BGCBC, informing them of this decision.

64. ANNUAL RETURN AND GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2016/17

The Council considered the Clerk's report, which he outlined. He emphasised that the numbers had not changed since the report in July. Council was now simply being asked to agree the contents of the Annual Return (the form) itself.

Queries were raised by Councillors White and Wall, and responded to by the Chair, the Clerk and various other members, about whether members knew what the term "qualified" meant, why the "yes" box had been ticked in relation to question 3 on the annual governance statement, who was responsible for signing off the accounts, whether the Wales Audit Office would charge the Council another £25,000 in future for the work on these accounts and why the accounts were back on the agenda.

Several members expressed confidence that everything possible had been done by the Council's staff to meet the relevant requirements as soon as was possible and that the Internal Auditor would not have signed the accounts if he was not content to do so, with the caveats outlined by him and by the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO).

Council **RESOLVED** (*with two members voting against and the remainder in favour*):

- (1) to approve the annual return (including the annual governance statement) and bank reconciliation attached to the report, further to its approval of the financial statements on 25 July 2018
- (2) to authorise the Clerk/RFO and the Chair of the Council to complete and sign the annual return and governance statement for 2016/17 and
- (3) to authorise the Clerk/RFO to submit the annual return and all relevant attachments for 2016/17 to the Wales Audit Office, as required.

65. VACANCY FOR A COUNCILLOR

The Clerk circulated a letter received from Gary Oakley on 29 August 2018 and stated that his was the only application received by the deadline advertised (24 September).

Council **RESOLVED** (unanimously) to co-opt Gary Oakley as a councillor for Aberbeeg.

The Clerk explained that Mr Oakley's declaration of acceptance of office and induction training would take place as soon as possible.

66. ABERTILLERY PUBLIC TOILETS

The Chair introduced local resident Sally Oakley, who had sought permission to make a brief statement on this issue.

Mrs Oakley thanked the Chair. She commented (main points):

- that she knew someone who no longer came to Abertillery and no longer used the shops because of the lack of public toilets, since the toilets on Tillery Street had closed down recently
- the Council's precept was only £112,000 approx
- taking out fixed costs, "no choice" spending and major items such as Christmas lights, there was only approximately £4,000 left to spend on public services
- she hoped very much that the Council would substantially increase its precept in the near future, to help pay for vital services to the public
- spending only £1.39 per month per Band A property (72% of properties locally were in Band A) was not an indication that A&LCC cared about its communities
- A&LCC needed to care more, and to do more for local communities
- providing public toilets was a key priority; such things were a very basic need
- someone locally could be employed part time to run the toilets
- this would mean the Council was providing public toilets and local employment.

Members commented (main points):

- the toilets had been vandalised continuously
- local people including a former councillor and his family had already given up their time and effort to run the toilets for several years
- A&LCC had paid £2,000 a year for this service, and it had been good; this was not a lack of money issue
- toilets were available to the public in The Met, the library, the Museum etc
- the toilet block needed to be demolished and replaced with a new-build
- CCTV may help detect who was vandalising the toilets
- CCTV would show who went in and came out; not who caused the damage
- anti-social behaviour was the problem; this was a Police matter
- the people who ran the toilets were very enthusiastic and conscientious; cleaning and maintaining the toilets every day, but they gave up due to the amount of vandalism and drugs at the site
- this was going on in the day time, not at night
- there would be nothing left if some people had their way
- towns need toilets; they could not simply be abandoned
- the public had in the past used toilets elsewhere, such as at Anvil Court, which led to complaints from staff there
- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council gave grants to pubs in the past to open up toilets, but this had stopped
- another council had praised the Abertillery toilets in the past
- Tredegar ran public toilets; they should be asked for their experiences
- public realms were collapsing due to cutbacks, lack of Police, no CCTV etc
- A&LCC should ask Blaenau Gwent CBC to reinstate CCTV in the area.

Council **RESOLVED:**

- (1) to write to BGCBC, seeking the reinstallation of CCTV in the town and
- (2) to contact Tredegar Town Council for their experiences of running public toilets.

67. COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFERS

The Clerk reminded members that Blaenau Gwent CBC was consulting A&LCC on the Community Asset Transfers listed in the agenda papers.

Councillors Roger Clark and Allen Rees declared interests in this agenda item, as listed on page 1 of these minutes.

Members commented (main points):

- they were concerned at the wholesale transfer of community spaces and off-loading of public assets
- BGCBC were going ahead regardless of what people thought
- some sports clubs were very eager to take on these areas and run them
- there were lots of barriers put in the way of using (for example) the cricket pitch
- these barriers would be removed if the site was transferred to the club
- a third of the sites listed were in the A&LCC area
- it was good to see people were interested in and willing to take on these sites
- A&LCC needed to work in partnership with them
- BGCBC would keep any sites people didn't want to take on
- BGCBC wouldn't be able to afford to maintain them
- this would lead to areas being gated up and not maintained at all
- some facilities could close down altogether
- what would happen to sites (e.g. Six Bells Park) where two organisations each wanted to take on bits of the park but not all of it; what happened to the rest?
- it was much better if groups took on parks for example, as they could then get grants and other funds, which councils could not
- the group would then also have control of the park and its use
- groups such as Ffrindiau Tyleri had been set up in the past for this reason
- once a site was transferred, the group would become the keyholder; BGCBC would do only the minimum it was required to do
- BGCBC was meeting with clubs to iron out any such queries or difficulties
- A&LCC should invite BGCBC reps to attend its next meeting to discuss this issue further; not only did it relate to sports fields but playgrounds too
- who would look after the playgrounds for example at Abertillery Park, if the rugby club took over the rugby pitch; the rugby club did not intend to.

The Deputy Clerk responded to questions that:

- BGCBC required clubs to submit business plans to ensure continued viability
- the law was not clear on whether community councils could take on assets.

Council **RESOLVED** that the Clerk write to BGCBC and invite the Leader, Deputy Leader and relevant officers of BGCBC to attend A&LCC's next meeting, to discuss this matter further.

Council returned to agenda item 10 at this point.

68. REPORTS BACK ON OTHER MEETINGS OR TRAINING ATTENDED ON BEHALF OF A&LCC

The Deputy Clerk reported that he had attended the Joint Consultation meeting with Blaenau Gwent CBC and other town and community councils in the area on 13 September 2018. Discussion had focussed on community asset transfers, well-being and school crossing patrols, the last of which BGCBC were considering as a possible savings measure. In answer to questions submitted by A&LCC (which came from Councillor Simmons), BGCBC had confirmed that no other community or town councils (C&TCs) in Blaenau Gwent were doing anything specific about the well-being agenda; that there were no plans to have C&TC representatives on the Public Service Board; that it was acceptable to have projects crossing area boundaries; and that no project proposals had been submitted yet.

Councillor Adamson stated that he had attended the Fly the Red Ensign for Merchant Navy Day ceremony at Tredegar recently, on behalf of A&LCC.

Council **RESOLVED** to note the reports back.

69. SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER (TIME LIMIT)

Council **RESOLVED** to suspend standing order 1(z) to extend the meeting for longer.

70. SOLAR FARM GRANT

Following questions posed by the Clerk, Council **RESOLVED**:

- (1) to apply for a grant of £35,000 or whatever amount is available from Community Green Energy / CIC this year
- (2) that the Clerk approach the company to enquire about the availability of the grant this year, as soon as possible
- (3) to limit the number of projects to a small number of flagship projects
- (4) that members email the Clerk with ideas for spending of the grant if they wish
- (5) that the public be asked for their priorities for spending the grant if possible
- (6) that projects be "one off" (without an ongoing revenue liability for the Council) if possible
- (7) that this issue be discussed further at the next Council meeting.

71. REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

Council **RESOLVED**:

- (1) to continue with the normal arrangements for Remembrance Sunday
- (2) to delegate all necessary powers to the officers to make the arrangements for Remembrance Sunday
- (3) that the issue of who lays wreaths on behalf of A&LCC at which locations be discussed further at the next Council meeting, if needed.

72. WINTERFEST AND CHRISTMAS LIGHTS SWITCH-ON

Councillor Phillips gave an update on the plans for Winterfest this year and on what components were planned where. He stated that discussions with traders were taking place, that the next meeting of Ffrindiau Tyleri (FT) would be on 8 October and that he would report further to Council on 24 October. He stated that FT would do its best to take on board the issues raised earlier by traders e.g. to space gazebos out further along Church Street, if that was possible given the infrastructure e.g. power supplies.

Council **RESOLVED**:

- (1) that A&LCC provides activities at Winterfest, similar to those provided last year
- (2) that those activities be provided on the Museum Car Park, Market Street
- (3) to delegate all necessary powers to the officers to make the arrangements for the Christmas activities to be provided at Winterfest by A&LCC.

73. FINANCE ORDER

The Clerk explained:

- that an invoice for £1,743.70 had been received from the Internal Auditor this morning, for his work on the 2016/17 accounts
- the Council had only budgeted £1,000 but had been made aware in the past that the cost would be significantly higher, as the Internal Auditor was new to the Council and the number of visits required was more than in a “normal” year, given the Council’s recent history
- he had checked the invoice for accuracy and it was in line with the agreed hourly and mileage rates for the number of visits and other work carried out
- paying more for the Internal Auditor was likely to mean having to pay significantly less to an external auditor in due course
- Council (not he) should agree to pay the invoice, as it was significantly in excess of the budget
- VAT amounting to £6,139.67 was being reclaimed for 2017/18
- Garry White and Co was the Council’s external payroll service provider; £78 per quarter was their normal fee.

Councillor White stated that Council had not agreed to the Chair and Clerk attending the One Voice Wales AGM and annual conference and that the total costs would include wages and travel.

The Chair explained that the Clerk and Chair were expected to attend the One Voice Wales conference on behalf of A&LCC and that staff could not be expected to work for free. The Clerk added that the cost for the Chair and the Clerk to attend the One Voice Wales conference and AGM on behalf of the Council was listed in the Finance Order. If Council agreed the Finance Order, it would be agreeing to pay for that attendance.

Council **RESOLVED** (*with one member voting against, one abstaining and the remainder in favour*) to approve the payments listed in the Finance Order and the payment to the Internal Auditor of £1,743.70.

74. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS / OTHER RELEVANT CORRESPONDENCE

No announcements were made, nor correspondence reported.

Councillor White asked why a recent letter from the Public Services Ombudsman (PSO) for Wales had not been reported to the Council, as it was important correspondence for the Council, which he thought the Clerk should have reported.

The Clerk advised that he was not at liberty to discuss the matter and that this was a public meeting of the Council.

Councillor White stated that:

- the outcome of a previous PSO complaint about a councillor had been reported to Council
- he could do whatever he wanted
- he had been taken to the PSO with 40 complaints
- the PSO had said there was no case for him to answer
- this should be in the minutes
- there were no minutes
- officers did not take minutes at meetings
- he had asked for the minutes which had been taken at the last meeting and told he could not have them.

Councillor Bard raised a point of order, commenting that Councillor White was suggesting officers were not doing their jobs properly. This was a slur on the officers.

Councillor White stated that:

- he had been slurred in a complaint that he had done 40 things wrong
- he had not done anything wrong
- he had been slurred in a report that said he did not attend any meetings of the Centenary Working Group; he had attended the working group
- officers had refused to give him the minutes they took in meetings
- they said they didn't take minutes in meetings
- the law required them to take minutes in meetings.

The Chair explained that the officers took notes at meetings, in notebooks. Those notes were used to prepare the minutes, at a later date. She asked the Clerk to hold up his notebook, which he did, to demonstrate this. The Chair explained that the notes were purely an aide memoire to the person who wrote them. The notes were also usually incomprehensible to anyone except their author. Minutes were typed up using the notes and submitted to the following Council meeting for confirmation as a correct record.

Other members stated that this was common practice and had been for many years.

A member asked if the issues raised by Councillor White could be recorded in the minutes, and if Council could move on.

Councillor Bard asked for his point of order to be recorded also.

Council **RESOLVED** to record these issues in the minutes.

75. CELEBRATING LOCAL SUCCESS

No recent successes were reported.

The meeting ended at 9.25pm.

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