

NANTYGLO & BLAINA TOWN COUNCIL CYNGOR TREF NANT-Y-GLO A BLAENAU

Mrs T Hughes Town Clerk/RFO

Hem no. 4

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Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on Tuesday 23rd February 2021 via a remote meeting at 2.00pm

A meeting to which members of the public were entitled to attend

Present: Councillor K. Jones JP, Town Mayor, presiding
Councillors G. Morvan, K Jenkins, D. Hillman,
M Williams and C. Hillman

In attendance: Mrs T Hughes, Town Clerk / RFO
Mrs N Horner, Assistant Officer

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Town Clerk confirmed that no members of the public were in attendance. **Resolved** to note the information received.

The Town Mayor, Councillor Ken Jones JP welcomed and introduced Councillor Michael Williams to Nantyglo and Blaina Town Council. The Town Mayor informed that Councillor Williams had very recently been co-opted to the Council as a Councillor for the Blaina Ward and that on behalf of Nantyglo and Blaina Town Council, the Town Mayor congratulated Councillor Williams well in joining the Town Council. **Resolved** to note the information received.

Declaration of Interest

Members were invited to declare matters of interest either at the beginning or at any time during the proceedings. Please note that all declarations of interest must be recorded in the book provided.

Resolved to note that no such declarations were received.

1. Apologies:

Members were invited to consider the apologies for absence received and to formally resolve to accept.

Resolved to note that apologies were received from Councillors K Treharne, L Emanuel, L Harris and R Pagett.

Further Resolved to accept the apologies received.

2. Town Mayor's Communications:

The Town Mayor's communications for February 2021.

The Town Mayor informed that due to the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic that there were no civic engagements etc to inform of.

Resolved accordingly.

3. Minutes of the Events Committee Meeting held 26th January 2021 (pages 98 - 100)

Members were invited to consider the above minutes and if appropriate to approve them as an accurate record of proceedings.

a) Matters arising, for information & clarification only:

p.99 (a): Relocation of Flagpoles – In response to a query, the Town Clerk informed that the officer responsible for assisting with this at Blaenau Gwent CBC had once again been contacted via e-mail but no response had been received to date. The Town Clerk informed that Andrew Parker (Liaison Officer at Blaenau Gwent CBC) had also been copied in to the e-mail.

Resolved that the minutes be approved.

4. Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held 26th January 2021 (pages 101 - 108)

Members were invited to consider the above minutes and if appropriate to approve them as an accurate record of proceedings.

a) Matters arising, for information & clarification only:

p.103(8a): should read 'volume'.

p.103(9a): add 'whenever possible'.

p.106(14a): should read 'presenting'.

p.107(15a): amend to 'approximately £10,500'.

Resolved that the minutes be approved.

5. Minutes of the Planning & Highways Committee Meeting held 9th February 2021 (pages 109 - 110)

Members were invited to consider the above minutes and if appropriate to approve them as an accurate record of proceedings.

a) Matters arising, for information & clarification only:

p.109: Date of meeting should read '9th February 2021'.

Resolved that the minutes be approved.

6. Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held 9th February 2021 (pages 111 - 115)

Members were invited to consider the above minutes and if appropriate to approve them as an accurate record of proceedings.

a) Matters arising, for information & clarification only:

p.112(d): Include 'and agreed with'.

p.115(4): Additional comment – local schools were now taking part (remotely) in the Urdd.

Resolved that the minutes be approved.

7. Minutes of the Task and Finish Group held 10th February 2021 (pages 116 – 118)

Members were invited to consider the above minutes and if appropriate to approve them as an accurate record of proceedings.

a) Matters arising, for information & clarification only:

p.117: Include 'investigate the possibility of grant funding and feasibility of project officer'.

Resolved that the minutes be approved.

8. Correspondence:

Members were invited to consider the listed correspondence, plus with the Chairman's permission, any urgent information that might be received prior to the date of the meeting.

a) Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (for information):

i All Wales Covid 19 Wellbeing Second Survey.

Resolved to note the information received.

ii Vaccination Update.

Resolved to note the information received.

b) Blaenau Gwent CBC:

E-mail response in respect to planning query re: 15 Gwent Terrace, Nantyglo.

Resolved to note the information received.

c) Sparkle Appeal (for information):

Thank you letter in respect of financial donation made by the Town Council.

Resolved to note the information received.

d) Relate Cymru (for information):

Thank you letter in respect of financial donation made by the Town Council.

Resolved to note the information received.

e) One Voice Wales (for information):

i My Constructive Conversations Course – March 2021.

Resolved to note the information received.

ii Information from Dyfed Powys Police informing of Facebook scam.

Resolved to note the information received.

f) Welsh Government (for information):

Elections Newsletter.

Resolved to note the information received.

g) Mr M Dally – Letter (for information):

Copy of letter received by e-mail in response to letter sent 9th February 2021.

Members discussed the contents of the letter and agreed that the inaccuracies on the notice board located at the Chapel were information in respect of grant funding obtained, administered and 'signed off' by Nantyglo and Blaina Charter Group, not the Town Council. Following discussions with the then Chair of Nantyglo and Blaina Charter Group, the Town Council agreed to formally retract the following statement:

"With reference to the Salem Chapel project and as a previous vice-president of the Nantyglo and Blaina Charter Group at the time when the chapel was being refurbished, you will be aware of the many issues and complex legislation surrounding the ownership, maintenance and safety of listed building".

Further to previous discussions and information received, it was also noted that Councillor D Hillman had been named as a vice-president of the Nantyglo and Blaina Charter Group as stated on the notice board located at the chapel. Council agreed to formally note that Councillor D Hillman had not been a vice-president of Nantyglo and Blaina Charter Group.

Members also agreed that it was unclear who commissioned the notice board referred to, or who supplied the information contained within it, due to the current members and officers of the Town Council not being in membership or employment of the Town Council at that time.

Resolved that a letter informing of the formal retraction of the statement be sent.

h) Independent Remuneration Panel Wales (for information):

Request for council participation in the Review of Remuneration Framework for Community & Town Councils.

Councillors G Morvan; K Jenkins; D Hillman and M Williams requested that their names be put forward to participate in this review on behalf of the Town Council.

Resolved that the above-named councillors be submitted to participate in the review.

Additional correspondence received with permission of the Chair:

i) Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (for information):

Vaccination update for week commencing 22nd February 2021.

Resolved to note the information received.

j) Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (for information):

Launch of South East Wales Vascular Network Public Engagement.

Resolved to note the information received.

9. Application to the Community Grant Fund:

Members were invited to consider the listed application(s). Members were also reminded that applications will need to be considered in conjunction with the current policy.

- a) *None received to date.*

Resolved accordingly.

10. Planning Applications:

Members were invited to consider the listed application(s).

- a) *None received to date.*

Resolved accordingly.

11. Licensing Applications:

Members were invited to consider the listed application(s), plus with the Chairman's permission, any additional applications that might be received prior to the date of the meeting.

None received to date.

Resolved accordingly.

12. Members' Updates:

Members are invited to inform and provide updates of any recent activities and/or concerns:

- a) Councillors K Jones, D Hillman & C Hillman:

Remote meeting attended on 18th February 2021 – Liaison Meeting with Blaenau Gwent CBC in respect of the Revenue Budget 2021/22 of which Councillor D Hillman provided an update of which was summarised below:

- A pre-meeting of the Joint Committee of Local Councils took place prior to the Liaison Meeting with Blaenau Gwent CBC of which Councillor D Hillman (vice-chair) chaired in the absence of Cllr M Morgan, Brynmawr TC (Chair).
- The report provided by Blaenau Gwent CBC was considered and the following issues were made. It was agreed that some of these issues (below) were to be queried with Blaenau Gwent CBC at the liaison meeting, if necessary (please note where applicable, BG CBC's response was located directly below the query/comment):
 - Concerns that some grants had been decreased nationally whilst there appeared to have been an increase in capital grants.
BG CBC: Revenue grants supported day to day costs whilst capital grants were one-off expenditure i.e. to purchase a piece of equipment.
 - The 2018 data in respect of education needed to be 'reset' to reflect Blaenau Gwent's position. Additionally, it was surprising to note that some benefit claims had fallen by 0.1%

BGCBC: This issue would be taken up with the Director of Education also no other concerns had been raised with this issue. There would be some other grants within the education and social services remit which would offset. Any alteration to the figures would be provided to the Joint Committee of Local Councils. Wales wide figures had been set at pre 2018 level which was to balance funding rather than having significant swings between authorities. It was unlikely that WG would need to treat all authorities on the same basis. In respect of the 0.1% fall in benefit claims, this was due to BG always having had a relatively high level of benefit claims compared to many other authorities. Due to Covid, many other authorities had now seen a higher level of increases in benefit claims. It was confirmed that BG would lose out financially due to this.

- As it stated general reserves were at an adequate level, would it be possible for the £200,000 general reserves be used to offset the proposed rise in council tax?

BGCBC: Councillor Daniels noted this request but explained that the general reserves were the third lowest in Wales and 'barely adequate'. Wales Audit were very quick to criticise levels of reserves and that financial resilience was an important aim of BGCBC.

- General query in respect of cost pressures and additional cost pressures as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic.

BGCBC: Although WG has funded such cost pressures resulting from Covid. This was included to identify the risk as cost pressures from the pandemic could continue into future years, although it was hoped that WG would continue to fund such costs.

- It was noted that there was a budget surplus of £1.3m stated.
- Query if Blaenau Gwent CBC had evidenced any risk to date as a result of the UK exiting the EU?

BGCBC: There was no evidence to date of any risk as a result of the UK having left the EU although EU funding can no longer be accessed.

- It was noted that forthcoming local elections could be classed as a risk factor in respect of the budget due to differing aims of different administrations.
- Comments in relation to the possibility of devolved services, working from home and the establishment of community hubs appeared to be a reversal of the previous aims of BGCBC.

BGCBC: It was proposed that the community hubs be located within the libraries of the four main towns and would provide a variety of front line services such as cash desks and benefit enquiries. Whilst planning was still in progress on this issue, the hubs would act as a link to more complicated advice requests.

- Was there any need to increase general reserves when the reserves appeared to be at an adequate level?

BGCBC: Audit Wales do not set the targets in respect of reserves although the previous target set by Blaenau Gwent was for 4%. Audit Wales had stated that reserves held by BGCBC was too low and as such, BGCBC aim to maintain the levels of reserves and increase where possible. The current level of reserves was 4.5%.

- Queries regarding the medium and long term financial planning and the impact of

such risk factors as elections, the future of buildings and working locations etc.
BGCBC: Accepted that this was a fair comment.

- Query with Blaenau Gwent CBC the review of Community / Town Councils and their representation to the Public Service Board (PSB). It was noted that Torfaen CBC's PSB included a Community/Town Council representative.

BGCBC: Informed that BGCBC was one statutory body to have representation on the PSB and the Community/Town Councils could help to deliver the Well-being plan. It was not common for Community/Town Councils to have representation on the PSB. If a government 'white paper' states that Community/Town Council representation was required, this would be discussed with Community/Town Councils.

- It was noted that the Barnett formula was still used in respect of local authority funding which penalised areas such as Blaenau Gwent

At the Blaenau Gwent Liaison meeting which immediately followed the pre-meeting, Blaenau Gwent CBC Leader Cllr N Daniel welcomed everyone to the meeting and stated that Chief Resources Officer Rhian Hayden would present the budget report with questions taken at the end:

The main points of Rhian Hayden's presentation were:

- The average increase in funding for Wales was 3.8%, of which Blaenau Gwent received a below average increase of 3.7%
- Transfer settlements in respect of teachers' pay grants and coastal risk management programme did not impact financially upon Blaenau Gwent CBC.
- The impact upon Blaenau Gwent in respect of the all Wales grant revenues would not be known until March 2021 although it was expected to be similar to 2020.
- The impact upon Blaenau Gwent in respect of capital grants was unknown at the present time.
- Whilst the UK government has paused public sector pay awards for 2021 (except for NHS) any pay award agreed by local authorities would need to be funded from their own budget. BGCBC had met with the Unions to discuss this and stated that the Unions were satisfied with BGCBC response.
- It was now known that there would not be any cash flat funding received from the Welsh Government.
- Bridging the funding gap in respect of the Covid pandemic can now be revised although Covid cost related pressures had not been detailed, it was assumed that these would be funded by the Welsh Government into the new year. As the funding gap reduces in subsequent years, future years show significant cost pressures.
- A wider public consultation in respect of the 2021/22 budget was currently taking place via the BGCBC website and other social media and this liaison meeting also formed part of the public consultation.

The Town Mayor thanked Councillor Hillman for his presentation.

Resolved to note the information received.

13. Meetings in Person:

Further to enquiries made with a neighbouring Council, members were informed that at the

current time, meetings in person could not take place due to Covid restrictions. However, there was a possibility that a member(s) could utilise Council facilities if they were unable to access a meeting in any other capacity. Please note that the premises would need to be risk assessed and comply with all relevant legislation together with the necessary equipment and wifi being available. It was emphasised that this method was not a choice for members to attend in this manner but only for those members who were unable to attend in any other capacity.

Members discussed the information received and the following comments were made:

- It appeared strange that in the current times that some councillors appeared not to have a phone of some kind to which they could access such a meeting.
- It was also stated that the meeting which took place at a neighbouring council, did so with seven members in attendance.
- The Town Clerk informed that the Acting Clerk of the Council in question had stated that five members were in attendance at the meeting in person. Furthermore, the Acting Town Clerk had informed that the committee meeting was held in person due to the contentious and confidential subject matter and adhering to all the advice received from the enforcement officer at Blaenau Gwent CBC.

Resolved to note the information received.

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 9th March 2021 at 1pm via a remote meeting.

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