

TREDEGAR TOWN COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Council held remotely via
Microsoft Teams / hybrid on Wednesday, 16th June, 2021 at 6.00 p.m.**

Present: Councillors G. James (Chair)

**S. Rees
T. Smith
A.E. Tippings
M. Cross
D.W.A. Howells
D. Jones
E. Jones
D. Rowberry
H. Trollope
S. Trollope
B. Willis**

**In attendance: Clerk – Ms. C. Price
RFO – Ms. A. Edwards**

By invitation: Internal Auditor, Mr. S. Bees

**037) Apologies. Councillors A. Jones, K. Phillips, P. Prosser, J. Thomas,
M. Turner and G. Walters**

038) Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members to make their declarations as and when necessary.

039) To receive any verbal recommendations of all Sub-Committees / Working Party held prior to this meeting of Council

No Sub-Committee or Working Party meetings had been held prior to Council.

040) a. To receive report of the Internal Auditor for year-end 31st March, 2021

The Chair extended a welcome to the Internal Auditor, who was in attendance to present his report for the Internal Audit for the year.

The Internal Auditor thanked Council for the opportunity to present his report, particularly following a difficult year experienced due to the pandemic. He thereupon spoke to the report, explaining the purpose of the audit was to review the financial propriety and governance arrangements of the Town Council in accordance with proper practices, as set out in the latest version of the One Voice Wales / SLCC "Governance and accountability for local councils in Wales – A Practitioner's Guide 2019". The Internal Audit had been deemed satisfactory in all significant respects, although a number of observations were included in the Appendix, by far the most significant being that Council had still not developed and approved a sustainable medium-term financial strategy.

Councillor H. Trollope joined the meeting at this juncture (6.08 p.m.)

He thereupon highlighted the following, outlined in the report and the Appendix 'Control Objectives and audit findings', confirming he would be pleased to respond to questions at any stage.

- Decisions taken under emergency delegation arrangements required subsequent ratification by Council to confirm compliance and mitigate risk of action / expenditure being deemed unlawful. However, there was some residual risk of the technical legality of the decision-making process being questioned by the external auditor.
- Deficit budget: the precept was last raised twelve years previously, therefore Council had again set a deficit budget; however, savings had been achieved during the year due to the impact of the pandemic, e.g. events / activities being cancelled. As a result of a decrease in the deficit, and increased General and Earmarked Reserves, Council had achieved a turnaround in the budgetary position at year-end.

Councillor S. Rees joined the meeting at this juncture (6.10 p.m.)

The Internal Auditor reiterated that it was now more important, than over the last two years, to set a medium-term financial strategy to address the recurring shortfall. He said it would be irresponsible for Council to plan for further depletion of General Reserves, as this could result in a cut of existing services or an inevitable increase in precept over successive years; these consequences could be avoided, however, by realistic financial planning.

Members thanked the Internal Auditor for the report, and also for the way the Internal Auditor and Council had worked together over many years, and the opportunity for open and frank discussion.

Council understood the information provided as reported and responded as follows:

- Council had established a Budget Working Group, which met regularly in addition to quarterly meetings, providing two structural layers when looking at financial reports.
- Due diligence was applied by Council on embarking on future / long-term leasing agreements, for example, agreeing longer term arrangements in respect of insurance.
- Recurring contracts and payments: the electricity supply to the Town Clock had been applied without Council's approval and, as soon as the discrepancy had been raised, the RFO had taken appropriate action.
- Emergency delegation arrangements: appropriate Council approval was sought in retrospect in urgent circumstances only to ensure compliance in respect of expenditure.
- Standstill precept: Council had not taken on any new services over the past five years; therefore, if Council agreed to take on any new services in the future, appropriate funding would have to be found and any movement shown in the budget.

The RFO said that any new administration would not be coming in until the elections in May 2022 and the budget-setting process would be undertaken in December / January by the current Council; therefore the precept would already be in place. A Member said Council were aware that the Elections would be held May 2022 and Council understood the budget would be set in December; however, further discussions would take place throughout the year and therefore proposed Council should note this report at this point and any comments Members' raised.

b. To confirm the Annual Accounts for year-end 31st March, 2021 and approve Mayor to sign

The RFO asked that Members formally agree the accounts to 31st March, 2021; the Officer thereupon highlighted the following in respect of confirming the accounts.

- The End of year accounts and Asset Register were considered 21st April, 2021, these had been the final / correct documents, with no changes from that date. Overall income for the year was £161,251.66 and overall expenditure was £137,329.75. Members were aware, as previously reported, expenditure was under predicted budget due to Covid restrictions

Council and the Officer thanked the Internal Auditor for his services; the Internal Auditor left the meeting at this juncture.

Annual Accounts were approved for year-end 31st March, 2021, and signed by the Mayor, as the Chair of this meeting, in the presence of Council.

c. Internal Audit 2020/2021: to undertake a review of the Internal Audit Process for the year ended 2020/2021

The RFO referred Members' attention to the report and appendix checklist: confirming that, following an initial meeting between Internal Auditor and four Senior Members, the Internal Auditor had undertaken his assessment and had been very thorough in this process. The Officer thereupon presented her report of the Internal Audit Service 2020 / 2021, which was a thematic approach to be reviewed every year.

A Member referred to the constructive criticism contained in the report of the Internal Auditor and had wished to respond in respect of relevant points; the RFO said that any queries for the Internal Auditor should be forwarded to the Officer in an email for her to pass on for an appropriate response.

Council confirmed approval of the re-appointment of Mr. S. Bees, as Internal Auditor to Tredegar Town Council for year 2021 / 2022, following his review - RFO to send appropriate letter of confirmation. In respect of the performance of the Internal Auditor, there being no queries or further comments; the statements outlined within the report were formally accepted and approved accordingly

d. Agree the Annual Governance Statements on the Return for 2020/2021, prior to External Audit

The RFO explained that the process slightly differed from previous years ; the electors' rights notice was to be displayed for six-eight weeks, with a fourteen-day period in September to contact the external auditors, if having any questions. The RFO would erect the notice promptly, however the dates would remain the same within the public realm. No external audit report had been received for a number of years, and reviews of the Internal Audit reports were received several times throughout the year as part of an ongoing process

Parts 1 – 9 of the Annual Governance Statement; Parts 1 – 8 were thereupon agreed as 'Yes' and Statement No. 9 (Trust Funds) as 'not applicable'. Members of the Council therefore agreed, to approve by resolution, to submit the Annual Return to the External Auditor.

e. Council approval and certification of Annual Return for 31st March, 2021 to be signed by Mayor

The Annual Return was approved and certified, and signed by the Mayor as the Chair of this meeting in the presence of Council, and in accordance with the statutory deadline of 30th June, 2021. The RFO requested the Mayor attend the office to sign all the supplementary documents to support the Annual Return; agreed by Mayor.

041) To consider a Schedule of Accounts for payment in June 2021

The RFO spoke to the report and explained that the bank reconciliations were available for Members to view.

- Cheque numbers 159 and 160 related to the purchase of items received against the Covid grant received, the VAT would be reclaimed. Effectively the only cost to Council was the cost incurred for installation
- The invoice had been received for the services of the Internal Auditor – the additional amount was presented and approved.
- G. Adams Construction the invoice date for payment was 21st June, 2021; the RFO asked if Senior Members were available to sign the cheque to visit the office, alternatively approval for the Clerk and RFO to sign and the RFO would hand-deliver the payment.

There being no further queries regarding the Schedule of Accounts, presented and additional items, as amended, were approved for payment. Transfer of funds, as approved by Council, would be undertaken in the presence of the appropriate Member and Town Clerk, which was noted accordingly.

A Member wished to take the opportunity to commend G. Adams Construction on the restoration work to the Town Clock and proposed that a letter be sent, highlighting how pleased Council was on the quality and expressing appreciation of how the work had been carried out, particularly as a lot of positive feedback had been received from the public.

042) To receive and adopt the following Minutes of Council:

- a) **Ordinary Meeting of Council - 19th May, 2021**
- b) **Special Meeting of Council - 26th May, 2021**
- c) **Annual Meeting of Council - 26th May, 2021**

It was agreed that, for points of accuracy only, all Minutes presented be moved en bloc as a true record.

043) Chair to sign Minutes

To be duly signed by the Chair, adhering to safety regulations and relevant restrictions, at the earliest opportunity – Chair to liaise accordingly.

044) Correspondence

- 1) One Voice Wales a) Local Places for Nature is back! Apply for a free garden package today.

- Noted: there was now a larger pack available that included a garden shed; this scheme provided excellent value and had been implemented on the Sirhowy Community Garden and Deighton playing field. There was still a small amount of trellis to be collected and put in place and the Member sought the help of any volunteers.

A group in Cefn Golau had taken advantage of this scheme, in the first instance for the community house and garden, and now applied for a second package to undertake planting around the area of Cefn Golau.

b) Public Health Wales: National survey of volunteers.

- Circulated prior to Council for Members consideration: Noted.

2) G. Adams
Construction

Lighting to illuminate Clock tower. Proposed lighting.

- The Clerk asked that consideration be deferred as information still awaited in relation to the second option; agreed, for consideration by the Public Facilities Sub-Committee.

3) Tredegar
Fabrications

Identified the hinges on the Clock door have worn causing the door to drop and rub.

- Council had complete trust in Tredegar Fabrications, who had provided a really good service to TTC on many occasions; a Member therefore suggested that the company be extended a free hand to deal with the issue under the urgent provision of expenditure delegated to the Leader.

Another Member said that it would be prudent for Members to meet with the gentleman on site to discuss the work needed, particularly as the Clock was a Listed Structure. The Chair agreed with this course of action, as an official quote would be needed prior to works being undertaken.

A Member said he was aware this problem had been developing over the years and felt that the company may not be able to fully give Council a price, as works could contain an unknown quantity. Tredegar Fabrications had also carried out work, free of charge in the

past, and the company was trustworthy. The Leader clarified the urgent provision for expenditure was delegated to the Clerk; he was sure the company was aware of the importance of the structure and could be trusted not to over-charge. Therefore, the Member could see no need for a formal meeting, suggesting one or two Members could meet the gentleman on site to discuss the works required.

Another Member supported the need to meet prior to works being undertaken, as Council were responsible for the Town Clock, and suggested that Councillor A.E. Tippings be present if only a few Members were to meet. The Councillor would be happy to meet, along with other Members, if Council so wished as the company was local and provided an excellent service in the past.

The Chair also supported the comments of Members and reiterated, once the works needed had been viewed by the gentleman, Council would require an idea of the costings to be incurred.

It was therefore agreed that the Leader, Deputy Leader and Chair of Public Facilities meet with Tredegar Fabrications to discuss the works required: Clerk to liaise.

4) Tredegar Twinning Association

Asking if there is any space available to store a gazebo, folding table and a few folding chairs.

- The only space available would be the storage area above the public conveniences - Council was happy for Twinning to utilise this space, but unfortunately it was noted that it was subject to condensation. Therefore, it was agreed that this space be provided on the proviso that the Association agree to a waiver that the equipment be stored on the understanding that Council could accept no responsibility in respect of theft or damage.

- 5) Cllr T. Smith Copy of email from Business forum Re: Tim 8)
watering planters for them.
- Noted: a Member welcomed the placing of the planters in the town centre, which would feature the Town Council logo. Leader to liaise with the operative regarding watering the planters.
- 6) B. Peeks The Queen's Platinum Jubilee Beacons
02.06.2022
- Agreed, for consideration by the Events Sub-Committee.
- 7) Kickstart Asking if Council are interested in participating in the Government Kickstart scheme.
- The Clerk asked if Council wished to participate in the scheme; a Member considered this a wonderful idea in introducing youngsters on their employment journey and fully supported the scheme. Another Member endorsed the comments, he suggested the Coalfields Regeneration Trust would be more than happy to help staff with the paperwork, having already completed the process.
- Another Member suggested that staff investigate to ascertain any liabilities; it was therefore agreed in principal, to report back to the Chair of Staffing and Leader initially, and then to the Finance and Staffing Sub-Committee for consideration.

PUBLICATIONS

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board Vaccination Update issue 20, 21 & issue 22 – added to website & Twitter; IWN, Aneurin Sports Development Newsletter Issue 8 June 2021; One Voice Wales, Town Clerk / Responsible Financial Officer, Abergavenny Town Council. Closing date for applications midnight 25.06.2021; IWN, Draft Minutes of meeting 19.05.2021 and poster for Phoenix Youth Respect Project (added to Twitter / website); Aneurin Bevan Community Health Council, Patients Voice News Bulletin Issue 41 Spring 2021 – website; IWN, EPP Courses; One Voice Wales & Improvement Cymru: Link to slides and video from webinar.

– ***distributed to Members***: Received.

9) AGENDA

None received.

Councillors T. Smith and B. Willis declared an interest in the following item and took no part in discussion or voting thereon.

045) Planning:

a) i) **To consider an Officer's Report (if received)** None received

ii) **List of planning applications:** None received

b) **Verbal report of the Planning Committee, if any** None received

c) **To consider Planning Applications submitted for Council's observations**

App. No.	Applicant	Proposal
C/2021/0177	Mr. J. Sandercock 6 Vale View	Demolition of single storey extension & construction of two storey extension, 6 Vale View.
No objections	Tredegar	

d) **To consider other planning matters**

- Car wash, Nantybwlch – there were ongoing issues with cars being washed closer to the road, resulting in the footpath becoming soaked, the Member suggested a need to write to Enforcement, to ascertain when granted if there was a limited area to carry out car washing, with the need for a formal response. This had been a problem for several years, and Council had to be mindful this was the only access route for schoolchildren, which should be safe access. This could be an issue for the Health and Safety Executive, as the use of the power-wash lance could prove a risk to the visually impaired and children, and to public health with chemical run-off into the drains.

Agreed: write to BGCBC Highways, Education and Environmental Health Departments, and Health and Safety Executive.

- Astral Garage – a Member expressed concern in relation to the amount of waste from the garage, as these chemicals were draining into the river, also parking was becoming a problem, exacerbated by the amount of business originating from the garage.

Agreed: letter to appropriate Departments of BGCBC in respect of the need to investigate waste (clean rivers) and obstruction to pedestrians.

046) Matters of Local Interest or Concern (by prior notice)

- None received.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 7.23 p.m.

Chair