

MINUTES OF THE BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 5th. AUGUST 2024

Present : Cllr. R Mills (Mayor)

Cllr. G Etheridge (Deputy Mayor)

Cllrs. K Jones, J Griffiths, D Davies, K Williams, D Box, C Clark, C Erasmus & A Short

Cllr. A Farina-Childs arrived late at Item 19

Cllr. K Etheridge attended remotely after some initial issues at Item 7

1. To Receive Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. M Gwynne, N Dix & P Cook

2. Declarations Of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this point

3. Police Report

The Clerk apologised that he had not sent an Invitation to the new Inspector

4. County Borough Report

With no Borough members present at the time there was no Report

5. Mayoral Announcements

The Mayor reported briefly on his request for the Clerk to seek clarification of remarks made by Cllr. Eluned Stenner at C.C.B.C. meeting relating to potential Closure of Blackwood Miners' Institute , which quickly escalated and is now placed on the Agenda.

The Mayor also reported that he had drafted a letter to the Prime Minister, on behalf of residents, particularly those who are part of our proud mining community, urging his Government to fulfil the promises made in their party manifesto concerning the Mineworkers Pension Scheme by reviewing and rectifying the surplus sharing arrangements and transferring the Investment Reserve Fund back to the rightful beneficiaries the miners themselves.

He shared with members this was a promise he had made to his close friend and former Town Councillor, Steffan Lewis AM prior to his untimely death in 2019, to continue the fight for justice. Members were ***unanimous*** in support of the Mayors actions

6. Correspondence

The Clerk presented his report on items of correspondence received since the last meeting and all were noted –

Caerphilly C.B.C.

Football figures (forwarded to members)

News Online (forwarded to members)

Notification of changed start time to Community Council Liaison Sub Committee – now 7.00pm on 22nd. July

Notification of Traffic Order prohibiting waiting on Greenwood Road From 26th. June

Proposed Events Programme for 2025/26 – funding permitting

Blackwood Spring Fair - Saturday 8th. March

Beach Party - Saturday 28th. June

Winter Fair - Saturday 22nd. November

Feedback from 12 week consultation on the Draft Waste Strategy – being presented to Joint Scrutiny Committee on Monday 8th. July

Acknowledgement of receipt of complaint from Trading Standards passed to them in respect of Jayne's Baby Bank

Request regarding Artwork Proposal at Corner of Woodbine Road – forwarded to members – individual responses seemed to support Chartists/ Heritage of town

Notification of BTC Stakeholders Meeting to be held 18th. September at the Woodbine Club starting 6.00pm

Notification of Temporary Road Closure at Ty Gelli, Cwmgelli to enable Drainage Works to take place – Mon. 5th – Fri 9th. August

Audit Briefing Note update from Town Centre Management Team – forwarded to members

Response from J Hillier Raikes after e mail from Clerk re. Press item £900k awarded to Blackwood for Placemaking Plans.

Currently being produced with a number of priority areas identified, but with little more consultation prior to going public and no knowledge of likely timescales. Reminded of Charter Agreement. Follow up from Paul Hudson acknowledging T.C. will be consulted once completed

Request members views regarding proposed enhancements –

Removal of disused bin store lower end of Car Park & install seating area

Wild flower planting

Install asphalt path as additional footway between car park and town centre

Replacement of bin screening – lane next to Card Factory to improve appearance - Response by 7th. August

Response from CCBC regarding our approach to assist tackling ASB at the Bus Station by installing Shutters to Bays -

In conclusion, the high costs, uncertain additional expenses, complex structural modifications, regulatory requirements, operational challenges, and insurance and liability concerns make the project to install shutters at the bus station an impractical and non-viable option. It is suggested that it would be more effective to address the root cause of the ASB directly through enforcement and community measures.

One Voice Wales

Multi Locational Meetings Guidance

Copy of Presentation by Deryck Evans (Audit Wales) – Themes & Lessons Audit 2022/23

Notification of National Conference to be held Wed. 16th. October at Llanelwedd

Audit Wales

Reminder to post Notice of Audit and timescales for delivery of Statement of Accounts plus required information

Borough Members

Request to use Offices for Joint Surgery with Police on Friday 12th. July

GAVO

Notification of Annual Volunteering Awards at B.M.I. on 8th. October
- Now possibly Blackwood Rugby Club

Insp. Oliver Petty

Information that he is leaving his position as Local Neighbourhood Police Inspector to better accommodate family life

Tarik Choudry

Response to email identifying complaint to Office regarding scooters And bikes being ridden dangerously at Bus Station - noted and to be added to Team Patrol Plan

Town & Comm. Councils
Liaison Committee

Notification/ Agenda/ Reports for meeting to be held Monday 22nd. July

Applications for Financial
Assistance

Valleys Eisteddfod 18th. Oct. Gwyndy Campus, Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni

Pentynmawr Junior AFC

Blackwood Town Cricket Club

Trefor Evans

Expression of Interest – Vacancy on Town Council

Sight Cymru

Request for Partnership on Sight Loss Friendliness In Blackwood

Blachere Illuminations Quotations for replacement Christmas Lighting

Police & Crime Comm. Request for members to encourage residents to participate in consultation exercise on Policing in Caerphilly & to place on Social media

In respect of the proposed enhancements at the Car Park, behind the High Street, members were in **agreement** with the proposals.

It was **agreed** to discuss possible attendance at the One Voice Wales National Conference at the next meeting

It was also **agreed** that the Applications for Financial Assistance and the Blachere Quotations be passed to Policy & Finance Committee for deliberation, that Trefor Evans be invited for potential Co-option interview at a later date, together with Louise Phillips, and that the request from Sight Cymru be forwarded to Jo Hillier Raikes for her attention.

7. *Schedule of Payments*

The Clerk presented his report on payments made/ are due for payment –

		£. p
SSE	Christmas Lights Electricity	453.78
Rhys Mills	Mayors Allowance	500.00
Currys Business	Additional Laptops	1,166.97
Newsquest	Advert – South Wales Argus	720.00
John Hold	June Salary + reimbursements	838.29
HMRC	June Tax/ NI	605.65
Playworks	June Fee	20.00
Zurich Insurance	Additional Premium	96.43
Caerphilly C.B.C.	Business Rates	1,238.00
Bebb, Tasker & Sucksmith	Lease Payment	960.00
Traditional Signwriting Services	Update of Honours Boards	252.00
Einfinity Ltd.	Set up laptops	312.00
G Edwards Etheridge (Microsoft)	Windows Licences – laptops	332.47
Studio 54	Beach Party Entertainment	1,750.00
Dancelicious	“ “ “	100.00
Mynydd. Ladies Choir	“ “ “	100.00
K White	“ “ “	100.00
DYT Dance	“ “ “	150.00
Atomic Productions	Staging & Sound Beach Party	1,600.00
Information Comm. Office	Data Protection Fee	40.00
John Hold	July Salary + reimbursements	827.49
HMRC	July Tax/ N.I.	606.05
Playworks	July Fee	20.00
Bebb Tasker & Sucksmith	Lease Payment	960.00
Don Elsbury Plant	Put up/ Take down Bunting	480.00
Notetop Office Solutions	Paper - 10 packs	118.08
Welsh Water	Water Rates	658.60

Cllr. C Clark queried why such a large payment had been made to Studio 54 when compared to the other entertainment. The Clerk explained that they had actually negotiated the bookings for the Taylor Swift Tribute act and the Steel Sound (and paying same - £1,050) whilst also supplying four slots from the Studio and the Disney Characters walking through town on the day.

Members accepted the Clerks explanation, and all payments were *unanimously agreed*

8. To Receive the Minutes of the Co-options Interview Panel held 10th. June 2024

It was *agreed* the Minutes be received

9. To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held 10th. June 2024

It was *resolved* the Minutes be agreed as a true record

9. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

11. To Receive the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting held 1st. July 2024

It was *agreed* the Minutes be received

12. To Receive the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee (Short listing) Meeting held 24th. July 2024

It was *agreed* the Minutes be received

13. Annual Report 2023/24

The Clerk presented the updated version which was *approved* by members, and *agreed* should now be placed on our Web page

14. Budget Monitoring Report to Period 3 - 30th. June 2024

The Clerk presented his report which was *agreed* by members. The Clerk stated a further monitoring report would be presented to the next meeting

15. Verbal Update on Beach Party held Saturday 13th. July

The Clerk gave a brief report on the Beach Party and thanked those members who had turned out on the day to show their support. The weather had been relatively kind with no rain, and attendances were good throughout the day with good crowds around the stage area for most of the day. The Mayor stated that he had visited most of the stalls and businesses in the High Street and the general consensus was it had been a very successful day, especially for the food outlets in town, where there had been queues outside many.

16. Publication of Members Remuneration 2023/2024

The Clerk presented his Report which highlighted [Section 151](#) of the [Local Government Measure 2011](#) requires Community and Town Councils to publish, within their authority area, the remuneration received by their members by 30 September following the end of the previous financial year.

This information must also be sent to the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales by the same date. A copy of statement to be shared with Wales Audit Office to ensure compliance.

Nil returns are also required.

The payments made by community and town councils to named members as:

- mandatory payments towards the additional household expenses of working from home on council business. These figures should be reported globally on the statement of payments.
- mandatory payments towards office consumables resulting from working from home. These figures should be reported globally on the statement of payments.
- responsibility payments
- allowances made to a mayor or chair and deputy mayor or deputy chair
- compensation for Financial Loss
- costs incurred in respect of travel and subsistence. These figures should be reported globally on the statement of payments
- any payments made for attendance on official business or approved duty

In respect of the publication of the contribution towards costs of care and personal assistance, relevant authorities are only required to publish the total amount reimbursed during the year. It is a matter for each authority to determine its response to any Freedom of Information requests it receives. However, it is not intended that details of individual claims should be disclosed.

Payment	Description
Name of Community & Town Council	BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL
Local Authority area (County)	CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH
Date return submitted to IRPW	
NIL Return	N/A
Group - 1 to 5 (state the Group number your Council belongs to)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group 3 (Electorate over 5,000 to 9,999)
Total cost of allowances paid to councillors each in receipt of £156 payment - to recognise councillors incur	£1,662

costs to do their role.	
Total cost of allowances paid to councillors in receipt of £52 payment - payments for costs incurred in respect of telephone, broadband etc.	£ 554
Responsibility Payment (up to £500 to a maximum of 5 members)	NIL
Chair / Mayor of the Council allowance Chair or Mayor's Personal Payment	£ 500
Vice Chair / Deputy Mayor of the Council allowance. This excludes any Civic Budget for their extra work.	NIL
Financial Loss Allowance	NIL
Travel & Subsistence expenses	£1,737.68
Total Attendance Allowance paid to all members (£30 per member, per Council meeting)	NIL
Contribution to Costs of Care and Personal Assistance (CPA)	NIL.
Other	£ 36
Total	£4,489.68
TOTAL NUMBER OF COUNCILLORS declined £156 allowance - for costs incurred in respect of working from home	2
TOTAL NUMBER OF COUNCILLORS declined £52 allowance - for costs incurred in respect of telephone,	2

Members *accepted* the Report

17. Blackwood in Bloom

The Clerk reiterated that this competition relies on members identifying 6 front gardens (visible from the public highway) within their respective wards, to be judged soon afterwards by members of the Events Committee.

For this to be successful, it is necessary for members to play their part in the process, which means some time & effort is given touring their wards and identifying the best front gardens on view.

Members in each ward should confer and agree on the nominations.

If members wish to proceed with the competition, each of the 4 wards should identify their nominations and forward to the Clerk by 15th. August and he will then arrange judging to take place early the following week.

Prior to Covid, Certificates & prize money of £25 were presented to winners at the Civic Awards Evening held at the Blackwood Miners Institute. I would suggest that instead of £25 cash payments (frowned upon by Audit) that perhaps we present £25 Vouchers for perhaps Blackwood Garden Centre thus supporting a local company albeit in a small way.

However , unfortunately over the past number of years, the enthusiasm of some members seemed to

have waned, and only a handful of members appear to participate in visiting their Wards checking out the gardens. Perhaps now is the time to reconsider the value / status of the competition ?

After some discussion members **agreed** the Competition be suspended until next year, and in the meantime the Events Committee consider how to better advertise the Competition, and possibly even asking individuals to nominate their own or somebody else's garden for judging.

The Mayor expressed his concern that the Events Committee had not met for quite sometime, and as hinted in the Clerks Report, it seemed the organisation of events was falling to just a small number of individuals. He identified the effects of the pandemic had possibly had a lasting effect, but suggested as the Events Committee was, to all intents and purposes, open to all members of Town Council perhaps Events form an Agenda Item on future Town Council Agendas, and that at the next meeting the Clerk identify previous Events organised/ paid for by us, together with the current events planned for the remainder of this year. This was **agreed** by members.

18. Planning Applications

The Clerk presented his report on Planning Applications received since the last meeting -

Case Ref. 24/0338/COU

Location: Chef Ceylon Ltd 10 Bridge Street Blackwood NP12 1AX

Proposal: Change the use from Restaurant to a children's nursery

Case Officer: Joshua Burrows 01443 864427 burroj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 24/0488/COU

Location: Unit 1A Blackwood Gate Retail Park Blackwood NP12 2FS

Proposal: Subdivision of existing retail unit, associated external works and change of use from Class A1 to Class D2

Case Officer: Joshua Burrows 01443 864427 burroj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 24/0503/HH

Location: 13 Parc Plas Blackwood NP12 1SJ

Proposal: Demolish existing conservatory and form new patio, demolish detached garage, erect single storey side and rear extension to create a one-bedroom annex

Case Officer: Abbie-Jane Stokes (01443 866221 : stokea@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Case Ref. 24/0527/HH

Location: 15 Coed Gelli Parc Cwmgelli Blackwood NP12 1GS

Proposal: Remove existing conservatory and replace with a single storey extension

Case Officer: Abbie-Jane Stokes (01443 866221 : stokea@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Case Ref. 24/0530/TPO

Location: Land At Grid Ref 317148 197924 The Fairways Blackwood

Proposal: Replace T1 beech tree with suitable specimen (Tree Preservation Order 2/82/IBC)

Case Officer: Abbie-Jane Stokes (01443 866221 : stokea@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Case Ref. 24/0484/RET

Location: 10 Cilgerran Way Cefn Fforest Blackwood NP12 1GF

Proposal: Retain the erection of 2. No fences to the front of property

Case Officer: Abbie-Jane Stokes (01443 866221 : stokea@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Case Ref. 24/0550/HH

Location: Hazeldene Pentwyn Road Blackwood NP12 1HW
Proposal: Erect single storey rear extension
Case Officer: Abbie-Jane Stokes (01443 866221 : stokea@caerphilly.gov.uk

After some discussion, it was **agreed** no objections be raised

19. Proposed Closure of Blackwood Miners Institute

The Clerk presented his report, stating that -

Following Cllr. Eluned Stenners remarks at Council Meeting held On Wednesday 24th. July reported in the Press, the Mayor asked had asked him to write on behalf of Town Council to seek some clarification on the matter. His letter was (forwarded to members for their information) forwarded on Sunday 28th.

On Monday evening he received an embargoed Media Release about a number of key savings proposals to be issued at 9.00am the following morning but sworn not to release until then. On reading the Release, I noticed Llancaiach was to be mothballed whilst the Stute was to be closed, he queried same and after a few emails back and fore they amended so that both sites were at least on the face of it to be treated equally.

Since then, it had been pretty manic.

Having researched a number of documents released by the Borough over the past number of months, the Clerk reported that he had finalised a response that he hoped members would agree to this evening which he believes identifies a number of inconsistencies, and asks a number of, hopefully, uncomfortable questions to Cabinet (who incidentally are also the Trustees of the Blackwood Miners Institute)

He reported that he had forwarded his proposed response to members, and read out same at the meeting.

Members present were ***unanimous in their support*** of the letter, and congratulated and thanked the Clerk for his work in writing same.

After quite a lively discussion, several members voiced their concerns that it seemed Blackwood and infact the former Islwyn area was a forgotten town/ area compared to Caerphilly and the former Rhymney Valley which had significant investment over the years, it was **agreed** this proposal to mothball the BMI should be opposed at all costs.

Cllr. G Etheridge, Deputy Mayor, reported that he had quickly organised a Petition, which had already received close to 2,000 signatures and had also on behalf of Town Council contacted both Ruth Jones MP & Chris Evans MP requesting them to write to Caerphilly C.B.C. expressing their concerns and asking to reconsider their decision.

The Mayor, whilst acknowledging the members good intentions asked that any such correspondence in future goes via the Clerk, as the Town Council, again being seen as a thorn in the Borough's side, could perhaps ourselves come under scrutiny and should wherever possible follow accepted protocol. After some further discussion, it was suggested that Lord Kinnock & Lord Touhig be contacted asking for their support in fighting the closure, as they had both been very supportive and vocal on the Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre Issue. This was **agreed** by members.

20. Update on Use of Offices

The Clerk reported that HSBC had used the Office for two weeks, whilst the Caerphilly Branch was being refurbished, and had had a fair number of clients through the door. The Offices had also been manned by a number of members throughout July, on hand to answer any queries, and the Clerk took the opportunity to thank those members.

Citizens Advice had informed the Clerk that additional staff had recently been appointed, and were now undergoing the required training and would make further contact over the coming weeks. Furthermore, a planned meeting with the Caerphilly C.B.C. Chief Executive Officer had had to be postponed, but was hopefully to be rescheduled in the near future.

21. Reports

The Clerk asked Cllrs. D Box and K Etheridge to briefly report on a recent meeting held at the Offices with Jackie Williams (Aneurin Bevan Gwent Public Health Team) who highlighted the Mental Wellbeing & Suicide Prevention Resources currently available in the area.

Both members stated that they were unaware of these resources, and were impressed by the assistance available – resources, courses & services to promote community mental wellbeing, to help prevent deaths from suicide, mental health support services and support people affected by death by suicide and thought by working together we could ensure the local community are made aware of what is currently on offer.

They were also both impressed with the enthusiasm of Jackie, and agreed to take forward a number of points, beginning with a presentation to Town Council which will hopefully be the catalyst to getting the community involved in changing the narrative of the bridge, and exploring whether there is a possibility of Blackwood becoming a Suicide Safer Community, followed by the possibility of an “ engagement event “ for the residents of the Town, possibly hosted by Blackwood RFC later in the year where local partners could be invited to pitch stalls to promote their services to the public.

After some enthusiastic discussion, it was unanimously agreed the Clerk try and arrange for a presentation at the September meeting, and the meeting start at 6.00pm to accommodate same.