

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Policy & Finance Committee of Cwmbran Community Council held on Monday 9 March 2015**

**Present** Councillor WM Howell (Chair), Councillors SWJ Ashley, S Brooks, L Chaney, M Day, S Evans, M Johnston, R Jones, R Kemp, TA Matthews and J Rees

Also David Collins (Clerk to the Council)

**PF14/068 Apologies for Absence**

None

**PF14/069 Declarations of Interest**

Members were asked to declare any personal and/or prejudicial interests that they may have and sign the Interests Sheet to give details of the nature of the interest.

**PF14/070 Itemised Schedule of Receipts & Payments (January 2015) & Bank Reconciliation**

Members considered the above information. Background papers relating to the schedule of receipts and payments were available to allow members to scrutinise any transactions in more detail.

Members were pleased to note that the sum of £613 had been raised for the Chairman's Charity on 7 March 2015 (A02).

It was **recommended** that the above information is noted.

**PF14/071 Bad Debts**

Members considered writing off bad debts totaling £140.33 (net) (2013/14) and £13.00 (net) 2014/15 as part of the preparation of the Council's accounts 2014/15. The Clerk explained the action he had taken to secure payment but, despite repeated attempts, they remained outstanding. All the debts referred to gardening work undertaken by the Task Force. The Clerk also described another debt which he was continuing to pursue and answered members' questions about potential options to secure payment.

It was **recommended** that the above bad debts are written off.

**PF14/072 Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Annual Report 2015.**

Members noted that the Panel's Annual Report had been published. The Report was available at

<http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/localgov/150223-irp-report-february2015-v1-en.pdf>

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Payments to Community Councillors were prescribed in Determinations 42 – 47 of the Annual Report. Details of the allowances were considered by members. Members noted that these were permissive powers that required a formal decision by the Council. But where the council made such a decision, it must apply to all members at the levels determined by the Panel. An individual member may make a personal decision to elect to forgo part or all of the entitlement to any of these allowances by giving notice in writing to the Clerk.

The Council was also required to give publicity to such payments.

It is **recommended** that determinations 42 to 47 of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Annual Report 2015 are adopted.

### **PF14/073      Town Twinning**

Members noted that this year, Cwmbrân's twin town of Bruchsal would celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its twinning arrangement with Sainte-Ménéhould, France, on 9 May 2015.

To celebrate this anniversary, representatives of all of Bruchsal's twin towns had been invited to attend the celebrations. The Chairman of the Council (or substitute) and a companion had therefore been invited to attend for the weekend 8 May – 10 May 2015. A similar invitation had been extended to Croesyceiliog & Llanyrafon Community Council. The Chairman of Croesyceiliog & Llanyrafon Community Council would be travelling to Germany, accompanied by another member. All costs – apart from travel costs – would be met by Stadt Bruchsal. There was provision within the 2014/15 approved estimates to meet these costs. The Council had been asked to confirm the names of those who would be attending by 15 March 2015.

Members agreed to draw lots to decide which other member should accompany the Chairman of the Council to Bruchsal.

It was **recommended** that any member who was interested in joining Councillor Evans (and 2 members from Croesyceiliog & Llanyrafon Community Council) on the above visit should contact the Clerk by 12 noon on Friday 13 March 2015 to express an interest.

The “winning” name would be drawn later that day by the Chairman of the Council.

### **PF14/074      Maintenance of Council House and Other Matters**

Members considered a report of the Clerk which outlined progress in relation to various routine maintenance jobs at the Council House.

Members noted that the repair and redecoration of the exterior of the Annex was substantially complete and that the building would soon return to regular, normal use. Redecoration of the Council Chamber would commence shortly. A number of minor plumbing and electrical works were also being undertaken. New IT equipment had been ordered for staff, as authorised by members. Maintenance & support costs would be regularised as part of this arrangement, with effect from 1 April 2015.

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There was some outstanding work required to repair broken plaster in the Main Office and locate the reason for this damage.

The Clerk also explained that enquiries had been made to ascertain costs of new furniture for use in the Chamber, with a view to allowing a more flexible use of the Chamber and better use of the existing IT equipment. Members considered other potential options such as changing the room layout for meetings or moving the projector and screen to another wall.

It was **recommended** that:

- (1) The Clerk to the Council examines other options to make better use of the Council Chamber, as described above, as a possible alternative to purchase of new furniture.
- (2) The Clerk to the Council continues to report regularly to members on maintenance matters.

**PF14/075 One Voice Wales Membership 2015/16**

Members noted that the fee for the Council's membership of One Voice Wales was now due. Members considered information which had been provided by One Voice Wales about the advantages of membership and the services provided. The fee would be £4,318 which compared with £4,175 for the current year.

It was **recommended** that the Council continue its membership of One Voice Wales, on the terms described above.

**PF14/076 Wales White Paper Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People**

Members noted that the White Paper on the reform of local government in Wales entitled 'Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People' had been published by the Welsh Government. Whilst much related to Principal Authorities and Area Boards, there were important implications for Community Councils. Members considered a helpful commentary on these implications from the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) helpful. Members discussed the implications of the White Paper for the future of Community Councils.

The White Paper also raised the proposal that community councils should pass a series of competency tests on democracy, capability, capacity and governance. The Clerk reported that he had informally assessed the Council's existing arrangements against these tests and the results had been favorable.

The Clerk to the Council answered members' questions potential future training opportunities for Clerks provided by the SLCC and others.

The White Paper was open for consultation until the end of April.

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It was **recommended** that:

- (1) the Council is content to rely on One Voice Wales to respond on behalf of the sector as a whole.
- (2) any members who also wish to submit individual comments on the White Paper should submit their comments to the Clerk for compilation and submission.

**PF14/077 Monmouthshire, Brecon & Abergavenny Canals Trust: Canal Restoration Project**

Members considered a request for funding towards maintenance costs of the above project. The request included details of itemised anticipated expenditure until 2020.

The Clerk to the Council commented on aspects of the project in terms of its contribution to delivering sustainability and providing employment and training opportunities. Members discussed the potential impact of a revitalised canal area on the local economy and environment but expressed their reservations about the implications of allocating funds beyond the life of the current council. Members also discussed the application within the context of other potential regeneration opportunities.

Other issues raised by members included:

- the need for a detailed understanding of anticipated expenditure.
- the need for a detailed understanding of the areas for which funding from the Council was sought.
- the need for a detailed understanding of other income sources.
- the potential to access EC funding.
- the possibility of carrying out a cost benefit analysis of the project.
- the possibility of the applicants attending a future meeting to describe the proposals in more detail.

It was **recommended** that:

- (1) the applicants are requested to meet with members to provide more information in relation to the items listed above.
- (2) a Regeneration Projects Sub Committee is established to identify and consider potential regeneration projects in Cwmbran and agree criteria for potential schemes. The Sub Committee would be a Sub Committee of the Policy & Finance Committee with membership to be appointed at Full Council on 25 March 2015.

**PF14/078 Torfaen Museum Trust**

Members considered a request for further financial assistance from Torfaen Museum Trust for 2015/16.

It was **recommended** that no additional finance is awarded to the Trust for the year in question.

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**PF14/079 Seminars & Meetings of Outside Bodies**

Members considered reports in relation to the following seminars and meetings of outside bodies, attended by representatives of the Council.

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| (a) | One Voice Wales Gwent Valleys Partnership                | 10 February 2015 |
| (b) | One Voice Wales Larger Councils Network<br>(oral report) | 25 February 2015 |

It was **recommended** that

- (1) the above reports are noted.
- (2) the Clerk includes details of the event held on 25 February 2015 on Members Matters.

**PF14/080 Cwmbran Park Bowling Club**

A request had been submitted by the club for the Council to contribute a full page advert for insertion in the club's handbook and website, at a cost of £50.00.

In 2013 the Council funded the cost of the advert from its Advertising & Publications budget (H06) but in 2014 the Council considered a similar request and awarded the club a grant of £500 from the Grants budget (K01) in view of financial difficulties the club faced at that time.

This matter was considered at the meeting of the Grants to Voluntary Organisations Committee on 2 March 2015.

The committee recommended that the matter is referred to the Policy & Finance Committee for consideration.

Members discussed the request in the context of other requests for financial assistance and wider advertisement policies. Following consideration of the application, a vote was taken which resulted in four members in support of the request and four against. The matter was therefore determined on the casting vote of the Chairman.

It was **recommended** that the Council contributes a full page advert for insertion in the club's handbook and website, at a cost of £50.00 to be met from the Advertising & Publications budget (H06)

*Signed .....*  
(Chair, Cwmbran Community Council)