

Minutes of a Meeting of the Policy & Finance Committee of Cwmbran Community Council held on Monday 12 March 2018

Present Councillor SWJ Ashley (in the Chair), Councillors AL Bird, Rh Bennett, SJ Brooks, PJ Cathcart, M Day, M Johnston, R Jones, RD Kemp, and WJ Walker.

Also David Collins (Clerk to the Council)

PF17/063 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were accepted from Councillor N Hopkins (work commitments). LJ Johnston (personal) and M Villars (personal)

PF17/064 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.

Councillor SWJ Ashley declared a personal interest in Minute PF17/081 (Requests for Financial Assistance) below.

PF17/065 Itemised Schedule of Receipts & Payments (January 2018)

Members considered the above information.

Members expressed their appreciation to Councillor M Johnston for his work in verifying bank reconciliations and supporting documentation.

Members noted that small items of expenditure were now being incurred in relation to the new accommodation at the Council House, such as the purchase of spare keys etc. This expenditure would be financed from within code G10 (Premises Maintenance).

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

PF17/066 Statement of Accounts 2017/18

Members noted that arrangements were now being in place to prepare the Council's Annual Accounts.

The Council's Internal Auditor had carried out an interim audit of the Council's systems of internal control on 5 February 2018. Members had been provided with a report which followed the audit. Members noted that the report described a satisfactory internal control environment. Members were disappointed at the length of time taken for the report to be produced.

The Council's existing financial systems were maintained in house, with regular scrutiny by Members. However, Members also considered the potential for drawing upon external support to assist with the preparation of the final accounts, members considered a quote from DCK Accounting Solutions, who were recognised across the town & community council sector for their expertise. Members also considered the potential to introduce a

computerised form of accounting which could further assist with the preparation of accounts.

It was **recommended** that

- (1) the report of the Council's Internal Auditor in relation to the Interim Audit is noted.
- (2) the quote in the sum of £1545.80 from DCK Accounting Solutions Ltd to provide support in relation accounts year-end closedown and preparation of year-end financial statements (including information for the Annual Return) in relation to the 2017/18 Accounts is accepted.
- (3) discussions continue with DCK Accounting Solutions Ltd and other potential providers, about potential software tools with a view to eventually moving to a computerised accounting system. The Clerk to report back on the outcome of the above discussions within 12 weeks

PF17/067 Earmarked Reserves: Staffing Salaries (inclusive)

Members noted the sum of £60,000 was identified within the Council's Earmarked Reserves for Staffing Costs. This was to help meet any expenditure which was unforeseen when budgets were set. Members had discussed the potential to utilise Earmarked Reserves to meet additional "one off" staffing costs which had been approved during 2017/18 (Minute PF17/052 refers). This would reduce pressure on budgets.

It is **recommended** that a contribution from Earmarked Reserves (Staffing) of £15,000 is confirmed to meet additional staffing expenditure approved during 2017/18.

PF17/068 Annual Investment Strategy 2018/19

Members considered a draft strategy for 2018/19

It was **recommended** that the Investment Strategy is approved

PF17/069 Standing Orders

Members considered revised Standing Orders and Contract Standing Orders. Members acknowledged that it was important to keep governance arrangements under review and discussed the matters within the context of the Council's overall governance arrangements.

Members suggested that a "master set" of key constitutional and governance documents is maintained for inspection by Members (hard copy). Members noted that key documents were also available to view on line. Members agreed that key constitutional documents should be approved on an Annual Basis. The Annual Meeting would provide an opportunity for this.

It was **recommended** that:

- (1) the Council approve the revised Standing Orders, subject to the addition of the words “and relevant constitutional documents” to Standing Order 2(b).
- (2) Council approve the revised Contract Standing Orders.
- (3) the Clerk is instructed to provide an Executive Summary of recent changes to the above documents at the next meeting.

PF17/070 Vacancies on Governing Bodies

Members noted that there was currently a vacancy on the Council’s representation on the Governing Body of Henllys Church in Wales Primary School. The Governing Body had confirmed that a parent who worked at the school was interested in becoming a Governor. The lady had recently nominated herself for Parent Governor but was unsuccessful. Members felt unable to recommend the appointment without further knowledge of the individual.

It was **recommended** that no action is taken.

PF17/071 One Voice Wales Membership fees 2018/19

Members considered a letter from One Voice Wales setting out details of Membership Fees for the coming year. The Leader of the Majority group drew Members’ attention to current pressures facing One Voice Wales.

It was **recommended** that the Council continue its membership of One Voice Wales for 2018/19 for a membership fee of £4833.

PF17/072 Torfaen Draft Well-being Plan

Members had asked to receive regular reports on progress in relation to the Council’s obligations in respect of the above. (Minute PF17/065 refers)

The Clerk described a model which he was developing to help illustrate the ways in which the Council contributed to the objectives in the Plan. The Clerk confirmed that he had discussed the format with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the committee. The model would indicate progress achieved to date in relation to key objectives and potential future actions. Informal discussions had also taken place at officer level with other town & community councils locally about the potential to use the model to help deliver a consistent approach.

Members noted that town & community councils were represented on the Torfaen Public Services Board (PSB) by Councillor Steve Harris of Pontypool Community Council. Councillor Harris had confirmed his commitment to this role. A copy of the draft minutes of the Joint Meeting of the PSB & Officer Support Group of 24 January 2018 has been sent to Members under separate cover however they were not in the public domain until approved at subsequent meetings. Members emphasised the importance of a strong voice for town & community councils at PSB meetings and the need for regular attendance.

It was **recommended** that:

- (1) the format for describing progress in contributing to the delivery of the Torfaen Well-being Plan is endorsed in principle.
- (2) the position in relation to town & community representation on the PSB is noted.

PF17/073 Requests for Financial Assistance

(Councillor SWJ Ashley declared a personal interest in this item)

Members gave initial consideration to requests for financial assistance for community projects in relation to the Monmouthshire, Brecon & Abergavenny Canal and a local Foodbank project (CoStar).

Members discussed each project in detail on the basis of information available at the meeting but considered that further details were required in order to consider each project further.

It was **recommended** that consideration is deferred to enable detailed information to be considered at the next meeting.

PF17/074 Council House Matters: Annual Health & Safety Inspection

Members considered a report on the outcome of the recent annual Health & Safety Inspection (Minute CL17/059 refers). The report summarised the key findings of the Inspection and described actions being put in place to address matters arising. There were no findings which required immediate and urgent action. The report also outlined progress in responding to the recent Fire Safety Risk Assessment.

Members asked that, in future, Members are provided with a copy of the full report received in relation to the inspection.

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

PF17/075 Council House Matters: Supply of Electricity & Gas

On 22 January 2018, Members considered a report in relation to the above. (Minute PF17/060 refers). Members had asked for an opportunity to consider the supply of gas and electricity from the same supplier. Details were therefore reported. The electricity contract would commence in May 2018 and the gas would renew in February 2019. The electricity would be a 60-month plan ending on 14 May 2023 and gas would be a 53 months plan aligned to end also on the 14 May 20123.

It was **recommended** that the terms submitted by British Gas for the supply of gas and electricity are accepted.

PF17/076 Seminars & Outside Bodies

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

- (i) One Voice Wales Larger Councils Committee 24 January 2018
- (ii) South Wales Larger Councils Forum 30 January 2018

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

PF17/077 Guidance for Principal Councils on the Review of Communities

The Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales (the Commission) had been asked by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government to provide updated guidance on the conduct of community reviews by principal councils to support greater consistency in the manner in which community reviews are conducted. Members considered the guidance, which was primarily designed to assist principal council officers in the conduct of a review of their communities. It had also been drafted to inform interested parties, in particular town and community councils, as to how the process should operate.

It was **recommended** the Clerk report to the next meeting to clarify the responsibilities of the Council in relation to issues included within the guidance.

PF17/078 Exclusion of the Press & Public

In view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, it was agreed that the following matter be considered in private and that the power of exclusion of the public under Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act, 1960 be exercised.

PF17/079 Staffing Matter

Members considered an oral update from the Clerk about current staffing matters and some of the options available to the Council. Members noted finance which was in place in relation to staffing.

It is **recommended** that the position is noted.

Signed (Chairman, Cwmbran Community Council)