

**ANNUAL MEETING OF THE FULL COUNCIL OF ABERTILLERY AND LLANHILLETH
COMMUNITY COUNCIL (ALCC) HELD ON 11 MAY 2022 AT 7.00pm
in the Council Chamber at Council Offices, Mitre Street, Abertillery and via video
conferencing (Zoom).**

PRESENT

Councillors: Gary Oakley (Chair); Nick Simmons (Vice Chair); Peter Adamson; Michaela Assiratti; Roger Clark; Tracey Dyson; Ben Owen-Jones; Beverley Lucas; Barrie Page; Rob Phillips; Josh Rawcliffe; Glyn Smith; Bernard Wall; Mariola Walters; Graham White.

Officers: David Cartwright (Clerk)

Other: Mr Allen Rees

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND WELCOMES

There were no apologies for absence. The Chair welcomed two new Members: Josh Rawcliffe and Mariola Walters, and former community councillor Mr Allen Rees, who joined the meeting via Zoom videolink as a member of the public.

12. ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR 2022-23

The Chair explained that, although he was no longer a community councillor, under the Local Government Act 1972, the retiring Chair is required to preside over the election of his successor. Under the same Act, he would not have a vote in the election but would be required to give a casting vote in the event of a tie.

Two Members were nominated and seconded for the office of Chair: Cllr Nick Simmons and Cllr Tracey Dyson. The Chair asked for the vote to be recorded. The votes cast were as follows:

For Nick Simmons: Peter Adamson; Ben Owen-Jones; Barrie Page; Rob Phillips; Glyn Smith; Mariola Walters; and Nick Simmons.

For Tracey Dyson: Michaela Assiratti; Roger Clark; Beverley Lucas; Josh Rawcliffe; Bernard Wall, Graham White and Tracey Dyson.

The Clerk confirmed that, as both nominees had received seven votes, it was the duty of the Chair to give a casting vote. The Chair cast his vote for Nick Simmons who was duly **ELECTED** as the new Chair for the Civic Year 2022-23.

The new Chair invited the retiring Chair to address the meeting.

13. RETIRING CHAIR'S ADDRESS

The retiring Chair said:

"Firstly, I would like to offer my congratulations to Nick Simmons on being voted Chair. I am sure you will all support Nick In the coming year. Chair, with your permission, I would like to make the traditional outgoing speech.

"Before I start, for those of you that are looking concerned, I will say that it is a relatively short speech. Although it runs to several pages, it is written in very large type.

"It has certainly been a rollercoaster ride over the last year-and-a-half being Chair of Abertillery and Llanhilleth Community Council. In fact, the whole period of my being on the council has been an experience that it not to be forgotten.

"I look back with great satisfaction on the achievements of the Council during my term of office. We worked, for the most part, as a team, intent on improving the lives and opportunities of the people living and working in the Abertillery and Llanhilleth Community Council area.

"I was co-opted on to the Council in October 2018. I remember my very first meeting when, ten minutes before the meeting started, I asked the Clerk if I could propose a motion at the following meeting to install defibrillators in the Council area. He said, "We can cover it in this meeting."

"I was pleased and relieved that the Council approved my hasty motion to support the defibrillator programme. We have built on that vote and, today, thirteen defibrillators have been installed with the hope of more in the future.

"January 2019 was, for me and, I believe, this Council, a turning point. The Council took the bold decision to increase the annual budget from a financially stagnant £113,000 to £240,000, which allowed the Council to support projects that could improve the lives and well-being of residents throughout Abertillery and Llanhilleth Community Council. To the Members who are here today, who supported that budget motion, I say this to you: you turned this Council around.

"This new budget, which has been built on in subsequent years, enables projects to continue and grow – not least, the Youth Project, which has significantly reduced antisocial behaviour in the community (young people being the top concern of residents in a survey undertaken by the Council in 2018, Town in Bloom), Party in the Park, further defibrillators, and I hope, much more to come.

"It would, however, be disingenuous of me if I painted a totally positive picture. Along the way, there have been many ups and downs, that is for sure. Some of the time it has been a challenge. If truth be told, it has been a challenge for nearly all the time. COVID prevented normal meetings. However, the Council rose to the challenge, promoting hybrid meetings – one of the first councils to achieve this – enabling all councillors to attend and express their democratic rights.

"Regrettably, the Council still has within it a segment of councillors – and a member of the public – who, in my view, have no interest or ambition to see the area of Abertillery and Llanhilleth thrive and prosper.

"Furthermore, integrity is the bedrock of a good councillor. Unfortunately, it is severely lacking in at least one councillor sat here tonight, who prefers to find fault with the efforts of others at every turn, whilst never promoting any projects for the good of the electorate. Some councillors here, are relentless in their pursuit of damage to the Council. It is a situation that has been going on since long before I joined and will, I fear, continue.

"These people weaponise the various offices of regulation in an unrelenting attempt to damage the Council and crush the moral of councillors who are doing their very best for the community. I find their behaviour shameful. I would urge those of you that have stood for Council in order to do some good for your community to be brave and to remember that, if you have personal integrity, you can always hold your head high.

"I would just like to add that with the recent election, I believe this Council has a golden opportunity to move forward with the new Blaenau Gwent Borough Councillors, who now represent Abertillery. Ross Leadbetter and Keith Chaplin seem very keen to promote the town, open the car parks and encourage tourism, which, in my view will be the saviour of the area and town. Having spoken to them both at length, I know they have the same goals as

this Council. I hope that this new Council will work as equal partners with Ross and Keith and give the people who live and work in the area the opportunity to flourish.

“Therefore, my wish for you all here is that you all continue to experience success, to feel fulfilled and motivated in all you do and achieve and to have nothing but good results with each completed project. While that may be an overly optimistic wish, it is sincere wish.

“I’ve also come to realise that being a part of a community is more than just sharing credit. A team effort takes compromise. When you are on a team you must, at different times, lead, follow and, more often than not, meet in the middle. You are very fortunate in having such experienced and knowledgeable clerks supporting your efforts. I know that I have often turned to them for advice and have known that I could always rely on them to be straightforward and honest in their approach. If you need to talk any Council matter through, I am sure that they will be only too happy to help.

“Furthermore, and most importantly, I would also like to pay tribute to my wife Sally, who has provided me with unstinting support through some very difficult and demanding times with this Council. Without her, fulfilling the role of being Chair would not have been possible.

“Finally, I wish to thank the staff and the supporting members of this council for all their help, understanding and friendship that they have all extended to me over the term of my chairmanship and while being a member of this council, I hope that that will continue to grow and prosper.”

The retiring Chair left the meeting at 7.24 pm.

14. ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE

The new Chair signed his Declaration of Acceptance of Office and then adjourned the meeting at 7.25 pm to enable all other Members to sign their Declarations.

The meeting resumed at 7.36 pm.

As all Members were present in the chamber and had signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office, no motion was moved to permit the signing of the Declaration at or before a later meeting of the Council.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST OR DISPENSATIONS

None

16. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR FOR 2022-23

Two Members were nominated and seconded for the office of Vice-Chair: Cllr Ben Owen-Jones and Cllr Tracey Dyson.

Council **RESOLVED** to appoint Tracey Dyson as Vice-Chair.

17. CHEQUE SIGNATORIES

The Clerk noted that the Council’s four current cheque signatories were still Members of the Council. Roger Clark said that he did not think it would be helpful to the Council for Rob Phillips and Glyn Smith to continue as signatories as they had played a part in authorising payments to the Council’s then-Clerk in 2014 which were subsequently found to be unlawful. Cllr Phillips replied that he took Cllr Clark’s comments as a slur. There had been no findings of any wrong-doing by either him or Cllr Smith and he was not a cheque signatory in 2014. Cllr Smith said that he also resented what he regarded as a slur. Both he and Cllr Phillips had acted in 2014 on the legal advice presented to them at the time. Cllr Clark said that he

did not intend any slur or to apportion any blame for what had happened in 2014. He was merely of the opinion that it would not be good for the Council for Cllrs Phillips and Smith to continue as cheque signatories. The Chair reminded Members that, in 2021, the Council had voted to accept in full an Audit Wales report into the unlawful payments which had not found any wrong-doing by either Cllr Phillips or Cllr Smith. The Clerk added that, on the advice of Audit Wales, since 2014-15, the Council had adopted a more robust system. All cheques were now signed by an officer and two of the authorised Members, who were always shown the matching invoice so that they could be confident that any payment was legitimate.

Council **RESOLVED** to authorise Rob Phillips, Glyn Smith, Tracey Dyson and Beverley Lucas to continue to sign Council cheques

Mr Allen Rees left the meeting at 7.50 pm.

18. TERMS OF REFERENCE

A motion was moved to accept the Committee and Working Group Terms of Reference 2022-23. Tracey Dyson proposed the following amendment:

5. Full Council Working Groups:

Delete "The Solar Farm Grants Working Group shall be dissolved and its duties passed to the Finance and Grants Committee." Insert "The Solar Farm Grants Working Group shall be dissolved and its duties passed to the People and Communities Committee."

Cllr Dyson said that the People and Communities Committee had established strong links with many local community groups and, therefore, had a better understanding of what potential applicants for Solar Farm Grants were trying to achieve than would the Finance and Grants Committee. Ben Owen-Jones, Graham White and Rob Phillips spoke against the amendment. Cllr Dyson withdrew her proposed amendment.

Cllr White stated that he believed it was poor practice for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Council to sit on either the HR Committee or the Finance and Grants Committee. The Clerk replied that, in line with guidance, the terms of reference for the Council's HR Committee had always included the Chair and Vice-Chair as they are the Members with whom officers have the closest day-to-day links. He agreed that the Council's terms of reference for the Finance and Grants Committee had always included the stipulation that the Chair of the Committee should not be the Chair of the Council.

Ben Owen-Jones suggested that more should be done to encourage committees to appoint, as non-voting members, non-Members of the Council who have specialist expertise. Cllr Owen-Jones received support from several other Members. Cllr Owen-Jones tabled an amendment to the terms of reference for all committees:

After the words "The Committee shall have the authority to appoint members of the Committee (or of a sub-committee or working group) who are not Members of the Council..." insert "The Committee is advised to actively seek to appoint non-Council Members with specialist knowledge of matters that fall within the remit of the Committee, and these shall for all purposes be treated as non-voting members of that committee, sub-committee or working group."

Council **RESOLVED** to accept the above amendment.

Rob Phillips tabled amendments to the terms of reference for the PlaCE and Finance & Grants Committees as follows:

Delete “The Committee should be six members and, in any case shall be no fewer than five.”
Insert “The Committee should be seven members and, in any case shall be no fewer than five.”

Council **RESOLVED** to accept the above amendment.

Council **RESOLVED** to accept the Committee and Working Group Terms of Reference 2022-23 as amended.

19. COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS

Graham White questioned whether the Chair of the Council should be Chair of other committees. The Clerk replied that the Council’s Standing Orders, when referring to committees and sub-committees state that “the Chair of the Council, if present, shall preside at the meeting.”

The following appointments were made:

- a) Council **RESOLVED** to appoint Beverley Lucas, Michaela Assiratti, Ben Owen-Jones, Peter Adamson, Barrie Page and Tracey Dyson as members of the People and Communities Committee.
- b) Council **RESOLVED** to appoint Rob Phillips, Josh Rawcliffe, Peter Adamson, Barrie Page and Nick Simmons as members of the PlaCE Committee.
- c) Council **RESOLVED** to appoint Beverley Lucas, Mariola Walters, Glyn Smith, Graham White and Peter Adamson as members of the Finance and Grants Committee.
- d) Council **RESOLVED** to appoint the new Chair and new Vice-Chair plus Beverley Lucas, Rob Phillips and Glyn Smith as members of the Human Resources Committee.
- e) Council **RESOLVED** to appoint Josh Rawcliffe, Ben Owen-Jones and Barrie Page as members of the Youth Engagement Working Group.

20. JOINT COMMITTEES AND EXTERNAL BODIES

The following nominations were made:

- a) Council **RESOLVED** to nominate Glyn Smith, Roger Clark, Graham White, Bernard Wall and Nick Simmons as members of the Joint Committee of Local Councils in Blaenau Gwent.
- b) Council **RESOLVED** to authorise the Council’s members of the Joint Committee of Local Councils in Blaenau Gwent to nominate two of their number to the Consultation with Blaenau Gwent Borough Council.
- c) Council **RESOLVED** to nominate Rob Phillips and Ben Owen-Jones as members of the Abertillery and District Twinning Association.
- d & e) The Clerk noted that former-Member Gill Clark had been listed as the Council’s nominee for St Illtyd’s Community Primary School Governors for a number of years. Josh Rawcliffe reported that he was already a parent-governor. Ben Owen-Jones reported that he had recently become a member of the Board of Governors of Swffryd Primary School. Council made no further nominations pending information from the schools as to whether this would be either needed or welcome.

21. FULL COUNCIL MEETINGS 2022-23

Barrie Page moved an amendment to change the date of the Council’s next meeting to 25 May 2022.

Council **RESOLVED** to agree the following schedule of meetings as amended:

- 25 May 2022
- 29 June 2022
- 27 July 2022
- 28 September 2022
- 26 October 2022
- 30 November 2022
- 14 December 2022
- 11 January 2023 – budget-setting meeting
- 25 January 2023
- 22 February 2023
- 29 March 2023
- 26 April 2023
- 31 May 2023 – Annual Meeting

22. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

25 May 2022

The meeting ended at 8.46 pm.

Signed as a correct record by the Chair.....

Minutes produced by David Cartwright, Clerk.