

**MEETING OF THE FULL COUNCIL OF ABERTILLERY AND LLANHILLETH
COMMUNITY COUNCIL (ALCC) HELD ON 25 JANUARY 2023 AT 7.00pm
in the Council Chamber at Council Offices, Mitre Street, Abertillery.**

PRESENT

Councillors: Nick Simmons (Chair); Tracey Dyson (Vice Chair); Peter Adamson; Michaela Assiratti; Steve Bard; Chris Hill; Ben Owen-Jones; Barrie Page; Rob Phillips; Deb Pitt; Allen Rees; Glyn Smith; Bernard Wall; Graham White.

Via Videolink: Josh Rawcliffe

Officers: David Cartwright (Clerk)

Other: Mark Lewis

Apologies: Tom Langley-Noel; Mariola Walters

Absent: Roger Clark

87. APOLOGIES AND WELCOMES

Apologies were received from Tom Langley-Noel and Mariola Walters.

The Chair welcomed former-community councillor Mr Mark Lewis of Cwmtillery who attended the meeting as a member of the public.

88. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST OR DISPENSATIONS

Rob Phillips declared a personal interest in two lines of the proposed budget as Secretary of Ffrindiau Tyleri and a member of the committee of the Abertillery Rock and Blues Festival.

Nick Simmons declared a personal interest in one line of the proposed budget as Treasurer of Ffrindiau Tyleri.

Deb Pitt declared a personal interest in one line of the proposed budget as Senior Practitioner of the Off The Streets detached youth work team.

On a point of order, Steve Bard said that he wished to mark the national day of the Welsh patron saint of lovers by wishing all Members "Diwrnod Santes Dwynwen Hapus." Members also congratulated Graham White on his sixtieth wedding anniversary.

89. MINUTES – 14 DECEMBER 2022 AND 11 JANUARY 2023

The Council **RESOLVED** that both sets of minutes were a true and correct record.

90. SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 1L

The Clerk explained that the Council's Standing Orders include a 'model' provision aimed at preventing an individual Member from disrupting a meeting by tabling dozens of amendments and then talking for as long as possible on each one until the meeting closed. While the motion to agree the budget for 2023-24 was a single motion, the budget comprised 58 separate proposed budget lines. Suspending this standing order would enable an individual Member to propose amendments to more than one budget line.

Mark Lewis interjected to ask if the meeting would include a section for 'Questions from the public'.

The Clerk replied that no questions from the public had been submitted in advance, as required by the Council's Public Questions Policy, and so none had been included on the meeting agenda.

The Council **RESOLVED** to suspend Standing Order 11 ("A councillor may not move more than one amendment to an original or substantive motion.")

91. COUNCIL BUDGET 2023-24

The Council considered a motion to agree a proposed budget for 2023-24 of £389,151.

- a) Ben Owen-Jones proposed an amendment that the budget line 'Community Council activities at town centre events' – included in the PlaCE Committee budget proposals – should be deleted and that organisations should apply for Council Grant funding instead.

The Chair asked for clarification as to whether Cllr Owen-Jones wanted to delete the budget line or to add the proposed budget line to the Council Grant budget line.

Cllr Owen-Jones said that he did not object to this budget line but was of the opinion that responsibility for it should be taken from the PlaCE Committee as the purpose of the budget line could be perceived to be too focused on Abertillery town centre to the detriment of the rest of the Council area.

The Clerk stated that the terms of reference of committees, including their budgetary responsibilities, would be a matter for the Annual Meeting.

Steve Bard suggested that the title of the budget line should simply be changed to reflect a wider purpose.

The Council **RESOLVED** not to amend the budget line but to retitle it as 'Community Council activities at community events'

- b) Ben Owen-Jones proposed an amendment that the budget line 'Community transport' – included in the PlaCE Committee budget proposals – should be deleted. He believed that the Council should, instead, work with other councils to draw up proposals for a joint feasibility study in a future financial year.

Rob Phillips replied that the Council had already raised the idea of joint-working with other councils but had made little progress as it had no proposals on which to base discussions. A professional feasibility study would identify concrete community transport options that could be examined together with councils and other public bodies.

Steve Bard and Graham White expressed a lack of faith that a feasibility study would ever lead to anything.

Deb Pitt said that she believed that consultation with local people would be more likely to produce constructive proposals.

Josh Rawcliffe agreed that Members should consult local people and local community organisations but that consultation should complement, not replace, a feasibility study.

The Council **RESOLVED** not to amend the budget line.

- c) Ben Owen-Jones proposed an amendment that the budget line 'Loneliness Project' – included in the People and Communities Committee budget proposals – should be deleted and that organisations should apply for Council Grant funding instead. He

believed that the project lacked a clear scope and purpose and risked cutting across similar initiatives funded by other organisations.

The Vice-Chair said that there would be insufficient funds in the Council Grants budget line to support the anticipated additional demands for funding from groups from all over the Council area that were involved in the Loneliness Project.

Steve Bard reminded Members that they had informally discussed the Loneliness Project in some depth following the Council meeting of 11 January 2022 and that assurances had been given that the People and Communities Committee would draw up clear aims and objectives against which the project would be evaluated.

Josh Rawcliffe said that, far from competing with other initiatives, the project's role was to help local organisations that were involved in combatting social-isolation to network and coordinate their work.

Ben Owen-Jones withdrew the proposed amendment.

- d) The Clerk apologised that the agenda stated that this item concerned the 'Council Grants' budget line. The agenda should have referred to the 'Christmas lights' budget line.

Barrie Page proposed an amendment that the 'Christmas lights' budget line – included in the People and Communities Committee's budget proposals – be kept at the same level as in the 2022-23 budget as he believed that proposals to enhance and expand the light displays in 2023-24 lacked public support.

The Council **RESOLVED** to reduce the 'Christmas lights' budget line from £40,000 to £30,000.

- e) Barrie Page proposed an amendment that the 'Christmas lights overhaul and maintenance' budget line – included in the People and Communities Committee's budget proposals – be reduced as indicative quotes from potential contractors implied that the costs would be lower than originally forecast.

The Council **RESOLVED** to reduce the 'Christmas lights overhaul and maintenance' budget line from £20,000 to £15,000.

- f) Allen Rees proposed an amendment that the 'Council Grants' budget line – included in the Responsible Financial Officer's budget proposals – be reduced from £17,000 to £10,000. The proposed budget line pre-supposed that the Council's grant award criteria would be changed. Cllr Rees pointed out that the Finance and Grants Committee had yet to even consider such changes let alone make recommendations to Full Council. This budget line had been underspent in recent years and he could see no justification for such a significant increase.

The Vice-Chair said that she expected the current financial climate to prompt a significant increase in applications for Council Grants in 2023-24.

Rob Phillips added that he expected inflation to lead to increases in the size of grants applied for in 2023-24.

Steve Bard stated that the trend of expenditure on Council Grants in recent years did not support the premise that demand for grants would increase in 2023-24.

The Council **RESOLVED** not to amend the budget line.

- g) The Council considered a proposal from the Responsible Financial Officer that a budget line be added for 'gov.uk domain email registration and licencing.' The Clerk reminded the Council that it had resolved in June 2022 to authorise expenditure to

migrate Members' email accounts from a public domain to a controlled domain. It had transpired that registration and licensing costs for the forthcoming financial year cannot be pre-paid – they must be met on a month-by-month basis during 2023-24. The Council therefore needed to make provision for £2,300 of expenditure to be made in 2023-24 rather than in 2022-23.

The Council **RESOLVED** to add the budget line 'gov.uk domain email registration and licencing – £2,300' to the Responsible Financial Officer's budget proposals.

The Council **RESOLVED** to agree the budget for 2023-24, as amended, of £376,451.

92. PRECEPT 2023-24

The Council **RESOLVED** that the Council's precept for 2023-24, which would remain unchanged from 2022-23, would be £289,000.

93. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

22 February 2023

The meeting ended at 8.26 pm.

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

Minutes produced by David Cartwright, Clerk.