

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE OF
ABERTILLERY AND LLANHILLETH COMMUNITY COUNCIL HELD ON 30 MARCH 2023
AT 6.00pm in the Council Offices, Mitre Street, Abertillery**

PRESENT:

Councillors (via videolink): Tracey Dyson (Chair), Michaela Assiratti, Steve Bard, Ben Owen-Jones, Barrie Page, Josh Rawcliffe

Officers: David Cartwright, Clerk

53. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND WELCOMES

None.

54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST OR DISPENSATIONS

Josh Rawcliffe declared a personal interest in Item 56a) as he had acted as an unpaid facilitator of the Ebbw Fach Men's Well-being Group. He did not consider the interest to be prejudicial.

Barrie Page declared a personal interest in Item 56a) as he had acted as an unpaid volunteer at Aberbeeg Community Centre. He did not consider the interest to be prejudicial.

55. MINUTES – 9 MARCH 2023

The Committee **RESOLVED** that the minutes were a true and correct record.

56. LONELINESS PROJECT

The Clerk noted that Items 56c) and 56d) had been added to the agenda after the original summons had been sent to Members. Copies of the two additional application forms had been sent to Members in advance of the meeting. The Clerk was of the opinion that the business to be transacted by the meeting was 'to consider grant applications.' Members of the Committee and the public had been given more than three clear days' notice of this. The acceptance of additions, amendments and other elements under that item of business could be ruled upon by the Chair of the meeting. The Chair stated that she intended to accept all four submitted forms as being the grant applications to be considered under this business item. There were no dissenting opinions.

The Chair noted that it had been envisaged that the Loneliness Project budget would be used to fund small grants in support of a wide range of groups and activities across the Abertillery and Llanhilleth Community Council area. The Clerk suggested that the Committee should consider whether it was appropriate to spend the entire 2022-23 budget on four applications from a relatively narrow geographical area. Josh Rawcliffe noted that the grants applied for aimed to support many activities over a long timeframe, that the groups sought to attract service users from a wide area and that many of the items for which grant funding had been requested would not be solely for the use of the applicant group. Each grant application could, therefore, be viewed as a number of smaller grant applications grouped into one.

Ben Owen-Jones questioned whether Loneliness Project grant funding should be used to pay for groups' running costs as these were specifically excluded from Council Grant funding. The Chair responded that the Loneliness Project working group had deliberately avoided such a stipulation for Loneliness Project grants as it was envisaged that the funding of running costs could be a key aspect of the start-up support required by embryonic groups.

a) Ebbw Fach Men's Well-being Group

Ben Owen-Jones questioned the high cost of some of the items of equipment for which funding had been requested and whether there was a need for more than one of any item. Josh Rawcliffe noted that the provision of multiple items enabled the group to split into smaller units working at their own pace. A number of the items had been identified as being safer, easier to store and of a more suitable size for some users with disabilities. Barrie Page said that it was important for the group to be able to use the most appropriate – and, therefore, best value – equipment and not simply the cheapest.

Michaela Assiratti left the room at 6.24 pm.

Cllr Rawcliffe noted that the total amount being requested by the four grant applicants was more than £500 in excess of the budget available in 2022-23. He believed that, if the Committee was willing to pay for room hire and refreshments for nine months in order to secure the Ebbw Fach Men's Well-being Group's future in the medium-term, the group would be willing to submit a separate application for equipment in 2023-24. Steve Bard disagreed with the suggestion saying that he would rather see the group fully-equipped now – especially as the equipment could be used by other groups at Aberbeeg Community Centre – so that the wider positive impact of the funding could take effect as soon as possible. The Chair agreed that, if savings were required, they could be better found within the other grant applications.

Michaela Assiratti returned to the room at 6.26 pm.

The Committee **RESOLVED** under Section 19 of The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 to authorise officers to pay a grant of £1,517.71 to the Ebbw Fach Community Group in respect of the Ebbw Fach Men's Well-being Group.

The Chair proposed that consideration of the application by Six Bells Community Centre (Item 56b) be moved to the bottom of the agenda.

c) NCT 'Bumps and Babies'

Josh Rawcliffe noted that this was the only 'Bumps and Babies' group left within a fifty-mile radius. It served a group that was at known risk of becoming socially-isolated and the grant would enable it to potentially double the number of service users.

The Committee **RESOLVED** under Section 19 of The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 to authorise officers to pay a grant of £1,349.75 to the National Childbirth Trust in respect of the Gwent Valleys (Llanhilleth) 'Bumps and Babies' Group.

d) Zion Dementia-friendly and Living Alone Group

The Chair noted that the group worked with some of the most vulnerable and socially-isolated people in the community council area and their carers. Its work is highly-regarded and it is one of very few dementia groups that is always fully-subscribed. Josh Rawcliffe noted that Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council was very limited in the financial support that it is permitted to provide to church-based organisations outside of its modest allocation of the Monmouthshire Welsh Church Fund. The Community Council is one of the few places to which the group can turn for public funding.

The Committee **RESOLVED** under Section 19 of The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 to authorise officers to pay a grant of £734.87 to Zion Miners Chapel and Community Room in respect of the Zion Dementia-friendly and Living Alone Group.

The Clerk noted that the Zion Dementia-friendly and Living Alone Group had applied for

Council Grant funding over successive years, even though those grants were more suitable for one-off funding applications. The Committee had agreed this Loneliness Project grant but, going forward, the Loneliness Project envisaged offering on-going support to groups at a lower level. The Zion Dementia-friendly and Living Alone Group was in danger of falling between two stools. He suggested that he work with the group and an appropriate committee to propose that specific funding for the group be included within that committee's budget proposals for future financial years. Barrie Page agreed that such a move would offer the group continuity and stability of funding.

b) Six Bells Community Centre

The Chair commented that this was the least detailed and least specific of the grant applications. Ben Owen-Jones suggested that it was difficult to award grant funding for materials, equipment and tools when none of those elements had been itemised. Steve Bard suggested that, while agreeing to the requested grant of nearly £2,000 based on such a vague application could be regarded as high-risk, it would be reasonable to offer a lesser amount based on the same information. He proposed that the community centre be offered a grant of approximately 70 percent of the full amount requested.

The Committee **RESOLVED** under Section 19 of The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 to authorise officers to pay a grant of £1,397.67 to Six Bells Community Centre in respect of groups using the community centre whose objects support people who are impacted by loneliness and isolation

The Chair proposed that the Loneliness Project working group should draft specific criteria and guidance for Loneliness Project grants for 2023-24 for consideration at a future meeting of the Committee. Cllr Owen-Jones suggested that it should be explicitly stated that running costs would only be funded where these were considered to be start-up costs. Successful applicants should be warned not to expect such running costs to be funded on an on-going basis.

The Committee registered their sorrow following the recent passing of Cllr Roger Clark and offered their formal condolences to his family.

The meeting ended at 6.51 pm.