

**MEETING OF THE FULL COUNCIL OF ABERTILLERY AND LLANHILLETH
COMMUNITY COUNCIL (ALCC) HELD ON 24 May 2023 AT 6.00pm
in the Council Chamber at Council Offices, Mitre Street, Abertillery and via Videolink
(Zoom).**

PRESENT

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

Via Videolink: Josh Rawcliffe

Officers: David Cartwright (Clerk)

Apologies: Michaela Assiratti; Mariola Walters and Graham White

The meeting did not begin until 6.31 pm.

1. APOLOGIES AND WELCOMES

Apologies were received from Michaela Assiratti, Mariola Walters and Graham White.

2. ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR 2023-24

Tracey Dyson was proposed as Chair by Rob Phillips and seconded by Josh Rawcliffe. No other candidates were nominated. Tracey Dyson was elected to the role unopposed and took the chair at 6.33 pm.

3. OUT-GOING CHAIR'S ADDRESS

The new Chair invited Nick Simmons to address the Council. Cllr Simmons said:

“When I first joined this Council, I found that it was a disjoined organisation with clearly differing groups that had their own views and objectives. We lost the then-Clerk and the Deputy Clerk, who had stepped up to the role for a period, declined to take over the position full-time. As a result, we had to begin the recruitment of a new Clerk.

“When, as a member of the Council’s HR Committee, I read the job applications, I was of the view that we needed to re-advertise the position. I wasn’t able to attend the job interviews but, if I had been on the panel, I think I would have argued against making an appointment. I will now admit that I was wrong. David Cartwright’s CV undersold his abilities and he has turned out to be a competent clerk. Steve Edwards has done a fantastic job as Deputy Clerk. He helped us over a period of great disruption, guided us through difficulties with Audit Wales and continues to keep our finances in order.

“The divisions between differing groups of members were still apparent when I began my term as Chair. I was very aware that I was elected only on the then-Chair’s casting vote. I supported Tracey Dyson’s appointment as Vice Chair then – and I backed her election as Chair this evening – as a demonstration of the need for all members to work together.

“During my term as Chair, I have strived to unite the Council and I feel that the growth of our work in the local community shows what we can achieve when we co-operate. Although they haven’t totally disappeared, internal distractions have reduced significantly.

“The main disruption now comes from outside the Council. One or two individuals keep up a steady flow of frivolous complaints and referrals to regulators. This results in a vast

amount of extra work for our staff, which wastes time that our officers would otherwise be able to use to support Members of the Council, the general public and local community groups.

“The budget we set for this year was not one for growth but maintains the improvements that this Council has made over recent years. It seems to be a trend that the UK Government and, in turn, the Welsh Government, will provide less and less in the immediate future. The burden is being passed down to our level of local government, which will saddle the public in this area with topping-up declining funding through the Council Tax.

“I can tell you that it is an honour to serve as Chair of the Council. The role involves a lot more than simply chairing meetings. You get to see much more of the operation of the Council and you appreciate the support of good staff.

“We have a reasonable structure of committees that elect their own chairs. This creates a healthy platform for debate and aids transparency in the workings of the Council. I found it beneficial to revert to being an ordinary member in committee, with the title of Chair of the Council giving me no greater influence over day-to-day decision-making than any other member.

“I hope the incoming Chair receives full support from what has become a group of members who are now much more united by the desire to keep the interests of the local community at the heart of what they do.”

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST OR DISPENSATIONS

None.

5. MINUTES – 26 APRIL 2023

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

6. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR FOR 2023-24

The Council **RESOLVED** to appoint Josh Rawcliffe as Deputy Chair for 2023-24.

7. PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN

The Clerk reported that he had failed to meet a deadline agreed with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales to respond to a complaint from a member of the public. Several members expressed annoyance that officers were forced to invest a disproportionate amount of time in dealing with obsessive complaints and correspondence from a handful of individuals. The Clerk said he shared their frustration, but his breach of the agreed deadline was not in dispute. The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales had recommended that a payment be made in acknowledgement of that breach and the Clerk endorsed that recommendation.

- a) The Council **RESOLVED** under Section 35 of The Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019 to make a payment of £50 to compensate a member of the public for ‘inconvenience and frustration’ as recommended by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.
- b) The Council **RESOLVED** to authorise officers to make such a payment.

8. APPOINTMENT OF BANK AUTHORISERS

Ben Owen-Jones proposed that the Council's existing cheque signatories be reappointed but that the appointments be reviewed if and when the Council's banking arrangements were amended.

The Council **RESOLVED** that Tracey Dyson, Rob Phillips, Nick Simmons and Glyn Smith be authorised to sign Council cheques, superseding all previous such appointments, and that the appointments will be reviewed if and when the Council moves to an online payments system.

9. COMMITTEES

The Council **RESOLVED** that the following shall be Committees of the Council:

- People and Communities Committee
- Planning, Commerce and Environment (PlaCE) Committee
- Finance and Grants Committee
- Human Resources Committee
- Community Empowerment Committee
- Blaenau Gwent Consultative Committee

10. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Steve Bard proposed that the responsibilities to review and scrutinise applications for Council Grants, Solar Farm Grants and Ward Grants be removed from the terms of reference of the Finance and Grants Committee so that the Committee could concentrate fully on its main duty to oversee the Council's accounts and finances. He also proposed that the Committee be reduced in size to a maximum of five voting members (and no fewer than three) to enable greater specialisation. Allen Rees asked for clarification of the Committee's current role in scrutinising other grant applications. He believed that it would be better for all grant awards to be ratified by the Full Council as the awarding of other grants by committees operated under inconsistent criteria and put too much spending power in the hands of too few individuals. The Chair, Ben Owen-Jones and Peter Adamson said that they believed that giving grant-award power to committees had improved the effectiveness, efficiency and scrutiny of Council funding to local community groups and projects. The Clerk noted that, if responsibility for the review and scrutiny of Council Grants, Solar Farm Grants and Ward Grants was removed from the terms of reference of the Finance and Grants Committee, those duties would revert to Full Council. That would force Full Council to consider the criteria for those grants and would be an ideal opportunity for Full Council to consider whether it wished to agree over-arching principles and criteria for the award of other grants by committees. Full Council could also decide whether it wanted to require the award of other grants by committees to be reported to, and/or ratified by, Full Council. He would include a suitable item on the agenda for a future meeting of the Full Council.

The Council **RESOLVED** to confirm the Terms of Reference, duties and authorities of Committees of the Council as amended.

Deb Pitt left the chamber at 7.17 pm and returned at 7.19 pm.

The Council **RESOLVED** not to reduce the membership of the Finance and Grants Committee.

Steve Bard proposed that the word 'grants' be removed from the title of the Finance and Grants Committee.

The Council **RESOLVED** that the name of the Committee shall be changed to the Finance Committee.

11. APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF COMMITTEES

The Clerk reminded Council that it could not appoint Members to committees in their absence. It was, however, in order to leave vacancies on a committee in the expectation that further appointments would be made at a future meeting of the Council.

The Council **RESOLVED** to make the following appointments as Members of the Committees of the Council to supersede all previous such appointments:

- a) People and Communities Committee
Steve Bard; Tracey Dyson; Ben Owen-Jones; Barrie Page and Josh Rawcliffe.
- b) Planning, Environment and Commerce (PlaCE) Committee
Peter Adamson; Chris Hill; Barrie Page; Rob Phillips; Josh Rawcliffe; Nick Simmons.
- c) Finance and Grants Committee
Peter Adamson; Steve Bard; Josh Rawcliffe; Allen Rees; Glyn Smith.
- d) Human Resources Committee
Tracey Dyson (Chair); Josh Rawcliffe (Vice-Chair); Rob Phillips; Nick Simmons; Glyn Smith.
- e) Community Empowerment Committee
Tracey Dyson; Ben Owen-Jones; Barrie Page; Deb Pitt; Josh Rawcliffe.
Peter Adamson was appointed as a non-voting Member of the Committee.
- f) Blaenau Gwent Consultative Committee
Peter Adamson; Josh Rawcliffe; Nick Simmons; Glyn Smith; Bernard Wall.

12. CHAIRS OF COMMITTEES

The Council **RESOLVED** that, with the exception of the Human Resources Committee, the Members of each Committee of the Council shall appoint the Chair of that Committee.

13. EXTERNAL BODIES

The Council did not nominate any Members to external bodies.

The Chair noted that she acted as the Council's liaison with the Blaenau Gwent Armed Forces Steering Group but that she may not be able to continue in the role in the longer-term. Josh Rawcliffe volunteered to shadow the Chair in the role.

14. FINANCIAL AUTHORISATIONS

The Council **RESOLVED** to confirm the authorities of the Responsible Financial Officer as detailed in the meeting Notes and Appendices.

15. FULL COUNCIL MEETINGS 2023-24

The Council **RESOLVED** to confirm the following schedule of Full Council meetings (all meetings to begin at 7 pm):

28 June 2023
19 July 2023
27 September 2023
25 October 2023
29 November 2023
13 December 2023
10 January 2024 – budget-setting meeting
31 January 2024
28 February 2024
20 March 2024
24 April 2024
22 May 2024 – Annual Meeting

The meeting ended at 7.40 pm.