

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF ABERTILLERY AND LLANHILLETH COMMUNITY COUNCIL
(ALCC) HELD ON 29 JANUARY 2020 at 7.00pm
in the Council Chamber, Mitre Street, Abertillery**

PRESENT: Councillors:

Gill Clark (Chair), Peter Adamson, Michaela Assiratti, Vanessa Bartlett, Roger Clark, Tracey Dyson, Julie Holt, Mark Lewis, Beverley Lucas, Perry Morgan, Gary Oakley, Rob Phillips, Tracy Postlethwaite, Allen Rees, Nick Simmons, Bernard Wall and Graham White

Officers: Richard Gwinnell, Town Clerk and Steve Edwards, Deputy Clerk

Others: 1 member of the public

ABSENT: Councillors Keri Bidgood and Glyn Smith

183. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND WELCOMES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Keri Bidgood and Glyn Smith.

Welcomes were extended to everyone present.

184. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair reminded members of the need to declare interests verbally and fill in a form.

Personal interests were declared later in the meeting. See minutes 190 and 194 below.

No other members declared any personal interests.

Councillor Adamson requested and Council agreed to consider agenda item 5 next.

185. MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR PETER ADAMSON

Councillor Adamson read out his motion as follows:

“That full Council consider if they have confidence in the Councillor Gill Clark, the Chair of ALCC Council 2019-2020, after presiding over the following: the disorderly conduct of meetings in the final months of 2019, namely the lack of minutes from previous meetings at the Dec. 11th 2019 meeting (and to date); the ignoring of council resolutions from previous meetings (i.e. the awarding of Solar Farm Grants); and failure to recognise councillors not declaring interests when voting on awarding Solar Farm Grants.”

Councillor Adamson pointed out that the past minutes had in fact been submitted to Council on 22 January.

Councillor Adamson made the following statement:

“Statement: no confidence in the ALCC Chair, January 2020.

I'm sorry it has come to this. Currently we have five councillors who have been reported to the Ombudsman and the Blaenau Gwent monitoring Officer, and the Chair is one of them.

The complaints have been lodged because of what happened at the December 11th 2019 full council meeting, where I, for one, was appalled at the total disregard of a resolution made at a previous meeting of how to award the solar farm grant money.

I wasn't the only councillor who was appalled.

There was a lead up to the events of the December 11th meeting. The most significant point in this lead up period for many of us was the email debate about the five year rule, and how it should be interpreted. Then there was the seeking of legal advice and the EGM meeting to consider the legal advice. Eventually it seemed Council had reached a democratically agreed way forward on awarding the solar farm grants, including how the five year rule would be interpreted, and notwithstanding the clerk's own substantial involvement in trying to influence how Council voted at that EGM.

Which brings me to a central complaint about how the Chair has acted, or rather not acted in what has been a heated episode that began in October 2019, and will continue to run until third parties provide a verdict.

Did the Chair allow the clerk a free hand in his involvement in the SFG episode, and by so doing allow the clerk to take sides in the debate on how and to whom the solar farm grants would be awarded?

I think the Chair did allow this to happen.

I understand this is a serious allegation in its implications, because the clerk is not supposed to take sides. The Chair can take sides because they have a casting vote in the case of a tied vote. The Chair is also there to mediate amongst council members (where possible), and to give guidance to the Clerk on behalf of Council, because surely the Clerk can stray from the strict remit of their job description, and become over involved in particular debates?

I concede making a judgement on whether to give guidance/instruction to paid members of staff is not necessarily an easy judgement to make. But the Chair has a special responsibility to make those judgements.

One of the main errors of judgement was to allow for the build-up of unwritten minutes from October onwards and through November/December. The Chair should have found a way of getting those minutes written up in time for the December 11th meeting. If the Chair had managed that task I would have much less of a case against her.

The effect of not having the minutes paved the way for the disorderly meeting on December 11th, when a properly agreed approach to awarding the Solar Farm grants, albeit hotly contested, was overthrown, and in some people's view, illegally so.

What happened on December 11th regarding the awarding of the SFG was an injustice to the only application the Solar Farm Working Group judged to be eligible and recommended for receiving the grant, which was the Roseheyworth Woodlands application.

The fact the grants were awarded in the end to unexceptional projects around the area, unexceptional in that they did not meet the special criteria of the SFWG - flew in the face of the efforts of most of the members of the Solar Farm Working Group. It has left many of us feeling cheated, not personally, but on behalf of the recommended project.

We need to move on. There is much new work to do. However to do this work we need to have confidence in each other and our officers.

I propose the Chair stands down and Council elects an interim Chair to hold office until the next normal change of office in the spring of this year.”

The Clerk asked Councillor Adamson to clarify what he was moving, as the motion he had submitted asked Council to consider if it had confidence in the Chair. The motion submitted did not propose a vote of no confidence.

Councillor Adamson stated that he was moving a motion of no confidence in the Chair.

Following contradicting comments on whether the motion needed to be seconded before a debate took place, the Clerk read aloud the relevant excerpt of standing order 1.

Councillor Oakley seconded the motion of no confidence. He also asked that Councillor Adamson’s statement be included in full in the minutes of this meeting.

The Clerk was asked to advise on the practical implications, if the majority of members voted that they had no confidence in the Chair.

The Clerk explained that the law specified that the Chair was elected at the annual Council meeting. The Chair remained as the Chair until the next annual Council meeting, unless they became disqualified or resigned in the meantime. If Council agreed that it had no confidence in the Chair, as she was not disqualified, it would therefore be a decision for her to make (whether to resign or not), pending the annual Council meeting in May.

The Chair stated that she had no intention of resigning. She had done nothing wrong.

Councillor Lewis asked whether he could vote, as he had not been present at the meeting on 11 December. The Clerk advised that the key question was whether members had confidence in the Chair or not. The motion contained a context, including what happened on 11 December. It was for Councillor Lewis to decide for himself, whether and how to vote.

Various members commented or questioned (main points):

- this was all irrelevant as the Chair was not going to resign
- Council could therefore go straight to a vote
- if a member had not been present on 11 December; he perhaps should not vote
- the issue here was not just about the solar farm grant decision on 11 December
- it was about the decisions in September, October, November and December

- people could not change the decision made on 11 December
- some members wanted all the funding to go to the Roseheyworth and Bournville Community Woodlands Association, but that had not happened
- people had voted and the majority had won; that was democracy
- the Chair had Chaired several very difficult meetings and had done so effectively
- this episode was an eye opener, for new members especially
- members were meant to be here to do their best for communities, not be at war with each other; what was going on?
- the Council had to make decisions in compliance with the law and standing orders
- previous resolutions had to be followed through
- the Council received legal advice from the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and held an extraordinary meeting on 18 November
- Council agreed in November to stick to the criteria agreed in September
- after much debate, the Clerk referred to the NALC advice on 11 December and advised that the Council could do whatever it wanted to do
- the Council made a mistake on 11 December
- a letter had been written (by Councillor Oakley) to the Clerk, suggesting further action to resolve the issue, but that action had not been taken
- the Clerk on 11 December advised Council, when he was asked to do so
- he reiterated the legal advice received from NALC, in answer to member comments
- the comments made by the Clerk on 11 December were being misapplied
- the legal advice had said the Council could decide the criteria meant whatever it wanted them to mean, but, once decided, that decision must be publicised, to be fair to all applicants
- that publicity had not happened.

The Clerk reminded members that the opportunity to apply for a solar farm grant had been advertised on 27 September. The closing date for applications was 10 October. Publicising a clarification of the meaning of the criteria, after the 18 November meeting (for the benefit of potential applicants) was therefore too late, as Council had decided (on 18 November) that there was no further opportunity to apply (after 10 October) for a solar farm grant. If solar farm grants were available in 2020, it would be necessary to publicise (in advance of the deadline) what the criteria actually meant.

Various other members commented (main points):

- ALCC did not have to take advice received through One Voice Wales (OVW)
- the legal advice was received through OVW, not from OVW
- ALCC had had some difficult times over the years, but not like this
- members should not be arguing; some should consider their positions
- Council needed to move on and get on with improving life for communities
- the Chair was staying until May, so this debate was a further waste of time
- almost half of Council members felt cheated at what happened on 11 December, on behalf of the Roseheyworth Woodlands project
- the responsibility for that laid with the Chair, for not overseeing the solar farm grant debate properly and for allowing a backlog of minutes to build up
- “the lack of minutes paved the way for the chaotic debate on 11 December”.

The Chair stated that she could not force staff to produce minutes of meetings, when there was not enough time to produce those minutes. ALCC's two staff were already working overtime, without pay, and she was concerned about that. The HR Committee had agreed to consider this matter further and to seek external help (e.g. from One Voice Wales). This situation was ongoing and would be reported back to Council in due course.

Further comments were made (main points):

- the law specified that minutes must go to the next meeting
- other tasks were undertaken by staff, when minutes should have been written
- writing minutes should be the number one priority of staff
- staff could have identified a problem and the HR Committee could have agreed to pay overtime, but this had not happened
- Council needed to move forward now and build on all the good work done over the last year
- getting rid of the Chair after all the good work done made no sense at all.

Councillor Oakley objected to comments made by Councillor Roger Clark. Councillor Roger Clark apologised. Councillor Oakley accepted the apology.

Further comments were made (main points):

- Council made decisions, not the Chair
- Council could not make decisions and then change them, the following month
- the Chair could not know everything, so had to rely on officers for advice
- seven local groups had received £5,000 each for solar farm grant projects
- all the communities involved were benefitting from that funding
- the funding would have been lost if the Council had delayed any further
- decisions had to be made and the funding had not been lost
- members should not be discussing these issues, due to the recent complaints made to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

Councillor Adamson again moved "that the Council has no confidence in the Chair". The motion was seconded by Councillor Oakley.

Councillor Holt moved an amendment: "that the Council has every confidence in the Chair as she has done a very good job of a very hard job".

Comments were made that the amendment negated the motion. The Clerk was asked to advise.

The Clerk advised that the amendment removed words from the motion and added different words, so it was technically valid. However, Councillor Holt could, if she wished, withdraw the amendment. Members would then have a simpler choice; for or against the motion.

Councillor Holt withdrew her amendment and asked for a recorded vote.

The following 8 members voted for the motion: Councillors Peter Adamson, Perry Morgan, Gary Oakley, Rob Phillips, Allen Rees, Nick Simmons, Bernard Wall and Graham White.

The following 8 members voted against the motion: Councillors Gill Clark, Michaela Assiratti, Vanessa Bartlett, Roger Clark, Tracey Dyson, Julie Holt, Beverley Lucas and Tracy Postlethwaite.

Councillor Mark Lewis abstained from the vote.

The Chair used her casting vote, against the motion, and the motion was lost.

In answer to further comments from Councillor Adamson, the Chair stated that she would not stand aside and that she had every confidence in herself.

Comments were made by various members that the Chair and Councillor Roger Clark had personal interests and could not vote.

The Clerk confirmed that, in line with legislation, the Chair must preside if they were present at the meeting, the Chair could vote, Councillor Roger Clark could vote, and the Chair had a casting vote.

Council returned to agenda item 3 at this point.

186. MINUTES: COUNCIL – 11 DECEMBER 2019

Councillor White asked why the minutes had not been amended after the meeting on 22 January 2020. The Clerk explained that the Council had not agreed any amendments to the minutes on 22 January, so the minutes had not been amended. They were on this agenda for confirmation as a correct record, as they had not yet been confirmed.

Councillor Adamson asked whether Councillor Holt had declared an interest in the Friends of Six Bells Park solar farm grant application, as that was not in the minutes.

Councillor Oakley proposed an alteration to minute 151 as follows:

- (1) Councillor Julie Holt had stated “everyone knows I am a member of Friends of Six Bells Park and I do whatever I can to help them”; this was not in the minutes and should be inserted in an appropriate place.

Councillor Rees proposed a further alteration to minute 151:

- (2) that the number of votes cast for and against each application at the Solar Farm Grant Working Group held on 4 December be included in paragraph 2 (as the Chair had read out the votes at the 11 December meeting).

Councillor Oakley proposed two more alterations to minute 151:

- (3) on page 6 of the minutes (page 8 of the agenda); he had said “Brynithel Community Centre did not apply because they felt they did not meet the criteria” (he had not said “Brynithel Community Centre had been told they could not apply”)
- (4) on top of page 7 of the minutes (page 9 of the agenda); He (Councillor Oakley) had not “told groups not to apply”; he had however “agreed with groups that they did not meet the criteria”.

Councillor Holt commented on proposed alteration (1) above that:

- she had said she was on the Six Bells Park Facebook Group
- more than 600 other people were also on that Facebook Group
- she would not answer any questions as this matter was the subject of a complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
- she was on 92 Facebook Groups
- she was on the Gwent Police Facebook Group, but she was not a policewoman
- there were approximately five people on the management committee of the Friends of Six Bells Park
- she had no involvement in or position on the Friends of Six Bells Park committee
- as a Borough Councillor, she was actively encouraged to be on as many Facebook groups as possible, as being on social media was a good way for members to get involved in and find out what was happening in their local communities
- Councillor Morgan, who had complained about her, was on the Roseheyworth and Bournville Community Woodlands Association Facebook Group
- he had made comments on that group, that he would not invite two ALCC councillors to meetings as they were “fools”.

8 members voted in favour of proposed alteration (1) above.

8 members voted against proposed alteration (1) above.

The Chair used her casting vote, to reject proposed alteration (1) above.

Comments were made by the Chair, Councillor Lucas and other members that it was very difficult to hear and understand what was going on at this meeting, as several people were speaking at the same time. This was not fair on anyone.

Following clarification of the wording of proposed alteration (2) above and with 10 votes in favour and other members abstaining, Council agreed proposed alteration (2) above.

Following clarification of the wording of proposed alteration (3) above and with 7 votes in favour and other members abstaining, Council agreed proposed alteration (3) above.

The Clerk explained that proposed alteration (4) attempted to alter the record of what he (the Clerk) had said at the 11 December meeting. He knew what he had said, and the minutes were a correct record of what he had said.

Councillor Bartlett stated that she remembered word for word what the Clerk had said. The minutes were accurate. If it was not true, the Clerk would not have said what he did.

Councillor Oakley withdrew that amendment.

Council RESOLVED (with 3 members abstaining from the vote): that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 11 December 2019 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the inclusion of alterations (2) and (3) above.

Further comments were made that:

- Councillor Oakley and some other members were abstaining from the vote on the accuracy of the minutes, even though they had insisted on alterations to the minutes and they had insisted earlier that they remembered clearly, who said what
- he (Councillor Oakley) could not remember exactly what was said, so he could not vote that the minutes were a correct record of the meeting
- the debate had been very heated on 11 December; it was difficult to remember who said exactly what
- members could not “have it both ways”.

The Clerk expressed a view that it was difficult to understand how these positions could be reconciled. He had 30 years' experience of writing minutes. If members could not clearly remember, they should not be questioning the accuracy of the minutes. This amounted to members not trusting the Clerk to get it right, which was not a good place to be.

187. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no public questions for this meeting.

188. GRANT APPLICATION: MENASH

The Chair of the Finance and Grants Committee (Councillor Oakley) reported that the committee recommended Council to seek further information from MENASH on its status, before making a decision on this application.

Council RESOLVED: to seek further information from MENASH before making a decision on this application.

189. WARD GRANTS CRITERIA AND PROCESS

The Clerk highlighted the proposed changes to the process (in process item 1), which had been agreed by the Finance and Grants Committee. The change allowed members to apply for ward grants for groups based outside their wards, if the groups served a multi-ward area or the whole ALCC area. This would bring the process in line with the criteria. Items 8, 9, 10 and 11 of the process had also been amended, to reflect decisions previously made by the Council on how ward grants were approved (by the Finance and Grants Committee).

The Chair of the Finance and Grants Committee (Councillor Oakley) stated that:

- the changes made it easier for members to make ward grants
- this was in line with the legal advice received from NALC (that Council could change its criteria from time to time if it wished by ordinary resolution)
- he still did not know why a £200 ward grant had to go to a committee for approval
- surely £200 grants could be agreed by councillors individually
- the committee on 13 January had made some mistakes with some ward grants
- the committee would consider ward grants again in March, including any ward grants which had not yet been agreed
- the ward grants for the Museum would be approved by the committee in March.

Comments were made or questions were asked by members (main points):

- councillors had already been advised by officers several times
- councillors could not make individual financial decisions
- at Blaenau Gwent CBC, “ward grant” decisions were made by the Executive
- why had some ward grants to Abertillery and District Museum not been agreed at the 13 January committee meeting?
- what would happen to those ward grants?
- all members needed to be more diligent in future (what they put in grants criteria).

Council RESOLVED: to replace the existing criteria and process with the proposed criteria and process (as attached to the agenda).

190. REPORTS BACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM WORKING GROUPS

Christmas Lights Working Group (CLWG): Councillor Phillips (Chair of the CLWG) summarised the notes and recommendations of the Christmas Lights Working Group, which were attached to the agenda as follows:

- the CLWG was very pleased with the Christmas lighting 2019, with a few minor exceptions (e.g. the tree at Warm Turn and the lack of lights at Bournville)
- discussions would be held with the contractor and Council later in the year about changes for next year (e.g. more lights in the fir tree at West Bank, Cwmtillery and a different location for the tree outside St Michael’s Church (e.g. in Jubilee Square))
- Swffryd, Llanhilleth and Brynithel were very happy with ALCC’s grant funding to pay towards their lights
- Bournville residents wished to install their own display in future too
- the CLWG proposed that Council make a grant of £800 for Bournville Christmas lights for the year ahead (as ALCC would otherwise have spent £800 installing lights there as part of the contract)
- this would require the decisions made at Council on 30 October (minute 102 (1) to (4) to be rescinded; this would have to be revisited later in the year
- the lighting at Somerset Street had been reduced in 2019, because more lighting was being provided in outlying areas, to give all communities a fairer share
- this reduction in lights at Somerset Street would remain the case.

He stated that the CLWG also agreed to recommend to Council that the grants given in 2019 for groups to provide their own Christmas lights displays (at Swffryd, Llanhilleth and Brynithel) be repeated in 2020, that the groups be informed and the grants be paid out as soon as possible in the new financial year, so those groups could plan ahead.

Questions were asked about the reduced number of lights at Somerset Street and where the blue stars had gone. Some shopkeepers had said they paid for lights in years gone by.

Councillor Phillips explained that:

- many years ago, ALCC decided only to fund lights in Somerset Street up to its junction with King Street

- the former Town Centre Manager had, without ALCC's knowledge, found a budget to purchase six blue stars for Somerset Street (beyond the King Street junction) and paid to have them installed there
- that had only lasted one year, after which ALCC ended up paying for the lights to be installed there by default, when Abertillery no longer had a Town Centre Manager (as the funding ceased)
- he had no idea whether shops had contributed to them, more than 10 years ago
- shops had never contributed to ALCC's costs of installing lights there every year
- decisions had been made over many years to put lights in different places
- ALCC last year decided to "share out" lighting to a wider area (e.g. Aberbeeg etc)
- ALCC had to cut down in other areas, as it did not have a limitless pot of money
- the lights previously provided in Division Street and High Street were also no longer being provided, as well as lights beyond the King Street junction of Somerset Street
- ALCC did its best but it was not possible to keep everyone happy.

Other members commented or questioned (main points):

- the Olde Sweet Shoppe was not there 10 years ago
- the Wales Audit Office warned ALCC about 10 years ago that it was spending far too much on Christmas lights and had to cut down
- the "tree" structure near Friars Walk in Newport was very good; could ALCC enquire how much a similar one would cost in Abertillery?
- some shopkeepers in Somerset Street were not happy at being left out this year
- ALCC had to stop somewhere, or it's precept would be "sky high"
- ALCC had to serve a lot of people in a lot of areas; lights could not be everywhere
- lights should have been provided at Bournville this year and were not, because the decision to add them to the contract was not taken till 30 October; this saved ALCC approx. £800 this year
- could ALCC give that money to Bournville, to pay for equipment needed to remove their lights from that tree?
- ALCC could pay its own contractor to remove those lights
- the lights provided in that tree by Bournville Community Hall were worth over £4k
- if ALCC's contractor was going to remove them, Councillor Morgan wanted to be on site when that happened; he therefore needed to know when it would happen
- if ALCC's contractor took them down, as the lights did not belong to ALCC, it had to be quite clear that ALCC took no responsibility for their condition.

Councillor Dyson, Councillor Lucas and the Chair again asked other members to show some consideration to other people and to stop speaking over other people and speaking when other people were already speaking, as it was very difficult for others to hear and understand what was going on, especially if they had hearing difficulties.

Council RESOLVED at this point:

(1) to suspend standing order 3(x) to extend the time limit for the meeting beyond the normal two hours.

Councillor Rees left the meeting at this point.

Following a further brief disturbance and a further request for order from the Chair:

Council RESOLVED:

- (2) to note the updates
- (3) to consider any outstanding issues later in the year (e.g. the St Michael's Church tree, the fir tree at Cwmtillery and grant funding for the Bournville lights)
- (4) to pay ALCC's contractor to remove the Christmas lights from the tree outside Bournville Community Hall (BCH)
- (5) to return those lights to Councillor Morgan (representing BCH) on the site
- (6) that the grants given in 2019 for groups to provide their own Christmas lights displays (at Swffryd, Llanhilleth and Brynithel) be repeated in 2020, that the groups be informed and the grants be paid out as soon as possible in the new financial year, so that those groups could plan ahead.

Following queries from members, Councillor Morgan commented that he had not voted, as he was Chairman of Bournville Community Hall. He would complete a form to that effect.

The Clerk reminded members that they needed to declare interests verbally and complete a personal interests form, if they had an interest to declare.

Leisure and Tourism Working Group (L&TWG): No update was given.

Shop Local Working Group (SLWG): Councillor Lewis (Chair of the SLWG) reported that:

- work was being undertaken on a number of initiatives, including an outdoor cinema event, Halloween event and car boot sale
- £135 more was needed for more window stickers
- posters would in future be put up on buses where possible
- the Abertillery Business Forum was now holding regular meetings again
- illegal parking at Market Street and access for deliveries at Church Street continued to be concerns
- further discussions were planned re car parking, the car park survey and CCTV
- the Police had been contacted about a number of recent incidents in the Arcade
- concerns had also been raised about a number of thefts and about people living in the Old Police Station on Somerset Street; again the Police had been informed
- he was speaking to the street cleaner later this week about the opening hours of Jubilee Square.

Wellbeing Working Group (WBWG): Councillor Simmons (Chair of the WBWG) reported that:

- progress was being made on well-being mapping
- more links needed to be made with other town and community councils
- ALCC would need to consider getting involved in local Well-being Working Groups (which were being established by the Blaenau Gwent Public Services Board) in future.

Youth Engagement Working Group (YEWG): Councillor Oakley (Chair of the YEWG) reported that:

- the Space Youth Café was seeking more funding for the youth food project
- the working group would need to meet to discuss this further
- BGCBC Youth Services had advertised more than once for the additional detached youth workers paid for by ALCC
- there had been very few applications, due to the limited length of the contract term
- the latest closing date had passed.

Council RESOLVED:

(7) to note the updates

(8) to spend another £135 on more shop local window stickers.

191. COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS

This item was deferred to a future meeting, given that it was now 9.20pm.

192. ELECTRONIC BANKING AND FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING PACKAGE

The Council considered a report of the Deputy Clerk, which he outlined briefly, seeking agreement to move to electronic banking and purchase a financial accounting package.

The Deputy Clerk responded to questions:

- officers would set up payments electronically
- they would then email the three members who currently signed cheques, to seek authorisation of the payment
- one member would need to log in to the system to authorise the payment
- signatories could be reviewed by Council in due course if it wished to do that
- the new financial management system would need to be installed this financial year, to ensure it was up and running in time for the new financial year
- payment for the new system would not be required until the new financial year
- none of the companies who had been approached about a package would provide retrospective accounting, as the data would be historical, not “live” and they would not be held responsible for accounts created outside their systems
- the new system could go live from April, if installed soon
- the Council had contracted with the Internal Auditor for three years
- there was no clear correlation between a new package and the number of Internal Auditor visits in the short term.

Council RESOLVED:

- (1) that officers set up electronic banking for all the Council's bank accounts as soon as possible
- (2) that Councillors Rob Phillips, Julie Holt and Glyn Smith (who were the current cheque signatories) be set up as the Online Electronic Banking payment authorisers, so that there is consistency of financial authorisations for all Council payments
- (3) that Financial Regulations are amended if required and are appropriate to allow for

- electronic banking, with any changes brought back to Council for approval
- (4) that officers put in place and action a formal tendering exercise to procure and install a financial accounting package within the budget already agreed by Council.

193. FINANCIAL RISKS 2020/21

The Council considered a report of the Deputy Clerk, which he outlined briefly, informing the Council of financial risks (as reported to previous meetings) and seeking agreement to appropriate measures to mitigate those risks.

Council RESOLVED:

- (1) that the officers conduct a comparison exercise across the major UK banks to find the one which has the best interest payments on a business reserve deposit account, which allows for instant access
- (2) once this comparison exercise has been carried out, the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) decides which new bank account to set up and officers take all required actions to move the current Natwest reserve accounts (not the current account) to that new bank account, whilst retaining existing authorisation controls
- (3) that the RFO requests Blaenau Gwent CBC to pay the precept to ALCC in four quarterly instalments in future.

194. FORMER QUEEN STREET PRIMARY SCHOOL: COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER

Councillor Tracey Dyson declared a personal interest in this issue as her daughter was a member of Abertillery Youth Drama and Musical Society (AYDMS) Junior Section.

Councillor Roger Clark declared a personal interest in this issue as his granddaughter was in the AYDMS Primary Group.

Councillor Gill Clark declared a personal interest in this issue as her granddaughter was in the AYDMS Primary Group.

Councillor Tracy Postlethwaite declared a personal interest in this issue as her granddaughter was in the AYDMS Primary Group.

Councillor Phillips reported that he had been a school governor at Queen Street School. The school building had needed a lot of work for some years. He would have reservations for that reason. In principle however he supported the transfer. He moved and:

Council RESOLVED: to support the proposed community asset transfer of the former Queen Street Primary School to Abertillery Youth Drama and Musical Society, for use as a multi-use Arts Facility.

195. REPLACEMENT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (LDP) PREFERRED STRATEGY

Councillors Adamson and Assiratti left the meeting at this point.

Councillor Simmons informed Council that:

- the replacement LDP had potentially significant implications for the ALCC area
- members should read all the documents involved and circulated by the Clerk
- ALCC should respond collectively (and as a member of the Joint Committee of Local Councils) in his view
- a new Abertillery railway station was included, thanks to pressure put on by himself and Councillors Oakley and Phillips
- he would go through the plan in detail and circulate notes to members, with a view to Council considering this further at its next meeting.

Council RESOLVED: to receive further details from Councillor Simmons about the draft replacement LDP preferred strategy at the next Council meeting.

196. REPORTS BACK ON RELEVANT TRAINING OR MEETINGS ATTENDED

The Deputy Clerk reported that he attended Blaenau Gwent CBC's Budget Consultation meeting recently. BGCBC were proposing a 4% increase in Council Tax for the year ahead. Education spending needed to increase by 5% (for teachers' pensions and other things). A further meeting of BGCBC would be held on 6 February.

Councillor Simmons reported that he attended a recent Joint Consultation meeting with BGCBC and reps of other town and community councils in the area. The Charter had been signed by all except Tredegar Town Council. Brynmawr had since then withdrawn their agreement to the Charter too. Joint Consultation meetings would however continue.

Council RESOLVED: to note the updates.

197. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS, RELEVANT CORRESPONDENCE AND CELEBRATING SUCCESS

The Clerk reported that he had been notified of five complaints made recently to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. He was not able to tell members what the complaints were about, who made the complaints, or who the complaints were about.

Council RESOLVED: to note the update.

The meeting ended at 9.40pm.

Signed as a correct record by the Chair

NB these minutes are a summary of the proceedings and record of the decisions taken. They are not intended to be a verbatim record.

Minutes produced by Richard Gwinnell, Town Clerk