

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GRANTS COMMITTEE OF ABERTILLERY
AND LLANHILLETH COMMUNITY COUNCIL (ALCC) HELD ON 14 NOVEMBER 2019 at
8.40pm in the Council Chamber, Mitre Street, Abertillery**

PRESENT: Councillors:

Gill Clark, Perry Morgan, Gary Oakley (Chair) (in the Chair), Allen Rees and Nick Simmons

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

Others: None

ABSENT: Councillor Glyn Smith

109. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND WELCOMES

No apologies were received.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the new committee and emphasised the importance of all members gaining a thorough understanding of the budget and the budget process. There was a good deal of work to be done, to ensure this. The draft budget could be discussed by this committee three times before the January precept deadline.

110. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No members declared any personal interests.

111. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Debate ensued on the committee's powers to decide grants and whether, if grants then had to go to the Council (after this committee) for approval, that would cause duplicated effort and excessive delays. Members reached a consensus that ward grants should be the responsibility of this committee, but not council grants and not solar farm grants. There would be a time delay in approving grants if meetings were held quarterly (which had been agreed) but applicants would need to get used to submitting grant applications on time.

The Committee RESOLVED:

- (1) To note its terms of reference, as decided by the Council.
- (2) To recommend to the Council that the Committee is delegated the authority to decide ward grant applications, without reference to the Council, in future.
- (3) To recommend to the Council that it replaces line 1 of the Committee's existing terms of reference with: "The Council itself takes all decisions relating to the approval of spending or grants (except ward grants).” NB underlined words are new words.
- (4) To recommend to the Council that it replaces paragraph 2 of the Committee's existing terms of reference with: "The Finance and Grants Committee's purpose is to consider and determine ward grant applications and to prepare, monitor, review and assist in the effective financial management of the Council. Its role is to make recommendations to the Council in any of the matters listed below.” NB underlined words are new words.
- (5) To recommend to the Council that it replaces section 6 of the existing terms of reference with: "To consider and make recommendations to the Council in respect of all requests for financial assistance submitted to the Council (but not solar farm grants and not ward grants).” NB underlined words are new words.

The Chair changed the agenda order, with the agreement of the Committee.

112. GRANT APPLICATIONS

Each application was considered separately and **the Committee RESOLVED:**

- (1) That Zion Miner's Chapel Intergenerational Craft Group be asked for more information on what the requested £500 council grant would be spent on, as this was not made clear in their application form
- (2) That the Council be recommended to approve the ward grant application from Councillor Gill Clark, for £50, for the Llanhilleth Tenants and Residents Association to spend on road signage
- (3) That the Council be recommended to approve the ward grant application from Councillor Bidgood, for £50, for the Llanhilleth Tenants and Residents Association to spend on road signage
- (4) That the Council be recommended to approve the ward grant application from Councillor Rees, for £50, for the Llanhilleth Tenants and Residents Association to spend on road signage
- (5) That the Council be recommended to approve the ward grant application from Councillor Lucas, for £50, for the Friends of Six Bells Park to pay for the rental of an indoor space to hold a fundraising event
- (6) That the Council be recommended to approve the council grant application from the Friends of St Illtyd, for £500, for the first stage of a project to make a photographic record of all the gravestones in the churchyard and produce a website, 3D map and database, to enable people to find out about their ancestors, long after the gravestones themselves have deteriorated beyond eligibility.

The Chair undertook to verbally report the Committee's conclusions at the Council meeting on 20 November 2019.

113. QUARTER 2 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT AND END OF YEAR FORECAST

The Chair reiterated the importance of all members understanding what was in the budget at the start of the financial year, what had happened since and what was left in the budget. He reminded members that the Council had increased its budget to £234,000 in 2019/20, with £98,000 not allocated to specific projects at the start of the year, but many decisions had been taken since then, to allocate funds to specific projects. He was of the view that the Council should not go into another year without specific spending proposals for its whole budget.

Discussion ensued and questions were answered by officers on the level of reserves (held in the Reserve Account), the level of underspend carried forward from previous years (held in the Current Account), expected underspends this year (e.g. on pension contributions, training and members allowances) and what (and when) should be moved from the Current to the Reserve Account. The Chair informed members that he would be proposing an increase in the council grants budget at the next Council meeting, to maximise spend in that area whilst also preventing an overspend on this budget line and minimise any underspends overall.

Comments were made by other members, including that:

- the Council's officers deserved a great deal of praise for managing within budget and keeping costs down (e.g. by closing the office on days when evening Council

meetings were held to minimise overtime)

- officers were providing “brilliant” service with no additional staff costs
- more money would need to be put in the youth budget line for more youth workers next year
- reports back were needed first, to ensure the money put in to date was effective
- councillors should be asked to submit their ideas for next year, to add to the budget suggested by officers (of £196k)
- the public should be asked what they wanted, before any extra spending was agreed on their behalf
- a survey could be drawn up for example to find out whether people wanted ALCC to spend money to take over the main car park in Abertillery
- there was no realistic chance of Blaenau Gwent allowing ALCC to take over the car park and keep it open at night, so a survey would falsely raise people’s expectations
- taking over the car park may be an option in future, given the worsening situation with car parking availability since Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council took over parking enforcement and started issuing parking tickets
- members could survey people at Winterfest, where many people would be gathered
- members were at liberty to draw up a draft survey if they wished.

The Clerk and the Deputy Clerk stated that:

- a survey should be agreed ideally at a Council meeting, if it was to be conducted on behalf of ALCC (as opposed to being conducted by individuals)
- this should be proposed by members to the Council on 20 November if members wanted a survey done urgently (e.g. at Winterfest)
- an amount could be built into the 2020/21 budget whilst the Council explored the feasibility of taking over the car park, if Council wished to do that
- if the funds were not used during the year, they could be kept in earmarked reserves for this longer term purpose, if Council so agreed
- all members should be asked if they wished to add to the 2020/21 budget as soon as possible.

The Chair agreed to draft a survey, for proposal to the Council on 20 November 2019, and to ask members at that meeting to submit their budget ideas before the committee’s next meeting.

The Committee RESOLVED: to note the Quarter 2 budget monitoring report and end of year forecast.

114. DRAFT BUDGET 2020/21

Discussion ensued on the draft budget prepared by officers and attached to the agenda. Members were of the view generally that any further increase should be kept to inflation only.

The Committee RESOLVED: to note the draft budget circulated pending further discussion at the next meeting.

115. DATES AND TIMES OF MEETINGS

The Committee RESOLVED:

- (1) That meetings of the committee be held on the following dates (all at 7pm) to discuss the following issues:
- Monday 2 December 2019: draft budget and precept 2020/21
 - Monday 13 January 2020: grants and draft budget and precept 2020/21
 - Tuesday 10 March 2020: grants (prior to year-end)
 - Thursday 23 April 2020: grants, end of year out-turn and audit plan
 - Thursday 11 June 2020: grants, draft Annual Return and Internal Auditor's report (assuming the Council establishes the Committee again next year).
- (2) That the Clerk circulate the dates agreed to members of the committee by email.

The meeting ended at 10.20pm.

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