

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GRANTS COMMITTEE OF ABERTILLERY
AND LLANHILLETH COMMUNITY COUNCIL (ALCC) HELD ON 13 JANUARY 2020 at
7.00pm in the Council Chamber, Mitre Street, Abertillery**

PRESENT: Councillors:

Gary Oakley (Chair), Gill Clark, Perry Morgan, Allen Rees and Nick Simmons (see 163 below)

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

Others: Councillor Graham White (not a member of the committee) and one member of the public

ABSENT: Councillor Glyn Smith

161. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND WELCOMES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Glyn Smith.

162. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No members declared any personal interests.

163. MINUTES – FINANCE AND GRANTS COMMITTEE – 2 DECEMBER 2019

Councillor Simmons arrived at this point in the meeting.

The minutes were moved as a correct record.

Discussion ensued on progress with the new buzzer in the Council Chamber (which was on order) and on the number of visits to the Council offices by the Internal Auditor in the previous year.

The Chair asked for the minutes of this meeting to record that the £1,500 budgeted for the Internal Auditor was for up to 30 hours work over a year, not for a specific number of visits, although it was hoped that visits would be less frequent in future (in theory, three visits per year including the June Council meeting).

Councillor Morgan moved that the words “the Internal Auditor visited 11 times last year” be added to the ninth bullet point of minute 145.

The Clerk reminded members that minutes were a record of decisions and a brief summary of the key issues discussed (not a full account of every detail discussed).

The Committee RESOLVED to confirm the minutes of the Finance and Grants Committee meeting held on 2 December 2019 as a correct record, for signature by the Chair, subject to the addition of the words moved by Councillor Morgan.

164. GRANT APPLICATIONS

The Chair and the Clerk reminded members that the committee could approve (but not refuse) ward grant applications and that council grant applications had to go to full Council in any case for approval.

The committee considered the applications attached to the agenda. Detailed questions were asked, information was given and discussion ensued on the applications. Discussion focussed particularly on whether councillors could apply for ward grants if the organisation was not based in their ward and whether ward grants could be given to groups which were companies. The Clerk circulated and outlined the ward grants criteria which had been adopted by the Council on 25 September 2019, in response to comments and questions. The Deputy Clerk pointed out that point 2 of the criteria allowed for groups which were outside members' wards to be funded (if the group served people in the whole ALCC area) but point 1 of the process restricted applications to groups within members' wards only. The Council would need to decide if it wished to amend the criteria or the process or both. If an application had not been made in the past for a group (because of the limitation in point 1 of the process), an application could be made in future, when the process was clarified.

NB two brief adjournments were held while the Clerk went to the office to find and copy an email relating to a ward grant application and the ward grants criteria.

Councillor Gill Clark declared a personal interest in the application at agenda item 4(n), for £200 for Abertillery Bluebirds AFC, because her son and her grandson were both members and players of Abertillery Bluebirds AFC.

The Committee RESOLVED:

- (1) To recommend that Council seek further information from MENASH on the nature of the organisation (e.g. whether it was a national charity, how many beneficiaries there were and exactly what the £500 requested would be spent on)
- (2) That the ward grant application from Councillor Gary Oakley, for £200, for the Friends of St Illtyd be approved
- (3) That the ward grant application from Councillor Michaela Assiratti, for £200, for Brynithel Community Centre, be approved
- (4) That the ward grant application from Councillor Gill Clark, for £50, for the Llanhilleth Miners Institute (Luncheon Club) be approved
- (5) That the ward grant application from Councillor Keri Bidgood, for £50, for the Llanhilleth Miners Institute (Luncheon Club) be approved
- (6) That the ward grant application from Councillor Allen Rees, for £150, for The Friendly Group, Soffryd Community Centre be approved
- (7) That the ward grant application from Councillor Graham White, for £200, for the Hospice of the Valleys, be approved
- (8) That the ward grant application from Councillor Bernard Wall, for £200, for the Hospice of the Valleys, be approved
- (9) That the remainder of the ward grant applications (at agenda items 4(c), (d), (e), (f), (j) and (n)) be deferred until the committee's meeting on 10 March 2020
- (10) That Council be recommended to change process (1), to allow members to apply for ward grants for groups outside their own wards, if the groups concerned had a multi-ward or whole-area benefit (e.g. the Museum, Hospice of the Valleys etc) and

(11) That members be informed of the new deadline to apply for ward grants.

165. DRAFT BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2020/21

The Deputy Clerk circulated A3 copies of the draft budget (which was attached on A4 paper to the agenda).

Lengthy debate ensued, with questions asked and answered about what was spent against various budget lines in the past year, what was left over and what the existing budget paid for. Members expressed various opinions about whether specific budget lines should be increased, decreased or removed altogether.

NB a brief adjournment was held while the Deputy Clerk went to the office to find the spend-to-date on member training.

Debate took place and questions were asked specifically on the required budget for:

- staff training and conferences; the committee agreed to propose that the budget be £400 (instead of £1,200) for the year ahead, given past underspends on this budget, and as the costs of staff undertaking CiLCA could be ringfenced within reserves and met from reserves if needed
- member training; the committee agreed to propose that the budget be £1,000 (instead of £2,000) for the year ahead, given past underspends on this budget
- the proposed IT upgrade, projector and data storage solutions; members had differing views on what was required; the Chair was of the view that external advice was required on the appropriate specification and quotes would be needed from a number of suppliers of IT equipment
- One Voice Wales membership; the Chair questioned the value for money of this
- printer rental; the existing lease was due to end in the next few months
- Internal Auditor costs; whether they could provide payroll services and the length of the contract
- travel and mileage
- marketing and publicity
- defibrillators maintenance
- council grants; the budget should be £10,000 in line with a previous Council decision
- allotments; the budget should be £542.40 due to a recent annual rental increase
- Christmas lights outside Bourneville Community Hall and at Somerset Street; some members felt more lights should be funded via the core contract or through grants; others pointed out that this was for the Christmas Lights Working Group to discuss and recommend to Council in due course
- car park community asset transfer; the committee agreed that the proposed budget should be removed
- Abertillery underpass; the committee agreed that the proposed budget should be removed
- Youth services; the figures should read £37,806 (for additional youth workers) and £3,380 (for the Space Youth Café Food Project)
- the "In Bloom" figure of £10,000 (listed under Leisure and Tourism Group); the committee agreed the proposed budget should be removed
- pay for use toilets; the committee agreed the proposed budget should be removed

- the “In Bloom” figure of £35,000 (listed under Well-being); the committee agreed that the proposed budget should be £22,000 (not £35,000)
- War Memorial Maintenance (Bourneville and Blaenau Gwent); the committee agreed to propose that an additional sum of £3,000 be added to the budget
- concerns were expressed about who would do all the new work required
- Halloween event; the committee agreed the proposed budget should be removed
- Food Festival; the committee agreed the proposed budget should be removed
- Shop Local events; the committee agreed a sum of £10,000 for events generally (with specifics to be agreed during the year).

The Deputy Clerk reported that the total budget to be proposed to the Council on the basis of the committee’s deliberations was £240,041.52.

The Committee RESOLVED: to recommend to the Council that it agrees a budget for 2020/21 of £240,041.52, based on the draft budget presented to this meeting, as amended at this meeting.

166. SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 3(x)

The Committee RESOLVED (during the budget debate above) to suspend standing order 3(x) to extend the time limit for the meeting beyond the normal two hours.

167. FINANCIAL RISKS: PAYMENT OF PRECEPT AND FINANCIAL SERVICES COMPENSATION SCHEME (FSCS)

The Deputy Clerk reminded members that ALCC had all its funds with one bank and that there was a risk of losing those funds, if the bank collapsed. He had contacted a number of other town and community councils in Wales. They all also had only one bank.

The Chair commented that this was because town and community councils in Wales did not know about the risks and the £85,000 Financial Services Compensation Scheme limit, possibly due to a lack of training.

The Deputy Clerk explained that:

- there was a risk of loss of funds in any case and the Council would be wise to move its reserves to a different bank (which paid interest on balances), to mitigate that risk
- ALCC could also ask Blaenau Gwent CBC to release payment of the precept to ALCC in quarterly instalments, so that ALCC did not have a sudden cash injection of £240k in April but could have four payments spread throughout the year instead. That would further mitigate the risk
- BGCBC had already indicated that they would be willing to do this if requested
- if ALCC moved to full electronic banking, staff would be able to move funds between banks and bank accounts much more quickly if required, to further mitigate the risk.

The Committee RESOLVED: to recommend to Council that it takes the following steps as soon as possible, to mitigate the risk of financial loss in the event of a bank collapse:

- (1) ALCC moves its reserve account to a different bank
- (2) BGCBC is asked to pay the precept to ALCC in quarterly instalments, rather than in one

annual lump sum in future years
(3) ALCC moves to full electronic banking.

The meeting ended at 9.30pm.

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