

2. Election of Chair for 2023-24

By law, the first business of the Annual Meeting is the election of the Chair for the forthcoming Council year. No other business can be carried out at this or any other meeting until a Chair is elected. The current Chair will chair the meeting until a Chair for the forthcoming year is elected.

The Chair is not the leader or 'Prime Minister' of the Council. The Chair takes on some minor duties and responsibilities but, apart from having a casting vote in Full Council meetings, the role has virtually no powers or authority above that of any other Member.

The Chair is 'elected.' This means that each nomination must be proposed and seconded and, if more than one candidate accepts their nomination, a vote must be taken. The current Chair may be nominated to serve for a further year. All candidates may participate in the vote to elect the Chair. If the votes of two candidates are equal at the end of the voting process, the current Chair must, by law, cast a deciding vote in addition to any vote that he has already cast.

If only one candidate accepts their nomination, they will be elected unopposed.

Once a Chair is elected, they serve until the next Annual Meeting and, unless they are disqualified or resign, they cannot be de-selected.

3. Out-going Chair's address

This is a short, valedictory speech traditionally allowed (unless the current Chair is re-elected), at the discretion of the new Chair, to their predecessor to mark the end of their term of office. Although, as a serving Member, the current Chair will still be bound by the Member Code of Conduct, traditionally he is given leeway to be as rude about officers and Members as the laws of defamation allow without fear of facing an official complaint. The speech is traditionally printed verbatim in the minutes of the Annual Meeting.

6. Appointment of Vice-Chair for 2023-24

The Vice-Chair is 'appointed.' This means that there is no requirement for a nomination to be proposed and seconded and any Member may nominate themselves for the role. If only one person volunteers or accepts a nomination for the role, a vote must still be taken to confirm their appointment.

Once a Vice-Chair is appointed, they serve until a new Chair is elected at the next Annual Meeting and, unless they are disqualified or resign, they cannot be de-selected.

The Vice-Chair takes over as chair of a Council meeting if the Chair is absent or leaves the chamber but the Vice-Chair does not automatically assume the role of Chair of the Council if the Chair is disqualified or resigns. In such a case, the Council must elect a new Chair of the Council.

7. Public Services Ombudsman

Between July and August 2022, a member of the public sent seven extraordinarily long emails to members of this Council's Planning, Commerce and Environment Committee, other current community councillors, a former community councillor and the Leader of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council giving his views about the distribution of Town in Bloom planters and hanging baskets in Cwmtillery. The emails, which were highly repetitive, totalled 7,000 words and included twelve attachments.

The member of the public received at least four email replies plus at least one telephone call from Members of this Council's PlaCE Committee. He also exchanged text messages with at least one Member of the Committee.

On 5 September 2022 he wrote a further email of more than 1,200 words to the Clerk of the Council. He described his email as an official complaint but it essentially repeated, at great length, the member of public's views about the distribution of planters and hanging baskets.

This Council's Complaints Policy states that it "covers those situations where a complaint has been made about the administration of the Council or about its procedures" and "deals with complaints that have not been capable of resolution on a less formal basis, or by explanations from the Clerk or Chair of Council."

The Clerk was of the opinion that the member of the public's email had not described a failure of the Council's administration or procedures. The member of the public had also been contacted by the Chair of Council. The Clerk considered this response to have been appropriate and adequate and so did not invoke the Council's complaints procedure.

Five months later, in February 2023, the member of the public made a complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales because his email had not received an official response from the Clerk.

The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales decided that the email sent on 5 September 2023 was a complaint and that the Clerk should apologise to the member of the public and send a response, which the Clerk agreed to do by 29 March 2023. Unfortunately, this date coincided with a period of very high workload and the Clerk failed to respond to the member of the public by the agreed deadline.

The Ombudsman reacted by threatening to publish a 'special report' into the matter if this Council does not pay the member of the public compensation of £50 as well as the Clerk responding to the member of the public's email of 5 September 2023. The Ombudsman also sent the letter shown below.

Such a payment requires the authorisation of the Full Council.

For information:

- There is no dispute that the Clerk failed to keep to the agreement to respond to the member of the public by 29 March 2023. He did not inform either the member of the public or the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales that he was struggling to keep to the agreed deadline.
- A payment of £50 is the usual recommendation by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales to compensate a member of the public for the 'inconvenience and frustration caused' by 'a failure to comply with an agreed early resolution.'
- The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales can recommend that a Council makes financial redress running into thousands of pounds. £50 for 'a minor injustice with no long-term impact' is the lowest level of compensation that the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales can recommend.




Our ref: 202206877

Ask for: Sarah James

 01656 644221

Date: 10 May 2023

 sarah.james
@ombudsman.wales

Mr David Cartwright
Clerk
Abertillery & Llanhilleth Community Council
Council Offices
Mitre Street
Abertillery
Blaenau Gwent
NP13 1AE

By email only
clerk@abertilleryandllanhilleth-wcc.gov.uk

Dear Mr Cartwright

Complaint made to the Ombudsman by [REDACTED]

I refer to my decision regarding [REDACTED] complaint, issued on 15 March **2023**, and subsequent communication between the Council and my Casework Officer, Ms Sarah James, and Assistant Investigation Manager, Mr Leigh McAndrew.

As a reminder, the terms of the early resolution settlement agreed by the Council were as follows:

By 29 March:

- a) Write to [REDACTED] to provide an apology and explanation for the failure to acknowledge his complaint
- b) Issue a complaint response.

Ms James emailed you on 30 March and 14 April as my office had not received evidence of compliance with the terms of the settlement. Ms James' emails were not acknowledged and did not receive a response from you.

Mr McAndrew therefore contacted you by telephone on 24 April. You informed Mr McAndrew that the agreed actions had not been completed and you did not give any timescale for when they would be. Mr McAndrew then emailed you to outline further actions which he thought were reasonable in order for the Council to address its non-compliance. You responded to that email on 28 April to say that the Council would complete the further actions, but you also referred to Mr McAndrew's email as a "threat or even blackmail".

The response from the Council to the agreed early resolution settlement has so far been poor and has fallen below the standard I expect. If the Council cannot provide an assurance that it is taking appropriate action to comply with the agreed actions, as well as the further actions outlined in Mr McAndrew's email, **by 31 May 2023** I will consider whether it is proportionate and in the public interest for my office to take further action and issue a Special Report, in order to highlight the failure of the Council to comply with our recommendations. A Special Report is a public document. You should therefore ensure that this letter is brought to the attention of Full Council at the earliest opportunity and that the Council's delay in complying with the agreed settlement should also be discussed at the next meeting of the Council.

In the meantime, please ensure that an update on the current position is provided to my office as a matter of urgency.

A copy of this letter has been sent to Ms Andrea Jones, the Monitoring Officer of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M.M. Morris". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michelle Morris
Ombudsmon / Ombudsman

Cc: Ms Andrea Jones

8. Appointment of bank authorisers

All cheques issued by the Council must be signed by two Members of the Council and an officer. Tracey Dyson, Rob Phillips, Nick Simmons and Glyn Smith are currently authorised to sign Council cheques.

It is envisaged that the Council may soon move to a secure electronic system whereby two Members would authorise payments electronically. Therefore, it is recommended that only members fully conversant with email and comfortable with transacting business online are appointed to these roles.

9. Committees

Although the Council currently has six Committees, it should be noted that the Blaenau Gwent Consultative Committee has never held a quorate meeting since it was formed in July 2022 and has no current terms of reference.

If any Member successfully proposed an amendment that a particular Committee should be disbanded, the duties, responsibilities and authorities of that Committee would revert to the Full Council.

10. Terms of Reference

Some minor changes have been made to the committees' Terms of Reference (See Appendix I):

- Responsibility for managing a Communications working group has been moved from the People and Communities Committee to the Community Empowerment Committee
- The PlaCE Committee's responsibility to appoint two Members to Abertillery Regeneration has been removed as this body ceased six years ago
- The PlaCE Committee's responsibility to appoint one Member to the Abertillery and District Local List of Buildings of Interest working group has been removed as this body does not appear to have met for five years
- The PlaCE Committee's responsibility for managing a Shop Local working group has been removed as this working group no longer exists and the Council has no budget for 'Shop Local' activities in 2023-24

Full Council has delegated some legal authorities, duties and responsibilities to its committees. Members who are considering proposing amendments to any committee's terms of reference should consult officers at the earliest opportunity to ensure that any such amendments conform to these legal requirements.

The number of Members on each committee may be amended but any Committee of the Council must have a minimum of three Members.

11. Appointment of Members of Committees

Again, Members of Committees are 'appointed' and so may nominate themselves. See Appendix II for a brief commentary on each of the committees. The current composition of each committee is shown in Appendix III.

Although it is not a legal requirement, it is recommended that Council goes through the laborious process of voting on each individual appointment.

13. External bodies

For years, the Council has dutifully provided nominations to the Abertillery and District Twinning Association and to the boards of governors of the Community Council area's two primary schools. The twinning association does not appear to have been active for eight years while Josh Rawcliffe and Ben Owen-Jones are each energetic members of their local school's board of governors. It is, therefore, recommended that it is unnecessary for this Council to provide nominations to these external bodies at this Annual Meeting.

14. Financial authorisations

As well as the financial responsibilities and authorisations delegated to each committee, the Terms of Reference shown in Appendix I lists the financial responsibilities and authorisations delegated to the Responsible Financial Officer.

15. Full Council meetings 2023-24

The Council traditionally meets on the last Wednesday of each month except August. However, in 2023-24, four of the 'last Wednesdays' coincide with school holidays. Therefore, alternative Wednesdays have been proposed for those months.

Terms of reference 2023-24

Committees and working groups

People and Communities Committee

To support community cohesion within the community council area and to strengthen local communities' links with people and communities from elsewhere through the provision of, and support for, public events, projects and initiatives.

The Committee should be seven voting Members – and, in any case, shall be no fewer than five – appointed by Full Council. The Committee may appoint additional Members as non-voting members of the Committee.

The Chair of the Committee shall convene an ordinary meeting of the Committee at least once every quarter.

The Committee shall have the authority to establish sub-committees and/or working groups from within the membership of the Committee and to appoint other Members of the Council to the sub-committees and/or working groups for which it is responsible.

The Committee shall have the authority to appoint members of the Committee (or of a sub-committee or working group) who are not Members of the Council. The Committee is advised to actively seek to appoint non-Council Members with specialist knowledge of matters that fall within the remit of the Committee, and these shall for all purposes be treated as non-voting members of that committee, sub-committee or working group.

The Committee's duties shall be:

To appoint, from within the membership of the Committee, the members of, set the terms of reference for, and manage the meetings and activities of the following working group (including any associated delegated budget) and any other sub-committees and working groups (including any associated delegated budget) whose management is delegated to the Committee by the Full Council:

- Christmas Lights Working Group

To appoint, from within the membership of the Committee, members of the following joint committees and external bodies:

- Blaenau Gwent Armed Forces Covenant Steering Group (one member)

To manage on behalf of the Community Council the following public events, projects and initiatives and to authorise expenditure within the associated budget lines that shall be delegated to the Committee by the Full Council:

- Christmas lights central contract (£30,000)
- Christmas lights overhaul and maintenance (£15,000)
- Llanhilleth TRA Christmas lights (£3,000)
- Brynithel Community Centre Christmas lights (£1,500)
- Swffryd Community Centre Christmas lights (£1,500)
- Bournville Community Centre Christmas lights (£1,500)
- Aberbeeg TRA Christmas lights (£1,500)
- Pentre Tyleri Christmas lights (£1,500)
- Christmas lights electricity costs (£1,800)
- Events and initiatives connected with Remembrance Sunday (£3,000)

- Maintenance of war memorial sites (£2,500)
- Loneliness Project (£5,000)
- Community Fun Run (£5,000)
- Community summer cinema events (£10,000)
- Party in the Park (£20,000)
- Musical concerts (£1,000)
- Grant funding to Abertillery Rock and Blues Festival (£2,000)

To manage on behalf of the Community Council any other public events, projects and initiatives and the associated budget lines that shall be delegated to the Committee by the Full Council.

To work with external agencies and grant-giving bodies, managing applications, as appropriate, by the Council for funding for events, projects and initiatives that fall within the remit of the Committee.

To scrutinise applications from external organisations for Council Grant funding for public events, projects and initiatives that fall within the remit of the Committee and to make recommendations to the Full Council.

To scope and cost proposals for Council support for projects, initiatives and public events in the subsequent financial year that fall within the remit of the Committee and to prepare a budget for these in accordance with the Council's budget-setting procedures.

On request, to provide reports and/or presentations to the Finance and Grants Committee in regards to project planning and expenditure.

To work with external agencies and grant-giving bodies, managing applications, as appropriate, by the Council for funding for events, projects and initiatives that fall within the remit of the Committee.

To consider the needs of the Community Council area and the opportunities for the Council in regards to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Blaenau Gwent Public Services Board Well-being Plan and the power to promote or improve economic, social or environmental Well-being under the Local Government Act 2000, and to make recommendations to the Full Council.

PlaCE – Planning, Commerce and the Environment Committee

To support the responsible development and maintenance of the built and natural environment within the Community Council area.

To support the development and maintenance of conditions favourable to retail, commercial and business activities within the Community Council area through the provision of, and support for, events, projects and initiatives.

The Committee should be seven voting Members – and, in any case, shall be no fewer than five – appointed by Full Council. The Committee may appoint additional Members as non-voting members of the Committee.

The Chair of the Committee shall convene an ordinary meeting of the Committee at least once every quarter.

The Committee shall have the authority to establish sub-committees and/or working groups from within the membership of the Committee and to appoint other Members of the Council to the sub-committees and/or working groups for which it is responsible.

The Committee shall have the authority to appoint members of the Committee (or of a sub-committee or working group) who are not Members of the Council. The Committee is advised to actively seek to appoint non-Council Members with specialist knowledge of matters that fall within the remit of the Committee, and these shall for all purposes be treated as non-voting members of that committee, sub-committee or working group.

The Committee's duties shall be:

To appoint, from within the membership of the Committee, members of the following joint committees and external bodies:

- Blaenau Gwent Heritage Forum (two members)

To consider and respond to public consultations and to express the views of the Council in regard to planning applications and other development control matters within, or that have a direct impact on, the Community Council area.

To consider, and respond on behalf of the Council to the Planning Authority on, matters regarding statutory structural and local plans.

To engage on behalf of the Council in informal and formal public consultation and public examination of the Blaenau Gwent Local Development Plan and relevant Place Plans.

To consider, and respond on behalf of the Council to the relevant bodies on, matters regarding:

- Highways, transport and vehicle parking
- Listed buildings
- Conservation orders and other environmental matters
- Licensing applications
- Tree preservation orders

To appoint, from within the membership of the Committee, the members of, set the terms of reference for, and manage the meetings and activities of any sub-committees and Working Groups (including any associated delegated budget) whose management is delegated to the Committee by the Full Council and to appoint other Members of the Council to those sub-committees and/or working groups:

To manage on behalf of the Community Council the following projects, initiatives and public events and to authorise expenditure within the associated budget lines that shall be delegated to the Committee by the Full Council:

- Town in Bloom (£14,450)
- Town in Bloom community involvement (£3,550)
- Grant funding to Ffrindiau Tyleri for town centre events (£2,500)
- Community Council activities at town centre events (£3,000)
- Allotments (£650)
- Provision of two new community defibrillators (£4,000)
- Maintenance of community defibrillators (£3,500)
- Environmental projects (£10,000)
- Community transport feasibility (£8,500)

To manage on behalf of the Community Council any other public events, projects and initiatives and the associated budget lines that shall be delegated to the Committee by the Full Council.

To work with external agencies and grant-giving bodies, managing applications, as appropriate, by the Council for funding for events, projects and initiatives that fall within the remit of the Committee.

To scrutinise applications from external organisations for Council Grant funding for public events, projects and initiatives that fall within the remit of the Committee, and to make recommendations to the Full Council.

To scope and cost proposals for Council support for projects, initiatives and public events in the subsequent financial year that fall within the remit of the Committee and to prepare a budget for these in accordance with the Council's budget-setting procedures.

On request, to provide reports and/or presentations to the Finance and Grants Committee in regards to project planning and expenditure.

To consider the needs of the Community Council area and the opportunities for the Council in regards to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Blaenau Gwent Public Services Board Well-being Plan and the power to promote or improve economic, social or environmental Well-being under the Local Government Act 2000, and to make recommendations to the Full Council.

Finance and Grants Committee

To monitor, review and assist in the effective financial management of the Council.

The Committee should be seven voting Members – and, in any case, shall be no fewer than five – appointed by Full Council. The Committee may appoint additional Members as non-voting members of the Committee.

The Chair of the Council, and the Chairs of Committees to which the Council has delegated powers to authorise expenditure, shall not be members of the Finance and Grants Committee.

The Chair of the Committee shall convene an ordinary meeting of the Committee at least once every quarter and, in addition, the Committee shall hold budget scrutiny meetings in October and November in accordance with the Council's budget-setting procedures.

The Committee shall have the authority to establish sub-committees and/or working groups from within the membership of the Committee and to appoint other Members of the Council to the sub-committees and/or working groups for which it is responsible.

The Committee shall have the authority to appoint members of the Committee (or of a sub-committee or working group) who are not Members of the Council. The Committee is advised to actively seek to appoint non-Council Members with specialist knowledge of matters that fall within the remit of the Committee, and these shall for all purposes be treated as non-voting members of that committee, sub-committee or working group.

The Committee's duties shall be:

To monitor, review, and to make recommendations to the Council regarding:

- the financial resources required by the Council to fulfil its statutory obligations and to support the well-being of its communities;
- the Council's borrowing requirements, reserve funds, investments and banking arrangements;
- the charging policies for services provided by, and provided to, the Council.

To monitor, review, and to make recommendations to the Council regarding the effectiveness of the Council's systems of internal financial control, specifically:

- Ensuring compliance with Regulations, statute or law and the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations;
- Ensuring an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the Council's accounting records and system of internal control;
- Monitoring the Council's income and expenditure against budget;
- Ensuring that accounts are properly maintained and reflect current best practice;
- Ensuring that bank reconciliations are undertaken regularly;
- Receiving and reviewing regarding the Council's draft accounts, draft Annual Return and draft Governance Statement, and making recommendations to the Council.

To monitor financial transactions including receipts, payments and bank transfers.

To identify business risks that may prevent the Council achieving its aims and objectives, and to make recommendations to the Council.

To ensure that the Council has appropriate insurance cover in place relating to buildings, property, staff, Members, public liability and employers' liability, and to make recommendations to the Council.

To determine applications from the Responsible Financial Officer and from Committees for authority to overspend up to and including £500 against any individual budget line¹.

In accordance with the Council's budget-setting procedures:

To receive draft budget presentations from the Responsible Financial Officer and from Committees, to scrutinise the draft budgets, and to make recommendations (to be minuted) to the Responsible Financial Officer and to the Committees;

To receive final budget presentations from the Responsible Financial Officer and from Committees and to compile a budget report and written recommendations plus written recommendations as to contingencies, reserves (including any proposals for earmarked reserves) and the precept for submission to the Full Council budget-setting meeting.

To approve (but not refuse) applications for Ward Grants made by Members².

On request, to receive reports and/or presentations as to project planning and expenditure from the Responsible Financial Officer and from Committees, to scrutinise expenditure and expenditure proposals, and to make recommendations (to be minuted) to the Responsible Financial Officer and to the Committees.

To review past Solar Farm Grant awards and to consider the criteria for, and administration of, Solar Farm Grant awards in 2023 and future years, and to make recommendations to the Full Council. To scrutinise Solar Farm Grant applications, and to make recommendations to the Full Council.

To scrutinise applications from external organisations for Council Grant funding for public events, projects and initiatives that do not fall within the remit of any other committee, and to make recommendations to the Full Council.

To consider the needs of the Community Council area and the opportunities for the Council in regards to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Blaenau Gwent Public Services Board Well-being Plan and the power to promote or improve economic, social or environmental Well-being under the Local Government Act 2000, and to make recommendations to the Full Council.

¹ Where an application for an overspend is not approved by the Finance and Grants Committee, a Committee may make an application directly to the Full Council. Where an urgent decision is required, it may be necessary for applications for overspends to be made directly to the Full Council, which meets more frequently.

² Where an application for a Ward Grant is not approved by the Finance and Grants Committee, the Member may make an application directly to the Full Council. Where an urgent decision is required, it may be necessary for applications for Ward Grants to be made directly to the Full Council, which meets more frequently.

Human Resources Committee

To monitor and review the performance of the Council's officers and to assist them to ensure the effective management of the Council's business.

The Committee shall be five Members, including the Chair of the Council – who shall be Chair of the Committee – and the Vice Chair of the Council.

The Chair of the Committee shall convene an ordinary meeting of the Committee at least once every quarter.

The Committee will exercise on behalf of the Council its powers relating to:

- Recruitment, rates of remuneration, termination of service, education, training, conditions of service, career development and all other similar matters relating to employees and, where relevant (such as in matters of training), members of Council.
- Performance reviews and annual appraisals.
- All matters concerning working conditions, employee service, staff welfare, agreements concerning salaries, sickness and grievance procedures, disciplinary measures, disputes and consultations with employees and their representatives.
- All matters relating to safety at work, risk assessment and safety policies.
- The exercise of any discretion in respect of any employee under the Local Government Superannuation Act and regulations.
- All other routine Human Resource matters within the general policies of the Council.

The Committee shall undertake a review of staffing and pay structure at least once in every financial year and will make recommendations to Full Council.

The Committee shall have the authority to establish sub-committees and/or working groups from within the membership of the Committee and to appoint other Members of the Council to the sub-committees and/or working groups for which it is responsible.

The Committee shall consider the needs of the Community Council area and the opportunities for the Council in regards to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Blaenau Gwent Public Services Board Well-being Plan and the power to promote or improve economic, social or environmental Well-being under the Local Government Act 2000, and to make recommendations to the Full Council.

The Committee shall have the authority to appoint members of the Committee (or of a sub-committee or working group) who are not Members of the Council. The Committee is advised to actively seek to appoint non-Council Members with specialist knowledge of matters that fall within the remit of the Committee, and these shall for all purposes be treated as non-voting members of that committee, sub-committee or working group.

Community Empowerment Committee

To combat alienation and social isolation among young people up to the age of eighteen, to support them to engage constructively with their local community and to assist them to inform and influence decisions within their local community that affect their lives.

To support people aged eighteen and over who could be described as vulnerable, isolated or disadvantaged within society and to assist them to inform and influence decisions within their local community that affect their lives.

The Committee should be five voting Members – and, in any case, shall be no fewer than three – appointed by Full Council. The Committee may appoint additional Members as non-voting members of the Committee.

The Committee shall have the authority to establish sub-committees and/or working groups from within the membership of the Committee and to appoint other Members of the Council to the sub-committees and/or working groups for which it is responsible.

The Committee shall have the authority to appoint members of the Committee (or of a sub-committee or working group) who are not Members of the Council. The Committee is advised to actively seek to appoint non-Council Members with specialist knowledge of matters that fall within the remit of the Committee, and these shall for all purposes be treated as non-voting members of that committee, sub-committee or working group.

The Chair of the Committee shall convene an ordinary meeting of the Committee at least once every two months.

The Committee's duties shall be:

To establish criteria for measuring the effectiveness, value-for-money and performance of Community Council-funded youth work.

To continually review the effectiveness, value-for-money and performance of Community Council-funded youth work.

To liaise with external agencies to formulate proposals for future youth engagement initiatives.

To examine external sources of additional funding for youth engagement initiatives and, if need be, help establish groups and act as members of those groups.

To take steps to establish a Youth Council/Forum within the Community Council area.

To manage on behalf of the Community Council the following projects, initiatives and public events and to authorise expenditure within the associated budget lines that shall be delegated to the Committee by the Full Council:

- Blaenau Gwent detached team (£63,293)
- Off the Streets initiative (£44,244)
- Youth-led projects (£2,000)

To submit proposed terms of reference for the Committee's adult engagement responsibilities to a future meeting of the Full Council.

To appoint, from within the membership of the Committee, the members of, set the terms of reference for, and manage the meetings and activities of the following working group (including any associated delegated budget) and any other sub-committees and working groups (including any associated delegated budget) whose management is delegated to the

Committee by the Full Council and to appoint other Members of the Council to those sub-committees and/or working groups:

- Youth Engagement working group
- Adult Engagement working group
- Communications Working Group

To manage on behalf of the Community Council any other public events, projects and initiatives and the associated budget lines that shall be delegated to the Committee by the Full Council.

To work with external agencies and grant-giving bodies, managing applications, as appropriate, by the Council for funding for events, projects and initiatives that fall within the remit of the Committee.

To scope and cost proposals for Council support for projects, initiatives and public events in the subsequent financial year that fall within the remit of the Committee and to prepare a budget for these in accordance with the Council's budget-setting procedures.

To scrutinise applications from external organisations for Council Grant funding for public events, projects and initiatives that fall within the remit of the Committee and to make recommendations to the Full Council.

To consider the needs of the Community Council area and the opportunities for the Council in regards to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Blaenau Gwent Public Services Board Well-being Plan and the power to promote or improve economic, social or environmental Well-being under the Local Government Act 2000, and to make recommendations to the Full Council.

Blaenau Gwent Consultative Committee

The Full Council shall nominate up to five Members of the Council to the Joint Committee of Local Councils in Blaenau Gwent. These Members shall be the Blaenau Gwent Consultative Committee of the Council.

The Committee will nominate two Members who have attended a meeting of the Joint Committee of Local Councils in Blaenau Gwent to represent the Council at the subsequent Consultation with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

The Committee shall draft its terms of reference, which will be submitted for ratification at a future meeting of the Council.

External Bodies

The Full Council may nominate members of the following external bodies:

- Abertillery and District Twinning Association (up to two members)
- St Illtyd's Community Primary (one nominee, who need not be a Member of the Council)
- Sofrydd Primary School (one nominee, who need not be a Member of the Council)

Responsible Financial Officer

To manage on behalf of the Community Council the following and to authorise expenditure within the associated budget lines that shall be delegated to the Responsible Financial Officer by the Full Council:

- Staff costs (£63,998)
- Memberships of Society of Local Council Clerks (£449)
- Training for officers (£500)
- Training for members (£1,000)
- IT support (£200)
- Zoom (£120)
- Vimeo - video hosting site (£290)
- Rialtas accounting system (£1,000)
- Bank charges (£400)
- Insurance (£1,300)
- Printing and photocopying usage (£700)
- Internet and phone (BT) (£550)
- Web hosting - Vision ICT (£285)
- gov.uk domain registration and licencing (£2,300)
- Stationery and postage (£740)
- Information Commissioner (£35)
- Internal audit (£1,200)
- Travel and mileage (£250)
- External Audit 2022-23 (Audit Wales) (£1,200)
- Welsh Water (£180)
- Other (£250)

Committees

Up until 2018, three-quarters of Abertillery and Llanhilleth Community Council's annual budget was spent on staff and administrative costs plus the provision of Christmas lights, leaving less than £30,000 a year that was actually reinvested into the local community. The Council could have been accused of talking about a lot of things (including issues over which it had no power or authority) without really achieving very much.

The Council went through something of a revolution at the start of 2019 when it more than doubled its budget and began trying to deliver initiatives aimed at having a real impact. At 2019's Annual Meeting, the Council delegated responsibility for many of these initiatives (and the associated budgets) to its committees.

In 2023-24, the Council's committees will manage 83 percent of the Council's annual budget (excluding staff costs). They carry much more responsibility than ever before and are considerably more business-focused. Committee meetings now concentrate on doing and achieving rather than talking, but this has put a lot of pressure on the Council's most active Members.

I thought it might be helpful to pen a few lines of guidance about the current and future issues the committees face. These views are entirely my own – you may wish to talk to the current members of individual committees for an alternative perspective. It would also be wise to pore through the minutes and papers of committee meetings.

Overall

Community councils do not have a Civil Service. The members of the UK's four national governments and its 383 principal authorities make decisions and then order their 5.8 million staff to carry out the work. Parish, town and community councils operate according to a completely different model. The huge reorganisation of local government enshrined in The Local Government Act 1972 and subsequent legislation gave parish, town and community councillors considerable powers *to do things themselves*. This Council has only 1.4 full-time-equivalent staff whose job is to ensure that the Council stays the right side of all the laws and regulations and to manage the Council's day-to-day finances. All the rest of the Council's activities – the organising, meeting, liaising, researching, procuring, attending, listening, promoting, deciding, contacting, scrutinising, evaluating etc – has to be done by Members themselves.

Two points arise from this:

- If you want to really influence and shape how the Council now does things, you need to get yourself appointed to the appropriate committee(s);
- There is little point in joining any Committee of the Council unless you are prepared to play an active role in *doing things*.

I think it is probably fair to say that the committees score highly for ambition, slightly less well for delivery and rather poorly for evaluation, which highlights the Council's Achilles heel: project management.

People and Communities Committee

Much of this Committee's emphasis has been on the organisation of events that seek to bring our communities together and these events have become much better focused over time. The deliberation regarding Party in the Park has concentrated more and more on ensuring that this free event successfully attracts families on low incomes who may not be

able to afford paid-for activities and on greater participation from families outside central Abertillery. A drive-in cinema event staged in 2021 has been replaced by plans for cinema screenings for children (again, especially those from lower income families) to relieve the pressure on parents during the school summer holidays. The Community Fun Run seeks to include people of all ages and abilities.

One of the Committee's most interesting and challenging initiatives is the Loneliness Project, which seeks to support organisations and groups that cater for (or have contact with) people experiencing social isolation. The project will help these groups to coordinate their activities, supporting them to link up and signpost their users to each other's activities. Some of these groups are very informal and simply identifying them and establishing contact will be a major piece of work.

In addition, the Committee has embarked on the tendering process for a complete overhaul of this Council's Christmas Lights provision.

PlaCE (Planning, Commerce and Environment) Committee

I think it would be fair to say that this Committee struggled to find its identity for a couple of years and sometimes got bogged down in issues over which a community council has no authority. However, things changed markedly in 2022-23. The Committee manages the Council's Town in Bloom project, where the emphasis is switching much more towards establishing a self-sustaining initiative through increased local community involvement. The Committee is looking to expand its 'environment' remit with proposed initiatives to open up overgrown areas for public use, to plant up derelict or unused land and to preserve and enhance public works of art.

Elsewhere, the Committee is concentrating on leading the Council's role as a statutory consultee for planning proposals such as major wind farms and it is becoming increasingly involved in looking at long-term initiatives such as possible community council involvement in the rebuilding of the area's transport infrastructure. The Committee is also responsible for the Council's involvement in supporting the local retail and business offering – a role that has become increasingly frustrating as the area still lacks a cohesive business forum with which the Council could partner.

Finance and Grants Committee

This Committee needs a shake-up. For more than thirty years, all this Council really did was employ a clerk and hand out Council Grants. The job of oversight of the Council's financial affairs didn't involve much more than questioning whether we could get a better deal on the office stationery. But that has changed considerably. Firstly, in 2015, the Council found that £84,000 of its money had been spent unlawfully and that it didn't really understand what the then-Clerk had been up to. More recently, the Council's annual budget has grown like topsy. In 2023-24, the Council is responsible for hundreds and hundreds of thousands of pounds of public money. In future years, this Council may need to administer hundreds of thousands of pounds more of potential grant-funding (from proposed wind farms) and to consider taking over assets and services that are currently run by the borough council.

I fear that, for years, Members have joined this committee under the misapprehension that it will give them power over how the Council spends its money. In reality, this committee has virtually no authority or powers whatsoever. What it *does* have is duties and responsibilities...and lots of them. Without wishing to be rude to any current or former Members of the Committee, I am not confident that this committee has ever properly undertaken many of those duties and responsibilities.

The Council needs a Finance and Grants Committee that can proactively get to grips with the Council's accounts: understanding, scrutinising and evaluating the expenditure of large sums of money; and understanding long-term financial planning. The Committee also needs to be able to formulate constructive recommendations to guide the financial planning of the Council and its committees.

No Member should join this committee unless they are confident that they will be able to get their head round the figures and are willing to put in hours of meaty, necessary but, frankly, boring work throughout the year.

Consequently, Council should give careful thought to, not only the calibre, but also the number of Members on this committee.

Human Resources Committee

Historically, this Committee has not done very much unless and until the relationship between officers and Members has broken down – at which point it has found itself suddenly having to deal with some very difficult issues. The time has now come for the Committee to take a strategic lead. The Council's current officers have a combined age of over 120 and, while the Council's budget and activity has more than trebled, its staffing levels have remained unchanged. The Committee needs to undertake some strategic planning in 2023-24 to ensure that the Council's future human resources match its medium- and long-term aims.

Community Empowerment Committee

The Council's newest committee is a real heavyweight, managing a budget of more than £100,000 and overseeing some of the Council's most important and impactful work. It is currently involved in a significant piece of work to evaluate and plan the direction of Council-funded detached youth teams across the Abertillery and Llanhilleth area while also embarking on a project to take the lessons learned and use them to increase the enfranchisement of people in our communities across all age groups. It's not for the faint-hearted.

Blaenau Gwent Consultative Committee

Historically, the achievements of the regular consultation between the borough council and its four community councils have been few and far between. The borough council only hold the meetings because they have to and, because the other community councils could, perhaps, be described as more insular and less ambitious than this Council, the consultation has acquired a reputation as a mere talking shop.

However, things could be about to change. The cash-strapped borough council is retreating rapidly to being a provider of only statutory services and the Welsh Government looks like it might start pushing for community councils to form alliances to take over some non-core services from local authorities. This Committee may soon need to engage at a much higher level, which would require a grasp of long-term, strategic and financial issues and some nimble political manoeuvring. Yet this committee has not successfully held a single meeting and does not even yet have any terms of reference. Before July 2022, the Council simply nominated up to five Members to attend the Joint Committee of Local Councils in Blaenau Gwent.

Meetings of the Joint Committee of Local Councils in Blaenau Gwent and the Consultation with Blaenau Gwent Borough Council take place on weekdays during office hours, which means that the demographic of community council attendees has tended to be skewed rather heavily towards one end of the age spectrum. All notifications, communications,

papers and information regarding meetings are sent out by Blaenau Gwent Borough Council via email. There is little point in any Member joining this Committee unless they will be able to attend the relevant meetings and are able to access the communications.

I repeat that the above views are my own. I would encourage Members to consult their colleagues for greater insight into individual committees.

David Cartwright
Clerk
May 2023

COMMITTEES 2022-23

People and Communities Committee (7)

Tracey Dyson (Chair)
Michaela Assiratti
Steve Bard
Ben Owen-Jones
Barrie Page
Josh Rawcliffe
[Vacancy]

PlaCE Committee (7)

Rob Phillips (Chair)
Peter Adamson
Chris Hill
Barrie Page
Josh Rawcliffe
Nick Simmons

Finance and Grants Committee (7)

Glyn Smith (Chair)
Peter Adamson
Steve Bard
Josh Rawcliffe
Allen Rees
Mariola Walters
Graham White

Human Resources Committee (5)

Nick Simmons (Chair)
Tracey Dyson (Vice Chair)
Rob Phillips
Josh Rawcliffe
Glyn Smith

Community Empowerment Committee (5)

Barrie Page (Chair)
Tracey Dyson
Ben Owen-Jones
Deb Pitt
Josh Rawcliffe
(Non-voting member) Peter Adamson

JOINT COMMITTEES AND EXTERNAL BODIES 2022-23

Joint Committee of Local Councils in Blaenau Gwent (5)

Josh Rawcliffe
Nick Simmons
Glyn Smith
Bernard Wall
[Roger Clark]
(Council resolved to authorise the Council's members of the Joint Committee of Local Councils in Blaenau Gwent to nominate two of their number to each meeting of the Consultation with Blaenau Gwent Borough Council.)

Abertillery and District Twinning Association (2)

Ben Owen-Jones
Rob Phillips