

## ABERGAVENTNY TOWN COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 16<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2022 AT 7PM ON MS TEAMS, & IN THE COMMUNITY ROOM, TOWN HALL, ABERGAVENTNY.

**Present:** Cllr M Groucutt (Chair)  
Cllr T Konieczny  
Cllr M Harris (MS Teams)  
Cllr R Harris (MS Teams)  
Cllr G Jones  
Cllr T Thomas (MS Teams)  
Cllr M A Brocklesby  
Cllr S Burch (MS Teams)  
Cllr N Tatam  
Cllr T Davies (MS Teams)  
Cllr L Van De Vyver  
Cllr M Hickman (MS Teams)  
Cllr P Simcock (MS Teams)  
Cllr D Simcock

#### **Absent without apologies**

None.

#### **In attendance:**

S Rosser (Town Clerk)

No public session

No public in attendance

PR 09/22	<b>Receive and approve apologies for absence</b>  Apologies were received from Cllr F Morgan, and it was resolved to accept the reasons for absence.
PR 10/22	<b>Receive Declarations of Interest</b>  None received.
PR 11/22	<b>To approve the minutes from 12<sup>th</sup> January 2022.</b>  Cllr N Tatam asked if the full budget breakdown could again be shared as it was not included with the January documents.  Cllr T Konieczny proposed to accept the minutes as an accurate record, seconded by Cllr Mary Ann Brocklesby. Accepted and approved.

PR 12/22

**To receive a report from the Town Clerk on the Interim Audit report.**

The Town Clerk presented her report to Councillors and asked for questions and comments. Cllr M A Brocklesby said it was a sensible response from Chairs about the recommendations and actions proposed, to go forward with good practices. Cllr N Tatam commented that the Auditor seems to be jumping the gun on the General Power of Competence, and there was only one decision minuted over the last year which references the legislation ATC were enabled to make the decision under. Cllr T Konieczny stated that having read the recommendations, it appeared that some recommendations were more 'cut and paste' exercises rather than being pertinent to ATC. As this is a new Auditor to us, they have produced lots of information which we've never had before. We may not be the perfect example which no Town Council would be, but we are streets ahead in completing auditing and accounting processes as put in place by the previous Clerk.

Cllr M Groucutt asked Councillors to go through the recommendations one at a time to either accept or reject them:

R1: Reconciliations: a revised format is proposed from March 2022. More information will be presented each month, with implementation from Month 10. All councillors happy to accept this recommendation and action.

R2: All Councillors happy to have Clerk specify under what powers we make recommendations and proposals under going forward.

R3: Charles Arnold Baker Book: Major changes to legislation for Wales come in to force in May 2022, and the main section under which we will be working can be accessed online, or via One Voice Wales. Councillors reject the recommendation to purchase the book at this stage.

R4: Dedicated finance section on each agenda for every Committee to ratify at each meeting. Councillors happy to accept recommendation to include a finance section on the agendas going forward.

R5: Grant Aid: ATC don't have General Power of Competence yet, so will be bound under section 137 of the Local Government Act when making financial decisions. Auditor was concerned ATC were entering into long term commitments and had concerns over the ability to control that. Each agreement is subject to annual review so we can withdraw if we feel this is necessary. This new way of operating with partners gives everyone firm footing which is very much appreciated by the organisations we support in this way. Councillors understand the concerns of the Auditor but felt they are unfounded. Councillors rejected this recommendation.

R6: Councillors feel this was not a necessary recommendation as Town Clerk and RFO are one and the same person.

R7: Cllr S Burch spoke about the Auditor raising concerns over the issue of the amount held in our accounts, and what was covered by the FSCS. Current legislation shows we would be covered or 500,000euros at present. We are very close to this amount. It would be sensible to look in to how we mitigate covering our finances currently held with Barclays Bank. Councillors asked the Town Clerk to talk to OVW about our options. Cllr Tatam shared the CCLA document he had previously from OVW which had been recommended previously. Cllr Konieczny said the £20K invested at Gateway Credit Union was covered by the guarantee, but our Precept is all banked at Barclays. The chance of them going bankrupt is slim, but it would be sound practice to see if there is a simple solution

	<p>to spread this money we hold over a wider net which may earn us interest. Councillors accepted the recommendation to investigate options further.</p>
PR 13/22	<p><b>To receive a report on arrangements for the Town Council Elections and Appointments.</b></p> <p>The Town Clerk walked Councillors through the report. Cllr M Groucutt had suggested this be presented to Councillors and he felt gathering relevant information in readiness for new Councillors would be good practice. The AGM / 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Council after the May elections will see the election of the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, chairs of committees and representatives on organisations and school boards of Governors etc. The current Mayor, Cllr T Thomas, or Deputy Mayor, Cllr T Davies, can preside over this until a new Mayor has been elected and they will then take over proceedings.</p>
PR 14/22	<p><b>To receive a brief report on the arrangement between MCC and ATC regarding the future of the Borough Theatre.</b></p> <p>Cllr M Groucutt informed ATC that everything is now in place to proceed with the partnership agreement between MCC and ATC to support the Borough Theatre, on the pre-requisite of signing a letter of understanding between the Melville Centre for the Arts and the Borough Theatre. This was due to concerns that if current representatives were no longer involved, that this good working relationship would fall away. Cllr Groucutt had attended a positive meeting between Borough Theatre and the Melville, and it is clear the way they compliment each other. The Agreement can be signed and there has been press interest in this from the South Wales Argus. County Councillor Lisa Dymock and Cllr Groucutt will sign the agreement, which will be subject to annual review, starting from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022, and running until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2027, for £10K per year in two instalments in May and November each year.</p>
PR 15/22	<p><b>To receive and note recent payments made in Month 10, including all relevant Income and Expenditure reports.</b></p> <p>Cllr Konieczny commented that in terms of assisting the Clerk, and to keep Audit happy, there is an overspend on the Large Grants budget of 218%. Cllr Konieczny proposed Council consider virements from another budget to balance the budgets. It needs addressing swiftly – not a case of no money just needs realignment. Environment Committee has been sorted by means of virements, so we can do the same with Large Grants. Cllr Konieczny is happy to work with the Clerk to look at this in readiness for Month 11.</p>
PR 16/22	<p><b>To receive a motion from Cllr T Konieczny on the future appointment of a Responsible Finance Officer.</b></p> <p>Cllr Konieczny recalled that pre-pandemic a Responsible Finance Officer post was advertised for unsuccessfully. ATC then found themselves without a Clerk in the summer of 2021, but we were fortunate their new employer allowed a transitional phase to give ATC cover in the interim. The situation may not be</p>

the same in future. ATC received advice from One Voice Wales that it would be prudent to look at having a Deputy Clerk post to ensure the smooth running of ATC, and to implement a 2-month notice period in future. OVW also recommended that the Deputy Clerk should also undertake CiLCA as well as the Town Clerk. This would cover ATC so all administration of the council would be fully covered and workable so there would not be a need for a peripatetic Clerk from SLCC if the situation arose again. This will give smooth transitions whatever the situation as there will always be a qualified officer in post. Cllr Konieczny proposes that ATC revoke the previous proposal of employing a part time RFO, and instead adopt the advice of OVW and appoint a suitably qualified Deputy Clerk. This was proposed by Cllr Konieczny, and seconded by Cllr G Jones.

Cllr Thomas very much agreed with the motion as he had been on the receiving end of not having a clerk from the start of his tenure as Mayor. With a new Council coming in, here is a need to safeguard ourselves as having a Town Clerk and P/T Admin Officer is not sufficient. The P/T RFO post was unlikely to be filled as an 8 hour a week post. A 0.5 FT post will attract a better quality candidate.

Cllr R Harris agreed with Cllr Thomas – ATC is now a £½ million organisation with a lot on its hands. We need assurances so we have no comebacks and it is essential we have suitable staff. We don't want to find ourselves in this position again.

Cllr Burch recognised these were valid points particularly for transition arrangements, but a new post will need to be properly assessed to see if it is needed in the first instance, and then if there is headroom in the budget for this. Cllr Groucutt responded to this, assuring there is work for a 0.5FT post and that this motion frees ATC from the RFO post previously agreed, clearing the decks for ATC to undertake this investigation by no longer being tied to a policy to provide a 8 hour RFO post. It clears away what didn't work in readiness to hand over to a new Council.

Cllr T Davies said this wasn't just for interim or transitional periods, but also periods of illness – it gives support for all going forward.

Cllr Tatam expressed his opposition to the creation of the 8 hour RFO post and wants to see ATC revoke the 8 hour RFO post, assess the workload and see exactly what is needed. Not keen to commit to having a Deputy Clerk.

Cllr Groucutt assured ATC that this doesn't commit the New Council to a Deputy Clerk, it simply instigates the investigation to make a case for it, and clear the 8 hour RFO provision.

Cllr Konieczny recognises Cllr Burch's concerns. A FT Clerk and PT Admin Officer of 12 hours a week with the proposal to find a RFO to assist with finances as this does take up a lot of time. It is an onerous duty on the Clerk, and there are other things ATC would want to do in respect of partnerships etc, and to deliver this requires more hours than the Clerk can give. Its dangerous to assume the Clerk is simply a minute taker and finance officer, the Town Clerk is the Principle Officer for the Town Council. We have the lowest number of employees of all larger Town Councils in Monmouthshire and it is a huge burden on our employees. After being in the situation we faced when the previous Clerk left it would be diligent for ATC to maintain a full workforce. An 8 hour RFO is not something we will easily attract so to revoke this decision and investigate options of a Deputy Clerk for the new Council to consider is the

	<p>sensible option.  Councillors were then asked to vote on whether to accept this motion as proposed by Cllr T Konieczny and seconded by Cllr G Jones.  11 for, none against, 1 abstain.  Motion carried to investigate provision of Deputy Clerk and revoke previous decision to recruit P/T 8 hour pw RFO.</p>
<p>PR 17/22</p>	<p><b>To receive a verbal update on the completion of the 6 month probationary period of the Town Clerk, and on the future structure of the Town Council.</b></p> <p>Cllr Groucutt informed Councillors that the Chairs of Committees and the Mayor met with the Town Clerk to review her first 6 months in post. Its been an interesting time, with not many having to go through this and also Covid. It is recommended to offer the post in full subject to the CiLCA qualification being completed. The bursary for this can now be applied for. OVW had advised the Town Clerk to complete 6 month in post to get her feet under the table so can now make a start with CiLCA. Councillors had asked if there was anything that would make the job easier, and the Town Clerk recommended an IT review, particularly being able to access files remotely via a cloud-based system or VPN. All Councillors were happy to accept this recommendation to offer the job full time to the Clerk and to investigate costs of altering the IT provision.</p>
<p>PR 18/22</p>	<p><b>To receive a report from One Voice Wales on Section 47 Multi Location Meetings Sector Survey.</b></p> <p>The report was noted from the Town Clerk on the Section 47 Multi Location Meeting provision changes as received from OVW. Cllr Groucutt proposed two additional recommendations to the report – 4.3 To investigate acquiring the ability for portable equipment to facilitate hybrid meetings if the Community Room was not available; and 4.4 To lobby for funding to allow TCC’s to comply with legal requirements to support implementation of these new requirements. This change to the provision of multi location meetings will be enforced from May 2022.</p> <p>Cllr Thomas explained that with regards to remote working, in reality Town Councils are the poor relations. All MCC County Councillors are given adequate IT to carry out their roles, whereas Town Councillors haven’t got this provision. If we are all expected to be able to work remotely, we need the kit to do so.</p> <p>Cllr Burch said that hybrid meetings are the future and the provision to host this facility is key to the sustainability of organisations. We need a sustainable outcome, instead of portable kit maybe we can encourage partners to offer the facility to enable hybrid meetings.</p> <p>Cllr Brocklesby agreed with Cllr Burch and said this is an inclusion issue. We should not disadvantage or stop people from join meetings. This makes the assumption that all are experienced in being able to join remote meetings. There is a Library of Things starting in Abergavenny, and as not everyone will have this type of kit, maybe MCC can invest in this for everyone to be able to use.</p> <p>Cllr Van De Vyver said that the IT doesn’t need to be an all singing and</p>

	<p>dancing laptop, just something which has broadband and video call capability, so something basic would be sufficient.</p> <p>Cllr Groucutt said the provision from MCC is only to be used for Council business so that is all it really needs to be able to support.</p> <p>Cllr Konieczny said it is important to understand that this will be a statutory duty on all TCC's and will have nothing to do with location. Its about the responsibility of councils to offer hybrid meetings for all including the public to be able to access this. Need to consider issues of cyber security, and ATC Town Clerk will need a laptop or secure system that can support this. There should be a laptop for specific access to allow this. It can then be used for hybrid meetings. We are fortunate that the room we currently use is available and has this equipment already fitted. There may be times in future where we want to go out into the community and so we should look to provide a better laptop for the Clerk to work remotely and offer hybrid meetings from anywhere.</p> <p>Cllr Brocklesby said to enforce a statutory duty with no financial provision on offer is tough so we should lobby WG and MCC for support with this.</p> <p>The report was noted, and it was resolved to include the two additional recommendations put forward by Cllr Groucutt. All in favour.</p>
PR 19/22	<p><b>Report from Councillors attendance at external bodies which are relevant to this committee.</b></p> <p>Cllr S Burch had attended a meeting at the Melville Centre to see the work that is being done. Exciting plans for the future, all looking really good.</p>
PR20/22	<p><b>Items for consideration at the next meeting on 9th March 2022.</b></p> <p>To consider costs of a new laptop and enabling remote access to working files.</p>

**Meeting ended 8:11pm**

**APPROVED AS A TRUE RECORD**

**CHAIRMAN ..... DATE .....**