

ABERGAVENNY TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 13th Oct 2021 7PM IN THE COMMUNITY ROOM, TOWN HALL, ABERGAVENNY

Present: Cllr M Groucutt (Chair)
Cllr T Thomas
Cllr G Jones
Cllr P Simcock
Cllr S Burch
Cllr T Davies
Cllr F Morgan
Cllr N Tatam

Absent without apologies

Cllr M A Brocklesby

In attendance:

S Rosser (Town Clerk)
J Langdon – MCC for presentation
C Lewis, M Pearse, J Gass – Abergavenny Community Trust for presentation

No public session

No public in attendance

PR 01/21	Receive and approve apologies for absence Apologies were received from Cllrs L Van de Vyver, R & M Harris, M Hickman, T Konieczny, D Simcock, and it was resolved to accept the reasons for absence.
PR 02/21	Receive Declarations of Interest None received.
PR 03/21	To receive a presentation and review the draft agreement from Abergavenny Community Trust. A short verbal report was delivered by Caroline Lewis to the Town Council as a brief overview of the report and draft agreement already received, to renew the partnership agreement for a further 4 years. Caroline thanked ATC for giving them the opportunity to speak to the Committee. It was acknowledged that a continuation of the partnership will contribute to meeting the Town Council's commitment to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. Lots of building improvements have been made throughout lockdown, and they are now looking to build on the community offer. Where finances are concerned, they are trying to model on how to keep the Trust in good working order for the future. Income

from usual activities has more than halved throughout Covid. They have 2.25FT staff employed at the centre, who are all multi-functional. Recovery and regrowth is limited due to the servicing of the building required to remain covid safe, and the limits to number of users in the building. The new financial year starts for them on 1st November 2021. They are still able to draw carefully on funds from various COVID recovery pots. This enables staff to stay on, and keep the building open. The budget forecast assumes ATC will continue with their £10k annual support, but by 2022/23 Abergavenny Community Trust may face a £15k shortfall, even with all the current financial support. They are investigating all possible financial avenues to compensate for this, to begin rebuilding services for the community and to continue to grow. A new set of deliverables has been added to their agreement for them to work towards, but they are also looking at new projects to launch and build upon, such as the community garden, supporting dementia and stroke groups, and investing in solar panels.

Cllr Groucutt thanked them for the presentation, and the draft agreement, commending them for going strong for the community, acknowledging the partnership enables ATC to fulfil objectives as set by out by the Wellbeing Act. Cllr Davies congratulated them on continuing to survive, and stated all information had been clearly laid out for the Council. Asking about a recovery timeline, Marion Pearse responded by saying it was positive to see diary bookings now repopulating slowly and returning every day. A bi-monthly risk assessment continues to be carried out to ensure ongoing survival, and they are remaining cautious. Overall, they are looking to longer term plans.

Cllr Tatam commented it was good to see a 4 year plan, but to what extent can the current administration commit the next Council to such long-term funding commitments, and were there any clauses that would enable adjustments of budgets and commitments midway through an agreement? Cllr Morgan confirmed the agreement has 12-monthly breaks to enable the future Council to review agreements, but that committing to a longer term plan allows for better long term planning.

Cllr Thomas said the demand for such a service is not likely to decline, with isolation increasing in communities, so the Trust are in a good position to help, building on their good reputation within the town. Comfortable with the agreement.

Cllr P Simcock said making stronger provisions means being able to build and enhance services for the future. She asked if there is hesitancy in volunteers assisting affected the food provision for the community, but ACT were able to confirm kitchen volunteers have all returned, but that being a small team meant if one was off then it had quite the effect on the rest of the team with all they have to cover.

Cllr Jones referred to the agreement enabling the Council to continue working towards objectives on the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, and it makes sense to continue to invest in the work the Trust are doing.

Cllr Burch said how loneliness and sociability is something affecting everyone. Was there any other support we could offer? The Trust are keen to increase community involvement.

Cllr Morgan commented on how the increase in energy and other costs will have quite the effect on their budget, questioning if keeping the amount of support static is appropriate, suggesting future annual reviews.

	<p>The vote was put to the Council to continue supporting Abergavenny Community Trust and look to continue with the agreement. Proposed by Cllr Morgan, seconded Cllr Davies. Unanimous vote – all in favour. The Trust were thanked for their efforts in all areas.</p>
PR 04/21	<p>To receive a presentation from Judith Langdon, Tackling Poverty and Inequality Manager, Monmouthshire County Council, on Funding and proposal for a local marketing campaign to support residents experiencing financial hardship, and consider the funding request.</p> <p>Judith Langdon commented she was humbled to present after such a fantastic presentation by Abergavenny Community Trust.</p> <p>The report had been circulated prior to the meeting, and JL briefly outlined that MCC are developing a marketing campaign with hyper local elements, and its purpose is to support people in financial difficulties. The need has been identified nationally. A county-wide campaign will amplify key messages, but needs local content. It will direct people to the available support. Many have complex needs and are new to being in such a scenario. Rather than just signposting, this is a pro-active shift in behaviours. The 3 key messages will be that there is more help out there than you think, that the earlier you seek help the better, and most importantly, that it's never too late. Citizens Advice Bureau have said often people present to them thinking there is no hope at all, with a real sense of complete hopelessness, but we want to get across these messages and start this shift in behaviours, encouraging people to take that first step. Funding will predominantly go towards leaflets, radio advertising, bus stop adverts, to help sew the seed, so people know where to go at the earliest stages. Cllr Groucutt said with the end of furlough, evictions restarting, Universal Credit cuts, and energy costs skyrocketing, it's a perfect storm for those who can't afford the rises in costs of living. As this report doesn't ask for money over a period, he proposed would a one-off grant for half of what was asked for be seen as acceptable, then to review the project with the new Council in the next financial year.</p> <p>Cllr P Simcock asked about the mechanics of the project, and how it will enable those who would struggle to clearly communicate with services to access them. There has been research on having one single number to go to a central point that then directs the person to the most appropriate service. JL responded, stating lengthy discussions have been had with the steering group, and whoever was chosen as point of contact might put people off making any contact at all. The aim is to have two or three numbers and emails, and members of the group will act as a contact team. The webpage already pulls together some services, so it's a balance of the two forces. Disability in a household does make it more prevalent to being affected by debt and in need of support. Money is needed to help make it known what we have on our doorstep.</p> <p>Cllr Thomas agreed with the campaign, and compared it as being similar to that used by the Foster Carers campaign. Covid has compounded many issues for people -free school meal uptake is at an all time high. To be able to pass on information in a non-prejudicial way is important.</p> <p>Cllr Jones said he already has the link to the webpage on his phone and finds the information on there already is very useful for people. He asked what benefit does ATC get for giving funding to this project, rather than doing something</p>

	<p>ourselves? JL responded stating the benefit will be that we are participating in a county-wide initiative, giving the message a better reach, making people feel more confident in the message and accessing the help advertised. It is like using National Campaigns to latch on to, it amplifies our local messages. Bigger reach, louder voice.</p> <p>Cllr Tatam asked about the 10 organisations on the list in the presentation, commenting they all work towards the same problem, so is this simply adding another one to the list, - umbrella organisations have a tendency to fail, as it takes people away from the front line. Cllr Burch responded, saying that all through the pandemic, JL and her team have pulled together all these organisations to tackle issues, feeding intel upwards, and all groups were now pulling together. It has improved partnerships, and they are now reaching areas that they weren't already reaching, in a non-stigmatised way. It's a challenge to reach people who have their 'head in the sand'. If all the stakeholders contribute and pull together it will give a big pot to work with.</p> <p>JL said the measure of success will be the benefit of collective working, MCC Comms Team are very good at data capture and will ensure this is embedded in the platforms used. Its good to see partners involved are sharing information on an operational level. We aren't adding another layer, rather making the most of what we've got.</p> <p>Cllr Groucutt thanked JL for her presentation and attendance. He said the Council have three options; to accept the report and give £5k, to accept the report and award a £2500 grant, with a pledge for the next Council to consider further funding in future., or to reject the request.</p> <p>Cllr Morgan said having access to a specialist service from this team would help to amplify the work already being done, and to build on it.</p> <p>Cllr Thomas said no support is not an option, whereas option 2 is a good middle ground. It points people in the right direction and is worth doing – a common sense approach.</p> <p>Cllr Jones said it would be beneficial to have a seat on the steering group panel, Cllr Burch, Cllr P Simcock, and Cllr Groucutt all sit on this, Cllr Groucutt offered to step aback so Cllr Jones can step up. All councillors can then cover each other to ensure we have a voice at the steering group.</p> <p>Cllr P Simcock asked if anyone feels this may just be another paper-based campaign. Cllr Groucutt reiterated that MCC Comms are a very experienced team, looking at different avenues such as radio campaigns and other alternatives in the media. Cllr Jones commented on how this may reach working families not just the illiterate or disabled, reaching people that never access these services.</p> <p>Cllr Morgan said it appears to be a broad service that's been offered and with things like a leaflet through every door, and Cllr Burch suggested a leaflet could go home with every school child.</p> <p>Cllr Thomas proposed we go for the £2500 grant then allow the next Council to make a decision on further funding. This was seconded by Cllr Tatam, and all were in favour. Unanimous vote.</p>
PR 05/21	<p>To receive and consider a small grant application from The Abergavenny Lido Group.</p>

	<p>Cllr Groucutt has spoken to the secretary of the group to ask if the Lido group aren't able to gather enough to carry out the feasibility study, would we get the money back. He also asked them if the project is in line with the MCC Climate Emergency due to heating the lido in winter, and asked about the costs quoted of £25k after already spending £16k. They responded saying they still don't know the full costs of the feasibility study, they need additional funds for the full specifications, reports and business plan. This grant request is simply for the feasibility study to be carried out.</p> <p>Cllr Tatam said the project doesn't seem feasible – the outdoor pool with have very limited use. Are we saying we'll be having a heated outdoor pool? It seems to be sentimental tomfoolery. Cllr Davies responded, saying in the last 10 years has seen a fundamental change in the enthusiasm and exponential change in outdoor swimming. Leisure centre pools are limiting for who can use their facilities and when they can use it. This is a committed group with specialists in funding applications, campaigns, business experts, even someone working on making the Lido carbon neutral. Lydney Pool is a similar model, and it is always over-subscribed. Without the feasibility study, we won't know if it is worth taking the project forward. Not many people don't want it. If we are saying we are going to support particularly young people in Abergavenny, this would tick those boxes.</p> <p>Cllr Jones said this didn't appear to just be sentimentality, commenting he enjoyed open swimming where he grew up. Pontypridd has an open-air pool and splash park which is hugely popular. Let's look to support this, and it will help to make an informed decision on the project.</p> <p>Cllr Thomas commented the outlay from us is low, and future funding will come from elsewhere. We need to know if this is a runner.</p> <p>Cllr P Simcock said it was a brilliant example of community development, and shows we are committed to support such a project.</p> <p>Cllr Morgan said that 5 years ago he though this was a daft idea, but in reality, people are running with it. The carbon neutral element – there are ways to mitigate this and having town water available for children to access in walking distance from their homes would be a bonus for many.</p> <p>Cllr Davies pointed out local triathletes have to travel 30 miles in either direction just to access such facilities for training, and this would encourage athletes of the future.</p> <p>Cllr Thomas proposed we award the £1k grant towards the feasibility study, seconded by Cllr Morgan, Vote was carried.</p>
PR 06/21	<p>To receive a verbal update from Cllr Groucutt on the Borough Theatre funding request.</p> <p>Cllr Groucutt has looked at the proposals brought to the Town Council by the Borough Theatre at the Extraordinary meeting in September. Although looking for an ongoing commitment, their minimum was to ask for 5 years support at £20k per year. There is a desire from ATC to help, but in all this felt like a step too far. Although Cllr Groucutt has spoken to both Cath Fallon and Dave Baxter from MCC and Cllr P Simcock as her role of administrator for Melville</p>

	<p>Theatre, its too soon to provide a balanced report to Council. MCC are looking for a partnership, not just coming to us with their begging bowl.</p> <p>There is a thriving arts scene in Abergavenny, and we are already committed to the Melville Centre, so pulling together both services will give us more bang for our buck. Melville has its own board and vision, but both Cllr P Simcock and Dave Baxter have shown commitment to working together. Its how we commit to a SLA with the Borough Theatre which is key. The report will be based on a scaled back agreement with MCC, with some support, but based on commitment to the Melville, to create and build on the town becoming an Arts and Cultural Centre. Rising from this can be a very exciting initiative.</p> <p>Cllr Tatam asked are we now considering revenue support rather than servicing the Borough Theatre debt for 15 years. Cllr Thomas responded that the perception was always ongoing support rather than capital support. The report will help us to look at the alternatives. Cllr Groucutt said he would seek cast iron guarantees that MCC wouldn't ask for any more than what was agreed.</p> <p>Cllr Burch said although the original ask was for 5 years of support, she didn't get the impression MCC would cut funding support to the Theatre any time soon. She queried if we know the plans for the management of the theatre, is it to remain as it is, or go over to MonLife, or even go independent? Previously considering how often they were open; they did not succeed in bringing 1st rate entertainment in to fill the theatre. Cllr Groucutt responded saying Dave Baxter is keen to make better use of the space, and is very keen to change this, using it for many more new initiatives. He is meeting with both Cath Fallon and Dave Baxter again to discuss support further.</p> <p>Cllr Jones is grateful for the work going in to this report. It seems MCC have underestimated yet again. Cabinet has agreed to meet the shortfall in funding – MCC own the building and they got it wrong.</p> <p>Cllr Morgan said we keep plugging gaps on funding that MCC consistently fail on. A partnership sounds interesting and gives us a seat on the board.</p> <p>Cllr Jones said we should be demanding deliverables, having annual reviews, and seeking assurance on being on the management board as with other agreements.</p> <p>Cllr Tatam asked what would happen to amateur groups, and could we include them – if we are community-minded they should be asked for their input.</p> <p>Cllr Burch asked can we see their business and marketing plan, and we should be able to look through this which will show their commitment. Cllr P Simcock also said she would like to see their long terms plans MCC have for the Borough Theatre.</p> <p>Cllr Morgan proposed Cllr Groucutt present his report to the Committee next month, and this was seconded by Cllr Davies, which was unanimously voted through.</p>
PR 07/21	<p>To receive and note the Polling District & Polling Place Review.</p> <p>Cllr Groucutt stated that MCC has a statutory duty to consult us on this report due to changes in some boundaries, though Abergavenny itself appears to remain the same with the polling stations remaining unchanged. The report was received and noted by all councillors present.</p>

PR 08/21	<p>To receive and note recent payments made in Month 6.</p> <p>Cllr P Simcock asked if the new Melville Agreement has been added to the budget list as they have now signed their agreement, and also asked where the £7k of funding for the new LED lights would be coming from. Cllr Groucutt explained the new Town Clerk is seeking training on the budgets and has enlisted the assistance of the former Town Clerk to go through this, expressing his thanks to the former Clerk for enabling this ongoing support.</p>
PR 09/21	<p>Report from Councillors attendance at external bodies which are relevant to this Committee</p> <p>None received.</p>
PR10/21	<p>Items for consideration at the next meeting 10th November 2021.</p> <p>Report from Cllr Groucutt on Borough Theatre SLA.</p> <p>No other suggestions received.</p>

There being no other business the meeting ended at 8:51pm

APPROVED AS A TRUE RECORD

CHAIRMAN DATE