



**Newcastle Higher Community Council
Cyngor Cymuned Castellnewydd Uwch**

DRAFT

Minutes of the Finance and Audit committee Meeting

Held via ZOOM

Tuesday November 7th 2023 at 6.30PM

Presiding: Cllr Heidi Bennett

Present: Cllr Samantha Barker, Cllr Sarah Botterill,

Apologies: Cllr M Griffiths

Absent: Cllr Richard Hughes

F01/23 Welcome and receive apologies

- Chair welcomes attendees and shares Cllr Griffiths may be attend if able but sends apologies if she doesn't make it on time.

F02/23 Declarations of interest from members to be highlighted (if any)

- None to note

F03/23 Audit Process Review 2023/24

- The chair states that the council have been without a clerk for some time so moving forward processes must be in line with financial regulations and prepared for audit.
- It was noted that the council are expecting an Audit Wales full audit in August and it was recommended that the Clerk ensures easily accessible audit trails (paper based) of all transactions, authorizations, quotes etc in preparation for the audit and ready for public inspection.

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F04/23 Grants Process for 2024/25

- The council has previously discussed a grants fund, however in the past it has been done on an adhoc basis. The committee suggests that a grants policy be drafted and presented to the full council to adopt. The system will work on an application basis and grants will be paid out based on council set criteria and decision. It was agreed that a more formal process would be more fair, consistent and inclusive to potential applicants within the community. The draft policy will outline certain criteria that applicants will apply against, with the aim that local voluntary groups, and community facilities will benefit from the process.

- The Clerk to draft a policy and present to Finance and Audit committee in January with the aim to present to full council in February.

Grants received by Council

- It was highlighted that a Community Asset transfer grant for the Pheasant field was approved by BCBC some time ago, and is to be matched by NHCC. NHCC need to. Move forward with the plan for improvements which included items such as installation of solar path lighting, football posts. It was suggested prices may have changed due to inflation and the clerk would look into new quotes for the work. Bench repairs and the noticeboard had already been put in place, and money could be included in the costs when drawing down the grant.
- The Clerk will contact Guy Smith, BCBC to suggest a date to look at the toilet facilities in Aberkenfig with a view to NHCC considering a possible rejuvenation or reuse of the building.

F05/23 To discuss completion of 2021/22 Audit and highlight recommendations laid out.

- The Clerk confirms the Full Audit has been returned for 2021-22 but has come back as a qualified statement, a concern for the council.
- The Clerk is to make enquiries with Audit Wales and seek guidance on next steps. Guidance to be sought on possible retraction and resubmission due to the document submitted being incorrect and not containing the relevant information. Clerk to contact Derek from Audit Wales for some clarity.
- On inspection, the council questions the internal audit report that was completed as it seems to be missing the information and the fields have not been populated. The Clerk to reach out to the Internal Auditor for some clarity and possible assistance. Clerk to then report back to full council.
- It's noted that the year 2022-23 was submitted by the chair of the council, without a clerk due to recruitment issues and inability to hire a locum clerk, however the concern is that the submission will also be incorrect, Clerk will ask for further guidance from Audit Wales.
- The Clerk will report at the full council meeting that Audit has returned as a qualified statement and further guidance is being sought through Audit Wales.

F06/23 Budget 2024/25 draft to be prepared and be agreed by a committee to a propose to full council in November.

- The chair states the aim is to utilize the council grants and income this coming year to actively promote and enhance the community areas.
- Cllr Botterill will work alongside the clerk in setting up a Sell2Wales presence to aid in the councils tendering / Request for quotes process.
- The committee read through this years budget and highlighted some underspending and reasons for this included lack of clerk and capacity to take agreed project forwards into the current year. These will be progressed in 24/25

- It was raised that other local councils are querying funding a joint play scheme, and provision had been made in the budget for potentially such a venture as well as a scheme in Penyfai.
- Projected end of year financial position for 23/24 was noted
- The Finance and Audit Committee agrees the budget for 2024/25 and recommends to full council that the budget is approved.
- The Finance & Audit Committee recommends to full council that the precept required for 24/25 remains the same as the previous year. Reserves currently held by the council against the budget set for 2023/24 will be brought forward and the council will have enough money to ensure it is able to commit and deliver on its ambitions and aspirations for the community.
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F07/23 Procurement Policy

- The council had previously suggested a potential procurement framework to work with and for it to be added to the Finance & Audit committee meeting.
- Cllr Botterill suggested that due to the council's range of needs and requirements from different providers a static procurement framework would be potentially limiting and restrictive. It was instead suggested that the council adopt a basic procurement policy, highlighting the ambition to use local suppliers and enhancing local economy however ensuring a value for money mindset and the ability to look outside the immediate community when securing projects and providers. The Clerk will draft a procurement policy and present to committee in January to then look at approval by the full council.
- The Clerk has been asked to seek advice from other community wards on their procurement strategies and their local suppliers.

F08/23 Ref Cllr Hopkin's recommendation of Purchase numbers from October's meeting. - Committee to discuss need for a PO book/system.

- Due to the size of the council and existing financial processes and use of Scribe, it was felt a formal PO system isn't needed, however the Clerk will include a PO or reference number against each transaction/invoice/payment which will work across Scribe, Excel cashbook and emails. This will aid in ensuring a smoother audit process going forward.

F09/23 Financial Risk Assessment Draft

- The Committee analysed and raised comments: It was noted that the risk assessment should include potential collusion, to which all members agreed, but noted collusion is low risk due to the number of people involved in the financial approval and sign off process.

- The committee agrees that a quarterly bank reconciliation is needed for full council in line with financial regs and such a review will also mitigate the risk of collusion. Clerk to issue one as soon as possible once data is uploaded to Scribe.
- It was noted that scores have been reviewed and a re-assessed score column has been added to reflect mitigating factors.
- The committee recommends that the council review and approve the risk assessment for 24/25.

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F10/23 Chair of committee additional agenda items (if any) followed by any additional items by committee members (if any)

- It was recommended that the Clerk seek advice from another council clerk re timescale of when in the calendar year standard items such as audits, review of standing orders and financial regs needs completing (e.g. AGM).

Next meeting: January (date to be confirmed). Meetings would be at each quarter end.