**Annual Report 2023/24 – Caerphilly Town Council**

This annual report was approved at the Town Council on 15 April 2024 (Minute 115.3).

**Council Organisation**

The Town council covers the two principal wards of Morgan Jones and St Martins and includes Caerphilly town centre and Caerphilly Castle. There are 12 town councillors representing the community areas of Tonyfelin, Parcyfelin, Bryncenydd, Watford, Twyn, Castle, and Cwrt Rawlins. The last elections were held in May 2022 and the next elections will be held in May 2027. Contact details for Town Councillors can be found on the website. The Town Council meets once a month (apart from August and December) and agendas and minutes can be viewed on the website. All Town Council meetings are open to the public. Since February 2022 meetings are arranged on a multi location basis enabling in person attendance at the Twyn Community Centre or remote access via the internet. For virtual attendance the Town Council uses Zoom.

The Town Council has no committees and all decisions are made by the full council. There are two working groups – Events Working Group and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Working Group. They discuss operational issues and make recommendations to the Town Council when decisions are required.

Anyone wishing to contact the Town Council can do so through the Town Clerk by email or telephone. The Town Council operates flexible office hours. It is possible to arrange a meeting with the Town Clerk Mon to Fri in person, although most enquiries can usually be dealt with over the telephone or by email.

 Email: caerphillytowncouncil@outlook.com

 Telephone: 07950935822

**Financial Information**

The budget for 2023/24 was approved by the Town Council in November 2022. Activities / events have returned to normal following the pandemic. The most notable exception is the absence of the fireworks display for a fourth year due to the ongoing building and conservation works at the Castle resulting in the non availability of the launch sites.

Income of £103,574 was lower than the original budget due primarily to the absence of the fireworks display as there was no sponsorship or street collection. In addition there was no CIL receipt. The majority of the income (94%) is from the council tax precept, the equivalent of £15-50 for Band D property. The running costs for the council (staff costs, Member allowances, administration, rent, rates IT, insurance, audit fees) amounted to £35,342. Around £58,000 was spent on various activities which included the Flower Festival, the town centre summer floral decorations, the Christmas lights and switch on event, the Lantern Parade, grants to local organisations and a donation to the Mayor’s charity (AP Cymru). VAT on supplies and services was £5174. Total expenditure was £100,182 which was met by income resulting in a small surplus carried forward within balances. Total balances carried forward into 2024/25 are £108,972

Notwithstanding inflation during 2023 and recognising the cost of living pressures on households, in setting a budget for 2024/25 the Town Council decided not to increase the precept which has now been held at the same level for 5 years. However in order to set a balanced budget it was necessary to allocate £32,140 from the balances. The estimates show that if this call on balances materialises it will result in a 33% reduction which may have implications for the precept in the future.

The Town Council does not own any land or buildings but has office equipment and other items with an asset value of £86,000.

**Relationship with principal council**

A charter governing the relationship between the principal council (CCBC) and the town and community councils within Caerphilly County Borough has been agreed. This sets out the responsibilities for exchange of information, liaison, and consultation on specific subjects. There is an established Community Council Liaison Sub Committee which holds quarterly meetings. The Town Council’s nominated representative on this committee is town councillor P J Bevan.

The Town Council has not entered any discussions with CCBC in respect of asset or service transfers.

The Town Council is a statutory consultee on planning applications within the Morgan Jones and St Martins Wards.

The Town Council responded to the CCBC consultation on their budget savings proposals for 2024/25 which will have an impact on residents.

**Training Plan**

A training plan has been published on the website and will be reported annually at the AGM. No expenditure has been incurred on training during 2023/24.

**Audit**

The audit of accounts for the year ended 31 March 2023 has been completed by Audit Wales and reported to the Town Council in October 2023. The Auditor General for Wales has issued an unqualified audit opinion.

“On the basis of my audit, in my opinion no matters have come to my attention to give cause for concern that, in any material respect, the information reported in the Annual Return:

* Has not been prepared in accordance with proper practices
* That relevant legislative and regulatory requirements have not been met
* Is not consistent with the Council’s governance arrangements
* That the Council does not have proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in its use of resources.”

The Certified Annual Return can be viewed on the website.

**Review of Community Arrangements County Borough of Caerphilly**

During the course of 2023 the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission published Draft Proposals in relation to the community review. The Town Council currently has 7 wards with a total electorate of 12071 and is represented by 12 community councillors. The Commission has proposed four minor internal community boundary changes, no change to the total electorate, and the town area should be represented by 14 community councillors with Tonyfelin and Watford each gaining an additional member. The Town Council has supported the changes which if adopted will be implemented for the next local council elections in 2027.

**Activities**

The highlights of the year have been the Flower Festival in June, winning a Silver Gilt Medal in the Wales in Bloom competition, a well attended Christmas Lights switch on event with entertainment from local school choirs and the combined Christmas Market and Lantern Parade. Sponsorship was provided to the Food Festival, Megaday, and the Little Cheese.

The Town Council operates a small grants scheme to support local organisations and societies that include members who are resident in the town area covered by the Town Council. Grants range from £150 to £400. The levels were set in 2019 and the tiered grant structure will be increased with effect from April 2024.

As well as a consultee on planning applications CCBC may consult on other policies and proposals such as the development plan and the regeneration strategy for Caerphilly town. The Town Council has met with CCBC officers to be updated on progress with the Caerphilly 2035 Plan. The town councillors liaise closely with Gwent Police on community safety and will pursue issues of concern raised by residents.

The Town Mayor attends events, launches, openings, and welcomes invitations.

There has been progress with the action plan that resulted from the application of the Health Check in the Finance and Governance Toolkit. This has resulted in the review and adoption of updated Financial Regulations, and the adoption of Health and Safety Policy Statement, Business Continuity Plan, and Document Retention and Disposal Policy. All these documents can be viewed on the website.

Tender exercises were undertaken for the supply and maintenance of floral displays in 2024, and for the installation, removal, and storage of Christmas lights in 2023.

The Town Council does not intend to pursue the general power of competence at the present time. Reliance will continue to be placed on specific legal powers and the general power under section 137(1) of the Local Government Act 1972.

**Priorities for 2024/25**

Activities / events have returned to normal following the pandemic. The one notable exception is the absence of the fireworks display which will be unable to take place in 2024 due to the ongoing building and conservation works at the Castle resulting in the non availability of the launch sites.

The budget estimates for 2024/25 were approved in November 2023 and did include provision for the fireworks display. The estimate of expenditure at that time was £140,740 against an estimated income of £108,600. To balance the budget required the allocation of £32,140 from balances. As there will be no expenditure on the fireworks display there will be a significantly reduced impact on the balances.

There is an unallocated amount of £10,000 in the restricted reserves (CIL receipts). There may be a further CIL receipt form CCBC in June 2024. The CIL Working Group will review whether to make any recommendations on use of the available funds or continue to build up the reserves against future projects.

Mike Prew

Town Mayor on behalf of the Town Council