**Annual Report 2024/25 – Caerphilly Town Council**

**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. Arising from a review of community boundary arrangements undertaken by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission the number of town councillors is expected to be increased to 14. 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 provides no direct services to the public and staff are primarily home based. 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 2024/25 was approved in November 2023. The assumptions behind the budget were:

* No increase in the precept which was retained at £15.50 for Band D properties
* Inflationary pressures absorbed through use of reserves
* Mandatory allowances budgeted for all Members
* No provision for optional attendance allowance
* No provision for carers costs (mandatory if eligible claim)
* No new areas of expenditure
* No change to staff resources other than local government pay award provisionally at 3% for existing employees

Taking these assumptions into account a budget expenditure estimate of £140740 was approved. Income was projected at £108600. The excess of expenditure over income required a contribution of £32140 from reserves to achieve a balanced budget.

The outturn shows income of £109550 against expenditure of £104951. The higher income was due to a larger receipt of CIL than projected offset by no income from fireworks sponsorship and street collection. The main saving on expenditure was due to the fireworks display not taking place. The result is that income has covered expenditure with a surplus of £4599 that will be added to carry forward balances. Total reserves carried forward into 2025/26 are £113571.

The running costs for the council (staff costs, Member allowances, administration, rent, business rates, IT, insurance, audit fees) amounted to £38000. Around £60000 was spent on various activities which included the Flower Festival, the town centre summer floral decorations, the Christmas Tree, Christmas Lights and switch on event, the Lantern Parade, grants to local organisations and a donation to the Mayor’s charity (Alzheimer’s Wales). VAT on supplies and services was £5369.

Similar assumptions to those listed above were made in setting a budget for 2025/26 making it possible to hold the precept at £15.50 for a Band D property for the 6th consecutive year. However in order to set a balanced budget it was necessary to allocate £30315 from the reserves. The estimates show that if this call on reserves materialises this will result in a 29% 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 £86000.

**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.

**Training Plan**

A training plan has been published on the website and is reported annually at the AGM. No expenditure has been incurred on training during 2024/25.

**Audit**

The audit of accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024 has been completed by Audit Wales and reported to the Town Council in October 2024. 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.

**Activities**

The highlights of the year have been the Flower Festival in June, a well attended Christmas Lights switch on event with entertainment from local school choirs, and the Winter Fair featuring the River of Light Lantern Parade. Sponsorship was provided to the Food Festival, Megaday, Cheese Festival, and Ffilifest.

The Town Council operates a small grants scheme to support local organisations and societies that include members / beneficiaries who are resident in the area covered by the Town Council. There is at tiered grant structure from £200 to £500.

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 and consultants 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.

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 2025/26**

Due to health and safety concerns arising from large crowds, including many children, assembling in the limited space in front of the Twyn Community Centre for the Christmas Lights switch on event the Town Council will be working with CCBC to make changes for 2025. This will involve the switch on being combined with the River of Light Lantern Parade and crowd assembly moved into the Twyn car park.

There will be no Fireworks Display in 2025 due to the ongoing building and conservation works at Caerphilly Castle. There has now been a gap of 6 years since this event was last held. The long term future of this event will need consideration in relation to event management resource implications and overall cost of such a large free event in the town.

The budget estimates for 2025/26 were approved in November 2024 and did include a nominal provision for the Fireworks Display based on costs form 2019 when the event was last arranged. The estimates assumed there would be a need for a contribution of £30315 from reserves. As there will be no expenditure on the fireworks there will be a significantly reduced impact on the reserves.

There is an unallocated amount of £16482 in the restricted reserves (CIL receipts). There may be a further CIL receipt from CCBC in June 2025. The Town Council has decided to build up these reserves to support a significant project.

Mike Prew

Town Mayor on behalf of the Town Council