**GROSMONT COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

**CYNGOR CYMUNED GROSMONT**

**Chairman/Cadeirydd Clerk/Clerc**

**Councillor Lowri Wynn Morgan Mr R Wade**

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**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GROSMONT COMMUNITY COUNCIL HELD AT THE GROSMONT TOWN HALL AT 7:30 PM ON THE 9TH JANUARY 2024**

Those attending the meeting: Councillors Lowri Wyn Morgan (Chair), Jude Rogers (Vice-Chair), Margie Barker, Nicholas Jones. Witek Mintowt-Czyz and Jan Williams. Also present were Russell James, Jane Moggridge, Peter Clarke and County Councillor David Hughes-Jones.

1. **To accept apologies for absence**

Councillor Jamie Edwards sent his apologies. The Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer, Robert Wade, also sent his apologies due to illness. Councillor Rogers took the Minutes in his absence, and recorded the meeting in accordance to a request made last year to apply to all meetings, to ensure all notes can be checked by the minute-taker.

 2. **To disclose personal and pecuniary interests in items of business listed below**

The Chair raised that she has a personal connection with the builder appointed as a contractor on the Town Hall project, who is her husband’s father. As a consequence, she has stepped back and will step back from any meetings regarding the tendering process, and between the contractor and project architect.

3. **Discussion on matters arising from the Police Reports and police issues generally**

Following the visit from Inspector Sowrey in the December meeting, the Chair noted this month’s Police Report now included five categories and more detail, which was welcomed. The incident regarding the black Vauxhall Corsa that had flipped over, referred to by Councillor Edwards in the last meeting, was also listed, and the owner had been located.

 4. **To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the Meeting on the 14th November 2023**

The Minutes of the last meeting were not sent to Councillor Williams. The Chair affirmed that Minutes should be sent to all Councillors, even if they were absent. The Minutes were then approved as a correct record, proposed by the Chair and seconded by Councillor Mintowt-Czyz.

 5. **To consider matters arising from the Minutes of the Meeting on the 12th December 2023** The Chair proposed that discussion of any matters arising that involve the Clerk, or require the Clerk’s presence in his joint role as RFO, are postponed until the next meeting. This was agreed unanimously.

 6. **To consider the progress of the work relating to the Town Hall Project and the Highlight ` Report, and specifically whether there should be a separate bank account for the Project.
 (a)** Regarding pressing financial issues regarding the Town Hall project, the Chair noted that she had spoken to One Voice Wales that afternoon to discuss how tonight’s meeting could proceed effectively without the RFO. One Voice Wales confirmed that a Council meeting could be held but anything in relation to finances could not be discussed without the RFO present. A Councillor could not stand in to undertake this role. Therefore the discussion of the separate bank account for the project would be postponed until the next meeting.

(b) For attendees who were not abreast of the current stage of the Town Hall project,the Chair explained that the Council was going through the process of completing an application for Borrowing Approval from the Senedd, before applying for a Public Works Loan to provide match-funding for the Town Hall project. It was hoped that that application for approval would have been submitted before Christmas, but this was not possible, as audited accounts were required for this to proceed. Requests for audited accounts from the clerk by Councillor Mintowt-Czyz and Councillor Jones in December had not resulted in accounts being sent. The Chair had sent the Clerk a similar email to this end today, she noted, after his email giving apologies for absence due to illness, as had Councillor Rogers. Councillor Mintowt-Czyz clarified that he had spoken to the accountants office today. They had not had an opportunity yet to audit accounts for the 22/23 tax year as the data was not submitted until December. This year’s accounts would not be available as the financial year does not end until March. Therefore the only audited accounts available for the Council for the application were for 2020/21 and 2021/22, which were nearly two years old. However, the data for 2022/23, he noted is in the auditors system. Councillor Wintowt-Czyz had also asked the auditors if he could be sent copies of the audit once it was completed but this was refused, on account of him not being the RFO. The Chair noted that the RFO does not have to be the clerk – this could be a separate officer – but our RFO currently is the Clerk, so nothing can yet be done.

The Chair then referred to item 17 of the standing orders for the Council, which sets out the RFO’s obligations regarding accounts and auditing. Quarterly statements have been sent to Councillors as required by item 17. The annual governance accountability return that is also required to be presented to the Council under item 17, for consideration of formal approval before 30 June each year, had not been seen by her last year. Councillor Wintowt-Czyz added that he had not seen this either, adding that no payments had been sanctioned to auditors in the last two years.
Councillor Rogers asked if the auditors could confirm to us when they would expect to have the accounts ready, as that would not involve disclosing financial information. This would help keep the GF applications on track. The Chair asked Councillor Wintowt-Czyz to send her contact details of the person he was dealing with at the auditors, so she could send them a formal letter, and that he pass on her contact details to expedite matters as much as it was appropriate. It was also agreed that further discussion would be needed to avoid similar problems in time-sensitive situations in future regarding the need for the RFO to be present.

(c) The Highlight Report was approved the Chair and seconded by Peter Clarke of GF. The Chair noted that the business plan submitted by Clarke was excellent and that she was very grateful for his time and effort put into form filling, budgeting and helping GCC.

 (d) Councillor Mintowt-Czyz noted an outstanding requirement to deal with regarding the application for borrowing approval, namely for a statement to indicate how the Council is going to repay the loan. He and Peter Clarke would be writing this imminently, but it also required being accompanied by a recent bank statement, which would be brought to the attention again of the RFO.

 (e) Councillor Mintowt-Czyz also proposed that the Council approve the submission of the application, which the Chair said was not possible as the RFO is not present. However, after discussion, the Chair proposed that *in principle* the Council approve the submission, and once the document was finalised in writing and emailed to Councillors, it could be approved. This was seconded by Councillor Barker and approved.

7.  **To discuss the Partnership Agreement**

The Chair proposed that the Council approves the most recent version of the updated partnership agreement, which noting that it is an organic document. Councillor Mintowt-Czyz seconded. The Chair is grateful to everyone for their hard work.

8. **To discuss Grosmont Online**

Councillor Rogers explained that she and Councillor Mintowt-Czyz were meeting this week to discuss website and domain renewal for Grosmont.wales. Councillor Mintowt-Czyz asked if he and Councillor Rogers could be delegated authority to move on choosing new providers if this was required. This was proposed by The Chair and seconded by Councillor Barker and approved.

**9. To receive items of correspondence**None has been forwarded by the Clerk or received by Councillors.

**10. To consider matters relating to Planning.**Nothing has been forwarded by the Clerk.

**11.To agree expenditure and other accounts matters and the Council’s budget for 2024/5 in anticipation of submission of the Precept request**

The Chair noted that the Clerk has sent financial documents to assist Councillors with Precept decisions. However, given her conversation with One Voice Wales, as discussed above, she proposed that this is dealt with next month. This was seconded by Councillor Rogers.

**12.To discuss the state of the roads in and about Grosmont**(a) Councillor Edwards sent a note in his absence about road issues that have been reported to him, namely potholes on Poorscript Lane, which have been reported to Fix My Street, and the state of the Hand Road. The Clerk had not written to the County Council last month about concerns regarding the bridge to Kentchurch, and this would be chased again at the next meeting. It was noted that a portaloo had appeared there, suggesting work, but was not present for long.

(b) Russell James brought up the fly-tipping on the Grosmont Road to Llangua. Councillor Edwards also mentioned this in his note, and wanted it minuted that a neighbour had offered to move the items. Mr James also brought up the bough of a dead tree bending into the road just downhill of this area, forcing traffic into the middle of the road, just before a blind bend. Councillor Rogers, who lives nearby, said she would go and photograph this and share it with Councillors to decide on next steps. Mr James noted that it was the responsibility of the farmer from The Sleath. Councillor Barker also asked for it to be minuted that the fallen tree on the road between Grosmont and Skenfrith had been removed by Colin Williams, and for him to be thanked.

**12. To discuss Footpaths**No urgent issues. Andrew Stumpf continues his good work with Ramblers Cymru/MonLife.

**13. To receive and consider any other business**

(a) Councillor Barker mentioned again the presence of dog excrement being left around the castle and hung by the “please take your dog poo home” sign. The Chair then summarised the reasons for not getting dog poo bins previously (regarding cost and/or the need for volunteers to manage them). Councillor Barker then suggested the Chair contact Cadw, as the issue is on their land. The Chair agreed she would do by email.

 (b) Councillor Jones pointed out that the local choir had made a large donation to Cadw after their fundraising concert last summer.

 (c) The Chair also confirmed she had spoken to Tracy the cleaner about meeting up to discuss things going forward with the Town Hall redevelopment. Tracy had mentioned that users were not taking their rubbish with them, which is required.

 **14.To decide the date of the next meeting**

Tuesday 13th February 2024 at 7:30 pm was agreed.