

Raglan Community Council
Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting held on Wednesday 22 May 2024.
This meeting was convened at the Fellowship Centre on Usk Road.
at 7:00 pm

Present

5507 Cllr Richard Moorby
Cllr Penny Jones
Cllr Susan Harrington

Cllr Nick Ramsay (Chair)
Cllr Hazel Leacock

5509 In attendance:

Adrian Edwards, Clerk to the Council. Cllr Martian Dorey logged-in remotely.
Cllr P Jones left the meeting at 20:45 hrs

5510 Agenda item 1:- Apologies for absence

Cllr Lynne Eilertsen Due to family commitments

5511 Agenda item 2:- Declarations of interest.

No declarations of interest were submitted, but members will make a declaration when and identified under the relevant minute.

5512 Agenda item 3:-15 minutes set aside for Community interaction and members of the community to ask the Chairman or the Council questions of local interest. Any questions should be relevant to the agenda and submitted to the clerk 3 working days before the meeting.

No members of the public in attendance

5513 Agenda item 4:- To receive and adopt the minutes from the Ordinary meeting, held on 24 April 2024

Proposed: by Cllr H Leacock seconded by Cllr R Moorby that the minutes are accepted.

All those present agreed

5514 Agenda item 5:- Matters to report

No matters reported

5515 Agenda item 6:- To consider any Police reports from Gwent Police

No reports received other than the monthly correspondence.

5516 Agenda item 7:- Clerks reports verbal or written.

The Clerk provided members with a report relating to the information received from Audit Wales and gave a full explanation. The report is attached to these minutes.

5517 Agenda item 8:- Consider any Planning Applications received before the meeting. All applications that were received were forwarded to members before the meeting for any observations.

No further comments were made relating to Planning Applications that have been forwarded prior to the meeting.

5518 Agenda item 9:- Safe crossing in Raglan High Street, (Cllr Penny Jones) on behalf of the school pupils

Cllr Jones gave a verbal report relating to correspondence she and the Chair of the Community Council had received from the school and the actions of some of the pupils “Ambassadors of Rights”

“In a recent meeting for the Ambassadors of Rights, we talked about the safety of people in Raglan when crossing roads. There is no safe place to cross because of the cars parked on either side of the high street and a busy junction where there is no pedestrian crossing of any sort. We also think that the new Tesco will bring more people and therefore more cars to this area of Raglan. When we talked, we agreed that we would all feel safer with a zebra crossing somewhere on the road. It would help children to walk to school safely and help all of the residents to stay safe when walking around Raglan village”.

There was some discussion relating to the concerns expressed by the Ambassadors of Rights group in the school. Cllr Jones explained that this will be raised with the most appropriate Officer in the Highways Dept and the Cabinet member at Monmouthshire County Council.

There was also some discussion relating to the following:

- Zebra Crossing in the village.
- Crossing of the A40 towards the Castle,
- Crossing the A40 between Monmouth Road, and the Dingestow junction.

5519 Agenda item 10:- Consider the receipt of invoices and payments made.

Date	Payment to	Amount	Cheque
22/5/24	Baptist Church (Hall Hire)	80.00	2459
22/5/24	Merlin Waste (Collection)	241.92	2460
22/5/24	Audit Wales	200.00	2461
22/5/24	HMRC		2462
22/5/24	Adrian Edwards (May salary)		2463
22/5/24	Traveling (Clerk)	26.55	2464
22/5/24	Reimbursement for Zoom platform	155.88	2467
22/5/24	Grant for (Raglan Sports Association)	2728.75	Not agreed
22/5/24	Llandenny Church (Grant Church Yard)	100.00	
22/5/24	Kids cancer	??	
22/5/24	Marie Cure Hospice	??	

This was proposed by Cllr Leacock seconded by Cllr Moorby that the above are agreed.

All those present agreed

5520 Agenda item 11:- Consider any correspondence received and forwarded prior to the meeting.

All those present acknowledged the correspondence forwarded by the Clerk and offered no further observations.

5521 Agenda item 12:- To provide an update relating to Raglan former Old Church School Chepstow Road, Raglan. (Clerk)

The Clerk gave a verbal report following the meeting with an officer of Monmouthshire County Council relating to the business case that has been presented for the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) between Raglan Community Council and Monmouthshire County Council. During this meeting it was explained that the current use and the maintenance of the Old Church School (ROCS) was discussed, and it was explained if the Community Council were interested in a CAT for the building, the Community Council should present an expression of interest in the first place.

Following some discussion, it was agreed that an expression of interest should be drawn up and presented for consideration.

5522 Agenda item 13:- MUGA details (Clerk)

The Clerk gave a verbal report following the meeting with an officer of Monmouthshire County Council relating to the Business Case that has been presented for the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) between Raglan Community Council and Monmouthshire County Council. The Clerk informed those present that he had not received any further correspondence relating to this.

It was explained that Monmouthshire County Council requested that a business case be presented, and it would be presented to the Cabinet member for consideration/agreement, but we are in the same position with no response.

5523 Agenda item 14:- Reports from the County Councillor

Cllr Jones gave a verbal report on several items.

- An update relating to the current 20 MPH issues.
- The A40 junction off Monmouth Road.
- The provision of a Zebra Crossing in the village (as item 9 above)
- Policing in the community

5524 Agenda item 15:- Update relating to the former school building and grounds on Chepstow Road (Cllr Harrington)

Cllr Harrington gave a verbal report regarding the former junior school and the information that has been forwarded so far.

Cllr Harrington believes that the building is becoming a health hazard for the community of Raglan and has expressed this to the relevant parties.

Cllr Harrington explained that she is still awaiting a response from the Church in Wales lawyers and Monmouthshire County Council officers.

Cllr Harrington expressed concern again over the trees that are overhanging the school grounds. It was explained by one elected member that they believe that contractors have been in the grounds of the old school and carried out some remedial works on the trees.

Those present noted Cllr Harringtons observations.

5525 Agenda item 16:- Reports from members on outside bodies

No further comments were presented

5526 Agenda item 17:- To confirm the date of the next meeting 26 June 2024

The date was agreed

5527 No other business was discussed, and the Chairman thanked everyone for attending. The meeting closed at 21:10 hrs.

Signed by _____

Chairman

Date 26 June 2024

Reports to: - Raglan Community Council

Subject: - Update following receipt of the Annual Returns from the Wales Audit office.

Report: - by the Clerk

Date: - 22 May 2024

The following is to provide members with an update relating to the accounts and in response to a resident who has made several observations which could be classed as allegations.

During my employment as Clerk to Raglan Community Council, I have tried to comply with all the policies and regulations during this time. Over the last several years, since 2019 and during the pandemic it has been difficult, and there may have been some slippage. If that is the case, it's not been done knowingly. Receipts and payments are recorded and presented for payment to every meeting for consideration by those elected to the Council. Two members sign every invoice/voucher when signing cheques and the invoice/voucher is also counter signed by myself as Clerk.

I have only recently received the Annual Returns for 19/20, 20/21 and 21/22 from WAO.

Below is an extract from the email that I have received from Deryck Evans on Thursday, April 25, 2024, where the above auditor said the following:

“Dear Mr Edwards. We completed the 2019-20 to 2021-22 audits in October 2023 and sent the certified returns to you by email (see attached). The fee invoices were raised on completion of the audits. We have received correspondence related to the 2022-23 audit and I am waiting to be allocated an auditor to follow this up”.

As far as the accounts for 22/23 are concerned they were completed by the Internal Auditor on 17/9/2023. The Annual Return was reported to Council on 27/9/2023 – minute 5365 and presented to Council on 3/10/2023 – minute 5381. Documents relating to 22/23 were delivered to WAO. Response still outstanding.

Annual Returns

The following are copies of the Audit opinions – Qualified made by the allocated auditor from the WAO.

Except for the matters reported below in my Basis for Qualification,

On the basis of **my review and subject to the matters and recommendations identified below, in my opinion no matters have come to my attention giving cause for concern that in any material respect, the information reported in this Annual Return:**

Qualified Statements from WAO

Assertion 1(19/20 & 20/21)

19/20 - The Annual Return provided for audit is unsigned. I have been unable to obtain sufficient audit evidence to conclude that it was approved by the Council.

20/21 – The Council did not approve the annual return by 3 June 2021 as required by the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014.

21/22 - The Council did not provide sufficient information in response to my original audit notice or to specific queries raised by my audit team for me to reach a conclusion on the accounting statement.

Explanations

The accounts for 19/20 and 20/21 were managed by Dorrell Oliver accountants from Abergavenny. Dorrell Oliver mislaid both sets of accounts. When they were collected from the office, they only presented 20/21 in October 2021. It was some time before 19/20 were found. When collected they had not been actioned fully.

The accounts for 19/20 were sent to WAO to complete the audit in June 2022.

As the Clerk I believe the case auditor hasn't taken on board the fact the country had been put into lockdown and business was interrupted greatly which I believe no-one had seen before, and everyone would recall those statements.

The accounts for 20/21 were completed by the Internal Auditor on 20/10/2021. The Annual Return was presented to Council on 27/10/2021- Minute 4998. The Chairman wasn't prepared to meet the Clerk to sign the return. See above for the issues relating to this year regarding the Internal Audit arrangements.

The accounts for 21/22 were completed by the Internal Auditor on 28/6/2022. The Annual return was presented to Council on 11/7/2022- Minute 5120. I will be contacting WAO for clarification of their statement, as I have not received any queries from WAO.

Assertion 3 – noncompliance with laws, regulations and codes of practice.

19/20 & 20/21 - The Council has not provided evidence **that a budget has been set** in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act (1992) and that the precept has

been set in line with the budget. The Act requires the Council to take into account its level of reserves when setting its budget requirement. We recommend that the Council sets a budget in accordance with the relevant regulations and codes of practice.

Again, the case audit officer has not considered the minutes (for 19/20 budget setting) where it is clear that the budget was monitored, and the precept was set for the forthcoming year. **Minute 4624 Agenda 6:** - dated 24th January 2019 states:

Consider and recommend a precept for 2019/20 The Clerk gave members a break down on the projected figures relating to the 2019/20 financial year. The Clerk reminded members that the precept is set against properties in band (d) on the table.

The Clerk explained that the table presented to members will provide a predicted budget, and those predicted figures can be seen in column five of the clerk's report, income, and expenditure up to month 9. The chairman explained to members anything relating to the village hall project is going to be in the second half of the financial year, so that can be considered at that stage if required. There was some discussion and the predicted budget and the devolution of services the county council may consider cutting or reducing. There was also consideration given to projects the community council will be considering in the next financial year. After further consideration it was:

Proposed: by Cllr Tilley seconded by Cllr Bevan to set the precept by 3% increase. **Resolved:** the precept would be increased by 3%

20/21 - Again, the case audit officer has not considered the minutes (for 20/21 budget setting) where it is clear that the budget was monitored, and the precept was set for the forthcoming year. **Minute 4624 Agenda 6:** - dated 15th January 2020 states: minute 4830 Agenda item 3:- Consider the clerks report up to month 9 in 2019/20 financial year and minute 4833 Agenda item 6:- Consider and recommend a precept for 2020/21.

21/22 WAO stated: Annual Budget The 2021-22 balance carried forward exceeded the 2021-22 precept. A copy of the budget was not provided to demonstrate that the Council takes its reserves into account when setting its budget and precept.

Again, the case audit officer has not considered the minutes (for 21/22 budget setting) where it is clear that the budget was monitored, and the precept was set for the forthcoming year. Minute 4891 Agenda item 3:- Consider the clerks report up to month 9 in 2020/21 financial year and minute 4894 Agenda item 6:- Consider and recommend a precept for 2021/22.

As previously stated in this report, I am unclear what is meant by the WAO comments for 21/22.

Assertion 4 – exercise of electors' rights.

19/20 & 20/21: The Council approved the annual return after the commencement date for the exercise of electors' rights. The Council should approve the annual return prior to the commencement of the inspection period and in accordance with statutory deadlines. Furthermore, the Council did not provide sufficient notice of the public inspection period as required by the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014.

The provision is made in Regulation 15(3) for situations where the RFO does not certify the accounts by 30 June. In these cases, the council must publish a notice (in a conspicuous place and on its website) setting out why the RFO has not certified the accounts.

The Council must then make arrangements to comply as soon as possible, which I believe that was done.

For the financial years 19/20 and 20/21, as reported above, there were issues with the Internal Audit arrangements. This was reported to Council under minute 4998 and members noted the information and approved the Annual Return which had been actioned.

Following the end of the 19/20 year, the country was placed into lockdown due to the Covid pandemic. Specific arrangements were made by WAO and the relevant notice to electors was placed on the website. The notice for 20/21 can 21/22 can be found on the website.

WAO has identified a transpositional error from the previous year's accounts. I can confirm there is no financial impact to the accounts.

WAO has also stated:

- *that the Council does not have proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.*

I am unsure what is meant by this statement.

All elected members of Raglan Community Council past and present were aware the Council has set aside a budget for many years to ensure the Council has the resources to enter a CAT for the MUGA and adjoining field with Monmouthshire County Council. Everyone was / is aware the progress has been very limited and very frustrating due to Monmouthshire County Councils lack of engagement with the Community Council and providing regular updates. Again, members are aware that a further business case has been presented and again, it would appear this has gone into the depths of Monmouthshire County Council.

WAO have also commented that the 21/22 balance carried forward exceeded the 21/22 precept. It would appear, WAO consider that the Community Council does not have any arrangements in place to ensure effective and efficient use of its resources.

As the Clerk I would totally refute that inference, every year elected members are provided with a full and in-depth report.

If the Community Council had not considered setting the precept that year, like that's been done every other year, the following year the Community Council would have needed to set a precept. Everyone could well imagine the outcry when the Community Council reset a precept; what would residents conclude, therefore I believe that's not reality.

During this time, the country was in a pandemic and following the restrictions it was difficult to manage and progress anything, and it would be interesting to know what the Community Council should have done differently at this time. Members will be aware of the changes to the boundaries in Monmouthshire and the time that was taking. Everyone knows the outcome from that process and the period following the elections in May 2022.

Its clear that the Community Council have been trying to provide a facility for residents over the years, but officers from Monmouthshire County Council haven't taken any responsibility in manging this transfer and it is still outstanding.

However, the Council has made a reduction in the precept for this financial year, as recorded in the budget set for 24/25.

I recommend that Council considers how these resources can be utilised for the benefit of the local residents immediately, as there is very little progress with Monmouthshire County Council.

Members may be aware that the Chair has received an email from WAO requesting a meeting in early in June, and the WAO have requested that the Community Council provides a large amount of paperwork. As the Clerk I would take from that, the resident who has been in correspondence with the Chair and others, must have made some form of allegation that there has been misappropriate dealings as WAO have already returned the accounts up to year ending March 2022. I understand the resident has referred to use of public funding, therefore this is going to have a financial impact on the budget and officer time.

Author: The Clerk to Raglan Community Council